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“Every nation, if it is to survive as a nation, must study its own history and have a foreign policy”

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How and why did the British set the Greeks against the Turks?

Introduction by Pat Walsh

This is the Centenary of the invasion of Ottoman Anatolia by the Greek Army acting as Lloyd George's cat's-paw to enforce a punitive settlement on the Ottoman Turks.

The political and military assault launched by Britain during the Great War on neutral Greece and the devastating effect this ultimately had on the Greek people across the Balkans and Asia Minor is almost completely forgotten about in Western Europe. The Greek King Constantine and his government tried to remain neutral in the War but Britain was determined to enlist as many neutrals as possible to help win it, no matter the consequences.

This was necessary for three main reasons:

Firstly, English Liberalism had to present the Great War as a great moral crusade of good versus evil in order that their M.P.s and base would support it. This meant that neutrality was almost impossible for others, as countries had to be either 'for' or 'against' the 'war for civilization' against 'barbarism.' This really was an innovation in the conduct of war and gave the Great War its catastrophic character because an accommodation or peace could hardly be made with evil, particularly for the Nonconformists, who made up a great deal of the Liberal rank and file. This thwarted all efforts at peace, particularly those of Pope Benedict XV, who tried to put a stop to Europe destroying itself in 1917.

Secondly, English Liberalism was opposed to military conscription. That made it necessary, once the Germans had not been defeated quickly, to get others to do the fighting for Britain – the fighting that the Liberal Party was reluctant to impose on its own citizens for fear of interfering in their freedoms. So, it became the norm to bully and bribe other nations to fight to avoid conscription at home, where liberal values mattered most.

Thirdly, the Liberal Imperialists, like Churchill, favoured a policy of expansion of the War in a desperate attempt to win it. In France and Belgium the war had got bogged down into a static war of attrition where great casualties were being suffered. The thinking was that if the fringes of Europe, and even Asia, were set ablaze this would let others take the casualties and stretch the forces of the Central Powers wider and wider to weaken their lines.

So, England made offers to the Greek Prime Minister, Venizelos, of territory in Anatolia which he found too hard to resist. Metaxas, the Greek Chief of Staff, had opposed such an adventure as madness. The Greek King, under the Constitution, had the final say on matters of war and he attempted to defend his neutrality policy. This was unacceptable to Britain, and tantamount to the action of an enemy. The King was described as a German puppet. Constantine was then deposed by the actions of the British Army at Salonika, through a starvation blockade by the Royal Navy, and finally by a seizure of the harvest by Allied troops.

This had the result of a widespread famine in the neutral nation that forced the abdication of King Constantine.

These events led to the Greek tragedy in Anatolia because the puppet government under Venizelos, installed in Athens through Allied bayonets, was enlisted as a cat's-paw to bring the Turks to heel after the Armistice at Mudros. They were presented with the town of Izmir/Smyrna first and then the Greeks, encouraged by Lloyd George, advanced across Anatolia toward where the Turkish democracy had re-established, at Ankara, after it had been suppressed in Constantinople. Britain was using the Greeks and their desire for a new Byzantium in Anatolia to get Atatürk and the Turkish national forces to submit to the Treaty of Sèvres, and the destruction of not only the Ottoman State but Turkey itself.

The Greeks were a useful cat's-paw because after the War Britain was virtually bankrupt and the promise had been made by Lloyd George to demobilize the troops immediately in order to win a snap election he called just after the Armistices. So the Greek Army was needed to do the imposing of the Treaty of Sèvres which British Imperial forces were unable to undertake for lack of British treasure and a lack of will to shed further English blood.

The Greek Army, which initially advanced well, finally perished just short of Ankara, after being skilfully manoeuvred into a position by Atatürk, in which its lines were stretched. Atatürk concluded an alliance of convenience with the Bolsheviks to secure his Eastern flank against the Armenians, who the British were urging to link up with Greeks. This was advantageous for both Atatürk and Lenin. It helped the Bolsheviks to secure Transcaucasia and the oil of Baku.

If Lloyd George had made a speedy and honourable peace with Ottoman Turkey in 1919, as Churchill proposed, and allied with Istanbul against Bolshevism it is conceivable that the Caucasus would have been held against Lenin with dramatic results. The history of the world would have been different.

Because the British Prime Minister adopted the course he did and managed to secure his Hellenic ally by irredentist rewards the ancient Greek population of Asia Minor fled on boats from Smyrna, with the remnants of their army after Britain had withdrawn its support, because the Greek democracy had reasserted its will to have back its King.

In the following article Turan Cetiner presents material concerning the Greek invasion of Anatolia that is not generally available to a Western audience about an event that, despite its historical importance, has all but been forgotten, despite the phrases that decorate First World War "Remembrance" such as "Lest We Forget".
One hundred years ago: The Greek invasion of “Smyrna” and the last crime of the Great War, May 15, 1919.

by Dr. Y. Turan Cetiner

One hundred years ago, fuelled by the post-WW I ambitions of the victorious powers, the Greek invasion of Izmir which then, they chose to refer to as “Smyrna” was a devastating episode in the unfolding Great War on the Ottoman Empire. On October 30, 1918, the Allies and the Ottoman Empire had signed the Armistice of Mudros to end hostilities between them. Shortly afterwards, on November 11, 1918, the Allies and Germany signed the Compiègne Armistice to end hostilities on the Western Front.

Two days later, on November 13, 1918, British and Allied troops occupied the Ottoman Capital, Istanbul - which they always choose to refer to as “Constantinople”. French, Italian and other Allied troops followed in like actions. In January 1919, the Allied Leaders, Prime Minister Lloyd George, Greece’s Premier Venizelos, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and France’s Georges Clemenceau et al., met in the Paris Peace Conference for which the “Peace” label was a mere cover for victor’s justice over the defeated powers, with its punitive arrangements. Urged and sponsored by Lloyd George, the Allies’ Paris Conference decided that the Greek army should occupy “Smyrna”, Ottoman Empire’s Aegean port city.

Paris Conference and its Decision on the Greek Invasion of Izmir


Venizelos had been engaged in a relentless effort to ensure Greece’s participation in the war. He recommended “the immediate participation of Greece in the Dardanelles Campaign of the Allies. Greece would get Smyrna as previously promised as compensation for such a brave move. Even Constantinople would be annexed to Greece” (A. Pallis, 1937: 17). King Constantine in his turn, was against participation in the war and was accused of being in sympathy with Germany by the British on the basis that he had his higher education in Germany and was awarded the title of Field Marshall by Wilhelm II. And, he was married to Wilhelm II’s sister.

Another perspective is needed here and this could be the importance of aristocracies’ “positive role” in maintaining the stability of Europe, if that was possible. However, such an attitude was generally not in place at all in the European ruling dynasties’ performing of policies to save their countries from the perils of the war. It is undeniable that King Constantine I of Greece, at least for some time, was exercising a cautious role through endorsing Greece’s policy of neutrality in a war ever encroaching on its territory, which in fact, had turned to be an imminent threat following the Anglo-French invasion of Thessalonika in September, 1915. Evidently, “through most of 1916 and 1917, the Allied commanders [in Salonika] had been more occupied with badgering the Greeks than with fighting the Bulgarians” (Stokesbury, 1981: 294). This being the case, Venizelos was considerably backed by the Allies in his efforts to force the King Constantine to abdicate and enter the war.

Venizelos’ insistence had initially cost him his premiership when Constantine and the Greek general staff opposed alliance with the Entente, and he was forced to resign on March 6, 1915. However, he assumed the premiership again in the same year after anti-Constantine factions gained power in the aftermath of the German-Austrian-Bulgarian advances towards Greece. The dispute brought about a constitutional crisis that came to be known as the Ethnikos Dikhasmos, the national secession. The ensuing political turmoil with serial changes of government ended in Venizelos’ favour as he once again assumed the premiership in June 1917 and had a free hand to send Constantine into exile to enthrone Constantine’s son, Alexander. As the time was finally ripe, he declared war on Central Powers.

The pressure of the Triple Entente, particularly British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, greatly facilitated Venizelos’ decision to enter the war. “His position was reinforced in January 1915 when Britain promised to award Asia Minor [including all of Modern Turkey] to Greece if Greece would lend military support to the Serbs and to the proposed British and French invasion of the Turkish mainland at Gallipoli.” (Curtis, 2013: 45).

No appraisal of the ambitions of Venizelos during these years should neglect the fact that a major part of the Great War strategy of the British Empire coincided with the Megali Idea. Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Minister, in a dispatch to Washington on January 17, 1917 had stated that “evidently the interest of peace and the claims of nationality alike require that Turkish rule over alien races shall, if possible, be brought to an end.” (Temperley, 1969: 172). Orchestrating a large attack on Turkey wherever and whenever was possible, made the Greeks ideal candidates for fulfilling Britain’s objectives.

The Armistice of Mudros was not the end of the Great War on the Ottoman Empire. Following the Armistice, it was only a matter of finding the most appropriate option be it the Italians or the Greeks to perpetuate the unsatisfied war aims of the Allies. In the Paris Conference, the Allied leaders, having already partitioned among themselves the vast Ottoman Empire lands, including North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula then turned their minds to detaching and partitioning among themselves the other major parts of the Ottoman Empire, such as Izmir and Istanbul.

The relatively easy fall of “Constantinople” to the British caused Venizelos’ appetite to grow and demand Greece’s share of the spoils from the collapsed Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Venizelos’ aspirations to “recapture Constantinople” and the setback he faced require further research to understand the magnitude of the efforts directed at partitioning the Ottoman Empire. He would soon, however, have to “settle” for, not the main object of his heart’s desire, “Constantinople”, but the second Grand Prize of the Ottoman lands - the charming Aegean port city of Izmir.

Venizelos was experienced enough to see that to pursue his vicious objectives he had to overcome rival competitors. Therefore, pushing the Italians aside through exploiting the differences of Rome and London in the European post-war settlements negotiations was a task he set himself. Having claimed “belligerent status” he was backed by the Allied war
machine in invading Izmir on May 15, 1919, which he presented as the pinnacle of his personal success and judgment.

During the first week of May 1919, the Italian anger towards the unfulfilled promises of the treaty-breaking British increased. The British and French were uncomfortable about the increased Italian presence along the coast of Turkey. On May 2, when the Big Three met, more reports of Italian moves along the coast of Asia Minor were coming in. “Madness,” said Lloyd George. Clemenceau was for a tough line: “If we don’t take precautions, they will hold us by the throat.” (MacMillan, 2003: 429). Another player likely to be much more cooperative with British interests than the embittered Italians soon emerged as perfect candidates to quell the Italian advance. Lloyd George announced that Venizelos had offered to send Greek warships.

Venizelos was stirring up feelings against the Italians and offering to help the Allies. He had been working hard from the start of the Paris Conference to press Greek claims, with limited success and the crisis with the Italians was, he recognized, Greece’s great opportunity. “Although Venizelos tried to argue that the coast of Asia Minor was indisputably Greek in character, and the Turks in a minority, his statistics were highly dubious. For the inland territory he was claiming, where even he had to admit that the Turks were in a majority, Venizelos called in economic arguments...To show how reasonable he was being, he renounced any claims to the ancient Greek settlements at Pontus on the eastern end of the Black Sea.” (Ibid.: 430). He would not listen to petitions from the Pontic Greeks, he assured House’s assistant (and the President Woodrow Wilson’s private translator), Bonsal: “I have told them that I cannot claim the south shore of the Black Sea, as my hands are quite full with Thrace and Anatolia.” (Ibid.).

**Planning the Invasion and the Widening of Aggression**

Venizelos wrote in his diary that when they met, Lloyd George “started with a simple question”:

“Lloyd George: Do you have troops available.

Venizelos: We do. For what purpose?

Lloyd George: President Wilson, M. Clemenceau and I decided today that you should occupy Smyrna.

Venizelos: We are ready. (Ibid.:432).

Acting euphorically, Venizelos met with the Big Three and their military advisers to conclude the invasion plan. He was confident of his military forces and the Greek inhabitants of Izmir would surely welcome them. The Turks, he thought, would not put up any resistance. “Lloyd George and Venizelos agreed that it would be best if French and English troops occupied the forts at the entrance to the harbour and then turned them over to the Greeks. . . . The whole thing,” wrote Henry Wilson, the British military expert, “is mad and bad.”” (Ibid.)

Though, neither the Greeks, nor the Italians were ready to back down, especially on Izmir, Venizelos finally grasped a negotiating edge in sending the Greek occupation forces to Izmir. “When Venizelos reached out for Smyrna and its hinterland, he was going well beyond what could be justified in terms of self-determination. He was also putting Greece into a dangerous position. . . . From another perspective, though, it created a Greek province with a huge number of non-Greeks as well as a long line to defend against anyone who chose to attack from central Anatolia. His great rival General Ioannis Metaxas, later dictator of Greece, warned of this repeatedly: “The Greek state is not today ready for the government and exploitation of so extensive a territory” Metaxas was right.” (Ibid.: 440-441).

The British were only interested in finding the most suitable pawn to further their war aims towards the ultimate dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. London was least of all concerned with rewarding Greece for its participation in the war, but primarily focussed on using Venizelos as its instrument. Venizelos thought that he would need to persuade the Allies that the majority of the population of the aforementioned region was Greek, in order to satisfy the requirements of “self-determination” that had infected the settlement with the appearance of US in the ranks of the Allies. However, the Ottoman Statistics of 1910 which has been widely accepted as a reliable source indicated that “the Greek population of the region was clearly fewer than the Turkish population. The total Greek population in the provinces of Aydin, Bursa and Bida was 511,544, while the Muslim (Turkish) population of the same provinces was 3,170,705.” (Cited in, Erhan, 1999: 13).

Again, it was claimed that the Greek army would occupy the city and province of Izmir to stop the Turkish atrocities against the Greek population. “Venizelos reported to the Paris Conference on April 12, one month before the decision for occupation, “Some serious troubles had been occurring in Izmir and Aydin.” He claimed, “Turks had committed some crimes against the Greeks in those regions” and emphasized his, “Concern for the furtherance of such atrocities. Lloyd George and the French Premier Georges Clemenceau strongly supported these accusations, despite the lack of convincing evidence in order to justify occupation.” (Ibid.:13, 14).

“On the morning of May 6, the Allies casually took the decision that set in train the events that destroyed, among many other things, Smyrna itself, Venizelos’s great dream and Lloyd George’s governing coalition.” (MacMillan, 2003: 431).

The invasion started on May 15, 1919. Contrary to the scenario presented by Venizelos, the mood in the city was tense and tumultuous events occurred. The Turkish inhabitants of the city were deeply uneasy. Agents of the Greek government had been there since the end of the war, trying to stir up popular support for Greek rule. The British and French representatives viewed events sympathetically, the Italians with hostility. As the first Greek troops marched into city, excited Greek crowds cheered.

“It was like a holiday, until suddenly a shot was fired by somebody outside a Turkish barracks. Greek soldiers started firing wildly, and when Turkish soldiers stumbled out of the barracks in surrender, the Greeks beat them and prodded them along toward the waterfront with bayonets. The Greek onlookers went wild and joined in. Some thirty Turks died. All over Smyrna mobs sprang up, killing and looting. By the evening between 300 and 400 Turks and 100 Greeks were dead. The disorder spread out into the surrounding countryside and towns in the following days. It was a disaster for the Greeks and Greek claims, and a foretaste of what was to come.

Throughout Turkey the news of the landings was received with consternation. They seemed to many a first step to the partition of the Turkish parts of the Ottoman Empire... Ataturk had by now decided that the place to be was the interior, where there were troops and officers loyal to nationalist ideals... The day after the Greeks landed in Smyrna, he left Constantinople with a visa from the British. Four days later, on May 19, he and his small party landed at the Black Sea port of Samsun. (Ibid.: 432-433).

Supported by the Allied military supplies, the Greek army expanded their occupation, and penetrated the interior of Anatolia. These were by no means peaceful occupations. The Greek occupation of Izmir and the adjoining territories were catastrophic for any acceptable settlement and ultimately for Greek and British interests.

In the thirteen days between May 17 and May 29, 1919, the Greek army occupied Urla and Çeşme, and controlled the whole Liman peninsula, including Menemen, Manisa, Aydin, Turgutlu, Bayindir and Tire. By the end of June, Odemis, Bergama (now Pergamon) and Kusadasi had been occupied as well. The
invasion of Aydin and smaller cities of Nazilli, Aydin, Odemis, Menemen, Manisa, Ayvalik and the villages between these were each scenes of indefinable violence and various atrocities.

The Greek Armies’ Massacres and the Inter-Allied Commission of Enquiry

The severity and enormity of the atrocities and massacres in the three-month Greek occupation of Turkish territory compelled the Allies to investigate the matter which resulted in a damning report of the invading Greek army almost seven months later. That said, the Paris Conference constituted its own Inter-Allied Commission of Enquiry into the Greek Occupation of Smyrna and Adjoining Territories. This Commission investigated the actions of the Greek troops during and in the aftermath of the occupation of Turkish territories. The Inter-Allied Commission of Enquiry was ordered to inquire into those responsible for the atrocities, and to submit their findings, conclusions and report urgently to the Supreme Council of the Allied and Associated Powers.

Despite Premier Venizelos’ strong efforts to downplay the severity of Greek aggression, The Report of Enquiry provided an undeniable account of atrocities committed by the invading Greek troops. Importantly, Lausanne Treaty’s underscoring of “the acts of the Greek Army or administration which were contrary to the laws of war (Article 59)” on July 24, 1923, were being documented as early as October 7, 1919, just six months after the start of Greek Armies’ invasion of Izmir on May 15, 1919 and its continuing onslaught towards Anatolian cities.

The Greek Armies’ massacres and atrocities against the Turkish population had prompted the ordering of this inquiry. The Commission held its first meeting in Istanbul on August 12, 1919. The Commission convened 46 times up until the end of the investigation on October 15. The first and last meetings were in Istanbul, but the Commission held all the others in the places where the incidents had occurred. The Commission visited Izmir, Menemen, Manisa, Aydin, Nazilli, Odemis, Ayvalik, Cine and the surroundings during the course of the inquiry and listened to 175 witnesses. There were Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Americans, British, French and Italians among the witnesses. (Cited in Erhan, 1999: 29)

Venizelos also tried to influence Council through stating that the day before the occupation, the Turkish population had assembled and that protests against the occupation had taken stage. However, General Bunoust immediately refuted Venizelos’s claims on the Turkish protests in Izmir. He explained, “These posters were not appeals for resistance and the Turkish population was only asked to assemble in order to prove that the Turkish element was in the majority. Moreover, the crowd of Turks was unarmed.” (Ibid.: 38).

The spotlight must also be turned upon Venizelos’ efforts to minimize the magnitude of mass slaughters by reducing these to isolated, individual crimes. He argued that whenever there had been complaints of excesses he had the culprits severely punished and that there had been two executions. Despite his claims, Venizelos was not successful in his efforts to persuade the Council that “the Greek government had taken all the necessary measures to prevent a recurrence of such incidents. At last he was forced to affirm that he did not wish to conceal anything and was ready to accept a commission of inquiry.” (Ibid., 26). Yet, according to him, “some excesses had occurred in Anatolia” too. Constantly looking for excuses he put forward pretexts like “the Greek troops had been attacked in the streets by people firing at them out of windows and of roofs.” Contrary to previous reports of the British officers from the field, Venizelos reduced all atrocities, even the massacre of prisoners, to “Rare and isolated instances.” (Cited in, ibid.: 28).

Venizelos could not give a satisfactory explanation of any obvious massacres i.e. killing of 20 prisoners. “He only repeated, “The Greek lieutenant commanding the escort of the prisoners was severely condemned after the incident.”” (Ibid.: 39).

The report provided the true account of events between May 15, 1919, the start of the Greek invasion of Izmir and October 15, 1919 when the investigation ended. Although later, Article 59 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty established the fact that “the acts of the Greek army or administration which were contrary to the laws of war” were both undeniable and dreadful, the background of these war crimes must be further elaborated. “W.L. Westermann, the American delegate to the Commission of Greek Claims at the Paris Peace Conference, recorded in a memorandum that, by the middle of June 1919... the Greek army and Greek officials in Izmir had been acting in a manner of semi-barbarity.” (Ibid.: 22).

“The Report of Enquiry”, under its “Account of Events that took place following the Occupation, which were established during the enquiry between 12 August and 6 October 1919,” underscored that:

“No. 1. Since the armistice. Christians have not been in danger in the Turkish province of Aydin. The Greek population was unquestionably persecuted in 1914 and during the war, and treated unkindly in the months immediately after the armistice by the Vali Nouriaddin Pasha. However, since the rise to power of the current Vali Izzet Bey, all the inhabitants, regardless of race, have been treated impartially.

Despite the presence of several gangs of brigands in the region, we can confirm that peace has been restored. Fears of Christian massacres were unjustified. Investigations have shown that attempts to rally Muslims to a Greek massacre, which came to the attention of the Greek authorities a few weeks before the landing and which were forwarded to Athens, were not written by officers in the Turkish constabulary, whose signatures appeared on these documents. These documents are undoubtedly forgeries.”

“The Report of Enquiry” was conclusive in its condemnation of the Greek High Command, which it held accountable for permitting grave atrocities during the Greek army’s occupation of Izmir. It further stated that:

“No. 8. The Greek High Command took no preventive measures to maintain order whilst the Greek troops marched through the town [Smyrna]. It had only placed detachments of Greek sailors in the immediate vicinity of the two points chosen for the landing. In accordance with the orders of the representative of the Entente, the Turkish troops stayed in their barracks.

No. 9. The Greek, military, civil, and religious authorities did nothing to appease the crowd. The ceremony conducted by the Metropolitan to bless the troops on their landing only served to add fuel to the fire. The behaviour of the crowd, gathered along the route taken by the troops, incensed the Turkish inhabitants, and led to acts of violence being committed by zealous individuals.”

The Metropolitan who blessed the Greek troops, as they marched through the streets of Izmir was Chrysostomos. More than three years later he would meet his fate when the Turks recaptured Izmir. Walder who in fact does not pay attention to this report concentrates on further details and describe the flow of events as “Monsignor Chrysostomos has another meeting with Nourredin Pasha, whom once he had said ought to be shot. Nourredin, now military governor, had not forgotten, and reminding the Archbishop of their last meeting, told him that he was to be hanged forthwith.” (Walder, 1969: 176).
Turning back to the Report of Enquiry, it stated the terrible scene on the first days of the invasion as follows:

“No. 13 – Along the route taken from the Konakssquare to the ship Patris, where they were imprisoned, the first convoys of prisoners comprised of officers and soldiers, as well as the Vali [Governor] and civil servants, were tormented by the crowd which accompanied them and even by some of the Greek soldiers escorting them.

All the prisoners were robbed. They all had to shout ‘Zito Venizelos!’ (Long Live Venizelos), and walk with their hand raised. Some were massacred....

No. 15 - On 15 and 16 May, countless acts of violence and looting targeted at the Turkish people and their homes took place in the town. Fezzes were stolen, preventing the Turks from leaving their homes. Many women were raped. Some people were murdered. The acts of violence and looting were committed for the most part by a mob of Greeks from the town, although it has been proven that soldiers also joined in and that the military authorities took no effective measures to stop the acts of violence and looting until it was too late."

“The Report of Enquiry” also underscored that the Greek High Commissioner, who arrived in Izmir on May 21, acted against the prevailing orders communicated in the telegram of May 20. He authorised the Colonel in charge of the troops to issue orders for the following on May 23:

“No. 20 – ....

a) The occupation of Aydin:

b) Intervention in the regions of Magnesios [Manisa] and Kassaba [Turgutlu], without having first requested authorisation from the representative of the Entente. The Greek High Commissioner has acknowledged his responsibility in this matter before the Commission."

The second part of the Report, “Establishment of Responsibilities” provided an undoubted account of how the war crimes of the invading Greek army started.

“No. 2. Far from being executed as a civilising mission, their occupation quickly turned into a kind of conquest and crusade.

No. 3. Responsibility for events which took place in Smyrna on 15 and 16 May and in the immediate vicinity of the town in the first days following the landing lies with the Greek High Command and with certain officer who failed in their duty.

No. 4. In the person of the civil Supreme Authority representing it in Smyrna, the Greek Government is responsible for the serious disturbances which led to bloodshed in the country while the Greek troops advanced...

a) Without requesting any authorisation from the representative of the Entente, it allowed the military Command to give the order on 10/23 May to send troops to Aydin-Magnesios and Kassaba outside the limits of the sanjak of Smyrna.

b) The same authority deliberately left the population in ignorance of the extent of the occupation, thus helping to increase the tension of the Muslim inhabitants and contributing to the ensuing chaos”. (The Report of Enquiry)

Report Section III, titled Conclusions put forward by the Commission, subsection I stated that:

“I.—The situation which has arisen in Smyrna and in the vilayet of Aydin following the Greek occupation is false because:

a) The occupation, which initially intended to maintain order, has all the appearances of an annexation. The only effective authority is in the hands of the Greek High Commissioner. The Turkish authorities which have remained in office no longer have any real power. They no longer receive orders from Constantinople, and in view of the near complete disappearance of the Turkish police and constabulary no longer have the means necessary to execute their decisions;

b) The occupation is imposing considerable military sacrifice on Greece, a sacrifice which is out of proportion with the mission to be carried out if this mission is a temporary one and intended only to maintain order.

c) In its present form, it is incompatible with the restoration of order and peace, of which the population, threatened by famine, are in dire need”

Subsection III of the Conclusions put forward by the Commission, records the Commission’s recommendations were:

“III. Under these circumstances, the Commission suggests the following measures:

a) All or part of the Greek troops will be immediately relieved and replaced by proportionally smaller allied troops.

b) The Greek soldiers will be withdrawn from the occupied zone to avoid any contact with the Turkish national forces, but to rescue their self-esteem, they will continue to play a cooperative role in the occupation.

c) As soon as the Allied occupation takes place, the Turkish government will be required to reorganize the constabulary under the interallied officers’ direction and command.

This constabulary must be immediately reorganized to ensure order and security in the entire region, and replace the allied detachments to this end.

d) Simultaneously with the reorganization of the constabulary, the Turkish government must restore the civil administration.”

Having established Greek troops’ responsibility for their unwarranted violence towards the Turkish people, the “Report of Enquiry” also provided copious examples of Greek troops’ violations of many international rules. In fact, this senseless savagery and lengthy killing sprees in the following months of unexplainable kind were already published in detail and brought to the attention of international public opinion by the Permanent Bureau of the Turkish Congress at Lausanne (Greek Atrocities in the Vilayet of Smyrna, May to July 1919).

The massacres and summary executions carried out by the Greek army had clearly violated Article 50 of the Hague Peace Conference Regulations which stated that “principally, no general penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, should be inflicted on the population on account of the acts of individuals for which they cannot be regarded as jointly or severally responsible,” (Darcy, 2007: 17). Clearly, in view of the violations of the 1899 and 1907 Conventions, the Greek troops in Western Anatolia had not conducted their military operations under the principles of international law at all. Despite this fact and the Conclusions of the Report of Enquiry the only- futile - action that the Council actually took was “to send a letter to Venizelos to inform him that the Greeks were responsible for the atrocities and to warn him not to repeat the same mistake in the future.” (Erhan, 1999: 50)

While the partition and the invasions were continuing, the Sublime Porte succumbed to foreign pressure and signed the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920. Having seen the course of event moving from bad to worse, on May 19, 1919 Mustafa Kemal Pasha had landed in Samsun on the Black Sea, to lead the Turkish War of National Liberation. On 23 April 1920, Mustafa Kemal called the Grand National Assembly in Ankara and effectively formed a unified government. Therefore, May 19, 1919 marked the start of the Turkish War of Independence which was won, years later, on October 29, 1923, when the new independent Republic of Turkey was proclaimed.
Without a noteworthy condemnation from the Great Powers, the Greek army continued its operations and atrocities in Anatolia for over three more years. The Greek onslaught met the first resistance of the Grand National Assembly's army in the 1st Battle of Inonu between 6 and 11 January 1921 which resulted in a stalemate. Greek army renewed its assault on March 23, 1921 and following a series of attacks and counter-attacks, the Greek III Army Corps retreated on March 31, yet still maintaining its order. The Greek army had also sustained its gradual advance on the line stretching from Izmır-Aydın to Kütahya and Eskisehir. Sakarya River became the last line of advancement where the Greek army was met with fierce resistance. On August 23, 1921, the people in Ankara heard the sound of Greek cannons fire when the assault started. (Gerede-Onal, 2003: 221). The Battle of Sakarya (August 23–September 13, 1921) culminated in the Turkish strategic victory at a huge cost particularly due to the high casualty rate among the officers.

The signing of the Treaty of Kars between the Ankara government, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the three Transcaucasian Soviet Republics on October 13, 1921 and the Treaty of Ankara with the French on October 20, 1921, helped to seal the fate of Venizelos' gamble. The decisive battle of the Great Offensive was won on August 30, 1922 and Izmır was liberated on September 9, 1922. The Greek army's onslaught that had started by the invasion of Izmır on May 15, 1919 and almost reached to the gates of Ankara, was pushed back to where it had started after three years and four months, in a matter of ten days.

The Greek army spent this interval in complete chaos to the extent that some units of the Turkish troops reached Izmır earlier than the withdrawing Greek troops did. Renowned Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet explained the bitterness of events to include the pity extended at the Greek soldiers in his famous "Epic of National Forces-Kuyuvi Milliye Destanı." He wrote from the perspective of his real life inspired character, reserve officer Nureddin Esfak.

"Nureddin Esfak's leg was stumbled upon the gashed corpse of an enemy corpse. Nureddin said:"

'Mikhail, the herdsman from Thessalia.'

Nureddin said:

'We did not kill you, but those who sent you here killed you…"' (trans. by the author)

The Great Fire of Izmır which broke out on September 13 was found out to be the last crime of Armeno-Greek incendiaries. Commander of the French fleet in Izmır, French Admiral Charles Henri Dumesnil reported to the Quai d'Orsay "a suspicion that our Consul General [Michel Grail le] is not far from sharing: on September 12, the Consul General of the United States, who remained very quiet, and kept in close contact with his colleagues, ordered suddenly the departure of all the American citizens [underlined by Dumesnil]." Dumesnil expressed the same suspicion toward the British Consul who evacuated his nationals as early as September 3 and pointed out that the information sources of American Consul who was an exponent of racist ideas, were Armenians, the ones of his British colleagues were Greeks, and as a result, wonders if the diplomats "knew in advance the danger to the city because of the Armenian or Greek arsonist organizations." (Report of Admiral Dumesnil, cited in, Gaun, 2017: 24)

Venizelos in Retrospective

Greece tried to complete the reckoning with its past quickly and before the Laussane Peace Treaty, on November 13, 1922, the trial by court martial had begun of Gounaris, the former Premier, Protopopadakis, the former Finance Minister, Theotokis, War Minister, Baltazzis, who had been Foreign Minister, Stratos, the Minister of the Interior and General Hatzianestis, Admiral Goudas and General Strategos. Six out of nine defendants were sentenced to death whose executions were carried out four hours after the verdict. Goudas and Strategos received life imprisonment sentence.

They were found guilty of High Treason, which, in a sense, defined attacking the coastal cities of Turkey and beyond, in the guise of recapturing ancient Greek lands, as an act equal to treason. Metaphorically the unsuccessful campaign had betrayed both Greece and its "ancient" legacy. Venizelos' miscalculations and misrepresentation were indeed numerous. Not surprisingly, London was furious over the executions and the British Ambassador was withdrawn from Athens.

Prince Andreas (Andrew) who was the commander of the Greek Second Army Corps at the critical Battle of Sakarya and who had refused to obey the orders on September 19, 1921 to follow plans, which resulted in a bitter defeat, was also sentenced to death. He was then banished from Greece for life and following his release on December 3, 1922 was transported with his family by HMS Calypso, including the infant Prince Philip (later Windsor), was reputedly carried out to the vessel in an orange crate (Rocco, 1992).

Gounaris paid a heavy price for his two premiership terms between March 10 to August 23, 1915 and from April 8, 1921 to May 16, 1922. The Invasion of Izmır was commanded by him, and following his assumption of the premiership for the second time, he had failed to fulfill his pre-electoral promise of ending the war in Asia Minor. In fact, before and after his terms of office, the spiralling effects of Venizelos' war designs were completely in play regardless of changes in the Greek premiership which saw less influential political figures acquiring transient roles: "The new Plastiras regime was seemingly determined to place all the blame for the Anatolian disaster on the previous government. Presumably Venizelos agreed with this policy, for without any apparent twinges of conscience over the part he had played himself, he sat contentedly at Lausanne negotiating with the Turks." (Walder, 1969: 340). Difficult decisions were made at Lausanne, to include the drawing of the frontier of eastern Thrace and Adrianople and the exchange of population. Undoubtedly, the Article 59 provided the final verdict on all these disasters and the war crimes committed by stating "the Greek army or administration "as the responsible of these grave atrocities and the outcomes of the war. Greece suffered another blow, which was unjust this time, as the Allies managed to escape from assuming their considerable share in the last crime of the Great War, although they had armed and instigated Athens and taken on an active role in enthusing the Greeks to their doom.

Right after Gounaris died on the scaffold, Venizelos, rather pathetically went to Lausanne in a last attempt to win the war at the conference table that he had lost in the field of battle. He was both the agitator and the agitated in the campaign against the Turks and that said, the fact should not be forgotten that as early as 1915, praising biographies had hit the shelves of the bookstores in London to promote him as a visionary statesman on a just cause. Writing the biography of a living person was not found contradictory when it came to him as the stakes were high and the reward substantial.

As soon as the Allied attack on Gallipoli began, on February 16, 1915, Venizelos had offered an army corps and the entire Greek fleet to commit in campaign. With a view to King Constantine's resistance to join the war, he prepared his third memorandum on the issue and insisted upon discussing it privately. He was adamant in his stance.

Greece would not need to fear becoming embroiled in Asia Minor with any of the Great Powers, because she could take advantage of their distrust of each other, not only to protect
her own portion of the Sultan’s inheritance, but also to expand at the expense of all the Powers until the unity of Hellas was achieved. Thus Venizelos took Constantinople on the mountain-top and showed him how the prophecy concerning the reign of the namesake of the founder and of the last sovereign of the Byzantine empire might be fulfilled. The role was Constantinople’s, if he were willing to play it. Speaking later of this interview, Venizelos said: “The King read the memorandum, and was visibly disturbed...the King, who quite evidently, as is clearly proved by subsequent events, had from the very beginning promised the Emperor of Germany that he would never be found in the Entente camp unless one of the Balkan States directly attacked him – the King said to me with great emotion, I remember the very words: ‘Very well, then, in God’s name.’ That is to say, he consented.” (Gibbons, 1920: 220-221).

A day later, when Colonel Metaxas, Chief of the General Staff presented his resignation underscoring that he could not remain in this position if a policy of which he did not personally approve was decided upon, Venizelos’ dreams to join in the Dardanelles campaign were literally over. Metaxas was a prudent adviser. Venizelos’ offer of a single army corps was not likely to make a difference in the balance of forces. The Dardanelles campaign had been mishandled and the element of surprise was lost. The campaign proved disastrous.

Writing in 1920, Gibbons argued that “neither the King nor the General Staff, both under German influence, sympathized with pan-Hellenic vision of the Premier.” (Ibid. 218) In a strongly hostile attitude, he added that:

“They recognized no obligations to the Greeks outside of Greece. They repudiated the obligation to aid Serbia. They had no sense of gratitude to Great Britain for having declared, even before Turkey participated in the war, that the Turkish fleet, which had become formidable because of the acquisition of the Goeben and Breslau, would not be allowed to leave the Dardanelles to attack Greece. They showed no interest in the tentative offer of Cyprus and the promise of a share in the inheritance of the Ottoman Empire that included Smyrna.”

(Ibid.)

Inconsistencies of Gibbons as he conveyed his views to the British audience in 1920 were numerous in the above paragraph only. There was no sense in his blaming of the King and Metaxas who did not favour the war as he both forcefully and vaguely interpreted Greece’s obligations to Greeks outside of Greece. No rationale could be found in extending an aid to Serbia. The German vessels Goeben and Breslau, which were added to the Ottoman Navy as a result of a series of events, by no means could be presented as an instrument to attack Greece. “An offer of Cyprus” and the “promise of a share in the inheritance of the Ottoman Empire that included Smyrna” were nothing but vague promises for a war of aggression on the Ottomans. Yet, he also interpreted the resignation of Metaxas as a situation where “political opinions were affecting military judgment” and German propaganda “getting in its good work”. (Ibid. 221).

Greece’s and Venizelos’ pivotal role was evident in these turning points. Not to mention the lengthy negotiations in Lausanne, two Conferences of London took place with an interval of nine years, to provide a revealing picture of Greek importance in events. The first Conference of London which had started in September 1912 and the further sessions of which had started on December 16, 1912 following the armistice to end the First Balkan War were the backdrop to the ambitions of Venizelos. When the sitting had been suspended Venizelos said to the Ottoman delegates:

“...You forget that we are at the close of a war, and that the whole of Turkey in Europe is occupied by the armies of the Allies. We ask you for a cession of territory; you reply by talking about reforms. Reforms and territorial concession have no common factor; all discussion is impossible”.

‘But you asked for reforms’ said Rechid Pasha. ‘Now we are offering them to you.’

‘Reforms’, retorted M. Venizelos ‘were all very well before the war. Now that war is over they are quite inadequate. Is your answer final?’” (Kerofilas: 1915: 96)

Almost nine years later when the Conference of London was convened between February 21 – March 12, 1921 again, Venizelos had lost the premiership as a result of November 1, 1920 general elections. The elections were not held for the last five years because of the national schism between the King and Venizelos. Dimitrios Kallias of People’s Party served as the premier between November 17, 1920 to February 6, 1921 and left his seat to Nikolas Kalogeropoulos, who remained in this seat until April 8, 1921. Gounaris, the leader of People’s Party, despite winning elections, would wait for his turn to assume the premiership until this date.

Despite his anti-Venizelist stance, Kalogeropoulos became the first to succumb to pressure and he decided to step up the Greek armies’ operations in Anatolia. He, in fact, acted quickly to disperse any clouds of doubt, following the departure of Venizelos, that the Greek army would end its onslaught. On the contrary he said, “Greek army, facing Mustafa Kemal, consists of 121,000 soldiers, combatants and non-combatants, and was confident that it would be able to annihilate Kemal’s forces within three months...He unhesitatingly affirmed that the Kemalists were in fact ‘not regular soldiers; they merely constituted a rabble worthy of little or no consideration.’ His confidence in the Greek troops was ‘absolute, and their courage was undoubted.’” (Friedman, 2016: 238).

Kalogeropoulos and Gounaris represented the transformation of People’s Party and the anti-Venizelist. Greece was on its course to continue the war in Anatolia and even the most obvious changes in the politico-military situation in the Turkish front could not be perceived in changing that. The Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly was also present at the London Conference in equal terms, symbolizing the rise of a new power centre with full legitimacy. Athens’ failure to see the new reality and its insistence on false assumptions were truly disastrous for Greece and the Greek community of Anatolia which were subjected to exchange of population as was long advocated by Venizelos.

Meanwhile, a plebiscite was held in Greece on December 5, 1920 which allowed the return of King Constantine I to re-assume the throne following the death of his son, Alexander by a bizarre incident, “Pro-German “King Constantine I’s return had no effect on the new government’s decision to continue the war in Anatolia. Times had changed, Constantine, whose younger brother Prince Andreas was already the commander of the Greek Second Army Corps in Anatolia, was silenced.

Conclusion

The Greek invasion of Izmir and other Turkish cities was part of Venizelos’ irredentist war designs to re-establish the ancient Greek Empire Hellas. Forces of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, led by Mustafa Kemal, fought and won their political independence in this warring atmosphere which lasted more than four years from May 15, 1919, to July 24, 1923, the day that the Peace Treaty of Lausanne was signed, after lengthy and successful negotiations between Mustafa Kemal’s comrade in arms Ismet Pasha and Lord Curzon, Britain’s Foreign Minister under Lloyd George’s successor, British Prime Minister Andrew Bonar Law.

Turco-Greek peace was completely restored during the time of Atatürk, who was actually nominated for the Nobel Peace
Prize by Venizelos in 1934 (Nobel Prize, (1934), Nomination Database, Mustafa Pascha Kemal). There have been decades long cordial relations between Turkey and Greece from 1930s to 1952 and a period of detente and cooperation. Following Turkey’s rightful and yet, inevitable intervention in Cyprus as a guarantor power when the atrocities of Nikos Sampson’s ethnic terror of ENOSIS had reached its peak in 1974 and in an atmosphere of ensuing low-level tensions, a few bitter decades resulted.

Despite ever present ups and downs, many intellectuals of the two countries’ common geography consider the Turco-Greek rapprochement as something worthwhile and worth pursuing. Former PM Bulent Ecevit’s – who had also decided on the Turkish Peace Operation to Cyprus – poem bears a testimony to that; “You become aware when you feel homesick; That you are brothers with the Greek; Just look at a child of Istanbul; Listening to a Greek epic... What if in our veins; It were the same blood that flows? From the same air in our hearts; A crazy wind blows.” There are indeed two great nations flourishing on the two sides of the Aegean that are much closer than they assume to each other. Disregarding of this truth through unconstructive gestures and revisionist interpretations of history, i.e. fabricating a “Pontus genocide” that is not only imaginary, but also contrary to what was documented in history may only lead to a failure to address the contemporary needs of the two Nations.

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Battle for the Caucasus: Britain Versus Russia (Part 2)

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By Pat Walsh

The struggle for the Caucasus began after the collapse of the Tsarist state in 1917 and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire the following year, opening up a large vacuum for someone to fill. Britain found itself in an unanticipated situation of gaining a large region it had not thought possible of taking. It was, of course, unthinkable for Britain to let the region be, as it was always thought that any region left to its own devices was an open invitation for a rival to step in.

Not only that. With Germany and the Ottomans defeated the Balance of Power policy – the great constant of British Foreign Policy – demanded that England return to its main rivalry with France and Russia, the two allies that it had procured for its Great War on Germany. The War on Germany, although Great, was a transient affair to see off a young upstart Power. Normal business should resume with the traditional enemy! The Caucasus should not be easily surrendered in the resumption of the Great Game with Russia, when it inevitably recovered from its temporary disablement. An opportunity presented itself and Britain did not get where it was in the World – on top of it – by not taking its opportunities.

In November 1918 General Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, outlined three possible lines of policy Britain could adopt to Russia (and the Caucasus), in a Memorandum presented to the War Cabinet.

The first option Wilson outlined was to withdraw all Allied forces from Russia, leaving the country surrounded by a belt of buffer states in a “cordon sanitaire”. This, however, would surrender the military initiative to the Bolsheviks and leave the buffer states under threat and probably unable to counter the Bolsheviks without considerable assistance from Allied forces. The British Army, about to be demobilised by Prime Minister Lloyd George, would not have the soldiers available for such an eventuality, and General Wilson did not believe that the other Allies could help.

The second option Wilson presented was the option of defeating the Bolsheviks through large-scale military intervention. This would cut off the Bolshevik threat at source. However, the lack of available forces and the financial constraints on Britain meant that Wilson felt this option to be unrealistic.

General Wilson suggested, therefore, the War Cabinet follow a third line of policy in which Britain would continue to support anti-Bolshevik forces with military material so that Allied forces could be withdrawn from Russia, when local anti-Bolshevik forces were in a position to take over. Wilson finished his Memorandum by arguing that it should be a Russian task, rather than an Allied one, to overthrow the Bolsheviks (Memorandum...