

JAMES BARROS

# The Corfu Incident of 1923

*Mussolini and The League of Nations*



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THE CORFU INCIDENT  
OF 1923



THE C ORFU  
INCIDENT OF 1923

MUSSOLINI AND  
THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

BY JAMES BARROS

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*TO MY PARENTS*



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*Dartmouth College  
Hanover, New Hampshire  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

- Amery Papers            The personal papers and diaries of Leopold S. Amery, London, England.
- Bulletin Périodique de la Presse Grecque*, etc.    Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (France), *Bulletin Périodique de la Presse*. . . .
- Curzon Papers           The personal papers of Lord Curzon, Kedleston, Derby, England.
- DBrFP*                    *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*; First Series (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1947-1960), 9 vols.
- DDDIG*                    Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Greece), *Documents Diplomatiques. Différend Italo-Grec: Août-Septembre 1923* (Athènes: Macris, 1923).
- DDI*                        Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, Settima Serie (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 1955), 2 vols.
- FRUS, 1919*                *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), 2 vols.
- FRUS, PPC*                *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, The Paris Peace Conference* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942-1947), 13 vols.
- Greek Archives            Archives Division of the Royal Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, Greece.
- Italian Archives           Archives Division of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome, Italy.

### *Abbreviations*

Keyes Papers	The personal papers of Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, Tingewick House, Buckingham, England.
L.N.	League of Nations.
League of Nations Archives	League of Nations Archives, United Nations Library, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.
NA	National Archives of the United States, Washington, D.C.

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

### JULY-DECEMBER 1923

- July 24 Italian fleet recalled to Taranto on instructions from Rome.
- July 29 A conversation is held in Rome between the Minister of Marine, Grand Admiral Thaon di Revel, Admiral Emilio Solari, and Captain Antonio Foschini, in which the former laments the decline of Italian prestige.
- July-August Conversations are held between military officials and career officials of the Italian Foreign Ministry as to what measures to take in the case of any Greek reaction to an Italian proclamation of sovereignty over the Dodecanese Islands. The decision taken after these conversations is to occupy Corfu, and the necessary military preparations are pushed forward during August.
- August 27 General Enrico Tellini and his staff are murdered near the Greek-Albanian frontier, but in Greek territory.
- August 29 Italian ultimatum is presented to the Greek Government.
- August 30 The Greek Government rejects the Italian ultimatum.
- August 30 Mussolini decides to adhere to the Conference of Ambassadors' projected note of protest to Greece over the Tellini murder.
- August 31 Italian naval units bombard and occupy the island of Corfu.
- August 31 The Conference of Ambassadors' note of

### *Chronology of Events*

- protest is presented to the Greek Government.
- September 1 Greece appeals to the League of Nations.
- September 2 Greece accepts the Ambassadorial note of protest and proposes that an international commission be appointed to investigate the Tellini murder.
- September 4 Greek proposals to settle the Italo-Greek dispute are presented to the League Council by the Greek delegate, Nikolaos Politis.
- September 5 Salandra, on instructions from Mussolini, denies competence of the League Council to handle the Italo-Greek dispute.
- September 5 The Conference of Ambassadors, meeting at Paris, assumes Greek responsibility for the Tellini murder and communicates its decision to the League Council.
- September 6 The Council of the League of Nations submits for the consideration of the Conference of Ambassadors eight suggestions as a means of giving satisfaction to the demands of the Conference as a consequence of the Tellini murder.
- September 7 A second note covering the demands of the Conference and the Italian Government is transmitted to the Greek Government.
- September 9 Greece agrees to execute all the requests for sanctions and reparations demanded by the Conference of Ambassadors.
- September 10 On instructions from the Foreign Office, Lord Robert Cecil does not press the

### *Chronology of Events*

- League's competence in the Italo-Greek dispute.
- September 10-13 After long and difficult negotiations the Conference of Ambassadors and the Italian Government devise a formula for the evacuation of Corfu.
- September 17 The Commission of Inquiry, sent by the Conference to investigate the Tellini murder, arrives in Epirus.
- September 17-18 The League Council acquiesces to the role assumed by the Conference of Ambassadors in settling the Italo-Greek dispute.
- September 22 The Commission of Inquiry forwards to the Conference of Ambassadors its first report, which is ambiguously worded.
- September 25 Acting on the strength of the Commission of Inquiry's first report, the Conference decides to award Italy 50 million Italian lire.
- September 26 Lord Crewe is instructed by Lord Curzon to accept the Conference's decision.
- September 27 Italian troops evacuate Corfu.
- September 27-29 A delay by the Greek Government in transferring the 50 million lire causes the Italian ships to anchor off Corfu for several days.
- September 29 Greece under protest agrees to pay Italy the 50 million Italian lire demanded by the Conference of Ambassadors.
- September 30 The Commission of Inquiry forwards to the Conference of Ambassadors its second report.

### *Chronology of Events*

- September 30-  
November 30 Agreement between the Conference representatives over how the investigation into the Tellini murder is to continue proves impossible.
- December 12-13 The first and second reports of the Commission of Inquiry are forwarded by the Conference to the Greek and Albanian Governments, as well as to the League of Nations.

## INTRODUCTION

**D**URING the interwar period the League of Nations appeared to many as the only hope for averting a repetition of the great disaster which had shaken Europe and the world from 1914 to 1918.

What many well-wishers of the League failed to realize, however, was that the organization established at Geneva was not as great an innovation in international relations as they thought. If they had looked carefully they would have seen that a more exact description of the structure and powers of the organization was given by its French name, *La Société des Nations*, than by its English equivalent.

Supporters of the organization often refused to admit that though the League could play a valuable role in international politics, it was still the foreign offices and chancelleries, especially those of the Great Powers, that were of paramount importance. They blinded themselves to the fact that the nature of international politics had not substantially changed with the establishment of the League, and that in foreign relations the desire to further the interests and well-being of one's country was still the order of the day.

Therefore, the League's seeming impotence during the Corfu dispute was a great shock to many of its supporters. They felt that the League and its principle had been betrayed and that the seeds of a future disaster had been planted. Whether these assumptions were correct will be examined in the following pages. The divergent positions taken by the Great Powers towards Italy and the League of Nations will be considered, as will the interpretation of the League by the Great Powers, especially the manner in which the League complemented their foreign policy requirements. The way in which the Corfu dispute was finally settled, and the actual role played by the League of Nations and the Conference of Ambassadors in

## Introduction

helping to bring the dispute to a peaceful conclusion, will conclude the study. Throughout, the relations between Mussolini and the career officials of the Italian Foreign Ministry will be touched upon. In essence, this study wishes to throw light on the handling of disputes during the League period and by doing so to attempt to discover the possibilities and limitations of political settlement under the auspices of an international organization.

Lastly, a few words should be said about sources. The only studies of the incident, prior to my own, were made in the 1920's. They are mostly French and German doctoral dissertations based on no documentary material except the public records of the League of Nations; they are cited in the bibliography. There were six parties to the affair: Britain, the Conference of Ambassadors, France, Greece, Italy, and the League of Nations, and I have examined the complete papers of four of these—those of the Conference of Ambassadors (never before used *in toto*) and the Archives of the League of Nations, Italy, and Greece. I might add that in the case of the last three special permission was needed before the papers could be examined.

In an attempt to use as much Italian documentary material as possible an examination was made of the Corfu dossiers in the Italian Foreign Ministry Archives. These materials, however, proved in general to be identical with those published in the seventh series of the *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, used in this study. Since this latter Italian publication includes documents from other Italian Government Ministries and departments it gives a fuller picture of Italian actions than does an examination of the Foreign Ministry Archives. Nevertheless, the Foreign Ministry Archives did yield several interesting documents not reproduced in the *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, and where these have been used they are clearly cited in the footnotes.

In the case of Greek documentary materials, the Corfu dossiers of the Royal Greek Foreign Ministry were also examined. These dossiers naturally included reports to Athens from Greek

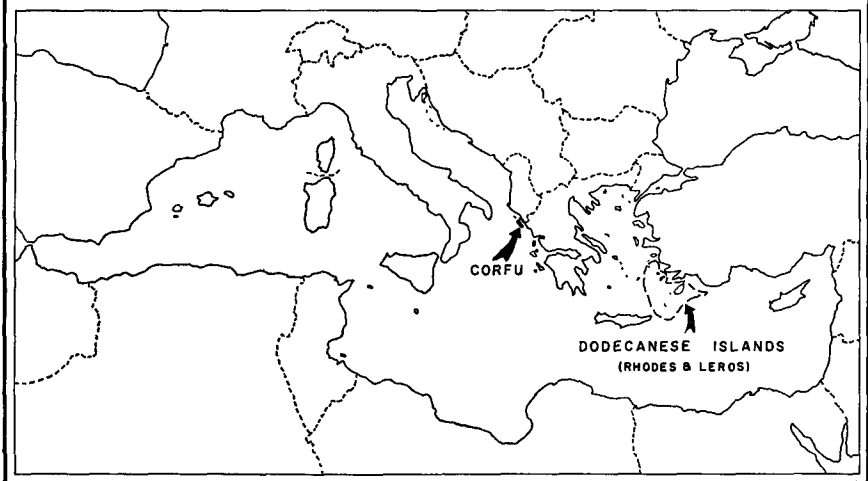
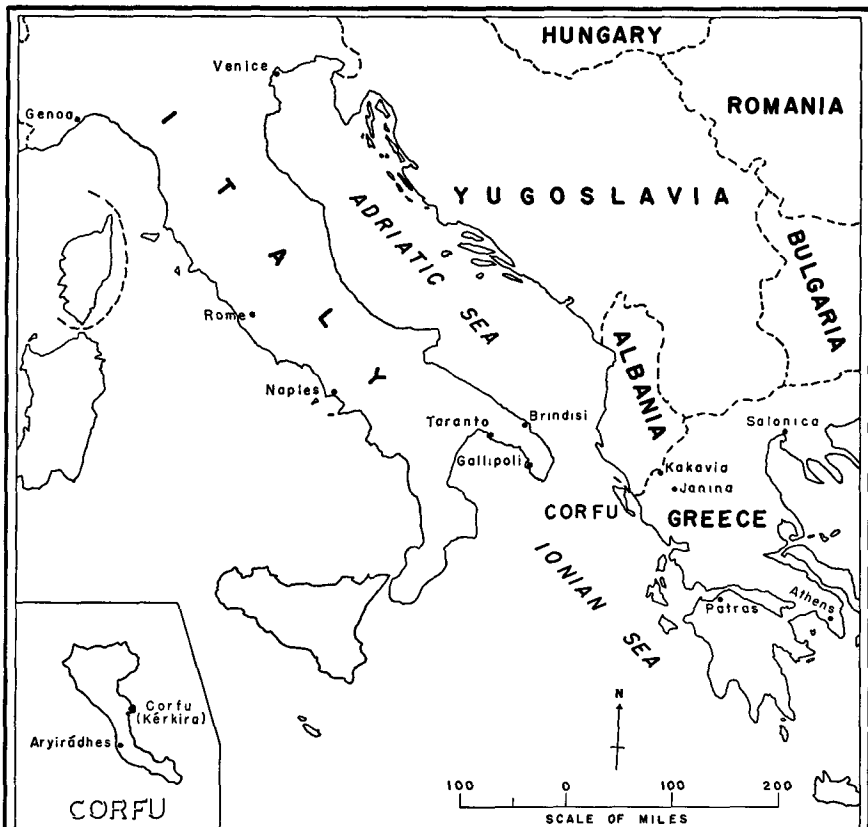
## *Introduction*

diplomatic and consular missions overseas, and instructions from Athens to these same missions. Of special interest in the Foreign Ministry Archives were the police, judicial, and other official reports on the murder and the actions taken by the Greek authorities to apprehend the Tellini assassins. After the defeat of Greece during the Second World War, all these papers in the Greek Foreign Ministry as well as archives in other Greek Government Ministries were closely examined by the Italian occupation authorities, undoubtedly in an attempt to throw more light on the Tellini murder. These researches, however, uncovered no evidence to link the Greek Government either directly or indirectly with the murder of General Tellini.

In the case of Great Britain, the Foreign Office operates under the fifty-year rule, so that their archives on the incident will not be open until 1973 at the earliest. To surmount this obstacle I examined as many private archives as possible, and special permission was given to examine the papers of the Foreign Secretary then, Lord Curzon, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Leopold S. Amery, and Admiral Sir Roger Keyes. Unfortunately, the papers of Stanley Baldwin, then Prime Minister, cannot be seen for many years to come, while the papers of other British cabinet ministers and military personages either contain no materials or are closed to researchers. As to the French, their archives are open only up to 1896 and the French Foreign Ministry has no intention of opening its archives beyond this period for many years to come.



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OF 1923



## CHAPTER I

### THE CONFERENCE OF AMBASSADORS

#### NEGOTIATIONS ESTABLISHING THE CONFERENCE OF AMBASSADORS

PRIOR to the First World War, conferences of ambassadors were a commonly accepted diplomatic institution for the negotiation and settlement of disputes. Thus the Conference of Ambassadors, the institution that played so important a role in solving the Corfu Incident of 1923, was no novelty. The Conference had its beginnings on July 1, 1919, three days after the signing of the Versailles Treaty. At a meeting of the Supreme Council held at the Quai d'Orsay, Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau proposed that the Council "nominate a Committee to watch the execution of the Treaty with Germany when ratified." Clemenceau added that "the Committee was to have no executive power but should superintend the work of all Commissions dealing with the details of the provisions of the Treaty . . . [furthermore it] would report to the Council from time to time what progress was being made and what further action might be needed."

Lord Balfour declared that he intended to nominate Sir Eyre Crowe, then Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and member of the British Delegation to the Peace Conference. Clemenceau's nominee was M. André Tardieu, French Delegate Plenipotentiary to the Peace Conference and Chairman of the Central Territorial Committee of the Conference, while Baron Makino proposed Mr. Otchiai, Secretary-General of the Japanese Delegation at the Peace Conference. It was agreed, however, to postpone nominations until the following day since both Secretary of State Robert Lansing and Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni of Italy were not prepared to offer

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any nominations.<sup>1</sup> On the following day Mr. John Foster Dulles was named as the American representative to the Committee, while Italy appointed Vittorio Scialoja.<sup>2</sup>

The Committee on the Execution of the Clauses of the Treaty, now established by the Supreme Council, was understood to be merely a temporary arrangement. Thus the Committee at an early date turned its attention to the creation of a more permanent organ having authority on any question raised once the Versailles Treaty came into force.<sup>3</sup> This organ, subsequently established as the Conference of Ambassadors, originated in an American proposal which the Committee had examined in three of its sessions and unanimously adopted.<sup>4</sup>

Paragraph 1 of the American proposal called for a special committee to study and follow up all questions "concerning the interpretation and the execution of the treaty with Germany." This excepted those questions specifically confided by

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, July 1, 1919. *FRUS, PPC*, vii, pp. 1-2; *DBrFP*, First Series, 1, pp. 1-2. According to Frances Kellor and Antonia Hatvany, *Security against War* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1924), 1, pp. 88-89, the Conference of Ambassadors owed "its existence, in all probability, to Mr. David Lloyd George." After the rejection of the League Covenant by the United States and with it the attempt to have "it share the responsibilities of bringing about European equilibrium, he conceived the idea of submitting questions of a political nature arising from the Versailles Treaty, not to the League of Nations . . . but to the Conference of Ambassadors, where the American representatives could 'unofficially observe,' and where, perhaps step by step, the United States would be drawn into a closer commitment to European Affairs." This theory is patently false, as the following pages will show—unless Clemenceau was acting in Lloyd George's behalf, which seems improbable. No less false is the statement that "Great Britain . . . probably made the original proposal of creating the Conference of Ambassadors." Gerhard P. Pink, *The Conference of Ambassadors (1920-1931)* (Geneva Studies, Vol. XII, Nos. 4-5, 1942; Geneva: Geneva Research Centre, 1942), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, July 2, 1919. *FRUS, PPC*, vii, p. 14; *DBrFP*, 1, p. 11; Commission to Negotiate Peace to the Acting Secretary of State (Phillips), July 4, 1919. *FRUS*, 1919, 1, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *FRUS, PPC*, xiii, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Note for the Supreme Council from the Commission on the Execution of the Clauses of the Treaty, July 23, 1919. *Ibid.*, vii, p. 362. The original French text is to be found in *DBrFP*, 1, p. 231.

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the Versailles Treaty either to the League of Nations, or to the Commissions on Reparations and on Military, Naval, and Air Control, or to some other organ. Established at Paris, the Committee if it so wished could also convene at other locations. The governments represented on the Committee were to be provided with "common and coordinated bases for information and interpretations," and in case of necessity with proposals relating to the matters defined above. At the earliest opportunity the Allied and Associated Powers were to make known the delegates, diplomatic or other, empowered to represent them in the projected Committee. These delegates in turn could be supported by technical advisers, depending upon the substance of the questions to be considered.

The relationship between the Committee, the governments, and the commissions authorized to execute the Treaty was to be regulated in the following manner: (1) commissions would report to the Committee all questions settled by them and the local German authorities or other authorities with whom they might be in contact; (2) the members of the Committee were empowered by their respective governments to send instructions to the commissions, to the Allied and Associated Governments, and to the representatives of the German Government when any disagreement arose in the field, *other than one of principle*. In the latter case the Committee, after a collective examination, would propose solutions to the governments. The governments in turn would notify their commissions in the field and the diplomatic representatives of the Allied and Associated Governments stationed in Berlin of the decisions and measures of execution. The Committee would also receive copies of the decisions for its information. The Allied and Associated Governments were to determine the relationship between the Committee and the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, in order that all steps taken to execute the Treaty would conform "to the principles and ideals which are the basis of the League." At the signing of the other peace treaties, in order to ensure "their execution under the same

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conditions," an organ, composed of the same persons, would be established.<sup>5</sup>

On July 28, almost four weeks after its establishment, the Committee forwarded the American draft recommendation to the Supreme Council for its action.

Lord Balfour, with foresight, questioned whether there would not be some confusion between the proposed new committee and the League of Nations. A Permanent Committee at Geneva and another at Paris "might lead to disputes."

Tardieu declared that Lord Balfour's doubts were adequately answered in paragraph 1 of the Committee's draft resolution. This clearly spelled out the Committee's field of jurisdiction and its relationship with the League and other organs. He felt there was no "risk of overlapping." In addition, according to paragraph 5 of the draft resolution, the Allied and Associated Powers would determine what relationship would exist between the proposed committee and the League of Nations.<sup>6</sup>

Balfour declared he was satisfied but raised a further question, whether the Council had any objection to the appointment of ambassadors as delegates to the projected committee. This question was interpreted by the American Mission at the Paris Peace Conference as "made . . . [undoubtedly] with the idea that the committee would merely serve as a clearing house between commission[s] functioning in Germany and the Allied and Associated Governments."<sup>7</sup>

Tardieu answered this query by directing Lord Balfour's

<sup>5</sup> Italics added. Draft recommendation. *FRUS, PPC*, vii, pp. 362-364. The original French text is to be found in *DBrFP*, 1, pp. 231-232.

<sup>6</sup> Lord Balfour was not alone in his confusion. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's it was to be voiced by numerous British M.P.'s. Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, Fifth Series, House of Commons, *Official Report*, Vol. 161, March 19, 1923, col. 2066-2067; *ibid.*, Vol. 169, February 14, 1924, col. 1126-1127; *ibid.*, Vol. 169, February 18, 1924, col. 1287-1288; *ibid.*, Vol. 170, February 25, 1924, col. 23; *ibid.*, Vol. 174, May 28, 1924, col. 384; *ibid.*, Vol. 175, June 26, 1924, col. 578; *ibid.*, Vol. 175, June 30, 1924, col. 908-910; *ibid.*, Vol. 175, July 9, 1924, col. 2229; *ibid.*, Vol. 235, February 12, 1930, col. 381.

<sup>7</sup> American Mission (Polk) to the Acting Secretary of State (Phillips), October 25, 1919. *FRUS, PPC*, xi, p. 654.

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attention to the draft recommendation. Though there was no specific need to appoint ambassadors, there was at the same time no provision against their appointment.

With no further questions and no dissents, the Supreme Council agreed to adopt the draft resolution submitted. Thus a Co-ordinating Committee to deal with questions of interpretation and execution of the Versailles Treaty was set up.<sup>8</sup>

Near the middle of October, the French delegation feared that the ratification of the Treaty and its subsequent execution would find the Allied and Associated Powers unprepared. They thought it "advisable to ascertain whether the International Commissions provided for . . . [were] nominated and ready to operate."<sup>9</sup> The French proposal did not specifically mention which particular "International Commissions" it had in mind. The Supreme Council, however, at its meeting of October 15 agreed that the Committee on the Execution of the Treaty should furnish to the Council a "list of the Commissions to be appointed in these first weeks," after the coming of the Treaty into force.<sup>10</sup>

The pressure was now mounting to see that the Allied and Associated Powers were adequately prepared to execute the Treaty when it came into force. It was only natural, therefore, that the following day the American Mission at Paris should report to the Secretary of State that nominations for the Committee to Co-ordinate the Interpretation and Execution of the Clauses of the Treaty with Germany were on the agenda for the next meeting of the Council. The Mission desired to "know as soon as possible who is to be the American representative."<sup>11</sup>

At that next meeting of the Supreme Council on October

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, July 2, 1919. *Ibid.*, vii, pp. 356-357; *DBrFP*, i, pp. 225-226.

<sup>9</sup> Note of the French Delegation dated October 13, 1919. *Ibid.*, viii, p. 665; *ibid.*, pp. 966-967.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, October 15, 1919. *Ibid.*, pp. 645-646; *ibid.*, pp. 961-962.

<sup>11</sup> American Mission (Polk) to the Secretary of State, October 16, 1919. *Ibid.*, xi, p. 653; *FRUS*, 1919, i, pp. 14-15.

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18, the United States, France, and Italy were not prepared to designate their representatives.<sup>12</sup> Four days later Italy appointed Count Lelio Bonin Longare, its Ambassador in Paris, with Professor Pagliano as alternate delegate. France nominated its Foreign Minister, M. Stephen Pichon, with M. Philippe Berthelot, the Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay, as alternate delegate.<sup>13</sup> England and Japan had previously designated their respective Ambassadors, Lord Derby and Mr. Matsui.<sup>14</sup> This left only the United States unrepresented. Such a situation, Secretary of State Lansing explicitly informed Frank L. Polk of the American Mission, could not be remedied "until we ratify the treaty, and until it becomes clear whether ratification of such appointments must be made by the Senate."<sup>15</sup> Polk stressed this point to the Supreme Council several times.<sup>16</sup>

The composition of the Committee now firmly established with the exception of the American delegate, the French and Italian delegates on the interim Reparations Committee began to propose "to extend the scope of the committee so as to constitute a consultative body to consider matters of importance arising out of the Treaty." The British delegate, however, took exception to this proposal declaring "that he was

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, October 18, 1919. *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 694; *DBrFP*, II, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, October 22, 1919. *Ibid.*, p. 732; *ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> American Mission (Polk) to the Secretary of State, October 16, 1919. *FRUS, PPC*, XI, p. 653; *FRUS*, 1919, I, pp. 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Secretary of State (Lansing) to the American Mission (Polk), November 6 [8], 1919. *Ibid.*, p. 660; *ibid.*, p. 19. However, as early as October 18, 1919, the Acting Secretary of State, Phillips, had made it clear that the United States was prepared to "act accordingly," and requested from the American Mission information as to the need in the way of assistants and clerical force, for the anticipated Committee. *Ibid.*, p. 654; *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> According to the Minutes of the Meeting of the Supreme Council of October 18, 1919, Polk informed the Council that "prior to ratification the United States was not authorized to be officially represented," on the Reparations Commissions. This point he reiterated on October 23, when he declared "that the United States could not be represented on any Commissions prior to the ratification of the Treaty by the Senate." *Ibid.*, VIII, pp. 692, 749; *DBrFP*, II, pp. 19, 54.

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against resurrecting the ghost of the Supreme Council after it had departed."<sup>17</sup>

France continually sought to extend the powers of what was to be the Conference of Ambassadors. The extension was finally realized in the Conference's handling of the Corfu dispute four years later.

The French position throughout the Versailles negotiations was opposed to the more limited American interpretation. Tacitly supported by the British, the Americans felt that the contemplated Conference of Ambassadors was no more than a co-ordinating committee dealing with questions "relating to the interpretation and execution of the Treaties."<sup>18</sup>

No less adamant was the American view that the future Conference of Ambassadors could not under any circumstances "become a continuation of the Supreme Council."<sup>19</sup> This point of view Polk never failed to impress upon his colleagues at meetings of the Supreme Council.<sup>20</sup> England first attempted to implement it in the Conference of Ambassadors after the entry of German troops into the neutral zone of the Rhineland, in March of 1920.<sup>21</sup>

During this minor crisis France attempted to use the Conference of Ambassadors as one more instrument in the furtherance of her policy of *sécurité* against a defeated Germany. She proposed that the Conference sanction counter measures against this blatant German violation of the Versailles Treaty. As President Alexander Millerand put the French case: "the Conference of Ambassadors charged with the interpretation of the Treaty and also charged with watching over its execution, is *ipso facto* qualified to examine all measures that may be

<sup>17</sup> American Mission (Polk) to the Acting Secretary of State (Phillips), October 25, 1919. *FRUS, PPC*, xi, p. 654.

<sup>18</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, November 10, 1919. *Ibid.*, ix, p. 76; *DBrFP*, II, p. 261.

<sup>19</sup> Secretary of State (Lansing) to the American Mission (Polk), November 6 [8], 1919. *Ibid.*, xi, p. 660; *FRUS, 1919*, I, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, October 28, and December 5, 1919. *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 786, and ix, p. 475.

<sup>21</sup> See Lord Derby's remarks at the Conference of Ambassadors' meeting on March 18, 1920. *DBrFP*, ix, p. 175.

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necessary to ensure its execution."<sup>22</sup> None of his colleagues could agree with this interpretation, Ambassador Bonin Longare of Italy included.<sup>23</sup>

Millerand's interpretation of the powers of the Conference prompted Scialoja two days later in London to ask Lord Curzon somewhat caustically "on which side of the English Channel decisions could be taken." Within four years the Italian attitude towards the Conference was to be vastly different. The Foreign Secretary's retort was "that of the two bodies the one in Paris and the other in London, the latter was best qualified to reach decisions."<sup>24</sup> Annoyed at Millerand's highhanded interpretation, Curzon lost no time and that same evening informed Lord Derby in Paris, "you should resist this claim, which has no legitimate foundation, by every means in your power."<sup>25</sup> The following day Lord Curzon made it clear to his colleagues that "it might sometimes be difficult to distinguish between what were matters of detail and what were matters of principle," though in his mind, "there was no doubt that the conference in London dealt with the latter."<sup>26</sup> Time and the requirements of national policy, however, would (in the Corfu crisis as well as on other occasions) find the British Government twisting and turning like a pirouetting ballerina, in its attitude towards the Conference of Ambassadors.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, March 20, 1920. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, Allied Representatives, March 22, 1920. *Ibid.*, vii, pp. 587-588. After the conclusion of the main session of the Paris Peace Conference on January 21, 1920, the Allied Representatives retired to London. At London, the sessions were divided on February 27, 1920 in much the same way that the sessions of the Paris Peace Conference had been split into the Council of Four and the Council of Five, or Council of Foreign Ministers. At London the main allied council sessions continued to sit at the Prime Minister's residence at 10 Downing Street. At the same time a complementary Conference of Foreign Ministers and Ambassadors met in Lord Curzon's room at Whitehall. This was what Curzon was referring to as "the other [body] in London."

<sup>25</sup> Lord Curzon to Lord Derby, March 22, 1920. *Ibid.*, ix, p. 223.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, Allied Representatives, March 23, 1920. *Ibid.*, vii, p. 600.

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### THE CONFERENCE OF AMBASSADORS AS AN INSTITUTION

On December 13, 1919, the Conference of Ambassadors was formally established during a meeting at London on the basis of a draft resolution offered by Lloyd George with Clemenceau's concurrence. The resolution stipulated that after the termination of the Peace Conference "large questions of policy" were to be handled by direct contact between the governments themselves. On the other hand, "questions of detail" were to be handled by a "Conference of Ambassadors." Though Viscount Chinda of Japan acceded in behalf of his government, Scialoja of Italy and Ambassador John W. Davis of the United States merely accepted the resolution for transmission to their respective governments.<sup>27</sup>

Davis' act had already been determined by the action of the United States Senate which had rejected the Versailles Treaty in November. This prompted President Wilson to order withdrawal of all American representatives on any Commissions, the projected "Committee of Ambassadors" included.<sup>28</sup>

By January 7, 1920, Ambassador Hugh C. Wallace cabled Secretary of State Lansing that his attendance "would be of advantage should the United States ratify the treaty at an early date." He therefore requested instructions concerning his "part in the meeting of the so-called Committee of Ambassadors."<sup>29</sup> In response to this cable Lansing voiced no objections to Wallace's "attending unofficially and as an observer" on condition that his colleagues would offer no objection to his "attending the meeting in such capacity."<sup>30</sup> Hence, throughout the life span of the Conference of Ambassadors, the United

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, December 13, 1919. *FRUS, PPC*, ix, pp. 856-858; *DBrFP*, II, p. 778; Davis (London) to the Secretary of State, December 13, 1919. *FRUS, 1919*, I, p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Secretary of State (Lansing) to the American Mission, November 27, 1919. *FRUS, 1919*, I, pp. 21, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Wallace (Paris) to the Secretary of State (Lansing), January 7, 1920. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Secretary of State (Lansing) to Wallace (Paris), January 9, 1920. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

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States Ambassador found himself in the unique position of being "an intermittent observer."<sup>31</sup>

On January 21, 1920, the Council of Foreign Ministers decided to call into being the Conference of Ambassadors set up by the Supreme Council. Curzon pointed out, though, that the Conference was never intended to handle the projected Turkish Peace Treaty (Sèvres), which was a question reserved exclusively for the attention of the Supreme Council.<sup>32</sup> The Conference held its first meeting on January 26, 1920; it was to hold its last one eleven years later on March 30, 1931. During that period it was to have 327 sessions and to adopt 2,957 resolutions.<sup>33</sup> It sat at the Quai d'Orsay and was served by an experienced and skilled secretariat headed by a secretary-general,<sup>34</sup> who in his communications used a very formal stationery inscribed "Conference of Ambassadors—Office of the President."<sup>35</sup>

By international usage the representative of the host country presides over any international conference. Therefore the Conference was often chaired by the President of the French Republic, who was the *de jure* president of the Conference. Though he often took decisions as the representative of France, he also signed the notes and other materials as President of the Conference of Ambassadors. By custom, however, the French President was represented by someone else in the French delegation,<sup>36</sup> a situation that France used to great advantage during the Corfu crisis. Thus, Jules Cambon, the great diplomatist, acted in place of the French President as President of the Conference, while M. Jules Laroche, of the political section of the Quai d'Orsay, and other members of the French delegation represented the official French view.

<sup>31</sup> *FRUS, PPC*, XIII, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the Meeting, January 21, 1920. *Ibid.*, IX, pp. 1005-1008; *DBrFP*, II, pp. 963-965; Wallace (Paris) to the Secretary of State (Lansing), January 31, 1920. *FRUS*, 1919, I, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> *FRUS, PPC*, XIII, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> The first two secretaries-general were Jules Cambon and René Massigli, both of whom figured prominently in the Corfu crisis. Pink, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Kellor and Hatvany, I, p. 89.      <sup>36</sup> Pink, p. 42.

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In the matter of representation the only exception made was in the case of Belgium when the Conference on February 2, 1920, resolved that "on account of its special situation as a Power bordering upon Germany, and taking part in the occupation of the Rhineland, Belgium shall be qualified to participate in the deliberations of the Conference of Ambassadors upon all questions for which the Conference shall consider the presence of a Belgium Delegate *advisable*."<sup>87</sup>

The Conference was unique in a number of other respects. It had added assistance from both ad hoc and established organs. It received advice and reports from naval counselors of the four principal powers. It established a Technical Geographic Committee to help with delimitation and territorial questions. A Financial and Editing Committee and a Technical Committee on Railroads also rendered assistance to the Conference in their appointed fields. Lastly, the Conference collaborated with the Allied Military Committee of Versailles. This committee had been granted the power, by a decision of the Heads of Government on December 13, 1919, to deal exclusively with the military problems relating to the Treaty's execution.<sup>88</sup>

The Conference's actions were taken in four forms: (1) resolutions, which were decisions without appeal and which could be questioned only by the governments permanently represented in the Conference; (2) declarations, which were grave acts in that they engaged the general policy of the ex-Allied States; (3) protocols, which concerned questions dealing with the application of the treaties and were signed by the ambassadors and plenipotentiaries; (4) the *procès-verbaux* of the meetings of the Conference.<sup>89</sup> The last was to be used as a face saving device for Italy during the Corfu crisis.

<sup>87</sup> Italics added. As quoted in Catherine S. Kadragic, *International Delimitation of Albania, 1921-1925* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1956), p. 7. The statement by Kellor and Hatvany, I, p. 89, that there were "no representatives of small states," in the Conference of Ambassadors is wrong, as the above clearly shows.

<sup>88</sup> *FRUS, PPC*, XIII, p. 8; Pink, pp. 125-161.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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As pointed out, the Conference of Ambassadors set up by the Supreme Council was not a totally novel feature in European diplomatic development. Prior to the First World War, conferences of ambassadors had been instituted many times.<sup>40</sup> These pre-World War One conferences of ambassadors differed in a number of ways from the Conference of Ambassadors established by the negotiations at Versailles. When established, these pre-World War One conferences "were given a definite task," which was "either narrow or wide." In contrast, the Conference of Ambassadors that sat at the Quai d'Orsay for eleven years entailed "a greater and more general task . . . the execution of the Peace Treaties of 1919 and 1920," and, by cooperation with other institutions, the creation of a new Europe.<sup>41</sup>

The previous conferences had their "basis in a new agreement valid specifically for each conference";<sup>42</sup> therefore they were ad hoc arrangements. The only point of similarity between the earlier conferences and the Conference of Ambassadors was that they all adhered to the cardinal principle of European diplomacy, "the preponderance of the Great Powers."<sup>43</sup> For in practice conferences of ambassadors were nothing more than formalized meetings of the Great Powers in concert. The necessity to solve certain pressing issues, which could not be handled effectively either by ministerial meetings or bilateral negotiations and in which a consensus and agreement among the Great Powers had to be found, led to their development. They were convenient and, depending upon the problem to be solved, an absolutely indispensable method for negotiating and settling disputes that touched or threatened Great Power interests. In a sense, conferences of ambassadors were self-constituted high courts of political adjudication and appeal. Prior to the First World War, in an age dominated by traditional diplomacy with its intricate and delicate negotiations, they proved to be the perfect instruments for secret agreements and compromise. It would be no exaggeration to

<sup>40</sup> Pink, pp. 15-16.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.