



The Turkish War of Independence: A Military History, 1919–1923

Edward J. Erickson

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A retired US officer and history professor, Erickson's primary area of specialization lies within the domain of the Ottoman Army, and his scholarly contribution pertaining to the Turkish War of Independence may be regarded as pioneering in its nature. The author explicitly asserts the absence of a comprehensive English-language investigation on the military campaigns and operations during the War of Independence, highlighting a significant lacuna in the existing scholarly literature. Consequently, the author undertook this research endeavor with the explicit purpose of addressing and bridging this critical gap. Furthermore, according to the author, the extant literature in Turkish and Greek languages pertaining to the War of Independence falls short of offering in-depth tactical analysis or critical examination of the military campaigns conducted during this period. The author contends that military historians in Turkey are confronted with a dearth of proficiency in foreign languages and lack a comprehensive, rigorously structured education in the discipline of military history. The author, who states that the Allies did not offer a fair treaty to the Turks and therefore the Turks started a long-lasting war of independence, differs from many western historians with this statement.

Erickson explicates that his publication is dedicated to a comprehensive examination encompassing the strategic, operational, and tactical dimensions of the Turkish War of Independence. The sources utilized in the composition of the book are described as a synthesis

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of official military histories from Turkish, Greek, British, French, and Italian perspectives, along with various relevant scholarly works on the subject matter. The author states that the War of Independence initially emerged as resistance against occupation and a struggle to get rid of occupation, and ultimately resulted in the establishment of a new independent country.

Stating that the War of Independence was waged on different fronts, against different invaders and with different methods, the author calls this situation "hybrid war" in current terminology, inspired by NATO's definition of "hybrid threat" in 2020. According to the author's perspective, Mustafa Kemal Pasha and his adherents were engaged in a multifaceted campaign during the Turkish War of Independence. They conducted conventional warfare against the Greek and Armenian forces, employed irregular troops in the resistance against the French, and confronted internal uprisings stemming from various motivations. In addition to these efforts, they actively promoted and incited the populace to rise against both the Ottoman government and the allied occupation of Istanbul. In addition, various deterrent attacks against the British and French who occupied the straits, propaganda activities against the occupations and the sultan, organization with secret societies, arms smuggling, occupation of strategic points and cooperation with anti-allied forces such as the Bolsheviks were also part of the War of Independence.

The book consists of twelve chapters: The End of the World War I (contrary to the expectations of the Allies, the Ottoman army, although defeated, had a significant fighting capacity and was not disbanded), Call to Arms (nationalists organized, and led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the conditions of Mudros Claiming that they had been violated, they took up arms and started resistance against the occupation. The author makes an interesting claim in this section; According to him, the Sultan and his government tried not to fully fulfill the Mudros conditions and delayed the discharge of the army.), To the First İnönü Campaign (Although the political and military conditions were positive for the Greek government at the beginning of 1920, the views of the allies changed towards the end of the year), The Long War Against Insurgents (internal rebellions and their suppression), A Short War on the Eastern Front (the Turks, left alone with the Armenians as a result of the withdrawal of the allies, defeated the Armenian forces in a short time and closed the front, They largely shifted the troops there to the west), The Franco-Turkish War (the French took on the role of protecting the Armenians, but since the Cilicia region was not occupied during the war, first the British and then the French occupation of the region failed), Second İnönü and Kütahya-Eskişehir (the nationalists narrowly escaped extinction, Greek troops achieved great gains but could not reach a definitive result, İsmet Pasha emerged as a skillful commander), The Culminating Point at Sakarya (the Greek army attacking with all its strength was stopped, defeated and retreated), Operational and Strategic Pause (Greek troops, While looking for ways to get out of the impasse they found themselves in, Mustafa Kemal and Fevzi Pasha made all-out preparations for a trained army with offensive capacity), The Great Offensive and the Pursuit to Izmir (the nationalists were perfectly prepared, the

Megali Idea dream disappeared, the Greek army suffered a terrible defeat), The Advance to the Straits and the Armistice (the great powers were shocked by the magnificent victory of the nationalists, while the nationalist troops were rapidly moving towards the occupied straits, the allies began to seek ways of diplomatic negotiations with the nationalists, a rebellion broke out in Greece, the British government fell), the Treaty of Lausanne and the Establishment of the Turkish Republic (Lausanne). The Treaty met almost all the demands of the nationalists, the establishment of the Republic of Turkey was officially accepted, Mustafa Kemal had achieved all his goals, without him it would have been difficult for the nationalists to achieve such a great victory).

Erickson asserts that terminology like "Turks" or "Kemalists" found in English sources in reference to Mustafa Kemal and his supporters is inaccurate. Instead, he advocates the use of the term "Nationalists," which he believes better aligns with the historical context and accurately characterizes their identity and objectives. The author has used Turkish official military history sources published between 1962 and 2006. Author's only Greek source is "A Concise History of the Campaign in Asia Minor 1919– 1922" which has written in English based on official Greek sources. The works used by the author as sources of Armenian military history are four books by American historian Richard G. Hovannisian. Three books from official British history, one book from official French history, and one book from official Italian history were used.

The book highlights several significant points:

- The Turkish War of Independence involved the active participation of regions encompassing all of Anatolia, all of Armenia, and all of Greece.
- Both warring factions fully mobilized their resources during the conflict.
- The war concluded in a catastrophic manner for Armenia, Greece, and the Anatolian rebels, with the Nationalists emerging as the victors.
- Tragically, the conflict resulted in the loss of numerous civilians' lives, marked by brutality, murder, and atrocities on both sides.
- A substantial population exchange occurred as a consequence of the war.
- The Turkish War of Independence is characterized as a war primarily defined by maneuver, in contrast to World War I, which was largely characterized by trench warfare.

There exists a substantial literature regarding the Turkish War of Independence, with Turkish publications being particularly noteworthy for their comprehensive and detailed coverage of the entire era. Given this context, this book could be regarded as a condensed and narrative overview of the War of Independence period, providing a valuable summary of the historical events during that time. In this context, it can be argued that the book may not offer entirely new insights to Turkish readers, especially if they are already well-versed in the extensive Turkish literature on the subject. Additionally, since the book heavily relies on Turkish sources, its

content may be largely familiar to those with prior knowledge of the topic. Even though the author claimed that he has made an analytical evaluation based on the synthesis of official military histories, however his evaluations, -at least for me as someone who has been studying the period for a long time and most probably for other historians who have been doing research on the period- are inadequate and far from fulfilling expectations. The author's assertion that his study falls within the domain of military history is notable. However, a significant portion of the book consists of narrative content, repetition of well-known events, and information derived from secondary sources suggests that there may be room for more in-depth analysis and original research within the text, especially for those seeking a deeper exploration of the subject. For all that, while I may not consider this book suitable for professional historians seeking in-depth analysis, it could still serve as a valuable resource for general readers who want a broad and accessible overview of the period.