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THE TURKISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE IN THE BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (1918-1922)

Abstract

In the British political system, the Parliament, consisting of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, has always been a leading legal authority in both the administration of the country and the determination of foreign policy. Since the nineteenth century, when the British Empire was experiencing its golden age, the Ottoman Empire has had a large place in British politics, which has been shaped by imperialist interests and orientalist discourses. In the early years of the twentieth century, Turkish-British relations, which entered a process of rupture due to developments in the Balkans and the Middle East rather than the economic-political axis, continued in a problematic manner. The occupation of Istanbul by the Allied Powers after the First World War was the most important breaking point in the strengthening of the national struggle under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. After the Treaty of Lausanne, it is seen that Britain's hostile diplomacy against the Republic of Turkey continued for a while in line with its economic and political interests.

The Turkish War of Independence, which corresponded to the period when the legitimacy of the British Empire began to be questioned, social opposition increased and political debates intensified, was closely followed in the British Parliament as well as in the public opinion. In this study, the discussions in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords from 1919 to 1922 will be evaluated and the prominent agenda items in Turkish-British relations will be presented. In line with the comments, analyses, questions and answers of the members of parliament, the decision-making mechanism of the British government in foreign policy will be evaluated and the reasons and results of its different approaches from the beginning of the War of Independence to the Chanak Crisis, when Prime Minister Lloyd George fell from power, will be revealed.













Keywords: UK Parliamentary Debates, Turkish-British Relations, House of Commons, British Claims on Türkiye, Chanak Crisis

İNGİLİZ PARLAMENTO TARTIŞMALARINDA TÜRK KURTULUŞ SAVAŞI (1918-1922)

Öz

İngiliz siyasal sisteminde Avam ve Lordlar Kamarası'ndan oluşan Parlamento gerek ülke yönetiminde gerekse dış politikanın belirlenmesinde her daim önde gelen yasal bir otorite olmuştur. Büyük Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun altın çağını yaşadığı 19. yüzyıldan itibaren emperyalist çıkarlar ve oryantalist söylemlerin de etkisiyle şekillenen İngiltere siyasetinde Osmanlı Devleti geniş yer bulmuştur. 20.yüzyılın erken yıllarında ekonomi-politik ekseninden ziyade Balkanlar ve Ortadoğu'daki gelişmelerle kopuş sürecine giren Türk-İngiliz ilişkileri sorunlu bir şekilde devam etmiştir. Birinci Dünya Savaşı ertesinde İtilaf Devletleri'nin İstanbul'u işgali Mustafa Kemal'in önderliğinde milli mücadelenin güç kazanmasında en önemli kırılma noktasıdır. Lozan Barış Antlaşması'ndan sonra ise İngiltere'nin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne karşı iktisadi ve siyasi menfaatleri doğrultusunda hasmane diplomasisinin bir süre daha devam ettiği görülmektedir.

İngiliz İmparatorluğu'nun meşruiyetinin sorgulanmaya başladığı, toplumsal muhalefetin arttığı ve siyasi tartışmalarının yoğunlaştığı döneme tekabül eden Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı kamuoyunda olduğu gibi İngiliz parlamentosunda da yakından takip edilmiştir. Bu çalışmada, 1919 yılından 1922 yılına kadar gerek Avam gerekse de Lordlar Kamarası tartışmaları değerlendirilerek Türk-İngiliz ilişkilerinde öne çıkan gündem maddeleri sunulacaktır. Parlamento üyelerinin yorum, analiz, soru ve cevapları doğrultusunda İngiliz hükümetinin dış politikada karar alma mekanizması değerlendirilerek Milli Mücadele'nin başlangıcındaki tavrı ile Başbakan Lloyd George'un iktidardan düştüğü Çanak Krizi'ne kadar olan farklı yaklaşımlarının nedenleri ve sonuçları ortaya koyulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Birleşik Krallık Parlamentosu Tartışmaları, Türk-İngiliz İlişkileri, Avam Kamarası, İngiltere'nin Türkiye Üzerindeki İddiaları, David Lloyd George

Introduction

The English Parliament, which was accepted as an authority with the signing of the Magna Carta by King John in 1215, not only gained superiority over the crown but also began to increase its influence in the country's politics. Despite England's centuries-old history, the existence of the Parliament is considered as a tool for creating the English nation and ensuring the superiority of the state (Pollard 1926: 4-5). In the 1500s, during the reign of the Tudor Dynasty, the modern English Parliament was institutionalized as the House of Lords and the Commons (Gözler 2009: 369). In the British socio-economic system, the bourgeois class, consisting of the rich landowners of capitalism, began to be effective in the administration of the country. For this reason, the House of Commons gained a new status both because it accepted the existence of the king and was the first authority where taxation laws were













discussed. As a result of the developments and wars that took place from the beginning of the 17th century onwards, it becomes clear that this position of the Parliament was constitutionally reinforced with the Glorious Revolution and the Bill of Rights of 1689. Within the framework of the Acts of Union enacted in 1707, approximately a hundred years after the union of Scotland with England, the Parliament of Great Britain, which included the Parliament of Ireland, was established in 1801.

In the nineteenth century, the British Parliament seems to have adapted to govern the country democratically without any civil war or revolution. Despite the expansion of the empire, increasing industrialization and religious pluralism, this system worked quite well (Saunders, 2008, p. 72). The removal of voting restrictions with the Reform Act of 1832 increased the representation of the people in parliament. This law, which was passed as a result of the power struggle between classes in British society that continued for centuries, is considered very important because it is 'the first of the five great reforms that gradually transformed the political system' (Bahçeci, 2020, p. 32). When the situation of parliament is analysed in the first half of the twentieth century, it is seen that there were conflicts of ideas among the Liberals who governed the country from 1905 to 1915 and a crisis of legitimacy in the House of Commons. Despite this, Liberal governments made it a tradition to bring foreign policy issues to the parliamentary agenda. Especially during the First World War, all parties supported the policies of the War Cabinet and the war efforts of the Dominions, thus making parliament an effective institution. In December 1916, it was suggested that Prime Minister Herbert Asquith should hand over decision-making authority to Lloyd George with a coalition government. The War Cabinet consisted of five members, including George Curzon, Bonar Law, Arthur Henderson and Alfred Milner, who had the main responsibility for the administrative conduct of the war. Lloyd George's cabinet was called upon to adopt a more energetic and determined policy. This government continued as a peacetime cabinet from 1919 until Lloyd George tendered his resignation following the Carlton Club Meeting in 1922.

The analysis of the sessions of the House of Commons and the House of Lords between 1919 and 1922, which constitute the main axis of the research, will reveal not only the echoes of the national struggle in parliament but also the fundamental dynamics that determined the change in Turkish-British relations. Until the First World War, the British political atmosphere was dominated by issues that gained strength in the shadow of the Eastern Question in the 1870s. The policies of protecting territorial integrity, which were the basis of England's approaches to the Ottoman Empire, began to lose their importance. The rhetoric of defending the rights of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects through reforms and strategies to be implemented within the framework of the European Concert formed the British political style. In this process, which was adopted especially by liberal political actors, the opposition to the Ottomans and the negative phobic attitudes towards the Turkish administrators continued until after the First World War. It has been the subject of many studies in British documents













and intelligence reports regarding the national struggle movement, the occupation of Istanbul and the early Republican Period (1919-1938). In this respect, this study aims to present an analysis of the sessions under which British politicians evaluated Türkiye's transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. It will be further questioned whether a political paranoia of their approaches to all these developments in the debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Hansard, a significant part of the British Parliament's publications, contains the speeches of members of parliament in the daily debates. Edited versions are published online, with every word meticulously recorded by Hansard reporters. In the preparation process of the research, a broad scan was conducted starting from 31 October 1918, the Armistice of Mudros was announced in the House of Commons, to 4 August 1922, when the Lloyd George coalition government's Near Eastern policy was discussed in the British Parliament last time. In this analysis, the debates and approaches regarding the National Struggle in the British Parliament will be examined under two main periods and subheadings. The first part of the study consists of frequently discussed topics such as the "Turkish-Greek War", "Armenians", "Mesopotamia-Mustafa Kemal forces", "Christian minorities in Asia Minor", or "Greeks and Kemalists" from 1918 to 1920. The second section will be an assessment of the issues that occupied the British agenda and foreign policy under the titles of "Ankara Government", "Near East", "Symrna and Constantinople", "Asia Minor", "Turkish Petroleum Company" and "Armistice". Throughout this period, the course of Turkish-British relations will be examined, as well as the attitude of British politicians at the beginning of the War of Independence and the reasons for their changing approaches after the fall of the Lloyd George Government will be investigated.

Debates on the Turkish War of Independence from the Armistice of Mudros to the Treaty of Sevres (1918-1920)

On 30 October 1918, an armistice was signed with the Ottoman Empire, which was defeated in the war with the Allied Powers, on the battleship Agamemnon, anchored in the port of Mudros in Limnos. This armistice was not only a document of surrender for the Ottomans, but also brought the occupation of Turkish lands and caused political division discussions among the allies. The fact that the armistice process was led by the British Delegation disturbed the French and created the impression that the negotiations were not of an allied nature. As Başak argues, "in addition to its harsh content, the violation of its articles and the use of the armistice as an instrument for the Allied powers' partition-oriented political projects triggered the emergence of a national resistance in Türkiye (Başak 2013: xvi)." In response, Prime Minister Lloyd George stated that the French complaints were unfounded, reminding them that the British had always been in command of the North Aegean and had led nine warships in the naval attacks on Çanakkale (FO 93/110/80. When evaluated in this context, it is quite













obvious that the British were trying to gain strategic advantages with their determination to establish a hegemonic structure in this region.

Next day, following the signing of the armistice on 30 October 1918: Home Secretary George Cave who served three years in Lloyd George's coalition announced the latest news in the House of Commons. Foreign Secretary George Curzon simultaneously highlighted the significance of the document in the House of Lords, who would become an important actor in the process from then on. There is little doubt that Lord Curzon was one of the most influential figures in British policy towards Türkiye and he would later made it clear that "his desire was the Turks to be expelled from Istanbul" (McCarthy 2022: summary). While it was emphasized that it was not yet possible to publish and share the terms of the ceasefire with the public, it was stated that they included articles 1 and 4 of the armistice that "the occupation of the fortresses in Çanakkale and the Bosphorus, which are necessary to secure the free passage of the Allied navies to the Black Sea, and the immediate return of all Allied prisoners of war (HC, An Armistice. 31 October 1918)." In the process following the occupation of Istanbul on 16 March 1920, a significant portion of the debates about Türkiye, especially in the House of Commons, consisted of evaluations regarding the situation of British prisoners of war, "the protection of the unarmed Christian population" and "Armenia". For example, Conservative Party member Sir Ellis Hume-Williams and Labour Party member Joseph King referred to the provisions of the Bern Agreement signed with the Ottomans on 26 September 1906, and brought up the issue of when the British prisoners in Turkey would be collected in Istanbul, who would make the necessary arrangements and how they would be carried out (HC, Armistice with Turkey. 5 November 1918). Lord Cave stated that contact was made with the British commanders of the naval forces in the region for this purpose, and that orders were even given to stock up on food and clothing for the prisoners, and that a large portion of the prisoners were gathered in İzmir and its vicinity (HC, Turkey. 7 November 1918). Another point that needs to be underlined here is that some Members of the Parliament reminded the graves of the soldiers who were captured in the Kut wars and died for the British Empire on the Gallipoli Peninsula, and stated that the necessary measures should be taken (HC, Dardanelles. 14 November 1918). These views are important as they are evidence showing a national will despite the disagreements in the British parliament regarding the policies to be implemented towards Türkiye.

On the other hand, one of the most important topics frequently questioned by both opposition and cabinet members were what arrangements would be made regarding the independence of the Armenians. The Armenians and the British have undoubtedly been in close contact since the Berlin Treaty of 13 July 1878. Not only were the British influential in bringing the Armenian issue to international dimensions, the British Government also acted with the idea that "the only obstacle that could be placed between the Turks and Central Asia" during the First World War would be the Armenians (Somakian 1995: 132; Başak 2016: 66). After the Armistice of Mudros, it was expected that the promises of independence would be fulfilled in













line with the Armenians' support for the British. For this reason, the failure to provide legal and political grounds for British discourses began to be frequently voiced by both the Armenian community and the politicians who supported this strategy (Başak 2016: 74-76). It is seen that especially members of the Liberal Party support the establishment of an Armenian State. Politicians such as William Chapple and Aneurin Williams pointed out Cilicia, which was the ancient region extending from the Alanya Cape in the south of Anatolia to Syria. They urged that there should be a guarantee that Armenia will not remain under Turkish rule or sovereignty in any way (HC, Turkey. 7 November 1918). The question of whether Britain was free to advocate conditions at the Paris Peace Conference that would guarantee Armenia's full independence, Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour replied as "in the affirmative" (HC, Peace Terms. 6 November 1918). From this perspective, the debates in the House of Lords on 20 February 1919 were quite important since they provide details about the British policies regarding Armenians and other Christian populations. The assessments of Lord James Bryce, who was considered one of the leading authorities on the Armenian Question since the 1870s and who enabled the use of Armenians as war propaganda material during the war, also determined the perspective of the British Foreign Office (Yildizeli 2024: 179). Another point that needs to be underlined here is that the arrangements of the British War Cabinet after the Armistice of Mudros did not meet the expectations of the Armenians on a political and legal level (Başak 2016: 129-130). Expressing this disappointment, Bryce argued that "the liberation of the Eastern Christians living in Asia Minor, Syria, Armenia and Arabia from Turkish rule would be a great opportunity and their independence would be considered one of the most important results of the Great War" (HC, Asiatic Provinces of the Ottoman Empire. 20 February 1919). Bryce stated that he believed the British would "do their utmost to give these people what they have desired for centuries past" (HC, Asiatic Provinces of the Ottoman Empire. 20 February 1919). Addressing Bryce, Lord Curzon followed a very traditional school of thought and said: "for fifty years the cruel and tragic sufferings of the Armenians have found in this country not only expressions of sympathy, but also active support. Our aim is to send them back, to take them back to their country (HC, Asiatic Provinces of the Ottoman Empire, 20 February 1919) ". Lord Curzon used political rhetoric that appealed to national feelings when he announced that policy coordination regarding the Armenians had been achieved: "Our officers, our soldiers, our civilians, our people of all sorts who are working in those countries, are not merely carrying on the necessary duty of military conquest and of recovery from the enemy of the lands they have misruled, but are engaged in the traditional British task of charity and mercy (HC, Asiatic Provinces of the Ottoman Empire. 20 February 1919)."

The occupation of İzmir by Greek soldiers on 15 May 1919 was closely followed by the British Parliament. British politicians wondered whether the Greeks carried out this military intervention in line with the Allies' self-determination goal or their own interests. In light of this, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cecil Harmsworth, reported that the













intervention was carried out on behalf of the allies with the provisions of Article 7 of the Armistice of Mudros (HC, Symrna. 26 May 1919). This article acted as a legal mechanism for the Allied Powers who "shall have the right to occupy any point of deportation in the event of a situation threatening their security." Despite this, the occupation of İzmir created great indignation in Anatolia and "constituted the most important driving force of the War of Independence (Armaoğlu 1998: 467)." The debates in the British Parliament until the end of 1919 seemed to have focused on the whereabouts of Enver and Talat Pashas, who were "considered responsible for war crimes and misdeeds against humanity committed against Arabs, Armenians, Jews and Armenians in accordance with their own orders" rather than the Turkish War of Independence (HC, Talaat Pasha. 29 May 1919; HC, Enver Pasha. 29 May 1919).

The House of Lords session on 17 December 1919, entitled "Turkish Administration in Armenia", is significant not only because the name Mustafa Kemal was brought up in parliament for the first time, but also because the Turkish troops in Asia Minor were referred to as "irregular gangs" (HL, Turkish Rule in Armenia. 17 December 1919). From the 1870s onwards, Lord Bryce proposed a coercive agreement to stop the activities of Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish troops. Lord Bryce continued his speech by stating that he believed that "His Majesty's Government is the duty of taking all possible steps to endeavour to free the country from these bands in order that the refugees may return and may again resume the cultivation of the country (HL, Turkish Rule in Armenia. 17 December 1919)." On the other hand, another important figure who was disturbed by the resistance movement of the Turks in Asia Minor was William Ormsby-Gore, one of the delegates of England to the Paris Conference. He described Mustafa Kemal as "a nationalist leader who does not recognize the authority of the Sultan" and held them responsible for the "ongoing massacres of Christians in Anatolia (HC, Turkish Rule in Constantinople. 18 February 1920)." According to Ormsby-Gore's assessment, the conditions of peace had to be clarified and pressure had to be exerted on the İstanbul government for the Armenians through a treaty. The common view of Penry Williams from the Liberal Party and the Conservative Samuel Horge was that "the Christian communities of the Ottoman Empire, especially the Armenians, should be liberated from Turkish domination as promised (HC, Turkish Rule in Constantinople. 18 February 1920)." This session in the House of Commons contains more clues about the Anatolian movement and the occupation of Istanbul. Bonar Law was a leading Conservative who supported Lloyd George in forming the coalition government. He served as a colonial secretary and remained in the House of Commons until 1923 as leader of Conservative party. Law stated that an instruction had been sent to the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, Admiral John de Robeck, "in order to prevent the massacres in question" and the necessary measures would be increased by the British government.

The decisions to take precautionary measures regarding "massacres against Armenians and other Christian minorities" frequently discussed in the parliament before the British occupation of Istanbul on 16 March 1920 (HC, Cilicia Massacres. 11 March 1920; HC,













Massacres in Cicilia, 15 March 1920). When Admiral de Robeck informed Lord Curzon "there should be no futile attempts to break the resistance" in Anatolia, it is believed that Britain had to determine a more balanced policy. Despite this, it is clear from the debates that the British deputies had various opinions about Mustafa Kemal and the nationalist movement. For instance, Hamar Greenwood as the Chief Secretary for Ireland, who supported Lloyd George's views at every opportunity, held Mustafa Kemal's irregular troops responsible for "the recent massacres and incidents in Cilicia." The British politicians were not satisfied with Mustafa Kemal's resistance to the occupying forces and started to condemn him. The Allies particularly pronounced the borders of the Southern Region of Anatolia with the vague term Cilicia (Başkan 2020: 3), and the British closely followed the occupations of Antep, Urfa and Maraş by the French and Armenian forces (Şıvgın 1998: 492-494). While the French and British power struggle continued in Cilicia, Mustafa Kemal became even more of a subject of curiosity with the victory of the Kuva-yi Milliye forces. Ormsby-Gore, further claimed that Mustafa Kemal Paşa was "an agent of the Committee of Union and Progress, which organized the massacres in question." Gore's statement was also a misrepresentation about Mustafa Kemal since the British officials gradually considered him as a challenge to their authority. The Kuva-yi Milliye organization was a voluntary-nationalist organization which was not directed by the Committee of Union and Progress. The parliamentary views on the Turkish War of Independence during this period can be seen more apparently in the questions posed to Lloyd George in a private note on 15 March 1920. Lord Robert Cecil expressed his dissatisfaction and asked the Prime Minister:

> "Whether his attention has been called to the answers given last Thursday by the Minister representing the Foreign Office to the effect that he did not accept it as a fact that Mustapha Kemal was the agent of the Committee of Union and Progress or that that Committee organised tie recent massacres in Cilicia, and that he could not say whether Mustapha Kemal was in close and constant communication with the Turkish Ministry of War; whether he is aware that on the same day the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs stated that the trouble in Cilicia was part of a definite Nationalist programme directed in the interest of the Young Turk Party, designed with the object of seizing any occasion for massacring the Armenians, and that there has been a constant interchange of communications between the Capital and the Nationalist Forces in Asia Minor, and that Mustapha Kemal, as official Governor of Erzurum, was a link between Constantinople and Asia, and whether he will arrange that in future full information on foreign affairs shall so far as is consistent with public interests be given to the House (HC, Massacres in Cicilia. 15 March 1920)."

At the end of the session, Lloyd George's evasive answers to these questions led to criticism from members of Parliament that the Prime Minister had not provided Parliament with information about foreign relations. The information that came to members of parliament













was incomplete and open to manipulation at many points. It is also clear that George had not set himself to the success of national forces under the command of Mustafa Kemal. The serious allegations for "Mustafa Kemal's espionage, Governor of Erzurum and responsibility for Armenian massacres" were not reflecting the truth about the events in Asia Minor. While the national liberation war for independence under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal continues to grow stronger, these also posed a far greater threat to the foreign policy strategies of Lloyd George's government.

Another development that was effective in the British decisions regarding the political situation in Türkiye was the prevention of a possible reconciliation between the İstanbul government and the Anatolian movement. As a consequence, the belief that the Ali Rıza Pasha Government would go beyond reconciling with the National Forces and would come under the command of Mustafa Kemal was making British policy makers anxious. So accordingly, after the resignation of the Ali Rıza Pasha Government, Bonar Law explained in the House of Commons that the new government took a clear stance against the national movement:

"The Imperial Decree appointing the new Grand Vizier, who took office on 5th April, condemned the Nationalist movement in outspoken terms as a rebellion which had gravely damaged the interests of Turkey and might still further endanger them. A further proclamation issued on the 10th April in similar terms gave the rank and file one week in which to submit to the Sultan, and threatened with condign punishment the leaders of the Nationalist movement and any Moslems guilty of excesses against Christians, and vice versa. Similar decrees have also been published by the Sheikh-ul-Islam. There is little doubt that the outrages which occurred were caused by, or at least had the approval of, the Nationalist party (HC, Anatolia. 19 April 1920)."

The next day, the British Foreign Office telegraphed Admiral de Robeck, expressing satisfaction with the new government taking office in İstanbul. The phrase "we must not take the risk to create a soft expectation of peace in the mind of Damat Ferid" gives the message that the British will keep the Istanbul Government under control (Armaoğlu 1998: 1998). During this period, it is seen that members of British Parliament defined the national struggle with terms such as "rebels against the Turkish Government", "Nationalist forces", "Turkish gangs" and "followers of Mustafa Kemal." Nevertheless, the Anatolian movement strengthened the domestic cohesion. Along with the signing of a temporary ceasefire agreement with France, the British perspective on Mustafa Kemal and the national struggle began to change dramatically. It was one of the defining moments that were realized that the nationalists were essentially a resistance power in the region. The policies implemented by Mustafa Kemal began to be followed closely in the British parliament.

The session titled "Mesopotamia" held on 23 June 1920 reveals the aspects to understand where key figures such as Herbert Asquith, Winston Churchill, Aubrey Herbert and Lloyd













George discussed several major issues with documents. That brief also indentifies several principles of British Government's Middle Eastern and Turkish policies in military, political, legal and economic dimensions (HC, Mesopotamia. 23 June 1920). Churchill as the Secretary of State for War made statements that the military expenditure of forty four thousand pounds in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia would not be increased and that no additional military units would be sent to the regions. Asquith, referring to Venizelos' statements, demanded legitimate information from the government "whether the Greek army was supported against the so-called Turkish Nationalists." Similarly, the attitudes of Indian Muslims towards the Ankara government who had Pan-Islamist tendencies were also considered as a threat. Responding to Asquith's insistent questions, Lloyd George referred to the Sykes-Picot Agreement which was signed on 16 May 1916. This secret agreement between Britain and France, which foresaw the sharing of the Middle East, also formed the basis of the British strategies in the region. The legacy of the agreement has led to widespread discontent in the region, especially among Arabs, however Lloyd George continued to consult Mark Sykes and appointed him as Political Officer at Arab Bureau. George further highlighted the importance of military power in the British mandates such as Baghdad, Basra and Mosul regions "with the approval of the Allies, the *Turkish Agreement was concluded at the San Remo Conference*" (HC, Mesopotamia. 23 June 1920). It is nevertheless true that majority of Members of Parliament referred to the Treaty of Sevres which was signed on 10 August 1920 as a Turkish treaty. Lloyd George claimed that "if the League of Nations asked Britain to leave these regions, there would be great chaos, even a civil war between Arab leaders might have occurred and eventually Mustafa Kemal would come down and occupy the country." He also asserted that Mustafa Kemal's movement would only be prevented by the independent Greek military power in the region and "with the right of mandate taken from the allies in accordance with the Turkish Treaty, the British would have both a moral and legal doctrine (HC, Mesopotamia. 23 June 1920)."

Debates on the Turkish War of Independence from the Treaty of Sevres to the Chanak Crisis (1920-1922)

The British Parliament's views to national struggle were at the heart of politics in the 1920s and members of Parliament were clearly eager to keep the discussions going. It is seen that in almost every session of the British Parliament, the national struggle and Britain's Near East policies have involved multiple considerations under headings such as "Turkish-Greek War", "Greece and the Ankara Government" and "Kemalists and Greeks." On 12 July 1920, Aubrey Herbert as a conservative member of the Parliament, and one of the prominent figures criticising the policies of the Lloyd George Government, questioned to what extent the Prime Minister's support for the Greeks in a new war served the moral, financial or commercial interests of Great Britain. Bonar Law, however, stated that the situation in question was "not a new war" and that the Greek advance was a "part of the Allies" operations to counter the aggression of the rebel nationalists directed against the implementation of the peace treaty













(HC, Greek Operations, 12 July 1920). Still, another question members of parliament were wondering was whether Lloyd George's coalition government and the allies had promised any military and economic support to the Greek forces operating in Asia Minor (HC, Greek Operations, 12 July 1920). Bonar Law, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, responded that the military and naval support was confined to ensure the freedom of the Straits and fulfilment of the peace terms (HC, Greek Operations, 12 July 1920).

The House of Commons session titled "Turkey" on 25 October 1920 appears to have been a breaking point in the British definition of the Turkish war of independence. Lloyd George referred to the Turkish National Movement as the Ankara Government under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal for the first time, although he added the adjective "so-called" (HC, Turkey, 25 October 1920). He further stated that Kemal's troops maintained their claimed authority over Northern, Central and Eastern Anatolia and the Ankara Government did not recognise the Treaty of Sevres. In the following sessions, the British parliamentarians' questions of how the Kemalist troops maintained their military power were substantially high. Lord Harmsworth, one of the most famous newspaper and publishing house executive of the period, claimed the Bolsheviks were supplying weapons and ammunition to the Turks through Trabzon and the Black Sea ports. It is nevertheless true that Moscow provided war material and the Ankara government tried to keep the aid as secret as possible since there was concern that the knowledge would increase inspections (Mütercimler 1992: 110-112). Lord Harmsworth further asked whether the government proposed to take any steps to carry out the provisions of Article 8 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which prevented private enterprise of munitions and implements of war (HC, Mustapha Kemal (Munitions), 27 October 1920). A majority of publicly-declared members concerned that a possible alliance between the Kemalists and the Soviet Government would give the Turks control over new states to be established in Arabia, while facilitating the Soviet delegates' efforts to develop communism in Turkey. In response, Lloyd George constantly declared that there was no Turkish-Bolshevik alliance (HC, Turkey, 06 December 1920). However, there was a clear collaboration between the Ankara and Moscow government. It is seen that George's denial was intended to give the impression that the national struggle was not a strong formation and that everything was under the control of the British government.

Another issue that attracted the attention of the Houses of Parliament was the military operations of the Ankara government on the Eastern Front and its relations with Armenia. Robert Sanders, Minister of Finance who declared matters concerning the advancement of Kemalist troops in Erivan, Kemalist troops and the Armenian forces have been compelled to evacuate Kars and Alexandropol (HC, Armenia, 01 December 1920). After the signing of the Treaty of Gyumri between the Ankara Government and Armenia on 3 December 1920, the approval of the Treaty of Sevres by the Kemalists became even more significant. While the first foreign state to recognize the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the National Pact













was Armenia with the treaty of Gymri, this was a strong impression of Turkish nationalists' political power. On the other hand, the principles imposed by the Treaty of Sevres increased the spirit of resistance, while unity and solidarity among the people were strengthened and participation in the national struggle increased. The British government was aware of all these recent developments. For example, Lloyd George assured that "the High Commissioners united on 24 November in pressing the Turkish Government to ratify the treaty (HC, The Treaty, 9 December 1920)." Lord Curzon had already submitted to the parliament's assessment in August 1920 that "the terms of the Treaty of Sevres had been produced for minorities such as the Armenians, Assyrians, Arabs and Kurds who had been suffering for years." In this respect, he stated that Britain was making efforts in the construction of the new Turkey and that it would gain legitimacy with the treaty:

"Now occurs a great opportunity. The Powers who have imposed this treaty and who regard it as a fair and just treaty will not be slow, if they find a spirit of good will on the part of Turkey, to render to her such assistance as lies in their power. Every one of us must realise, whether he be pro-Turk or Turkophobe, that the old Turkey of the Pashas and the past, the Turkey of corruption, intrigue, mis-government and massacre, has gone, has fortunately gone forever, and now is the occasion for building upon the ruins of that old and vanished Turkey a new Turkey which shall be better than anything that in modern times has been associated with her name (HL, The Treaty with Turkey, 04 August 1920)"

In contrast to Lord Curzon's claims, the Treaty of Sevres undoubtedly fuelled the spirit of Turkish national movement. It was one of the main reasons why the Lloyd George Government's policy of controlling Anatolia through Greek forces was the most significant formula during this period. However, the elements of British policy began to fail over time which lasted until the resignation of the coalition government on 19 October 1922. The process was accelerated with the fall of Eleftherios Venizelos from power subsequent to the Greek elections in November 1920. The situation of the Greek military in Asia Minor and the question as to whether Britain would continue to provide financial support to Greece were prominently on the political agenda. Although Lloyd George expressed determined views that British would continue its strategic partnership with the new Greek Government, there was still unrest within the parliament. In order to calm this uneasiness, Cecil Harmsworth as the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated, "the Venizelos Government had taken out a loan of approximately six and a half million pounds, the new Greek Government had been informed that no further financial assistance would be provided if the former King Constantine were to return to the throne of Greece (HC, Greece, 09 December 1920)."

Public trust had begun to fall as well as the confidence of members of parliament regarding the support for Greece which were among the major pressure factors in Lloyd George's coalition government. Public anxiety about war threats in Asia Minor was widened













with economic and political payoffs. Charles Townshend, the commander of the unit captured by the Turks at Kut Al Amara, simply asked the Prime Minister whether Britain was at war with Turkish nationalist forces (HC, Turkey, 13 April 1921). Lloyd George had to declare that Britain remained neutral in almost every session. He further stated "Istanbul was under military occupation by the Allies, who had agreed to maintain their neutrality, and the British were in no way financially dependent on any side (HC, Greece and Turkey, 21 April 1921)." Nonetheless, the invitation of the Ankara Government to the London Conference on 12 February 1921 subsequent to the military success in the First Battle of İnönü was the establishment of diplomatic relations. This recognition did not only increase the prestige of the Anatolian movement but also influenced the views of the deputies in the British Parliament. During meetings, it is clear that the members of the parliament accepted that the national struggle had been recognised as a political authority. The terms of the agreement that the Kemalist Turks reached with France regarding Cilicia and Northern Syria and the articles as to the protection of the subject races have become a matter of curiosity (HC, Turkish Nationalist Government (Agreements), 20 April 1921). The signing of the Ankara Agreement on 20 October 1921 and the continuation of negotiations with General Franco furthered the political prestige of the Kemalist Government. However, the deputies regularly expressed their concerns with the fact that the Christian minorities would continue to be governed under Turkish rule (HC, France and Turkey, 7 November 1921). The diplomatic relations of the political structure in Asia Minor, also known as the Ankara Turks, with Moscow and Muslims in India were particularly analysed. These criticisms also played a pivotal role in the development of psychological superiority of the Turkish national struggle.

From the autumn of 1921 onwards, the collective failure of Greek military campaign subsequent to the Battle of Sakarya which faced fierce resistance from Turks continued to be intensely debated in the British Parliament. This period was also the time of the major disagreements arose during the sessions. Austin Chamberlain and Cecil Harmsworth, who supported Lloyd George's policies, made efforts to persuade the parliament. The most serious criticism of the coalition government was whether fifteen million pounds was given to the Greeks in 1920. Lord Islington declared these disagreements and feuds in the House of Lords:

"Whether it be true or not, there is no doubt that the opinion is prevalent throughout the East that the Prime Minister has thrown an undue influence on the side of the Greek Government as against Turkey. This has undoubtedly had a very injurious effect upon our interests throughout the Continent of Asia. I realise, as all noble Lords must, that this is an extremely difficult and delicate question. One realises that there are two schools of opinion on the subject in this country; if one knew it, there are probably two schools of opinion within the Cabinet itself"













This seems to fit the understanding that the majority in both chambers was that the Lloyd George Government was trying to provide direct and indirect financial aid to Greece. To put it simply, this economic assistance was used to fight against the Kemalist Turks. In response to the claims that Greece had used this loan under the Trade Establishments Acts, L. Malone pointed out that it was urgently necessary to end hostilities between Greece and Türkiye and to consolidate peace with the Turkish people (HC, Greece, 20 February 1922). He further argued the cabinet should assure the parliament that there would be no further financial aid to the Greeks (HC, Greece, 20 February 1922). Lloyd George tried to convince that the decision in question was taken by the Trade Establishments Act Committee and that no direct financial aid was being provided. On the other hand, George gave the impression that he evades questions about making peace with the Turks or the Kemalists. Another point that draws attention in these discussions was that in March 1922, Lloyd George and his supporting deputies were still not convinced about Mustafa Kemal's political authority. Foreign Secretary Cecil Harmsworth stated that he still believed the treaty of peace must be concluded with the sovereign of the State, the Sultan and "government believe that Moslem interests in India and the East desire, as do His Majesty's Government, a general settlement with Turkey, embracing all Turkish territories and authorities (HC, Turkey, 7 March 1922)."

As the Turks were advancing towards the Great Offensive, the debates in the British Parliament regarding Lloyd George's Greek-supported policy accelerated. In April and August 1922 it is clear that in almost all the sessions, rather than perceiving this issue as a diplomatic issue, the coalition government's Near East strategies were strongly questioned on military, economic and political grounds. For instance, in a long speech delivered to the House of Commons on 4 August 1922 Liberal Joseph Kenworthy strongly urged Prime Minister Lloyd George to shift his policy in the region:

"For the first time, an observer who has recently been in Anatolia has paid a tribute to them, and says there is a recrudescence of Turkish national life. Are we alive to the dangers of force? The worst thing that can happen to us of the British Empire would be a great victory. I beg the Prime Minister now to have the courage that he praised in Lenin and to change his policy. We have been in the wrong in this matter. It is not a question of Cross against Crescent. It is not a question of helping the underdog. In this case the under-dog is the Turk, disarmed, rendered helpless by British arms, before Greece. I beg the Prime Minister to take his opportunity of restoring a great market, and perhaps to pave the way for a reconciliation between our ideas and the great world of Islam (HC, Near East, 4 August 1922)."

Lloyd George, who had no regrets about his policies in response to this comment, stated that the Allies and Greece had accepted the peace conditions, but Mustafa Kemal could not be convinced. He reiterated that his hope for the agreement was still in the Istanbul Government and the Caliph. Despite all these unyielding views, it is interesting to point out













that his description of Mustafa Kemal as a great general and patriot (HC, Near East, 4 August 1922).

At the end of August, Mustafa Kemal's complete elimination of Greek forces from Western Anatolia and his advance towards the Dardanelles was not only threatening control of the Straits but also marked the beginning of the end for the Lloyd George administration. While Lord Birkenhead, Robert Horne and Winston Churchill adopted Lloyd George's war with the Turks as a method to persuade them to make peace, the conservative members of the cabinet drafted a manifesto to oppose this policy. In addition to the military and economic fatigue that has been going on for three years in the Near East, the events leading up to the crisis have "brought Britain to the brink of war with Turkey and acted as a catalyst for the collapse of the coalition government (Çulfalı, 1999, p. 817)." On the other hand, it is quite remarkable that there are no records of discussions in Hansard between 4 August 1922 and 20 November 1922 regarding the Chanak crisis. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that the views in the British Parliament were also in the direction of the national struggle being a political authority.

Conclusion

The British Parliament has developed in line with economic and political developments since thirteenth century which became the fundamental part in the English political tradition in modern times. When the Houses of the Parliament were constitutionally reinforced with the Glorious Revolution and the Bill of Rights of 1689, there used to be many long periods of one-party dominance, firstly by Whigs and later by Tories. As a result of industrialization, the nineteenth century was the time that the British Parliament seems to have adapted to govern the country democratically. The parliamentary scrutiny of the government's foreign policy has become a significant feature in British politics. Since the nineteenth century, Ottoman imperial decline had major effect on British policy makers' views. The strand of the orientalist discourse and British liberal imperialism underpinned the foreign policy. Therefore, the perspectives of the political actors who were evaluated Turkish policies with phobic attitudes in light of the "Eastern Question" was not only strengthened in the 1870s but also continued to grow until the end of First World War.

This research analysed the speeches of members of parliament in the daily debates via Hansard which contains a significant part of the British Parliament's publications. The discussions in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords on Turkish War of Independence from 1919 to 1922 revealed how the British imperial attitude towards the Ottoman Empire formed the basis of the Turkish nationalist movement. The preparation and organization stages of the Turkish national liberation were closely followed in the British Parliament. Despite this, this military action was not considered a national struggle and was perceived as a threat to British authority in the region. The Lloyd George administration continued to take a steadfast stand against the War of Independence by supporting Greece













militarily and taking the Istanbul government on its side. The first conclusion of the study is that the majority of the debates regarding the Near East were in the House of Commons. The issues, views and perspectives on Turkish administrators and political actors inherited from the Ottoman Empire had not changed at the end of World War I. For instance, one of the most prominent topics frequently questioned by both opposition and cabinet members was what arrangements would be made regarding the independence of the Armenians. The question of whether Britain was free to advocate conditions at the Paris Peace Conference that would guarantee Armenia's full independence was not only considered as a part of British diplomacy but also was engaged in the traditional British task of charity and mercy. It is seen that the Turkish nationalist movement in Anatolia was first discussed while analysing approaches to Armenians. The House of Lords session on 17 December 1919, entitled "Turkish Administration in Armenia", is significant not only because the name Mustafa Kemal was brought up in parliament for the first time, but also because the Turkish troops in Asia Minor was referred to as "irregular gangs." With the rise of Anatolian movement's military and political power under Mustafa Kemal's command, however it becomes clear that this understanding began to be changed. Another point revealed by the study is that the discussions in the British Parliament on Turkish War of Independence turned into a right-left struggle and criticisms towards Lloyd George's coalition government. Efforts by cabinet members to portray the nationalist movement in Türkiye as a temporary resistance and strong tendency to support Greeks were gradually opposed by the conservative and labour deputies.

Focusing solely on parliamentary debates, this study provides a clearer understanding of the British views on Turkish War of Independence and the reasons for the British unwillingness to respond to cyclical demands for change of policies in Asia Minor. The main emphasis of the rhetorical practise of parliamentary debates on Turkish War of Independence, which, this research has argued, constitutes the manifestations of anti-Turkish attitudes but eventually agreed by way of compromise between British policy makers and Turkish nationalists. As Mustafa Kemal Pasha gained more on the front with political achievements, the hostile perceptions towards the Turkish nation which had been formed the general framework British policies since the nineteenth century had become obsolete. The necessity of changing the administration of the Lloyd George Government, which refused to accept this reality and continued to claim to fight the Turks, started a new era in Turkish-British relations.

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