

TWO VICTORIOUS WAR LEADERS: DE GAULLE AND ATATÜRK*

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On the occasion of the centennial of the former French President Charles de Gaulle's birth, I would like to offer a comparison between Atatürk, the national hero of Turkey, and de Gaulle, the national hero of France. Although the two great statesmen lived and acted at different periods of history, they belong more or less to the same half-century and were, therefore, subject to roughly similar political and social forces. Comparing them can be considered useful to better understand the distinguished persons as well as their times.

Allow me to describe first the circumstances of Atatürk's times. The First World War had ended with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Soon after the signing of the armistice of Mudros (30 October 1918), large sections of Turkey which until then had not yet been invaded, were occupied by the Allies—for instance, Eastern Thrace, the Adana region, Hatay, Antep, Maraş, Urfa, Mosul, Antalya, Fethiye, Marmaris, Bodrum and Konya. In many places the Allies (England, France, Italy) had small military detachments and/or control officers. The Arab possessions of the Ottoman Empire had already been occupied during the fighting before the armistice. For the Turks, this was certainly a very grave situation.

What began to make the situation look rather hopeless was the sending of Greek troops to İzmir by the Paris Peace Conference. These troops, not only occupied the city (15 May 1919), but they also spread out into the Aegean region. The country, as I pointed out earlier, was already to a

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large extent occupied. However, a Greek occupation was considered an entirely different matter. An occupation by one of the Powers was, admittedly, a great misfortune. Nevertheless, in such a situation the Turks inhabiting the region could hope to continue their existence. With the Greeks, on the other hand, the Balkan experience had shown that such hopes were rather slim. What is called the struggle of independence found its driving force in the reaction to this predicament. At least since the beginning of the armistice, world public opinion was aware of the demands of the Greeks in the Aegean and Marmara regions (including İstanbul), in the Black Sea region, of the Armenians and the Kurds in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, including Cilicia (by the Armenians). Naturally, the Turks too were aware of this, but they tried to believe that somehow the Paris Peace Conference would brush aside these demands as unwarranted and more or less respect the territorial limits of Turkey at the time of the signing of the armistice. There were all sorts of reasons for this Turkish optimism. The primary reason was probably the principle of self-determination enunciated by President Wilson. Another hope in certain quarters was that the Bolshevization of Russia would re-create the Crimean alliance with France, Britain and the Ottoman Empire allied against Soviet Russia. Under those circumstances, the Powers could not, it was thought, afford to make the peace treaty too harsh. For most Turks, the amputation of the Arab provinces was considered an already harsh enough imposition.

In evaluating the Turkish situation, it should be borne in mind that the Ottoman peace treaty was signed at a very late date after the end of the war. Between the armistice and the communication of peace conditions, i.e., by 11 May 1920, eighteen months had elapsed.

The Greek occupation of the Aegean region was a tremendous blow to Turkish hopes. It seemed to indicate that the peace treaty was to be a harsh one, because Greek occupation could only be explained by the acceptance, in advance, of Greek claims to the region. Although there had earlier been some steps in the direction of preparations for resistance, if need be, against the Allies, it is very doubtful indeed how effective a movement could have been set in motion if an event of high provocation, such as the Greek occupation, had not occurred. Another event in the same direction was the gratuitous violence shown by the British during the reinforcement of the occupation of İstanbul on 16 March 1920. Finally, of course, came the peace conditions themselves, which more than justified the fears that had arisen. According to the Peace Treaty of Sèvres, signed on 10 August 1920, by the representatives of the Sultan's government, the Empire was due to lose, compared with the Treaty of Lausanne: a) Eastern Thrace and the İzmir-Manisa-Ayvalık region; b) the Northeastern region of Anatolia to an Armenian state, which according to the boundaries drawn up by President Wilson was to comprise Tirebolu, Gümüşhane, Erzincan, Muş, Bitlis and the region to the east of these points; c) the rest of the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia to an autonomous and

eventually independent Kurdistan; d) Mardin-Urfa-Antep-Ceyhan-Hatay were to be given to Syria; e) the Straits and the coast of Marmara, including the hinterland of the coastline and the city of İstanbul to be administered by an international Straits organization. İstanbul was, thus, to be the site of two capitals at the same time (Ottoman capital and capital of the Straits organization), but its status as Ottoman capital was to be contingent on the "good behaviour" of the Turks. Since the chances of the long-term coexistence of Greek and Turk and of Armenian and Turk was then considered to be at best problematical, the rather obvious result for the Turks seemed to be their eventual extirpation from their homelands and from their very capital. Again, according to the Treaty provisions, a 3-Power Financial Commission was to be set up to establish a very strict control of the finances of Turkey, including the very making of the state budget.

The knowledge of these peace terms was a traumatic experience to all Turks, and the first reaction was one of universal and categorical non-acceptance. The Allies were prepared for such an event, and they, therefore, unleashed a general offensive by the Greek forces which ended in the occupation of nearly all Western Anatolia, up to the Bursa-Uşak line. The response of the government of the Grand National Assembly, led by Atatürk, was to reiterate its determination to continue the struggle. The Sultan and his government, on the other hand, bowed down and agreed to sign the peace treaty. The difference between these two views wasn't restricted to this issue. The two governments were, ideologically speaking, worlds apart and diametrically opposed. The Ankara government's ideology was what may be called democratic-nationalist (or bourgeois), whereas the Sultan represented the absolutist-theocratic (or feudal) ideology. The 1908 constitutional revolution had brought the former ideology to power, embodied by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). However, defeat in World War I discredited the CUP so thoroughly that Vahdettin, the last Sultan, felt that he could do away with the constitutional régime. For this, he counted upon the support of the British. He seems to have thought that he could 'buy' this support by offering the Caliphate as a prop for British imperialism in Muslim colonies. Thus, Vahdettin chose the line of docility in his relations with the Allies, and especially, the British, imbued as he was with feudal ideology, loss of territory-whether Turkish or Arabic didn't matter much-was anathema to him, and he struggled to retain as much territory as possible, even if at the cost of independence.

For Atatürk and his friends, on the other hand, the situation was quite different. They were determined to preserve the constitutional régime installed in 1908 and were set against a restoration of absolutism. In the autumn of 1919, they waged a bitter struggle to bring to power a liberal government which would hold parliamentary elections. Their conception of post-war Turkey was a Turkey which, having given up all its Arab provinces would have earned the right to set up a fully independent nation-state. Thus, the

Sultan was trying to salvage as large a territory as possible by sacrificing the state's independence, while the democratic-nationalist movement, imbued with the ideals of Turkish nationalism, was trying to inaugurate a fully independent Turkish state in exchange for abandoning all claims to the Arab provinces.

These two opposite world-views were already engaged in a keen ideological struggle when the 'reinforcement' by the British of the occupation in İstanbul on 16 March 1920, transformed the situation. The reinforcement of the occupation was quite openly proclaimed by the Allies to be against the nationalists and in support of the Sultan. Many nationalist leaders, including a number of deputies, were arrested. Acting upon this indication of support, the Sultan formed a strong-fisted government headed by Damat Ferit Paşa, which launched an armed struggle against the democratic-nationalist movement. Simultaneously, Parliament was dissolved. Atatürk ordered new elections and together with the deputies who escaped from İstanbul, the Parliament, re-named the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, held its first meeting on 23 April 1920. The civil war continued until autumn, by which time the Sultan's army and uprisings on his behalf had all been defeated. Having won the civil war, Atatürk now had to defeat his principal external enemies, namely the Greeks (and the Armenians). This task was accomplished at the end of the summer of 1922. Upon the Greek defeat, Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, tried to engage his country in war against Turkey, but failed to do so. France and Italy had some time before decided to come to terms with the government of Ankara. Ankara's brilliant victory over the Greeks enabled it, on the one hand, to sweep away the centuries-old Ottoman Sultanate, and, on the other, to achieve the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). This, in bare outline, is the story of Atatürk's struggle in the Turkish war following World War I.

Charles De Gaulle waged his victorious struggle, two decades later, in a very changed world. Nevertheless, there are some important similarities, and it is interesting to note some of the differences.

First, let us consider the element of defeat. Turkey was defeated, and had to sue for peace at the end of four years of struggle. France and Britain had declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, upon the invasion of Poland. Nevertheless, the fact that they did not fight the Germans on the frontiers of France until the Germans chose to launch their attack eight months later on Holland, Belgium and France (10 May 1940), seemed to indicate that the French and the British lacked the determination to fight. Leaving aside the British, it can be said that in France, a consensus to fight Germany was lacking, and that this lack of consensus was the direct result of the polarization of the French society. The French right (here meaning all sections of French society, except those represented by the Socialists and the Communists) could not stomach the existence of the left, especially the

Communists. Such a situation apparently had also existed on the eve of World War I, as shown by the assassination of Jean Jaurés, but somehow that had not prevented a consensus which enabled the successful conclusion of that war. On the eve of World War II, the French society was much more polarized. The example of Russian Bolshevism was a frightening sight for the French right, and the increased strength of the left had been demonstrated by the Popular Front electoral victory in 1936. For many right-wing Frenchmen that had seemed a kind of dress rehearsal for a coming Bolshevik régime. Some of them, at least, apparently were of the opinion "better Hitler than Communism, or even Blum." Of course, how far the left and especially the Communists could stomach the right is another aspect of the same problem, and there is no doubt that the Communists, by their words and action, contributed to a large extent to the attitude of the right. Nevertheless, since the right ideologically, politically and economically, dominated French society, its responsibility for the lack of consensus might be said to have been greater.

A few words about the connection between consensus and success in warfare. It seems to me that given a 'minimum' of equivalence in men, armaments, and command, consensus and the resulting determination to fight are very important factors in military victory. Thus, it can be said that the Egyptian and Greek armies' success before the Turkish armies in the 1830's and the Greek advance in 1919-1920 was due in large measure to the fact that the Turkish society was deeply divided by the reforms of Mahmut II in the first case and by the civil war between the Sultan and the democratic-nationalist movement in the second. The sweeping successes of the Napoleonic armies can be ascribed to a large extent to a strong consensus in French society.

I should also point out that the lack of consensus in France (and Britain) on the eve of World War II was apparent, not only in the weakness of the will to fight, but also in deficient military preparedness, whether in the production of armaments and munitions, rationing, or in the adoption of new military tactics such as those espoused by de Gaulle. Another indication of broken consensus was the decision of the French National Assembly on 26 September 1939, to dissolve the Communist Party and to ban its publications. In January 1940, the Communist deputies were declared to have forfeited their seats in the National Assembly. The motive for this action was the Soviet-German Pact, whereas the Communists had presumably shown their patriotism on the 2nd of September by voting for military credits. It should also be noted that until the Reynaud government in March 1940, no corresponding measures against pro-German circles were taken.

Both in the case of Atatürk and of de Gaulle, they felt that the struggle should be continued, while their rivals, who were their compatriots, felt that the war could not and should not continue. In France, soon after

military defeat occurred in May 1940, Commander-in-Chief Weygand demanded an armistice. Prime Minister Reynaud was for continued resistance. There was talk, and there were plans (defended by de Gaulle) to fall back to Bretagne, to make the region a fortress supported by Britain against the German armies. How feasible these plans were, I do not know—at any rate, they did not materialize. What could be done and what Reynaud, most of his ministers as well as the President of the Republic Lebrun had decided to do was to move the government and the fleet to North Africa and to continue the struggle from there. This was decided upon. However, Pétain, hero of World War I and a last-minute addition to the government, was against going. In the end, the government did not go, Reynaud resigned on the 16th of June and was replaced by Pétain. From then on, everything was transformed. Pétain was a man of the extreme right, which tried to interpret the military defeat as a defeat of the Third Republic, or, in other words, of democracy. The extreme right wanted to see the Third Republic defeated, bankrupt, so that they could build their authoritarian dictatorship. To continue the war against Germany would mean that the Third Republic was not dead and, therefore, that a right-wing dictatorship could not be established—at least for the time being. The fact that the victor of the war seemed to be Germany, which itself was governed by a right-wing dictatorship, meant that the French extreme right could hope to derive, at the very least, moral support from the Nazi government and —with some optimism— even material support for its new régime.

Defeat in 1870 had ended the Empire, defeat in World War I had brought republican régimes to Germany, Austria and Hungary. These were all moves to the left. It was only proper that defeat by rightist Germany should bring —French authoritarian rightists probably thought along these lines— a right-wing régime closed to the left and inspired by Fascist and Nazi models. It is interesting that the Vichy régime, as in Germany, dropped the title of republic—Pétain was head of the state, not of the republic. (It should be noted that the Vichy régime, in spite of its definite rightist character, entertained the *illusion* that it was neither right nor left, that it was 'above' capitalism and socialism. It may be said that to a certain extent, the authoritarian régimes of the interwar period, and also that of Vichy, were manifestations of certain unpreparedness of the masses for full democracy, a residue of their attachment to monarchy.) Probably the greatest fault of the Third Republic, according to authoritarian rightists, was the fact that it had allowed the *Front Populaire* to come to power. Vahdettin and his supporters thought along similar lines. The government of the CUP had decided to join the war on the side of the Central Powers. Since the constitution had been restored by the CUP in 1908, now that the CUP was completely discredited by military defeat, the Sultan apparently thought it was natural that the constitutional régime should be abrogated or at least severely curtailed.

Now for another aspect of this situation, the aspect of collaboration with the enemy. This is present both in the French and Turkish cases. The new régime brought about as a result of defeat owes its existence to that defeat: therefore, it is generally inclined to collaborate with the enemy that has realized that defeat. Collaboration is not necessarily treason as long as there is a certain *quid pro quo*. After the armistice, Vahdettin for a long time sought an arrangement with the British. Although he promised them "total submission", and was ready to give them vast concessions (project of 30 March 1919), he expected from them in return no less than the restoration of the Empire. The British paid no attention. According to some sources, he eventually made an agreement with them, but the British side was represented here on the level of the Intelligence Service (12 September 1919). The peace terms were a great blow and created a negative reaction, but the spectacular success of the Greek Army persuaded him to sign the peace treaty. In the French case, Laval was not content, as Pétain was, merely to set up a right-wing authoritarian régime. He also had ambitious plans in foreign policy and was of the opinion that Germany would win the war, that with its new régime France could be a partner with Nazi Germany in building a new European order. If France did not fulfill this role, Germany might choose England (after having defeated it) as its main partner. The relative moderation shown by Hitler in the terms of the French armistice encouraged such optimism. The French demands that the fleet and the Empire should not be handed over were accepted. The Germans would temporarily occupy three-fifths by France only in order to conduct the war with England.

Even though Laval became Prime Minister, his hopes were not realized. The arrogant racism of the Nazis made it impossible for them to cooperate on anything resembling an equal footing with any other nation, however advanced, and however useful such cooperation might be for German ends. In a short while the Nazis began to put into effect their policy of bleeding the French economy white. Secondly, though Laval with great obstinacy tried almost to the very end to pursue a policy of collaboration, including full military cooperation with Germany, Pétain was opposed to that kind of cooperation. For that reason Pétain, as a result of a coup, was able to get rid of Laval for some time.

Now, let us compare de Gaulle and Atatürk more directly. At the beginning, Atatürk had a greater advantage over de Gaulle in that he was already a well-known person when he started to lead the national struggle: his victorious role on the Dardanelles front in 1915 was well known. Further, he had the advantage of going to Anatolia by appointment of the Sultan, a position which provided him with a useful start. Also, despite his relatively young age, Atatürk was already a senior general. De Gaulle, on the other hand, was not well known by the French public before the war. He had written a book describing what was to become known as the *blitzkrieg* strategy of war. While the Germans had carefully studied and applied the ideas

contained therein, the French Army had disregarded it, preferring instead the Maginot strategy. De Gaulle began to become known in France only very late, after he won an armored engagement (1940) which first procured him the rank of general and then his appointment as Under-Secretary on June 5. But the Battle of France was already lost, and de Gaulle had to flee to England. Thus, when two days after the formation of the Pétain government, he launched his appeal through the BBC to continue the struggle (18 June), there was hardly any response at first.

However, there is a similarity between the two leaders from the point of view of their rivals. Vahdettin was a clever and astute politician. More important, he enjoyed the prestige of the 600-year old Ottoman dynasty and the religious position of the Caliphate. No wonder that Atatürk, in spite of years of struggle, felt that he could face him directly only after the complete rout of the Greek forces in Anatolia. In the French case, Pétain, as the victorious commander of the Battle of Verdun, was a national hero. Thus both Atatürk and de Gaulle faced formidable opponents.

However, what made their tasks so much easier and contributed to a very large extent to their success, was the uncompromising enmity their adversaries showed to their respective countries. In Turkey's case, the British, in the person of Lloyd George, followed this policy which culminated in the Sèvres Treaty. In the case of France, the seemingly considerate attitude of Germany at the very beginning soon gave place to a policy of all-out exploitation and brutality. It was these policies which made the cooperation or the pliancy of the Sultan and of Vichy appear in an ugly light, which eroded the positions of Vahdettin and of Pétain, while they built up those of Atatürk and de Gaulle.

Another comparison can be made from the point of view of their allies. De Gaulle had the support of the British and much later, of the Americans. Atatürk was supported first by the Soviets, later by the French. External support was naturally of great value, but it brought some problems too. In the French case, after France capitulated, the British felt obliged to attack the French fleet stationed at Mersel-Kebir. Naturally, there was a lot of bad feeling on this account *vis-à-vis* England and de Gaulle's struggle, supported as it was by the British, was affected by this situation. In the Turkish case, Soviet support in those early years of the Revolution was necessarily a weak support. Further, Bolshevism was regarded by European public opinion as a rejection of civilization, of religion and decency. Therefore, the support and sympathy of the Bolsheviks was also in some ways a handicap. In this respect, French support, which came especially after the signing of the Turco-French agreement at Ankara (20 October 1921), was of great importance because it showed that the Ankara régime was not Bolshevik.

From the point of view of the military struggle, Atatürk was in a more favorable situation than de Gaulle. He controlled the army, which controlled most of Turkey. Of course, during the civil war the army's control in Western and Central Anatolia was very precarious-if it existed at all. Still, he was better off than de Gaulle who was completely cut off from France either by the German occupation or by the Vichy government. Until the Normandy invasion, de Gaulle could only exercise a limited and indirect control in France through the underground Resistance movement. Otherwise, he had to content himself with gradually extending his control in the territories of the Empire.

I have tried to point out in this brief study the various differences and similarities of the Turkish and French liberation movements. I would like to end by pointing out an important similarity. Both movements were definitely democratic compared to their rivals. Thus, their success enabled both countries to make significant progress on the road of democracy. The success of Atatürk and the movement he led, not only closed the door to a restoration of absolute monarchy, but at the same time brought into being the secular, democratic republic. De Gaulle's success was a success of the republican principle, of France's development along the path opened by the French Revolution, and of the country's progression from a bourgeois democracy towards a social democracy. (It should be remembered in this conjunction that the Vichy government abolished both the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and the very basic principles of the Revolution: Liberty, equality and fraternity.) Also, it should be stressed that Atatürk's success was again an obvious success for the principles of the French Revolution.