

TURKEY

By a KORERO Staff Writer

SHORTLY after the historic meeting of Mr. Churchill, President Roosevelt, and Marshal Stalin in Teheran, Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt conferred for three days in Cairo with the Turkish President and Foreign Minister. Although overshadowed by the Teheran meeting, this conference attracted much attention in Britain and America.

Turkey is to-day the most important neutral, and a glance at the map on the next page will show why. In the first place, she is the guardian of the straits connecting the Mediterranean with the Black Sea. The Russian campaign, particularly in the south, might have run a different course if the Axis had had free use of the Straits for their war vessels. Equally, it is desperately necessary for Germany to make sure that similar use of the Straits is denied to the Allies.

That is the main reason why the Germans threw so much weight into the counter-attack which dislodged Allied invasion forces from the Dodecanese islands. These islands are a screen round the entrance to the Dardanelles.

A second reason for Turkey's importance is that the north-western corner of her territory is a bridge between the Balkans and Asia Minor. If Turkey had not stood firm in the disastrous days of April and May, 1941, when Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece, the German armies would have poured south into Syria and Palestine, seized the great oilfields of Iraq, and made the Allied position in North Africa untenable. Then German propaganda was trying to persuade Turkey that neutrality was against her national interests and that she must take sides or forfeit her right to a voice in the affairs of Europe. To-day German propaganda anxiously extols the wisdom of Turkey's neutrality policy, because Turkey now holds one gateway to the Balkans, and along her southern frontiers are the Allied 9th and 10th Armies.

The outcome of the talks between Allied and Turkish leaders is not yet known. Most British and American newspapers take the view that Turkey's entry into the war is unlikely—for the present at any rate.

Some newspapers, however, point out that Sweden, although maintaining her neutrality, allowed Germany the right to transport troops across her territory. This, they suggest, might be a precedent for Turkey.

One incidental result of the talks at Ankara has been a marked improvement in relations between Turkey and Russia. Traditionally, Turkey has been suspicious of Russia because the Straits are for European Russia a vital outlet for her commerce. Several times during the present war the Turkish press has shown acute anxiety over the question of the part Russia is likely to play in eastern Europe.

Turkish-Russian relations became acutely bad in the early part of 1942, when two Russians holding official positions in Istanbul were sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude for alleged complicity in an attempt to assassinate the German Ambassador, von Papen. The recent improvement in Turkish-Russian relations means that the United Nations have got past one of the main obstacles to a satisfactory post-war settlement in eastern Europe.

Though a neutral, Turkey has suffered severely from the war. An army of 500,000 men has been continuously mobilized; universal military service has been extended to three years; the navy and the air force (thanks to British and American aid) have been expanded; and the output of war industries has been increased. Shortage of labour has affected food-production, and bread is severely rationed. There are also restrictions on industries producing luxuries and non-essential goods.