Letter from the British Ambassador in Ankara, M. Peterson, to the Deputy Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, O. G. Sargent, 1 August 1945

Secret & Personal.

…

Many thanks for your Secret & Personal letter of 21st July (R 12179/4476/G).

I agree that Archie’s[[1]](#footnote-1) letter (of which I have had now the text) served as a caveat. But matters have gone somewhat further since then and I must admit I am not satisfied, from the news I have so far received from Potsdam, that any one has up till now grasped the nettle firmly and told the Russians that this bullying of Turkey simply will not do.

2. In a dispatch which I sent off by yesterday’s bag I tried to summarise the position in this country at the moment and show how it is affected at every turn and in every sphere by the Russian menace. This is bad for trade – which is surely a question of the first importance for us – and also bad for the further development of San Francisco. Also it brings in the Anglo-Turk alliance.

3. As regards the second point I feel that something would have been gained – possibly a great deal – if the Russians had been induced to put it on record that their demands were not demands but merely suggestions advanced in the course of conversation. As things stand at present the Russians are getting it both ways. If they chose (to put it at its worst) to attack Turkey they could say that they had put forward demands and they had not been met.

4. As regards the danger spot at the moment what I meant in my letter of July 10th was of course that the eastern frontier seems to me to be the place where any trouble is likely to begin. Precisely because it would be much more “dangerous” for the Russians to advance on the Straits, which would involve other interests notably our own, would entail their making use of Bulgaria or Romania or both and would be carried out as it were in the full light of day with Istanbul as it is stuffed with foreign press correspondents. On the other hand the eastern districts of Turkey are rigidly a military zone: nobody visits them (although my Press Attaché has managed to bring off a little tour there from which I expect him back very shortly): and any coup the Russians might attempt there would be shrouded in obscurity and might even, for some time at least, be represented as a mere border disturbance.

5. Out interest in the Straits themselves is quite clear enough not to require further definition by me. But as regards the rest of it – what I call the “bullying” of Turkey – I see no sign that we have so far been anything like sufficiently definite. I suggest we use two arguments – firstly, that the withdrawal of Turkey from the German sphere of influence into which Turkey had fallen back even since the last war has been our work and represents a diplomatic feat of some magnitude and importance. Having got hold of Turkey we have not the least intention of letting her go[[2]](#footnote-2). We might further argue that the present Russian method of treating Turkey is so reminiscent o Hitler’s methods in Europe as to be repugnant to us and indeed in our view to run contrary to, and endanger, the new Security Organization.

6. A final point. The Turkish Prime Minister [Saracoğlu] and Chief of the General Staff[[3]](#footnote-3) have up till now, with my full encouragement, resisted what is undoubtedly strong pressure, coming particularly from the General Staff other that Orbay himself, to carry out extensive measures of mobilization. I do not know how long we can go on resisting this pressure, if things do not improve. And indeed I must add I do not feel satisfied that I personally will be justified in using such influence as I have against mobilization.

Forever,

Maurice Peterson

[TNA, FO 371/48774]

Keywords: Turkey, inter-allied relations

1. Archibald Clark Kerr. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Analysing this thinking in Peterson’s message, the historian W.R. Louis emphasised several similarities in Soviet and British concepts of exercising control over states within their spheres of influence; he cites the opinion of yet another Foreign Office official (R. Allen, note dated 1 September): ‘He believed that Russian domination of their satellites was ‘far more “extreme” ’ than the corresponding British way, but that it was important to recognize that the British as well as the Russians aimed at ‘control’’ (Louis WR. The British Empire in the Middle East 1945 – 1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism. Oxford, 1998. P. 78). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Orbay, Mehmet Kâzım (1887 – 1964) – Turkish General, Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish armed forces (1944 – 1946). In Soviet sources Orbay is characterized as a “reactionary figure” from the İnönü circle, often disagreeing with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. See: Gasanly Dzh. SSSR – Turtsiia. S. 71–72, 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)