

## THE TURKISH VICTORY AND THE THIRD WORLD\*

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### I

Generations of Turkish intellectuals have taken pride that Kemalist Turkey has led, at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the first, anti-imperialistic war of an under-developed country, scoring victory over the developed nations of the West. Mustafa Kemâl Atatürk asserted several times that this struggle did not pertain to Turkey alone. What Turkey defended was the cause of all oppressed nations. He said: "Anatolia will withstand all aggressions... By this it performs a duty dear not only to itself, but also acts as a hurdle frustrating attacks on the whole East. But such aggressions will, doubtless, come to an end."<sup>1</sup> After the Turkish military victory on the 30th of August, 1922, he maintained that this would "affect not only Turkey's fate, but would also inspire the exploited nations to action against the cruels who put limitations and exert pressure on the life and independence of others."<sup>2</sup> In the first anniversary of the same victory, he termed it as "a field battle that influenced history."<sup>3</sup> That victory had *de facto* reduced the notorious Sévres Treaty to a mere scrap of paper, substituting instead the Treaty of Lausanne. Many Turks now consider the War of National Liberation (1919-1922) of their country as important for having brought about a breach in the world imperialist system. The success of the struggle of the Turkish people meant hope for other peoples of the continent of Asia, then chained to colonial oppression.

The Turkish Revolution signified the victory of a non-European people over Western subjugation. Powerful and insidious enemies were rebuffed and defeated for the first time by the fighting force of an un-developed society.

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<sup>1</sup> Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. II, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Atatürk, *Tamim ve Telgraflar*, p. 479.

<sup>3</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. II, p. 179.

## II

The anti-imperialistic struggle of the Turkish people was led, as well-known, by Mustafa Kemâl Atatürk, whose principle slogan had been "full independence". The central theme of our War of National Liberation had been, not only to clear our territory of Greek, British, French and Italian troops, but also to achieve all-round sovereignty and economic independence. In all his speeches, memorandums, telegrams and all kinds of statements made during that war, the first and foremost topic had been "full independence" as an inalienable right. This concept was centrally-located in Mustafa Kemâl's mind, belief and action.

That concept had always been with him. His reports to Talât and Enver Pashas in September 1917 drew attention, *inter alia*, to overwhelming German influence in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the command of its armed forces. His comparatively junior rank at that time in a hierarchical organisation such as the army did not prevent him from opposing foreign encroachment. After a few years, when his dedication to his people, his extraordinary capacities as a military man and sensitivity towards alien exploitation placed on him the leadership of armed resistance, he wrote: "Our aim is to attain territorial integrity within our national boundaries as well as full sovereignty. We shall struggle against any power aiming to prevent us from accomplishing this aim. We shall continue to fight against it until we achieve victory."<sup>4</sup> The gist of the "Amasya Memorandum", dated 21/22 June, 1919, as dictated by him, was as follows: "The territorial integrity and independence of the nation is in jeopardy. The government in Istanbul is unable to carry the responsibility it has shouldered. The independence of the nation will be safeguarded by the irreversible decision and resistance of the people themselves."<sup>5</sup> He qualified the guarantee of "sovereignty and full national independence"<sup>6</sup> as the principal duty of the new Assembly, in a statement that he signed on November 5, 1919, in relation to elections to that representative body. While Istanbul, the old capital, was under occupation, Britain, as one of the occupying powers, had attempted to change the Turkish Minister of Defense and the Commander-in-Chief. Mustafa Kemâl termed this act as "clear aggression at political independence" and stressed the need to inform the "Peace Conference, the European nations, the Islamic world and every corner of the country"<sup>7</sup> of this attempt. In his protesting note

<sup>4</sup> Atatürk, *Nutuk*, p. 457.

<sup>5</sup> *Nutuk*, Vol. III, pp. 915-916.

<sup>6</sup> *Tamim-Telgraflar*, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> *Nutuk*, pp. 366-367, 371.

of March 16, 1920, addressed to the occupying powers and the neutral states, he termed the Armistice, based on the Wilsonian principles, as a manoeuvre to deprive the Turkish nation of its means of defense and added: "We believe in the sanctity of the struggle that we are waging to secure our rights and independence and are confident that no power can take away from a nation the right to live."<sup>8</sup> In an interview with the *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, he said, on the day of the inauguration of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, "Freedom and Independence are inherent in my character... For me, national independence is a matter of life and death."<sup>9</sup> He described the new government in Ankara as one "created with the purpose of fighting against imperialism."<sup>10</sup> On December 20, 1921, he said to the Soviet commander Mikhail Frunze: "Turkey will soon recover her territory from the foreign usurpers."<sup>11</sup>

### III

Mustafa Kemâl knew that political independence was very important, but certainly not the final victory over imperialism. That the mere hoisting of the national flag or the welcoming of the birth of the new sovereign state by gun salutes were not to be taken as automatic liquidation of the positions of imperialism. He said: "When one refers to independence, what is meant is certainly full independence and freedom in action in the political, financial, economic, judicial, military, cultural and other spheres. Lack of independence in anyone of the afore-mentioned connotes total lack of independence of the nation and the country in its real essence."<sup>12</sup> The semi-colonisation of the Ottoman Empire, was, doubtless, instructive in his conviction that foreign capital had been instrumental in securing control over Turkey. His following remark is noteworthy: "Scientifically speaking, one can say that the (Ottoman) government had done nothing except acting as the gendarmerie of foreign capital."<sup>13</sup> He qualified the Ottoman Empire as financially dependent on the foreign metropolises.<sup>14</sup> As early as 1906, he had told the following to his co-workers in the Salonica branch of the Fatherland and Freedom Association: "I invite you to duty in reacting to the present despotism with a revolution, in bringing down that absolute and rotten administration and in establis-

<sup>8</sup> Atatürk, *Söylev*, 3rd pr., Vol. I, p. 302.

<sup>9</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. III, pp. 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> *Tamim- Telgraflar*, p. 357.

<sup>11</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. II, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Nutuk*, pp. 623-624.

<sup>13</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. II, p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> *Bugünün Diliyle Atatürk*, pp. 102-103.

hing the nation's will."<sup>15</sup> When a group of capitalist states tried to impose on this semi-colony the Sévres Treaty in 1920, he said to the United Telegraph correspondent: "This treaty, which aims to destroy our political, juridical, economical and financial sovereignty, thereby denying our right to live, does not even exist as far as we are concerned."<sup>16</sup> He correctly expressed that full independence was possible only through financial independence.<sup>17</sup> It was this conviction that led him to reject the agreements that his Foreign Minister Bekir Sami had reached with England, France and Italy. Including certain economic concessions, they had been initialled at a time when odds were very much against Turkey. Mustafa Kemâl rejected them, nevertheless, also ousting his Foreign Minister. As he had expressed to Mikhail Frunze: "The Turkish people ... had decided to live independently or to perish."<sup>18</sup>

Believing that one of the first conditions to safeguard full independence was the will to fight for it, he popularized in Turkey the slogan: "Independence or Death."<sup>19</sup> In a letter to the Governor of Sivas, he wrote: "Our nation is determined to protect its independence and existence, at all cost."<sup>20</sup> One day after he set his foot on the Anatolian soil, he stated in a telegram to the Istanbul Government: "The nation and the army cannot reconcile themselves with the unjust aggression aiming at their very existence."<sup>21</sup> The military intervention of the West in Asia Minor had resulted, in Mustafa Kemâl's words, "with the reinforcement of the will to resist and overcome the enemy."<sup>22</sup> A day after his arrival to Ankara, he said to the public leaders of that city that right stood above might, and that world public opinion had to be convinced of the people's determination to resist all difficulties. He voiced the opinion that imperialism would retreat when confronted with determined resistance.<sup>23</sup> It was only after active armed resistance that the occupying forces were compelled to accept the people's right to live. Mustafa Kemâl tied this outcome to "the proper use of the weapons."<sup>24</sup> On July 8, 1920, he said in Sivas: "Even if the whole of our country is reduced to ashes, we shall climb a hill and carry on the fight. Some parts of the country are already

<sup>15</sup> Söylev ve Demeçler, Vol. II, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 228-229.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> Nutuk, pp. 13-14.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 935.

<sup>21</sup> Tamim-Telgraflar, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Söylev ve Demeçler, Vol. III, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 167.

occupied... But those familiar with the art of war know that what is important in defense is the principal purpose."<sup>25</sup> The will to fight for freedom and independence is the result of the consciousness to stay independent. It is believed in Turkey that Mustafa Kemâl's action and thoughts have served the formation of this consciousness, not only in the Turkish people, but also in some other countries of Asia.

However, even in the patriotic camp there were some who lacked faith in the people. They supported the idea of a U.S. mandate over Turkey, even during the first steps of the liberation movement. Mustafa Kemâl fought against the idea of an American mandate at the Congress of Sivas, before he drew the sword to frustrate British plans in the Middle East. Even the celebrated Turkish authoress Halide Edip, in a letter to Mustafa Kemâl on August 10, 1919, had defended the mandate in the following words: "If a nation sincerely applies to the U.S.A., that country would consider it an opportunity to prove to the European Powers that it is capable of creating an administration favorable to the mandated people."<sup>26</sup> She added that the "times of adventure and war had passed." Rauf Bey, too, categorically stated that Turkey had to accept the U.S. mandate.<sup>27</sup> Hâmi Bey went further to suggest that Turkey needed to conduct propaganda to be awarded by U.S. acceptance of a mandate over her territory.<sup>28</sup> Refet Bey even suggested that the mandate "did not contradict independence."<sup>29</sup> Mustafa Kemâl expressed in every occasion the futility and the traitorous character of such suggestions. For instance, on January 10, 1920, he declared that tendencies to seek the protection of imperialistic countries were "totally incompatible with the genuine interests of the fatherland."<sup>30</sup> Saying that the Turks were now armed with "a new ideology,"<sup>31</sup> he suggested armed resistance "until rights were recognized".<sup>32</sup> On September 20, 1921, he qualified the victory at Sakarya as the subordination of the idea of conquest and exploitation to the idea of independence.<sup>33</sup> And with the final victory in the Autumn of 1922, he congratulated his comrades-in-arms "for the idea of independence that their deeds represented."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Nutuk*, pp. 95-98.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>28</sup> Uluğ İğdemir, ed., *Sivas Kongresi Tutanakları*, Ankara, 1970, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup> *Söylev*, p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> *Tamim-Telgraflar*, p. 161.

<sup>31</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. I, p. 320.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 186.

<sup>33</sup> *Tamim-Telgraflar*, p. 413.

<sup>34</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. I, p. 247.

The representatives of the Ankara Government were invited to the Lausanne Conference in consequence of successes on the battlefields. Mustafa Kemâl's condition to start talks with his adversaries were the acceptance of Turkey's full independence in political, fiscal, economic, military, legal and cultural spheres. His statement along these lines to General Harrington, Britain's representative in Istanbul, is well-known.<sup>35</sup> He repeated the same notions, in an address to the people in İzmir on January 31, 1923: "When we say that we want peace, every one ought to know that what we actually mean is that we want full independence."<sup>36</sup>

The negotiations at Lausanne had been full of debates and frequently heated. In Mustafa Kemâl's words, "centuries-old accounts were being settled."<sup>37</sup> As well-known, the Convention was even called off when Turkey refused to accept Western design to reduce that country once more to the status of a semi-colony through economic measures which later came to be known as "neo-colonialism".

Imperialism was now forced to seek new methods to be able to retain its control. The champions of imperialism say that with the achievement of political independence and the formation of a national state, the process of "decolonisation" reaches an end. This argument aims to create the impression that the main tasks of the national liberation movement are accomplished. Today, however, Asia, Africa and many Latin American countries know that such arguments are designed to enable colonialism to retain its remaining positions. Mustafa Kemâl had written in the early part of the Twentieth Century that national liberation movements do not end with the achievement of political independence.

Mustafa Kemâl's insistence on full independence has been a source of inspiration for many other countries which faced similar problems. During the war years, he said that he was "against imperialism that threatened to destroy us and against capitalism that wanted to swallow us."<sup>38</sup> He believed that by armed resistance, Turkey defended not only her own rights, but also those of the whole East.<sup>39</sup> Turkey was "serving all humanity by confronting Western imperialism."<sup>40</sup> The National Assembly's memorandum of May 9, 1920, signed by Mustafa Kemâl and addressed to the Islamic world, had drawn attention to the significance for the whole

<sup>35</sup> *Nutuk*, p. 644.

<sup>36</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. II, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> *Nutuk*, pp. 701-702.

<sup>38</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. I, p. 196.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> *Tamim-Telgraflar*, p. 339 .

East of Turkey's occupation by the Western Powers.<sup>41</sup> To the Azerbaijani Ambassador, he said on October 14, 1921: "Our nation is proud that with its sacred struggle, it is also serving the liberation of the Islamic world and the world's exploited peoples."<sup>42</sup> He was hopeful that the whole of Asia would march on the path of independence. Attaching due attention to early symptoms, he said: "For the last four months Egypt has been a scene of bloody events aiming at national independence... There are revolts of wide dimensions in India... The army of Afghanistan has taken up arms to frustrate the British desire to end Afghani national existence... Syria, Iraq... and the whole of Arabia are in ferment."<sup>43</sup> In a letter to the President of the Central Khilafat Committee in India, he wrote that no power was able to prevent independence, if maintained and protected by maximum will-power and persistence.<sup>44</sup> And in a statement on the future of colonies and semi-colonies, he said: "All exploited nations will one day annihilate their exploiters."<sup>45</sup>

He expected hundreds of millions of the downtrodden and benighted to awaken from Medieval stagnation to a new life and to rise to fight for elementary rights and democracy. At that time, it was impossible to launch a general offensive against colonialism. The balance of the political forces in the world was still in favor of imperialism. A general offensive could only be launched after the Second World War, when the entire colonial system collapsed within a short period of time.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>42</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. II, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Tamim-Telgraflar*, p. 479'

<sup>45</sup> *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Vol. II, p. 29.