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World War: BALKAN THEATRE: Even Without the Turks

The stuff that myths are made of was being spun out in Greece last week. The Greeks spoke and acted like a race of giants 20 feet tall, hurlers of thunderbolts, crushers of men. Far from being daunted by the noisy threat which was giving Germany victory after bloodless victory in the Balkans, the Government declared: "Greece has shown in the most definite way that any idea of armistice would find her disdainfully hostile." The heart was still fiercely hot in Greece's Army; it launched a violent attack along the entire central section of the Albanian Front, and within 48 hours announced the capture of positions which the Italians had spent months fortifying, and of 2,200 men.

But Greek valor did not entirely erase Greek realism. The Greeks had their promises from the British (see p. 26); perhaps the British would put on a show at Salonika which would help. But something else which would also help would be Turkish belligerency. Last week the Greeks were reported to have asked Turkey whether belligerency were possible, and if so, how much, where, when.

The Turkish answer was conditioned by some very concrete considerations. By terrain, by training and by materiel, Turkey is constrained to think only of defense.

Therefore, unless the British were prepared to participate generously in a Turkish effort, the greatest hope the Greeks could have—a Turkish stroke at the German flank in Bulgaria—was not probable.

The Turks would treat any attacker to a first-rate shindy. European Turkey, the small patch of land north of the Dardanelles hinged on Istanbul, is divided from Bulgaria by ranges of formidable hills. In them the Turks have spent four years maneuvering extensively. They also have two fortified lines: the Maritsa Line, running parallel to the river of that name from the Aegean to Edirne (Adrianople) and from there to the Black Sea, and the Chatalja Line, about 20 miles north of the Bosphorus. Behind these run The Straits. To man her defenses Turkey has an Army of about 25 divisions, two armored brigades, four cavalry divisions, and about a half-dozen fixed garrisons—about 420,000 regulars in all.

Turkish equipment is poor. They have outmoded French-made Schneider 75-mm. artillery, some Mauser rifles, obsolete 105-mm. howitzers, German 1888 Mannlicher rifles, less than 100 anti-aircraft guns, a few out-of-date Russian-made six-ton tanks and six-wheel armored cars, perhaps 400 planes, mostly British Bristols, German Heinkels, U. S. Martins.

Cognizance of these factors—and the Greeks have assuredly been cognizant of them for a long time—made the tough talk in Athens and the tough acting in Albania seem all the more supermanly.

Even Italian Virginio Gayda, who habitually talks taller than all the Seven Hills of Rome, not only stopped trumpeting about the Greek war having been won by diplomacy, not only stopped talking about the huge force the British were supposed to be landing at Salonika, but even lent credence to "reports in Egypt" that now the Greeks were going to help the British in Libya. He wrote: "The British ... as well as Greek troops must abandon Balkan aid and rush to the weakened, endangered Wavell Army."

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