

*Turkey and the Victory over the Third Reich. Turkey in British Policy between 1943 and 1944*

At the turn of 1942 and 1943, the British authorities began to reconsider the question of Turkish war engagement. Since signing the alliance in October 1939, this issue has been raised several times (especially after the Italian accession to the war, the Italian aggression against Greece and the German attack on the Soviet Union). During that period of time Turkey was treated as a barrier to protect British interests in the Middle East from the expansion of the Axis countries. However, at the end of 1942 breakthrough in military affairs changed the Turkish role in British strategy. As a result of the defeats suffered by the Wehrmacht in North Africa and on the Eastern Front, the Turkish state began to be perceived as an ally that could take a part in defeating of the Third Reich.

The British prime minister Winston Churchill thought about turning Anatolia into a base for the Allied ground forces, from which an offensive in Bulgaria and German-occupied Greece would be launched. However, preliminary military planning exposed that this type of action did not promise success on a strategic scale, due to logistical constraints in establishing bases in the territory of the Turkish state, and unfavorable natural conditions in the eastern Balkans. Instead, the British military proposed to use Turkish territory to establish bases for Allied strategic bombers to carry out regular attacks on the Romanian oil fields in Ploesti, which were the main source of fuel for the German military effort. Churchill was convinced by this plan, although at first he did not completely abandon the concept of the land offensive.

After the American allies accepted the need to engage Turkey in the war, which took place during the Casablanca conference in mid-January 1943, the British Prime Minister went to a meeting with Turkish President Ismet Inonu, which took place at the end of January 1943 in Adana. Contrary to his earlier announcement, Churchill did not insist on Turkey joining the war immediately. He decided to achieve this goal gradually. In the following months, during military talks British tested Turkey attitude towards the war, still it was not satisfactory.

After the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943, Churchill came to the conclusion that the time had come for Turkish involvement. However, this idea met with opposition from the FO, which, based on the experience of previous years, was skeptical about this idea. Moreover military establishment was also against Turkish participation in the war at that stage. The United States also stiffened its position on this issue. The approach of the American military authorities began to dominate. They feared that the increased involvement



of Allied forces in the Mediterranean area would lead to further delays, and in the worst case scenario, that could cancel a carefully prepared English Channel invasion. The Americans also did not agree to take advantage of the capitulation of Italy, which took place in September 1943, to seize Greek territory including the islands in the Aegean Sea. In this situation, the British acted on their own and the command in the Middle East, using very limited resources, tried to take control of the Italian archipelago of the Dodecanese. The improvised operation failed, and the Wehrmacht soon started the counter-offensive, retaking the islands that British were able to occupy.

At that time, the British made a direct request to the Turkish government to provide airfields for RAF forces, but it was refused. Despite the defeat in the Dodecanese, they continued their pressure, which was the result of the British-Soviet arrangements at the Moscow conference in October 1943. The culmination of these diplomatic activities took place at the second Cairo conference in December 1943, which initially set the date for the passing of Turkish bases for RAF on mid-February of the following year. Their takeover was aimed at regaining the Dodecanese islands by Great Britain, the conquest of which at this stage of the war had more prestigious and political meaning than military. However, as Ankara made its consent conditional on the Allies carrying out huge supplies of military equipment, the negotiations ended in a fiasco.

From February 1944, the significance of Turkey's accession to the war against the Third Reich decreased radically. A certain revival in the spring and summer of 1944 was one of the elements of the deception plan that intended to facilitate the landing of the Allied forces first in northern and then in southern France. However, the greatest achievement was forcing Ankara to cease deliveries of chrome in April 1944 and severance of German-Turkish relations at the beginning of August 1944. There were also attempt to use Turkey on order to force Bulgaria to surrender. However this plan was never implemented.

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Zolubini