

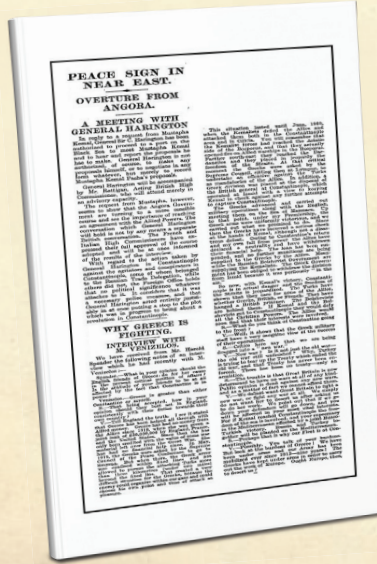
A HISTORICAL INTERVIEW WITH GREEK PRIME MINISTER VENIZELOS*



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PEACE SIGN IN NEAR EAST.

OVERTURE FROM ANGORA.

A MEETING WITH GENERAL HARRINGTON

In reply to a request from Mustapha Kemal, General Sir C. Harrington has been authorized to proceed to a port on the Black Sea to meet Mustapha Kemal and to hear and report the proposals he has to make. General Harrington is not authorized, of course, to make any proposals himself, or to negotiate in any form whatever, but merely to record Mustapha Kemal Pasha's proposals.

General Harrington will be accompanied by Mr. Rattigan, Acting British High Commissioner, who will attend merely in an advisory capacity.

The request from Mustapha, however, seems to show that the Angora Government are turning to a more sensible course and see the importance of reaching an agreement with the Allied Powers. The conversation which General Harrington will hold is not by any means a separate British conversation. The French and Italian High Commissioners have expressed their full approval of the course adopted and will be at once informed of the results of the interview.

With regard to the action taken by General Harrington in Constantinople against the agitators and conspirators in Constantinople, some of whom belonged to the Russian Trade Delegation, while others did not, the Foreign Office holds that no political significance whatever attaches to it. It considers that it was a necessary police measure, and that General Harrington acted entirely justifiably in at once putting a stop to the plot which was in progress to bring about a revolution in Constantinople.

WHY GREECE IS FIGHTING.

INTERVIEW WITH M. VENIZELOS.

We have received from Mr. Harold Spender the following notes of an interview which he had recently with M. Venizelos:—

S.—What in your opinion should the English friends of Greece do for her cause in the present critical position of affairs? Is the attitude of your friends to be at all affected by the fact that Constantine is in power?

V.—Greece is greater than either Constantine or myself.

S.—That being accepted, how in your opinion should they best act in England, consistently with their duties towards their own country?

V.—Tell England the truth. I see it stated that Greece has been helped all through with Allied money. Greece has had no money from the Allies since 1918, when she was given a joint loan of £30,000,000 by England, France, and the United States. Since then she has only been credited with the value of some war material left over from the Great War. She has had no financial help since. In May, 1918, the Greeks were asked by the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference to go to Smyrna. But when there, the Greek army was confined within fixed lines and not allowed to pursue the attacking Turks more than three kilometres [under two miles] beyond the fixed line. That created a very difficult situation for the Greeks, because the enemy could organize within our gaze and could choose his own point and time of attack at pleasure.

This situation lasted until June, 1920, when the Kemalists defied the Allies and attacked them both in the Constantinople area and in Cilicia. You will remember that the Kemalist forces had reached the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus, and that they actually opened fire on Allied warships in the Bosphorus. Farther south-east they reached the Dardanelles and they placed in jeopardy the freedom of the Straits. At that critical moment the Greeks were asked by the Supreme Council, sitting then at Lympe, to undertake an offensive against the Turks as mandatories of the Allies. In addition, a Greek division was placed at the disposal of the British general at Constantinople, which operated at Ismid with a view to keeping Kemal in check against any further attempts to capture Constantinople.

The Greeks advanced and carried out military operations along with the English, meeting them on the Sea of Marmara. Up to that point, under my Premiership, the Greek arms were uniformly victorious, and we carried out what we promised to do. Since then the Greeks have incurred a serious check at the hands of Kemal, although not a disastrous defeat. Owing to Constantine's return and my own fall from power the Allies have declared a neutrality and have withdrawn their financial help. The loan has been suspended, and no further munitions are being supplied to the Greeks by the Allies. Meanwhile the Russian Bolshevik Government are supplying the Kemalists. The Greek Government has been obliged to withdraw the division from Ismid because it was perilously "in the air."

So now, with Kemal's victory, Constantinople is in actual danger and the freedom of the Straits is jeopardized. The Turks have shown that they care for none of the Allies, whether Greeks, British, or French. They have hanged a British prisoner. The Bolsheviks are behind them. If Kemal and the Bolsheviks got to Constantinople they would defy all the Christian Powers. The Allies would soon find that their interests were involved.

S.—What do you think of Constantine going to the front?

V.—Well, it shows that the Greek military staff have a very sanguine view of the success of their operations.

S.—Critics here say that we are being dragged into a "new war."

V.—New war? Is it not just the old war—the old war still unfinished? Why, Turkey is trying to tear up the Treaty which ended the old war, and that Treaty has never been enforced. There has been no treaty—only an armistice.

S.—The trouble is that Great Britain is now determined to have no wars at all of any kind. Public opinion is dead against any new wars, and as a matter of fact we cannot afford them.

V.—We do not want Great Britain to fight a new war, or fight any war at all. We simply do not want her to desert us after asking us to do her work. We point out that if we go down your defenders will go down, and you will be affected in your most vital interests. For if Kemal reaches Constantinople the freedom of the sea is involved, and your supremacy in the Mediterranean affected by a joint Russo-Turkish victory. Russia and Turkey together will be planted on the Mediterranean.

S.—Perhaps that is why our Fleet is at Constantinople.

V.—Possibly. You talk of your burdens. But look at the burdens of Greece! We have been under arms and our Army has been mobilized ever since 1912—nine years! The Greeks have kept under arms in order to carry out the work of Europe. Ought Europe, then, to desert us?

*The Times (London, England),
Friday, Jul 08, 1921; page.10; Issue 42767.*

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THE PRESENT REVIEW ARTICLE AIMS TO provide a historical evaluation of an interview with Greek Prime Minister Venizelos, published in *The Times* during the years of the Turkish War of Independence.¹ This short interview is highly informative in terms of reflecting the political realities of the period.

The interview was conducted on July 8, 1921, as part of a report on the authorization of Sir General Harrington, Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in Istanbul, to meet with Atatürk². In the interview, Venizelos explains the financial support Greece had received since the beginning of the war from the United States, Britain, and France. It is also clear that the will behind the Greek attack on Turkey came from Britain and other allied forces, described by Venizelos based on concrete events.

Looking at the political atmosphere in which the interview was held, the situation was as follows: After the First World War, the Paris Peace Conference convened on January 18, 1919 to determine the content of treaties to be applied to the defeated states. The Treaty of Sevres, which aimed to destroy the Turkish homeland, fell to the share of the Ottoman Empire. When looking at this conference and subsequent developments, it seems that Greece was the main actor in the negotiations on the sharing of Turkish territory.

Although Greece remained neutral in the First World War, it joined the war in 1917 after Britain offered the Greeks possible opportunities for territorial gains in the Near East. Britain thought that a Greece under its control would secure colonial roads in the East. As the first step in this policy, Greece invaded Izmir on May 15, 1919. The striking point here was that the Allied Powers declared in the first note that Izmir would be occupied by the Allied Powers and in the second by Greece on their behalf (Ertan, 2011: 84.). The Greeks first landed soldiers at Izmir and then began to advance into Anatolia with various excuses. Venizelos, who was in Paris during the conference period, also asked for the Allied Powers' permission to allow Greek troops to occupy places as distant as Ayvalik in the North and Aydin in the South. The Allied Peace Council was reluctant to allow Ayvalik's invasion by the Greeks, and instead limited the Greek expansion to Akincilar (Seljuk). Thus, the Greeks, who found support for invasion, began to advance from Izmir and captured Manisa on May 26, and afterward occupied Aydin on May 27, despite it being contrary to the decision of the Peace Conference. This was followed by the invasion of Turgutlu and Ayvalik on 29 May (Turan, 1998: 223).

¹ This document was brought to our attention by Prof. Emin Gürses, a member of the BRIQ Advisory Board. We express our gratitude for thank Prof. Gürses' contribution.

² In *The Times*, it is alleged that the subject of meeting with Harrington was brought to the agenda upon Atatürk's application. However, Atatürk explains in his work entitled *The Speech (Nutuk)* that a conscious distortion was made on this issue and that it was Harrington who wanted to talk to him. Atatürk emphasizes this situation in the letter he sent in response to the news that Harrington sent him (Nutuk, 1983).

In Western Anatolia, important successes were achieved with the first and second İnönü victories on behalf of Turkey, which were critical to the resistance of the National Forces Movement. The movement started under the leadership of the Reddi İlhak Society and then transitioned to the regular army. As a result of attacks by the Greeks with almost all their forces, the Turkish forces retreated, but, finally, the Battle of Sakarya and the Great Offensive ended the Greek occupation.

Eleftherios Venizelos was the Prime Minister of Greece during the Turkish War of Independence and one of the architects of Greece's Megali Idea. For this purpose, he took an active role in the plans of Western states, especially under the leadership of Britain against Turkey. Venizelos was not just any leader of Greek politics. He was one of the leaders of the Greek, Serbian, and Bulgarian alliance policy against the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, along with the military administration of Greece since 1910. One of the most important accomplishments of this alliance was the accession of Crete to Greece. As a result of King Constantine's abdication during the first World War, Venizelos came into power with the support of the British and became a practitioner of British-led aggressive policies against Turkey.

Greece as an Eternal "Proxy" State

The concept of a "proxy war" has entered our political literature as a result of political developments and wars in the Middle East, Balkans, and the Caucasus in the 21st century. Under the US-Israel alliance, in particular, we see that various Sharia Salafist organizations have targeted Syria, Iraq, and Iran in our geography and have achieved varying results. However, "proxy war" is not a new phenomenon. History shows that states can also function as "proxies" as a result

of the overlap of their "self" interests and objectives. Greece is the most typical example of a country that fights directly under the control of an imperialist state in Turkey's political history. As emphasized in this interview, Venizelos complains about not getting the support Greece wanted at the time when the war was victorious on the side of the Turks.

The thesis that the war of independence is a "Turkish-Greek war or a war against minorities" is expressed by some anti-Republican sections regularly. The interview with Prime Minister Venizelos and numerous other objective sources proves how unfounded this thesis is. The main subject here is Greece. As stated in this interview, the Greek state was in the role of an actor who realized the political aspirations of the West both in the years of the War of Independence and previous periods.

The rebellions that started with the nationalist movements affecting the whole world in an ideological context after the French Revolution not only led to the establishment of micro-scale nation-states in the Balkans in the 19th and early 20th centuries but also made these states act directly as the military and political instruments of Western imperialism in further political processes. In this respect, the Greeks had a dominant role in the weakening of the state and land losses in the Balkans from the Greek Revolt that started in 1821 and the Balkan War in 1912-1913, within the borders of the Ottoman state. On October 5, 1821, 12,000 people were killed in the massacres in the city of Tripolitza from Turks, Albanians, Jews, and other nationalities in the uprising that started in the Peloponnese. Until the summer of 1822, the deaths, as a result of the Greek uprising, reached 50,000. (Sonyel, 2014: 208-209).

During the foundation of Greece, whose existence dates back to this period, the main imperialist states of the period, especially Britain, had

initially objected to its statehood, especially in terms of gaining political influence in the Balkans and further breaking the existing power of the Ottoman State. After the Balkan Wars, however, the dimension of political and military relations with the Greeks was strengthened with the acquisition of power by the Greek state. After the Armistice of Mondros signed by the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, Greece appears to have taken part in British plans, especially in line with its own “Megali Idea” goal, along with the British, French, and Italian invasions.

For example, during this period, some developments regarding the role of the British gained importance after the Battle of Sakarya, one of the most critical stages of the War of Independence. After the Kars and Ankara treaties, contradicting those who think that the Turks cannot resist a major power like Britain, Atatürk argued, “India, Egypt and, other countries clearly practice an imperialist policy of oppression, and that Britain cannot trust Turkey, nor will it give up the goal of destroying this country.”(From British archival documents, Sonyel, 2003: 2015).

The Constantly Resurfacing Thesis that the War of Independence Is A “Turkish-Greek War”

Since the beginning of Turkey’s intensely rich intellectual life in the 1960s, discussions about the nature of the national liberation struggle continue. Baseless statements that the war of independence was a Turkish-Greek war, that the Turks never fought against the British, that the battles of Inonu never happened were expressed

from time to time. As regards these theses, it is especially necessary to mention the name of Idris Küçükömer (for further information: Küçükömer, 1984).

These misguided statements were supported by theses such as that the Turkish Revolution was not a revolution and that Mustafa Kemal came to power with the support of the British. The proponents of these theses, intentionally or unintentionally, blur history by overshadowing historical facts through misguided interpretations. However, a hundred years can be seen as recent in the science of history, and proving a thesis about such a period is relatively simpler. Considering that those who put forward these theses are not even historians by profession, it should not be overlooked how desperate their attempts are. In this sense, this short interview with Prime Minister Venizelos proves the value of the work of Turkey’s valuable historians such as Salahi Sonyel, Erol Ulubelen, and Bilal Şimşir based on British archival sources. 🌸

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