

THE ANGLO-TURKISH CONFLICT FIFTY YEARS AGO

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Fifty years ago at Chanak (Dardanelles), on Turkish territory, the Turkish Army under *Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk)*, the national hero of the Gallipoli campaign, faced its British counterpart, commanded by General *Sir Charles Harington*, Commander-in-Chief, Army of Occupation. What was the British Army doing on Turkish soil, and why were the armies of these two nations poised for armed conflict? The story goes back to the First World War. The Ottoman Empire, which had participated in that War as an ally of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria), was defeated by the Entente Powers (Britain, France, Italy and Greece), and was forced to sign the Armistice of Mudros on 30th October, 1918. This Armistice¹, some of the terms of which were deliberately made ambiguous, enabled the Allies to set about possessing the war spoils in the form of Turkish territories which they claimed to be theirs "by virtue of the secret treaties and by right of conquest"². The secret war-time agreements, contracted by the belligerent Allies on different dates, had envisaged the complete dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the division of Turkish territories amongst Britain, France, Italy and Tsarist Russia³. They had also revealed the hypocrisy of the Allies, who had openly declared their war aims to be, *inter alia*, the preservation of the integrity and independence of the Turkish homelands⁴.

NOTE: For the abbreviations used in this article *vide* bibliography annexed.

¹ FO./3449/181110, Armistice documents; FO./5259/E 5737, rough notes kept by the British delegation during the armistice negotiations. *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1917-18, vol. cxi, pp. 611-613.

² Earle, pp. 280 and 300.

³ DBFP 1/VI, chap. III; Cmd. 671 (LI), 1920; Temperley VI, pp. 4-22; Hurewitz II, pp. 7-25; Mears, pp. 608-620; Bullard, *passim*; G. Lewis, pp. 52-53; Howard, pp. 181-213.

⁴ Lloyd George declaration of 5.1.1918; Lloyd George II, p. 809; PRFRUS, Suppl. 1, 1918, Part 1, pp. 4-12; *Times*, 7.1.1919. President Wilson declaration, 8.1.1918; PRFRUS, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-17; Baker III pp. 23-41; Evans, p. 76; Howard, p. 202.

Shortly after the signature of the armistice, the Entente Powers went ahead with their plans to dismember the Ottoman Empire by occupying the key points, and by gradually extending their occupations into the heartland of Anatolia to include whole provinces inhabited predominantly by Turkish/Muslim people. Thus the Straits and Istanbul, the capital, were occupied by British and French forces; Italian troops were landed at Antalya (Adalia), French troops at Cilicia, and Greek troops invaded the province of Izmir. Western Thrace was under Greek control, Eastern Thrace under French troops and Musul under British forces. The Allies, moreover, encouraged the subject nationalities — the Greeks, the Armenians and the Kurds, to put forward lavish demands for territories to be carved out of Turkish homelands. The Greeks asked for Western Anatolia and hankered after the Black Sea coast where the establishment of a Pontine Republic was envisaged⁵. The Kurds claimed part of the Eastern Provinces which would be formed into an independent Kurdistan under British auspices⁶; and the Armenians put forward very lavish demands, claiming all of the Eastern Provinces and the territories in the south-east and north-east of Turkey, to be formed into a Greater Armenia⁷. (The parallel in the United Kingdom would have been the secession of Scotland, Wales, South-East England and Northern Ireland.)

Most of these demands found an echo in the abortive Treaty of Sévres, which was practically imposed upon the Ottoman Government on 10th August, 1920. This still-born treaty⁸, described by one British writer as the “death warrant” of the Turkish nation⁹, deprived Turkey of most of her territories, and confined her to a small Anatolian

⁵ FO./4376/PID 161, Paris Peace Conference, 4.2.1919; *Times*, 15.1.1919; FO/3659/110915, Greek Archbishop Chrysanthos to Lloyd George, Paris letter, 27.5.1919; *The Euxine Pontus Question*, Paris, 2.5.1919.

⁶ FO./3657/11446, Kurdish Committee memoir, British High Commissioner Calthorpe to Acting Foreign Minister Lord Curzon, Istanbul despatch, 5.1.1919; FO./4192/140507, *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, booklet by Captain Driver; FO./4191/70483, Cherif Pasha memorandum, Paris, March, 1919.

⁷ FO./4376/PID 206, Paris meeting, 26.2.1919.

⁸ The treaty was neither ratified nor implemented.

⁹ G. Lewis, p. 66.

state with a narrow outlet on the Black Sea¹⁰. Moreover, under a Tripartite Agreement the Allies agreed to divide Turkey into zones of influence, purporting to help her in reconstruction and to avoid "international rivalries"¹¹, but actually in order to exploit her economically and politically. To the Turks this was a treaty of revenge. It created bitter repercussions, and sounded like a tocsin all over the country. For the first time the national sentiments, already fanned by *Mustafa Kemal* and a handful of his Nationalist supporters following the Greek invasion of Izmir (15th May, 1919), took firm hold of the mass of people who, with few exceptions, turned their eyes to Ankara, the Nationalist capital, as their only hope for salvation¹². There, the Nationalist Turks had already set up, on 23rd April, 1920, a *de facto* government, and had pledged themselves, in a National Pact, to save the independence and integrity of the Turkish homelands.

Soon after, the Italians and the French realized that the Turkish Nationalist Movement in Anatolia was a force to reckon with, and began to come to terms with it. Britain, however, who was mainly responsible for the despatch of Greek forces to invade İzmir, adhered tenaciously to her pro-Greek policy, and went on providing moral support, if not material, to her Greek protégé. By the middle of 1922, the Turkish Nationalists faced a formidable Greek army in Western Anatolia, with the diplomatic support of Imperial Britain behind it; whilst they themselves had to rely on France, Italy, Soviet Russia and certain Muslim countries for moral and material support. All diplomatic haggings to solve the Eastern Question without bloodshed had failed. The interests of the Allies were too divided to allow such a peaceful settlement. Nevertheless the Turkish Nationalists' diplomacy performed miracles in dividing the Allies by playing one against the other, and in alienating the Greeks; so much that, when they launched their surprise offensive on 26th August, 1922, no one lifted a finger to assist the Hellenic Kingdom whose ambitions knew no bounds. The Greek army in Anatolia was utterly routed and chased beyond the waterfront of Izmir in a matter of days.

¹⁰ FO./5108/E 4333, Vansittart to Curzon, Paris despatch, 5.5.1920; *British and Foreign State Papers*, v. 113, pp. 652-776; Cmd. 964 of 1920.

¹¹ FO./5095/E 4107; DBFP. 1/VIII, pp. 141-143, Forbes to Tilley, San Remo despatch, 29.4.1920; Cmd. 963 of 10.8.1920; Erim I, pp. 524-529.

¹² Mikusch, pp. 251-252.

The repercussions of this Turkish victory found an echo outside the boundaries of Turkey, throughout the dependent and oppressed countries, which now looked to *Mustafa Kemal* for liberation. Muslims all over the world hailed this Turkish success as “the greatest victory of Islam over Christendom, of the East on the West, of Asia over Europe, and of Nationalist Turkey over Imperialist Britain”¹³. This victory exulted the Nationalists and produced a very threatening situation for the Allies, particularly for Britain, who had the Dardanelles under her occupation and whom they regarded as an obstacle barring the way to Thrace. They were determined to retake Istanbul and the Thracian capital of Edirne by force of arms if necessary¹⁴. This Turkish determination shifted the centre of gravity from Anatolia to the Straits. Alarmed by the magnitude of the Turkish victory and by the risk to their own interests, the Allies drew together¹⁵. They sent detachments to Izmit and Chanak to demonstrate their unity, and warned the Nationalists that they would not tolerate any violation of the “neutral zone” (zone occupied by the Allied forces in the Straits)¹⁶.

Meanwhile, the sensational appeal to the Dominions on 16/17th September, by *Lloyd George* and *Churchill*, inviting them to join in the defence of the Straits, had an electrical effect on this unity¹⁷. General Pellé, the French High Commissioner in Istanbul, was instructed immediately to proceed to Izmir to see *Mustafa Kemal* in order to extricate

¹³ FO./7848/E 10531, Consul Morgan to Curzon, Aleppo despatch, 20.9.1922; FO./7898/E 10419, Consul Creig to Ambassador Young, Sarajevo despatch, 25.9.1922; FO./7742/E 10754, General Allenby to Curzon, Ramleh despatch, 25.9.1922; *ibid.*, E 10013, General Situation Report, 1/10.9.1922; FO./7848/E 10961, Consul Satow to Curzon, Beyrout despatch, 3.10.1922; FO./9121/E 1979, Henderson to Curzon, Istanbul despatch, 13.2.1923; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, 11.2.1923; ATTB IV, p. 479; Bayur, p. 115; Evans, p. 372.

¹⁴ FO./7887/E 9154, British Ambassador Graham’s conversation with Osman Nizami Pasha, Ottoman ambassador designate, Rome, 10.9.1922.

¹⁵ Cab. P. 23/31, 48(22), 7.9.1922; *ibid.*, 49(22), 15.9.1922; Evans, pp. 372 and 381, Istanbul telegram 13.9.1922, and London telegram, 16.9.1922; FO./7894/E 9939, Rome to Ankara, 19.9.1922.

¹⁶ FO./7888/E 9350, Poincaré to Hardinge, Paris note, 14.9.1922.

¹⁷ CP No. 465, Hardinge to Curzon, Paris telegram, 18.9.1922; CP 9893, Graham to Curzon, Rome telegram, 21.9.1922; FO./9176/E 10937, Turkey Annual Report for 1922; Evans, p. 382, London telegram, 19.9.1922; Beaverbrook, p. 161; Owen, p. 635; Walder, pp. 210-230.

the French Government from its embarrassing position,¹⁸ and to assure him that France in no way associated herself with the British Prime Minister's action. *Pellé* asked *Kemal* not to violate the neutral zones. He assured him that the High Commissioners would demarcate the line behind which the Greek troops would withdraw. But *Kemal* would accept no bargaining on Thrace, where he must send a certain number of troops to maintain order. The Greeks must withdraw immediately to the west of Maritza. He would not recognise the "neutral zones". Besides, it was difficult to stop "the victorious Turkish army", which would march on Istanbul simultaneously with Chanak. As England would not agree to modify considerably her policy in Thrace, he must settle the matter by military means. Nevertheless he would come to a conference, preferably at Uskudar, but he would not arrest the movements of his troops.

Pellé implored him not to prejudice the meeting of the conference by committing any rash act, and warned him of the tenacity of England when once she was engaged in a struggle¹⁹. In Paris, *Poincaré*, the premier, terrified of new entanglements, announced in the French Chamber on 19th September that France would not go to war with Turkey. French public opinion did not favour it. The Italians followed a similar attitude; so did a great section of the British public, which was stirred up by the *Daily Mail*, to call meetings of protest against a war with Turkey. The T. U. C. made it clear to *Lloyd George* that working-class opinion was "absolutely antagonistic to war"²⁰. When the withdrawal of the French and Italian detachments from Chanak and Izmit demolished all semblance of Allied unity²¹, Britain rushed reinforcements to the Dardanelles and to Istanbul, and requested assistance from Serbia and Roumania, who were reluctant to take sides²².

¹⁸ FO./7888/E 9426, Rumbold to Curzon, Istanbul telegram, 17.9.1922.

¹⁹ *Kemal's* conversation with *Pellé*, Izmir, 18/19.9.1922; *Söylev* II., p. 466; *Speech*, p. 568; Aydemir III, p. 24; FO./7891/E 9711, Rumbold to Curzon, Istanbul telegram 21.9.1922; FO./9176/E 10937, Turkey Annual Report for 1922.

²⁰ Walder, p. 240.

²¹ CP No. 482, FO/7891/E 9639, E 9641, Rumbold to Curzon, Istanbul telegrams, 19/20.9.1922; *Times*, 19/20.9.1922.

²² FO/7891/E 9674, Curzon to Rumbold, London telegram, 16.9.1922; CP No. 476, Millingen-Drake to Curzon, telegram, 20.9.1922; CP No. 513, Curzon to Cabinet, 21.9.1922; FO./7901/E 10784, Blair memorandum, Belgrade, 3.10.1922.

In face of this war hysteria in British Government circles, the Nationalists did not remain inactive. They strove to come to a direct understanding with Bulgaria for joint action against the Greeks, and simultaneously urged the Serbians to make common cause with them and to seize Salonica. On 17th September, *Hamid*, the Nationalist representative, told the Serbian Minister in Istanbul that the Nationalists were out for all the *Misak-ı Milli* (National Pact), including autonomy for Western Thrace, which, if not conceded by the Allies, would lead to war. The Turks would transfer their troops from Asia to Europe across the Black Sea²³, with the help of the Russians, who they hoped would invade Bessarabia if the Roumanians actively interfered²⁴. They made every effort to isolate Britain who, they were fully convinced, wished to dominate Istanbul and Thrace. But despite their bellicose attitude, they preferred to solve the problem by diplomacy²⁵. *Kemal* had already stated to *Ward Price* of the *Daily Mail* that even in victory, the Turkish demands were no more than the *Misak-ı Milli*²⁶. He was ready to attend in person any conference to be held on Turkish soil²⁷. Such a conference between the Allies and the belligerents was also being urged by *Rumbold*, the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, who suggested that it should be held on a basis sufficiently modified to ensure the attendance of the Kemalists. It would give the Allies a breathing space. "If we allow the situation to drift", he warned *Curzon*, "Kemal will not rest quiet. Unless negotiations supervene, he will endeavour to get (to Thrace) via Constantinople or Chanak". Britain was not prepared militarily to meet the Kemalist threat both at the Dardanelles and at Irak²⁸.

Following this advice, *Curzon* went to Paris, where he met *Poincaré* on 20th September and patched up Allied unity by a compromise, after agitated discussions for several days during which, as the defender of the Greeks, he was repeatedly attacked and humiliated by *Poincaré*,

²³ FO./7892/E 9721, Rumbold to Curzon, Istanbul telegram, 21.9.1922.

²⁴ FO./7896/E 10197, Secret Intelligence Report, 26.9.1922.

²⁵ Kemal to Karabekir, İzmir Telegram, 22.9.1922, ATTB IV, p. 460; Karabekir, p. 1166.

²⁶ *Daily Mail*, 15.9.1922.

²⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 15.9.1922; Kemal's statement, 26.9.1922 in *Chicago Tribune*; ASD III, p. 45.

²⁸ FO./7888/E 9346, Rumbold to Curzon, Istanbul telegram, 14.9.1922.

who posed as the champion of the Turks²⁹. The joint note which was drafted by *Curzon* in the end, inviting the belligerents to a peace conference, accepted, in principle, the return of the Turks to Europe, and called for a meeting between *Kemal* and the Allied generals to arrange the withdrawal of the Greek army behind the Maritza line. The note was a success both for *Poincaré* and for the Turkish cause³⁰.

Meanwhile strong differences arose among the Nationalist leaders. *Hüseyin Rauf*, the premier, *Ali Fuat*, the general, and other Westerners, who relied upon French support promised by *Poincaré*, favoured diplomacy in solving the immediate problems. The military leaders, however, were being encouraged by the Russians to attack the Straits and Istanbul without parley with the Allies³¹. *Kemal* asked *Aralov*, the Soviet Ambassador, whether Russia would take action against the Balkan states if they intervened. The Russian envoy, referring to a recent message from the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, *Karakhan*, urged *Kemal* to liberate Istanbul and the Straits, and promised him full Russian support. The Russian army under *Egorof* in the Caucasus was already being reinforced in order to assist the Turks in Anatolia³². As for military operations against Roumania, *Kemal* was referred to the government of the Ukraine, to which he sent a long communication invoking the Treaty of January 1922, which was signed between the two countries, and asking whether Ukraine would act against Roumania. But no reply was returned³³.

All this time *Kemal* was being pressed by *Rauf* and others to give up military operations and to leave the political aspect of the problem to the government. But he refused to give in, declaring that his military duties were not yet over. When a Turkish cavalry unit entered the so-called "neutral zone" at Erenköy, he refused to recognise any such zones which the Greeks, during their aggression, were not asked

²⁹ CP 9735, FO./7892/E 9735 to E 9755, Paris meetings, 20/22. 9.1922; CP No. 596, Curzon to Cabinet, Paris letter, 20. 9. 1922; Hardinge, p. 273; Sforza, p. 95.

³⁰ CP No. 571, 9995, Paris conversations, 23. 9. 1922; CP No. 615, Hardinge to Foreign Office, 24. 9. 1922; PRFERUS, 1923, II, p. 880; Walder, pp. 213-237.

³¹ FO./7895/E 10147, Rumbold to Curzon, Istanbul telegram, 28. 9. 1922.

³² FO./7896/E 10197, Secret Intelligence Report, 25. 9. 1922.

³³ FO./7893/E 9795, Secret Intelligence Report, 22. 9. 1922; FO./7896/E 10197, Aralov to Moscow, telegram, 25. 9. 1922; FO./8170/N 903, Leeper minute, 11. 10. 1922; Evans, p. 383; London telegram, 21. 9. 1922.

to respect, but which the Nationalists, who were now chasing the "ransackers of Anatolia", were ordered to recognise as neutral together with Istanbul and the Straits³⁴. This Turkish advance caused a great military and political crisis which almost led to a direct armed conflict between Nationalist Turkey and the British Empire, and which would probably have involved other Powers as well. A disaster was only averted owing to the wisdom and foresight of *Harington* and *Kemal*, both of whom managed to restrain their war-mongers and chose to negotiate rather than to fight³⁵. *Franklin-Bouillon*, a Turcophile French politician, who was sent to Izmir by *Poincaré* in post-haste, after *Curzon's* suggestion that he should use his influence to restrain *Kemal*³⁶, played an important part in averting hostilities. He managed to persuade *Kemal* to halt his army by assuring him that the Turkish demands would be met, and that Turkey would receive Eastern Thrace up to Maritza before the peace conference assembled³⁷. By his action, he rendered considerable service to both sides, although he had offered the Turks more than Britain and even France were prepared to give³⁸.

About a week later, an armistice conference was convened at the small Turkish town of Mudanya on the Marmara coast, and after a week of tough negotiations and bargaining, with spectacular inter-

³⁴ *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, 28.9.1922; ATTB IV, p. 462; *Daily Telegraph*, 27.9.1922. Ali Fethi, Nationalist Minister of the Interior, believed that the British wished to erect Istanbul into a new Gibraltar and constantly to exercise strong pressure on Turkey. FO./7893/E 9795, *Daily Telegraph*, 25.9.1922; FO./9176/E 10937, Turkey Annual Report for 1922.

³⁵ Kemal-Harington correspondence, FO./files 7895 to 7898; Cab. P. 23/31, 52(22); FO./7897/E 10276, Bouillon to Poincaré, in Hardinge to Curzon, Paris telegram, 1.10.1922; Meinertzhagen, pp. 122-124; Evans, pp. 386-387; Ronaldshay, pp. 307-309; Nicolson pp. 274-275 and 306; Owen, p. 650; Walder, pp. 290-301; *London Opinion*, 1.10.1922; ATTB IV, pp. 463-464; Cebesoy I, p. 74; *Vakit*, 1.10.1922; Karacan, pp. 8-9; Aydemir III, pp. 21-22.

³⁶ FO./7894/E 9913, CP No. 616, 828, Hardinge to Curzon, Paris telegram, 25.9.1922; FO./9176/E 10937, Turkey Annual Report for 1922; *Le Temps*, 25.9.1922; Aydemir III, p. 25.

³⁷ Kemal's conversation with Bouillon, Izmir, 28.9.1922; *Söylev* II pp. 466-467; *Speech*, pp. 568-569; Cebesoy I, pp. 72, 75-79; Biyıklıoğlu I, p. 439; Aydemir III, p. 24; FO./7897/E 10366, Rumbold to Curzon, Istanbul telegram, 2.10.1922.

³⁸ FO./7901/E 10777, FO./7894/E 10551, Rumbold to Curzon, Istanbul despatch, 3.10.1922 and telegram, 4.10.1922.

vals of suspense, giving rise to the possibility of resumption of hostilities, the Mudanya Armistice was signed on 11th October, terminating the Anatolian venture of the Greeks, and paving the way for the final peace Treaty of Lausanne, whereby the Turkish Nationalists managed to procure most of their *desiderata*.

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