

SECRET

A

SECRET

In view of the importance which the Turkish question has assumed in recent months, His Majesty's Government feel it desirable to state for the information of the United States Government the nature of their policy in regard to Turkey and the strategic grounds on which it is based.

It is vital to the Middle Eastern position of the Allies, firstly, that the Germans should not be allowed passage through Turkey and, secondly, that Turkey should resist if attacked. An Axis attack on Turkey would not be aimed at the conquest of Turkey alone, though no doubt Germany would be glad enough to obtain certain Turkish raw materials. The main objective of the attack would be the destruction of the right flank of Great Britain's position in the Middle East and the capture of Egypt and the Suez Canal. A further aim might well be Iraq and the Persian Gulf, though this is unlikely to be an immediate objective until the Germans have occupied the Caucasus. The best, and so long as Great Britain holds Cyprus and has control over Syria, the only method of turning the British right flank is a drive through Anatolia.

Were the Turks to acquiesce in the passage of German troops, the British forces would be obliged to occupy defensive position along the Northern Syrian and Iraq frontiers, with the following grave disadvantages: (1) unsuitable country with no natural strong defensive features, and a very
difficult/

difficult divergent line of withdrawal through Syria and Iraq; (2) a heavy scale German air attack from the Anatolian air fields on British lines of communications and Egypt; (3) a powerful threat of air and sea invasion of Cyprus, and in the event of its loss an increased air threat to British positions in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and the Canal itself.

In the event of Turkish resistance and combined Turco-British action a very much more satisfactory system of defence in depth could be adopted with the following advantages: (1) topographically, Turkey is much more suitable than Syria for defence, and even if most of Anatolia were quickly overrun there are very strong natural defensive positions in Turkey along the line of the Taurus mountains which the Allied forces would be able to occupy instead of having to stand in Syria; (2) the German air threat to Syria would be kept at a distance, and the Anatolian air fields would be at the disposal of the Royal Air Force for attacks on Axis bases in the Aegean Islands and Greece, German lines of communication through the Balkans, and the Roumanian oil fields; (3) Cyprus would be less vulnerable.

There are the following further advantages of Turkish resistance; (1) Even if the resistance were not prolonged, some toll would be taken of Axis man and war material; (2) A successful defence of Anatolia would provide Allied bases for both land and air forces for attacks on Greece, Crete, the Aegean

Islands/

Islands and the Dodecanese and could lead to the developing of an offensive strategy through the Balkan countries at a future date.

The above strategic considerations will make it plain how important it is to His Majesty's Government that the Turkish will and capacity to resist should be maintained. If she is to resist, it is necessary to collaborate with her whenever possible and generally try to build her up militarily so that she may be in a position to play a useful part if attacked. It is from this point of view that the maintenance of as large a supply of war materials as possible in the period before a German attack or German demands for transit rights assumes particular importance. Any hint or suspicion in the Turkish mind that the present volume of military supplies might be decreased would seriously prejudice the chances of the Turks resisting German demands or a German attack. During the recent discussions with Turkey about the supply of chrome, His Majesty's Government would have liked to be able to use the threat of cutting off supplies if a satisfactory chrome agreement were not concluded. But in practice they could not afford to do so, for the simple reason that strategically it is essential, with a German attack in the Middle East as an ever-present possibility, that His Majesty's Government should/

should avoid any quarrel with Turkey such as
might lead the latter to adopt a policy of
isolation or to go over to the Axis.

67

THE BRITISH EMBASSY,
WASHINGTON, D. C.,
October 22nd, 1941.