

# The Kemalist Revolution and Asia




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## ABSTRACT

The Turkish revolution is a model that emerged from a struggle against imperialism, proving that God is not British, and aiming to establish a system based on capitalist principles favoring the interest of the people. The Chinese model, under the leadership of Sun Yat Sen, similarly fought against imperialism and colonialism, following the Kemalist Revolution's path. Under the guidance of the Communist Party, they continued with a National Democratic revolution. Today, these two countries, both fighters in their own right, holding the two ends of a path and sharing a similar fate, yet differing in aspects ranging from economic development to their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, is not a mere coincidence. The leader of the defense of their respective homelands at that time saw the global polarization clearly and proposed a solution: "Against the harmful group that has afflicted us... There is a common front that separates the East from the West, stretching all the way from the North to the South. To be able to defend on this front, it will require the genuine and sincere solidarity of nations that have become each other's allies... However, the states participating in this solidarity must be individually strong, fortified with the idea of independence." This understanding is a stance against the enmity and division imposed by imperialism. Success has always and will continue to come through this path. The political stance, culture, and understanding targeted today also stem from this standpoint. The coming century is a time to rewrite history from Asia to Africa and Latin America. The key to success lies in our hands.

**Keywords:** Turkish Revolution, Kemalist Revolution, Atatürk, Türkiye, Asia.

THE GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF the early 20th century underwent a profound transformation, driven by a series of impactful revolutions that reshaped global dynamics. One revolution's outcome catalyzed the next, establishing a momentous chain of events from the Balkans to the Pacific.

The annals of this epoch bear witness to a sequence of pivotal episodes: the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Iranian Revolution of 1906, and the Turkish Revolution of 1908, each compounded by the conflagration surrounding Tripoli, the Balkans, and the Dardanelles. These occurrences were subsequently paralleled by the Chinese Revolution of 1911. These preludes set

the stage for two seminal triumphs in the struggle against imperialism and archaic institutions: the October Revolution of 1917 and the Republican Revolution of 1920.

These early successes in the endeavor to dismantle imperialistic structures and antiquated systems served as a prologue to the potential birth of an unprecedented global order. As the 21st century dawned, a quartet of nation-states, namely Türkiye, Russia, China, and Iran, once again assumed a prominent position in shaping the contours of this developing world paradigm. These entities stand not only as active participants in the struggle but also under the scrutiny of international discourse.



Atatürk and King Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan, 1928, Ankara (TCCB, 2023).

The aforementioned states share several salient attributes, including a robust lineage of imperial and state traditions. Their historical trajectories have borne witness to experimental endeavors that facilitated the dismantling of antiquated norms and the establishment of novel paradigms. Moreover, they possess a reservoir of capability, erudition, and cultural heritage that positions them as potential agents of transformative change.

### **Past Trends are Unsustainable**

Today, major upheavals are taking place in the world and in Türkiye. A new world order is being established. There are huge economic and social problems, and past trends are unsustainable. This time the Atlantic system has reached a dead end. The imperialist-capitalist system is now incapable of providing solutions.

“The sun beginning to rise from the high horizons of the future is the fortune of the nations of Emerging Asia. The fact that this fortune will never again be shrouded in black clouds depends on the care and sacrifice of the

nations and their pioneers.” This is how the Kemalist Revolution views the past and the future. During the visit of Afghan King Amanullah Khan and his wife in May 1928, President Mustafa Kemal said in his speech at the dinner: “What strange manifestations of history, what meaningful coincidences and similarities of world events.” What is this meaningful coincidence? We are witnessing something similar today. In 1919, “While they were fighting for independence in the middle of Asia, we were fighting here in the east of Europe, in front of the eyes of the entire civilized world, shielding our breasts against the blows struck against our independence and freedom.” Nine years have passed. But the leader of the Revolution, of course, looked to the past for the future:

“For nations in love with independence and freedom”, those days should always be remembered, not as a time of suffering but as “a time of vigilance”. For “there are fundamental and vital principles for nations that have realized in their conscience the true nature, the broad meaning and the high value of independence and freedom.” He emphasizes them one by one in his speech:

“...Never to tolerate any violation or limitation of independence and freedom at any cost and any price, to keep independence and freedom protected to the fullest extent, and if necessary, to shed the last drop of blood of the last individual to set a glorious example in the history of humanity. Only those nations that are ready and able to make all kinds of sacrifices for the sake of this principle can be considered as a society worthy of the respect of civilized humanity.” (Atatürk, 2007a:126-127).

It is the most important definition of the path to success. History has also proven it. Today, nations that know the true meaning and value of their independence and freedom will adorn history with a new example. Together they will be the founders of a new world.

### Valuing National Freedom

The Turkish nation is a freedom lover. At no time in its history has it allowed colonizers on its soil, nor has it been subjected to the imperialist yoke. After the First World War, among the *defeated states*, only Türkiye made the defeated states accept its national independence and sovereignty, national borders, and economic and social demands. Moreover, at that time, there was an occupied center of the Empire that had fully surrendered to the imperialist states. On October 30, 1918, the Mudros Armistice Agreement signed by the Istanbul government disbanded its army. On August 10, 1920, its lands were divided with the Treaty of Sèvres. That nation rose up and brought both imperialism and medieval institutions to their knees. The great Parliament of the nation was established in Ankara on April 23, 1920. The provisions of Sèvres, consisting of 13 chapters and 433 articles, were now considered invalid.

### Our Source of Strength

İsmet İnönü was the representative of that courageous Parliament at Lausanne. He said, “They had unjustly denied us the right to live. We went to express that we were capable of living. We wanted only this. We were in the strongest position for this. We pursued this goal until the end.” In an interview on TRT on October 15, 1973, İnönü quoted Lord Curzon saying in Lausanne: “We are not satisfied with the Treaty of Lausanne. We could not get anything we said. You are buying a ruined country. Aren’t you going to rebuild it... with what... how... will you do it. He has the money... and I have the money.”

He was referring to Joseph C. Grew, the US observer. And then he adds: “You will come, you will ask for money, you will kneel, and I will take out of my pocket all that you refuse and show you!” İnönü never forgot Curzon’s words throughout his political life.

At that time, he responded: “What we want here is to provide all the conditions for an independent, civilized state. Let us ensure this. Let there be peace; if I come to you, you can do whatever you want!”

### The Turmoil They Rely On

A journalist asked İnönü in a program on TRT: “What were they counting on when they said these words?” İnönü’s answer clarifies the methods and hopes of the imperialists even today. “They thought that the revolutions could not be carried out and that there would be turmoil in Türkiye.”

“Amid this turmoil, the justice advisors thought that the cabotage rights would only last for two years, and in short, that the other issues related to the capitulations would drift away on their own and the old regime would be restored.





Atatürk and Turkish citizens  
(TTK,2023).

“This hope lived with them until the end. But it appeared in my mind as a constant danger. It remained alive and fresh, and I began to govern with it in mind. ‘İsmet Pasha always governs with the mindset of Lausanne. However, the world has changed,’ and all kinds of breaches were opened with an indiscriminate financial policy. This is where the real mistake was made.”

“Naturally, we did not take a gram of gold from the Ottoman Empire. When we left power in 1950, the Central Bank had a gold treasury that Türkiye had never seen (122 tons of gold). We left it like that. Everything has changed” (Kal, 1973).

### **The Target was the Kemalist Revolution and its Program**

Indeed, the world had changed. After the Second World War, the expansionism of US imperialism, which did not see the war on its territory but was on the winning side, knew no boundaries. After the 1950s, with two American coups in 1970 and 1980, 10 years apart, the Turkish people were pressed to give up their *National Democratic Revolution to break away from their history*, as the CIA Station Chiefs put it, and to abolish *national borders*. With the *New World Order, Globalization, and Integration with the World Economy* programs, the independence and

sovereignty of the country were attempted to be taken over economically and culturally. The target was the principles and program of the Kemalist Revolution. This threshold had to be crossed to dominate the world. This program had to be abandoned.

### A Meaningful Milestone

The theoreticians of scientific socialism who witnessed the Kemalist Revolution, as well as the leaders of the countries that put the experience of scientific socialism into practice in many different countries, recognized this reality at that time and attached importance to the contribution of the Turkish Revolution. For the world revolution, the Kemalist Revolution was a significant turning point. As Atatürk said, the Kemalist Revolution was not only for Türkiye. It would determine the fate of the geography behind us. It was going to be long and difficult. The imperialists knew this too.

### The Target is the Whole East

Mustafa Kemal was aware of this responsibility. He would accomplish a difficult task because he analyzed imperialism correctly, a key that would open the door to success a century later.

Already in 1921, he was analyzing the future as follows: Anatolia, just like on the map, “is in a position where the whole of Asia, the whole World of the Oppressed, is moving towards the world of oppression. In this position, Anatolia is exposed to all oppressions, attacks, and assaults. Anatolia is wanted to be destroyed, trampled, and torn apart, but, gentlemen, these attacks are not limited and restricted to Anatolia. The general target of these attacks is the whole East. Anatolia is defending itself with its entire existence against all kinds of attacks and assaults and is confident that it will succeed.

With this defense, Anatolia is not only doing its duty for its own life, but perhaps it is building a barrier against the attacks against the whole East. Gentlemen, these attacks will, of course, be broken. All these assaults will surely come to an end. Only then will true tranquility, true prosperity, and humanity prevail in the West, in the whole world” (Atatürk, 2003:50-51).

### Same Goal a Century Later

A century later, we face similar tasks. The rise of Asia will also save the West. Indeed, at that time, the Turkish Revolution was closely watched by all Asian countries, which, step by step, raised the flag of struggle against colonialism.

The word *constitutionalism* (meşrutiyet) in Turkish comes from the Arabic root meşrut, which means *conditional*. However, it entered political history for the first time in the Ottoman Empire as a form of government, a definition of government. This is the definition given in the article *Meşrutiyet* in the Ottoman-Turkish Dictionary:

“A name given to the legal and political period in Türkiye that began with the Constitution of 1876 and continued with the 1909 amendments.”

Later, the concept spread as “the method of governing by law under the presidency of the monarch”. Dictionaries also give these two meanings. For example, the concept of “constitutionalism” first entered Iran in a sense close to this definition with the reports of Mirza Hussein Khan Sipahsalar, who served as the Iranian Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. He used the word *Meşrutiyet* to mean *the participation of the people or some classes of society in state affairs*. Later, however, Iranian Constitutionalists preferred to use its English equivalent in Persian as *constitution government* (Dilek, 2007).



Atatürk made a speech on the 10th anniversary of the Republic, 29 October 1933 (ATAM, 2023).

This can be counted as one of the characteristics of the Turkish Revolution. We know that the leader of the revolution later took a special interest in our Turkish language, devoted a lot of time and effort to it, and resisted imperialism in that field as well. It is an important building block that makes a nation a nation. The Language Revolution is one of the deep-rooted and important aspects of the Kemalist Revolution.

### **Distinctive Features in the Struggle Against Colonialism And Imperialism**

Indeed, from India and Afghanistan to North Africa, Latin America, West Asia, and the Arab countries, one can detect the impact of the Turkish Revolution. The success or failure of the uprisings against colonialism and imperialism in these countries is explained by taking the Turkish Revolution as a criterion. As a matter of fact, we

know that even in the prisons of these countries, this kind of accounting was done. For example, Nehru found the principle of *secularism* of the Turkish Revolution distinctive in this respect.

Indian Muslims had been following the Turkish revolutionary movement since the *Young Turks*. During the Russian War of 1877-78, prayers were offered in mosques in India and relief funds were collected for the wounded (Güngör, 2001:325).

Mahatma Gandhi was very impressed by the 1908 Freedom Revolution and the opening of the Parliament and considered the Turkish presence a strong state in Europe (Wasey, 2002:248-249).

However, the fact that they were under the tutelage of British colonialism made a significant difference from the Turkish Revolution. They saw the Caliphate as a symbol of their independence movement and religion as decisive for continuing their unity and culture.

Before the First World War, they telegraphed



Talat Pasha for the Ottoman Empire to remain neutral and asked him to “prevent the outbreak of a war that would force Indian Muslims to be disloyal to the Caliph and Britain”. When the National Struggle began to part ways with the Istanbul government, a “day of prayer for the honor of the Caliph” was declared for the Muslim population. Hindus were also united in their support and participated in fasting and prayers. As the process progressed, some said they would boycott British goods if they did not sign a peace treaty and tried to convince the Sultan to support Mustafa Kemal (Çöhçe, 2002:151-165).

### The Solution

When the war was won against Western imperialism, Mustafa Kemal was declared a national hero. Although the abolition of the caliphate shook relations, the fact that, for the first time, a Muslim country brought the West to its knees at Lausanne had a great impact in India, and ideas such as “there is no need for a caliphate anyway, or Mustafa Kemal should be the caliph” emerged. It was finally decided that Türkiye should be supported for its economic development and achievements. Ultimately, it was concluded that for India to gain its freedom, it was necessary to do as Mustafa Kemal had done and find radical solutions.

Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized that the most important factor underlying Mustafa Kemal’s success was the secular revolution and that this was the only way to achieve unity in a country where religious and cultural divisions existed. Women’s rights, the unity of education, and the separation of religious and secular affairs were decisive. He argued that reforms could be expected to last forever (Sadıq, 1981:224-226).

### Principles of the Kemalist Revolutionary Program

The National Democratic Revolution Program of the Kemalist Revolution also developed and progressed to overcome the obstacles. The 1930s were a significant turning point in Türkiye’s political and economic history. Both the developments in the world and Türkiye’s experiences of the previous decade necessitated an accounting by the Kemalist government. The young Turkish Republic endeavored to increase production to consolidate its independence on economic foundations. They had seen the decisive power of the economy and economic independence during the National Struggle.

In his opening speech to the Parliament on March 1, 1922, the leader of the revolution devoted much space to the economy. However, he started with the question: “Who is the owner and master of Türkiye?” The parliament responded: “The peasant, the true producer!”

“The struggle against imperialism and the sultanate has now defined the fronts. Türkiye is a *nationalist* country. And the economic aim of the Grand National Assembly is to achieve its welfare. The reason for our misery and disaster today is that we do not know this fact” (Atatürk, 2003:279).

Who is responsible for our misery and disaster? The Sultan’s administration. Then the work should start from there. The first separation happened on April 23, 1920. Sovereignty was taken from the sultan and given to the nation. Then the Republic was declared on October 29, 1923. This is written at the beginning of the principles. It states that the State of Türkiye is a Republic. This is the form of the state. It is a state regime. It is a definition of power. It is a definition of sovereignty and sanction power.



## Preserving the Revolution for Eternity

“We recognize individuals as part of the people, and consider them to be from and for the people, who accept absolute equality before the law and do not grant privilege to any individual, family, class, or community” (Atatürk, 2007b:154).

**“There is no privilege for individuals or classes in our system. Our laws apply and take effect equally and fully on all citizens.”**

According to the Kemalists, *Populism* is not a theoretical work of our noble spirit. It has not been incorporated into principles based on emotions, nor is it a work of compassion. Populism was researched by asking what needed to be done to protect Turkish independence forever, and the principle of populism was adopted by determining the necessary conditions. They saw populism as a prerequisite for the nation’s salvation, for living independently and humanely.

Şükrü Kaya briefly defines populism amidst applause in the Assembly: “Our populism is a system that goes toward the people, not for the people; it is a system that is by the people and with the people. This system aims for the direct administration of the country by the people. There is no privilege for individuals or classes in our system. Our laws apply and take effect equally and fully on all citizens. There is no legal offense that one will not be held accountable for after obtaining knowledge.”

## Strong Economy, Strong State

“Life means economy. To build a strong state to live, economy is essential.” In this context, “One of the important goals of our economic policy is to nationalize the economic institutions and enterprises that directly concern the general welfare, to the extent allowed by our financial and technical capabilities” (Atatürk, 2003:280).

The *state-centered system* applied by Türkiye is not a translated system of ideas put forward by socialist theorists since the 19th century. It is a system that emerged from Türkiye’s needs, a unique system for Türkiye. State intervention in property relations is necessary for this reason. *Mixed economy!*

The foundations of the National Democratic Revolution are strengthening, and construction is ongoing. However, without secularism, you get stuck, unable to overcome problems. How will you implement statism? Land ownership, feudalism, and religious leadership are issues. They are all part of a whole, connected to the struggle against imperialism and our independence.

On February 5, 1937, a bill was introduced by Malatya Deputy İsmet İnönü and 153 colleagues, and some articles of the Constitution were amended. And the six principles became constitutional articles. The Republic of Türkiye is *Republican, Nationalist, Populist, Statist, Secular, and Reformist*. The official language is Turkish. The capital is Ankara. Purpose:

The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye regards protecting its life and independence as its sole and sacred aim, liberating its people from the domination and oppression of imperialism and capitalism, and making the

true owner of will and sovereignty (Atatürk, 2002:323).

This government was established because our national sovereignty was in danger. Its owner is our nation. Unconditionally! Thus, the Assembly and the Deputies will exercise this authority (Atatürk, 2003:120).

The Turkish People's Government is administered by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. In provinces, they are elected by the people's general vote. They represent not only that province but the entire nation. The army is solely the army of the GNA. The President of the GNA is also the President of the Council of Ministers (Atatürk, 2002:324).

### **The Cause and Legacy of Victory**

After the Turkish nation's Independence was achieved, a state system was established that would not return to such hardships and dangers. The principles and programs to be implemented in this state system were determined. These were not merely done to adapt concepts prepared by scholars in their cells, in their sensitive consciences and minds. They are the implementation of a march based on reality. The principles of our Republic were thought out and applied on the battlefields. "The cause and the legacy of victory!" It is based on the necessities of life. It is not based on statistics; the aim is not to apply specific formulas perpetually. This is the essence of revolutionism. Some "good" laws gather dust behind library showcases. There are perfect systems that have not found an application area and opportunity. They are perfect! But only on paper! Kemalist Revolution states, "The best law is the one that suits the nation best."

### **Two Models in History**

The Turkish Revolution was the first successful revolution in the oppressed nations of the world. Its principles are symbolized by arrows. The tips of the arrows are open toward the future. They are like the rays of the sun that illuminate endlessly into eternity. In history, two models have emerged in this field. One is the Turkish Revolution. A model that opposes imperialism, proves that God is not English, and tries to develop a system based on independent people and capitalism that supports the oppressed in this world. The other is the Chinese model. After a struggle against imperialism and colonialism similar to the Kemalist Revolution, under the leadership of Sun Yat Sen, the Communist Party continues the National Democratic Revolution.

The fact that these two struggling countries hold the two ends of a road and share a similar destiny, yet have differences in economic development and their response to COVID, is not a coincidence. After World War II, the Chinese Revolution continued. The Kemalist Revolution fell under the influence of the expansionist goals of the USA. It experienced deviations and blockages from the National Democratic Revolution Program. The Turkish Revolution will overcome today's difficulties by moving further and further in the direction indicated by the arrows. In the coming century, we will lead the establishment of a fully independent, more egalitarian, and brighter Türkiye and world.

### **Like-Minded Countries**


Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stated on March 3, 1922: "Aggressive, invading, and hostile states consider the earth their mansion and regard

humanity as enslaved beings condemned to work for their ambitions. (...) They accept the humane and just principles they declare not because they find them acceptable but to isolate the masses of humanity that they have kept under the chain of oppression for years and to continue to hold them in easier captivity by isolating them from all their weapons.”

### We Will Write a New History

As the leader of the defense of the homeland, Atatürk also saw and proposed a solution to the polarization in the world at that time: “Against the group that has come from harmful and poisonous minds and has attacked us. (...) A common front separates the East from the West and extends from the North to the South. Defenses on this front will be possible with the genuine and sincere solidarity of nations that have become likeminded with each other. (...) However, the states involved in this solidarity must be strong on their own, each with strong independence ideas, and well-established and equipped.”

This understanding is also a stance against the enmity and division imposed by imperialism. The path to success has passed through here and will continue to do so. Today, the targeted political stance, culture, and understanding are the same.

In the 1920s, he said, “Türkiye will not follow the demands of existing history books, but the genuine necessities of history. (...) We will tear them apart and create a new history” (Atatürk, 2004). The century ahead is the time to write a new history from Asia to Africa, from Latin America and beyond. The key to success is in our hands. 

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