

MUSTAFA KEMAL-LAWRENCE MEETING IN THE LIGHT OF BRITISH DOCUMENTS

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In April 1926, Brigadier-General Moberley of the British Army was writing a book, entitled *History of the Mesopotamian Campaign*, which included a section on Turkish war aims and Pan-Turkism. He approached the British Foreign Office for information on the subject, whereupon one of the officials, W. G. Childs, drew up a minute 20th April for the use of the Department. This minute throws interesting light on the personality and career of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). Apparently, Childs had spoken to Colonel T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia reputation) on the subject, who had told him that, "by a curious accident", he (Lawrence) was able, in September 1918, "to have several conversations with Mustafa Kemal Pasha", and that among the topics discussed was that of Turkish war aims.

The gist of Mustafa Kemal's statement to Lawrence was said to have been as follows: He declared that the real Turkish interests in the war lay in the East, and that this opinion was strongly held by the Committee of Union and Progress and the party more closely defined as the "Pan-Turks". He stated further that the attainment of Turkey's Eastern ambitions had been made the subject of a pre-war agreement between the German Government and the inner group of Turkish leaders (doubtless the same group of Enver, Talat and others, who were in negotiation for a secret treaty with Germany before the war).

Mustafa Kemal understood that the agreement was in the nature of a definite pledge to the Turkish leaders rather than a formal agreement between Governments. The essentials of the pledge were: That on the conclusion of the war (taken for granted that it would be a successful war), Germany would ensure that Turkey was placed in possession of Trans-Caucasia, North-Western Persia, Daghestan, Terek and the Trans-Caspian region. These prospective territorial gains, "in effect assuring the fulfilment of Pan-Turkish territorial ambitions", formed the governing consideration which secured Turkish support for Germany in the war.

Childs believed that some doubt existed as to whether the whole of Trans-Caucasia was intended, but the area to which the pledge applied

certainly included Russian Armenia and the Muslim regions of Trans-Caucasia. In speaking of "Pan-Turkish views" regarding Egypt and the Arab countries (Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Mesopotamia), Mustafa Kemal is said to have used more decided terms. Egypt, Kemal had said, was of no interest whatever to the Pan-Turks (for the purposes of conquest), and Turkish operations against Egypt were merely demonstrations for strategical purposes. As for Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia, they were not only valueless in the Pan-Turkish scheme of things (except in certain strategical aspects relating to the war), but would be positive dangers and encumbrances if they remained in Turkish possession. The Pan-Turks, Kemal declared, would lose them without a regret; they would even be glad to be rid of them.

Here Childs explained that, when Mustafa Kemal spoke thus, the British Army of the Tigris had not yet begun its final advance, and that he did not envisage the loss of Mosul and the control of the routes thence into Western Persia. Indeed, Childs made the suggestion that "the stubborn attitude" of the Turkish Government regarding Mosul at the Lausanne Conference and subsequently, had its real source in Pan-Turkish aims for the future. Enver Pasha's insistence on the offensive for the recovery of Baghdad had been German interest, but also with the purpose of recovering the control of the route from Baghdad into Persia. The plan, therefore, had the advantage of serving both German and Pan-Turkish interests, a matter of special importance to Enver Pasha, who was, in fact, in a very difficult position. He was the handle by which Germany held the Turkish Government, but he was also the chief leader of the Pan-Turks, and thus compelled to support the policy of the Pan-Turks, for the party was exceedingly powerful. Enver therefore had to serve two masters. His influence with his Government varied with the fluctuations of the war. He was most powerful when the course of the war promised well for Germany; whenever the war went against Germany, the Pan-Turks demanded that their interests should come first, and were able to impose their will on him.

Mustafa Kemal apparently did not allege that Enver was in German pay -that, perhaps, according to Childs, went without saying. But the fact was noted that, in the *Memoirs* which Mustafa Kemal was then (1926) publishing in a Turkish newspaper, he related how the Germans had endeavoured to influence him (Kemal) by sedig him "a box of gold"-a gift which he adroitly evaded. In considering Enver Pasha's wartime policy, it was assumed that he not only had German masters, but German paymasters.

Childs believed it was of great interest that Mustafa Kemal should have told Colonel Lawrence that, at the beginning of 1918 he had become the leading spirit of those Turks who put pressure on Enver Pasha and required that Turkish interests must come before German ones. By this time Mustafa Kemal's following had grown so powerful that this party was able to dictate the broadlines of Turkish military policy. "It insisted that immediate steps should be taken to realize the Pan-Turkish aspirations in the East (!)", claims Childs.

Mustafa Kemal is also said to have asserted that, at this stage, it was plain to him and his supporters that Germany would lose the war; they demanded therefore that Turkey's remaining military resources should be devoted to exploiting Pan-Turkish aims (!). They required the concentration of 100,000 Turkish troops in Trans-Caucasia and North-Western Persia. Mustafa Kemal is said to have told Colonel Lawrence that he had declared at the time that, if 100,000 Turkish troops were in the Caspian region when Germany collapsed, the exhausted Entente Powers would find it impossible to eject them. The Powers might hold Turkey in Europe, Istanbul and the Straits, but they could not, in practice, overrun Anatolia, or maintain themselves there. With 100,000 Turkish troops in Trans-Caucasia, the Turks would speedily reach Trans-Caspia, and once they were in Central Asia, he saw no limits to the possibilities which this would offer. A Turkish army could appear on the frontier of Afghanistan; it could reach Eastern Turkestan and Mongolia, if desired.

In Mustafa Kemal's opinion, a Turkish army at large in Central Asia would have everything its own way, and secure for Turkey territorial gains far outweighing any losses which might occur in the West. This plan, Mustafa Kemal explained, Enver Pasha had at last been compelled to adopt and put into execution, in spite of German opposition. But the Turkish troops concentrated for the purpose had never reached the required numbers, nor was the policy adopted in time. With regard to Talat Pasha, Mustafa Kemal was said to have stated that, as a matter of personal policy, that "astute" Grand Vezir always refused to take sides when military leaders differed ¹.

Considering that Mustafa Kemal never believed in Pan-Turkish or Pan-Turanism, the ideas attributed to him by Colonel Lawrence and W. G. Childs are unconvincing. Nor is there any evidence that a meeting had

¹ Public Record Office, Foreign Office archives, FO 371/215/L 2540.

actually taken place between Kemal and Lawrence. If such a meeting had taken place, why was it not mentioned by Kemal or Lawrence in their respective memoirs?² Besides, the exact time and place of such a meeting have not been disclosed. Lawrence claims that he met Mustafa Kemal in September 1918. Let us trace the activities of both men during this time.

Mustafa Kemal, who was appointed to the command of the Seventh Army, for the second time, on 7th August 1918, took up his command on 18th September. At the time the Seventh Army was in Palestine between South Nablus and the Shreia River. He wrote to a doctor friend:

“Syria deserves pity. There is no governor, no commander. *There is a lot of British propaganda. The British secret service is active everywhere...* The British now think that they will defeat us by their propaganda rather than by fighting...”

Did this letter imply that Kemal had a chance meeting with Lawrence without realising the latter's real identity? It is very difficult to say, although Kemal's letter is very interesting.

Basing his assumption on the revelations of an Indian deserter, Kemal predicted that the enemy would attack in the early morning, or evening, of 19th September 1918. It actually attacked on the night of 18th September and pushed the Turkish armies towards Damascus. Kemal had realised that it was vital to prevent the enemy from passing East of Jordan, where the Fourth Army was already being harassed by the Arab legions of Emir Feisal and Lawrence in an attempt to cut the only remaining Turkish lines of retreat.

Kemal entered Damascus alone, with a small personal escort, Feisal's Sherifian flag hung from the windows whilst Arab bands roamed the streets, drunk with excitement, and firing salvos of cartridges into the air. This must be after 30th September when Lawrence himself was already in Damascus. Did both men meet there? It is possible, but when, where and how? There is no concrete evidence. Kemal stayed for a short while and then returned to Kiswe where he found orders from the German Supreme Commander, Liman von Sanders, to hand over his troops to the commander of the Fourth Army and to proceed to Rayak to rally and command a mixed

² See Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: *Söylev* I and II, Ankara 1963-4; T.E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, London 1976 (reprint); see also David Garnett (ed.): *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence of Arabia*, London 1964.

group of units salvaged from various parts of the front. Lord Kinross claims that as the Arab troops marched into Damascus Kemal was on his way to Rayak³.

Lawrence, who gave a vivid account of his exploits in *The Arab Bulletin*, published by British Intelligence in Cairo, after describing “the destruction of the (Turkish) Fourth Army”, observed:

“Our horses rode that evening (September 30) into Damascus. There, Shukri el-Ayubi and the town council proclaimed the King of the Arabs and hoisted the Arab flag as soon as Mustafa Kemal and Jemal had gone...”⁴

In the light of the above documents and the statements attributed to Mustafa Kemal both by Lawrence and Childs, it is difficult to believe that Kemal and Lawrence had actually met.

³ Lord Kinross: *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation*, London 1981, pp. 118 ff.; Uluğ İğdemir: *Atatürk'ün Yaşamı, I, 1881-1918*, Ankara 1980, pp. 124 ff.; see also Falih Rıfkı Atay: *Atatürk'ün Hatıratları*, Ankara 1965.

⁴ *Letters of Lawrence...*, op. cit., p. 256.

