

## MUSTAFA KEMAL'S UNIQUE ROLE IN THE WORLD HISTORY

N. A. BALOCH\*

Mustafa Kemal is one of those great figures of the world, who changed the destiny of their people and left on abiding impression on the comity of nations. He was the first and the most successful freedom fighter to generate hope for those nations who were under the European colonisation and to set the example of national liberation, freedom and development. With his great intelligence, boundless patriotism, profound wisdom and great energy, he succeeded where others are likely to have failed. His capacity for leadership and politics, crowned his efforts with success and he united his people in creating a new, progressive and proud nation, Modern Turkey.

For the Turks, Mustafa Kemal was a liberator, a great reformer and builder of Modern Turkey. He revitalized the weak nerves of the nation with his genius, and imbued the new generations with patriotism, and urge for progress. He was the harbinger of a new awakening, herald of freedom in Asia: under his leadership the war of independence of Turkey sounded the death-knell of colonialism in Asia. He stood firm like a rock against the designs of the great world powers of the day.

Before discussing Mustafa Kemal's Unique Role in the World History, it is necessary to analyse the factors leading to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Empire, which at one time possessed vast territories in Europe, Asia and Africa, and had played for five centuries a predominant part in the political and military history of the Mediterranean region, of the Balkans, and of south eastern Europe, was at the mercy of the European powers.

The decline of the Ottoman Empire started with the impact of Western capitalism in the 17th century.

---

\* Prof. Emeritus, University of Sindh, Hyderabad/PAKISTAN.

The defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 was a great blow to the Ottoman Empire because Turkey lost in the wars the Aegean Islands and all her European possessions, except a part of Thrace.

In the First World War, Turkey fought on the side of Germany against the Allied forces and very soon the little that was left of the Eastern portion of the Ottoman Empire was arrayed against the Turks. Mustafa Kemal was assigned to work under the German General Liman von Sanders. The German General began to like Kemal's courage and initiative and he saved him from being banished to remote areas.

Allied forces had landed in Gallipoli which, if they had been successful, would have eliminated Turkey from the struggle much earlier; but the proverbial bravery of the Turkish soldier found an ally in the rare generalship of Mustafa Kemal, and this landing ended in a disaster.

Paying a great tribute to Mustafa Kemal, Allan Moorland, author of a *Biography of Churchill*, says: "Had Liman von Sanders not taken a chance and boldly committed the bulk of his forces at once, and had not a fanatical young general Mustafa Kemal taken charge in the firing line, the British almost certainly would have been through and gained the heights"<sup>1</sup>.

Mustafa Kemal, thus, distinguished himself by his brilliant tactics at Gallipoli and was recognized first brilliant commander and 'the saviour of the Dardanelles' and destined to become the founder of the Turkish Republic.

The British failure at the Dardanelles raised the morale of the Turkish people. For the first time within the living memory, the Turks had won a victory against a European Power.

The War ended in 1918 in the defeat of Turkey and her ally Germany. The Turks had perhaps been the greatest sufferers. The people were weary and desolate. There was no question of reviving the Empire or recovering any of the lost provinces of Arabia or Syria, but it was a question of saving Turkey itself. In reality, the foundations of the Ottoman Empire stood shattered at that time. Its existence was threatened with extermination.

---

<sup>1</sup> Alan, Moorland, *Churchill-A Pictorial Biography* (Panther Book), p. 45, quoted by S.M.H. Mashoor, *Muslim Heroes of the Twentieth Century*, Lahore 1978, p. 54.

The European Powers, intoxicated with success, did not realize that misfortunes and disasters which had fallen upon the Turkish nation throughout the long period of decline were due to misrule and incapable leadership. The Allied forces failed to understand the indomitable courage of the Turkish nation for whom honour, freedom, independence and liberty have always been dearer than life.

The European Powers were sure that the "sick man of Europe" was dead, and that the only thing remained to be done was to bury him and share his possessions.

The Turks were the only Muslims who had never lost their independence and liberty. They had never been ruled by the foreign powers throughout the history. It was due to this reason that after the armistice of Mondros when the Allied forces entered Istanbul on 13th November, 1918, and compelled the Sultan and his government in Istanbul to accept the terms and conditions which were in their interest, the Turkish people without waiting for the appearance of a national leader, started various national resistance movements in opposition to the Allied forces. To render this opposition more effective, it was essential that these movements should be coordinated under a popular leader. The only person who was compitent and popular among the masses as well as in the army, was Mustafa Kemal, the hero of the Gallipoli.

Two weeks after the signing of the Armistice (13th November, 1918) Mustafa Kemal came to Istanbul the day when, in accordance with the terms of the armistice, the Allied fleet passed, through Dardanelles and arrived at Istanbul. The seat of the Caliphate and the Sultanate was taken over by the Allied Military Administration. The Ottoman Sultan was allowed to continue, but he was to function under Allied control.<sup>2</sup> "With formal pomp and ceremony", says Lord Kinross,<sup>3</sup> "Admiral Calthrope led a sixteen mile convoy of British" and other Allied warships through the Dardanelles and into the Bosphorus. Here they anchored off the Golden Horn, so closely congested that the water could scarcely be seen between their decks. It was another black day for the Turks when General Franched d'Espérey made a triumphal

---

<sup>2</sup> *Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*, Ankara 1961, p. 31. *Turkun Alt. Kitab, Gazinin Hayati*, Istanbul 1981, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Kinross, *Atatürk, The Rebirth of Nation*, London 1964, pp. 134-135.

entry into the city at the head of his troops, riding without reins on a white horse and thus aspiring to lay the spectre of Fatih, the Muslim Conquerer of Byzantium, who had done the same".

This was followed by the division of the Ottoman provinces in the Arab countries among the Allies. Anatolia was also divided by the Allies into British, French, and Italian zones of influence.

The Istanbul Government was now little more than a shadow of cabinet, with the Ottoman Sultan having no value, no merit and no authority in the eyes of the world.

It amounted, as Mustafa Kemal had long foreseen, to an end of the Ottoman Empire and its break-up into series of small states and foreign spheres of interest.

The Ottoman Sultan believed that it was useless to resist and merely to force the Allies to smash Turkey completely. The Sultan, therefore, was cowed and completely submissive to every dictate of the Allied Powers, but there was in Anatolia a rising wave of unrest which disturbed the Allied. To assert his own authority and at the same time satisfy the Allied demands, the Sultan on 15 May, 1919, sent Mustafa Kemal as Inspector General of the Ninth Army stationed in Samsun with the assignment of repressing disorders and hastening the disarmament. On the same day (15th May 1919), the Greek army with the approval of the Allies landed at Izmir and began to advance inland. Izmir was sacked and about a thousand shops and commercial establishments in the city were looted and damaged and many houses of Turks were burned down and the killing continued for many days by the Greek army.<sup>4</sup>

The Greek invasion of Izmir in May 1919, infact, marks a starting point of the National Liberation struggle.

Mustafa Kemal wanted to turn the broken remnants of the Ottoman armies into a well organized, strong and effective force capable of defending the rights and independence of Turkey. "If we can't succeed" said Mustafa Kemal, "rather than fall into the the plan of the enemy like a bird, and be

---

<sup>4</sup> Stanford J. Shah, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II, London, n.d., p. 442, Powelle, Alexander, *The Struggle for Power in Muslim Asia*, Lahore 1976, pp. 130-31.

condemned to a gradual, ignoble death", he continued "We prefer, being the sons of our forefathers, to die fighting."

Weakened by years of war, despised by their former subjects, betrayed by their leaders, the Turks had suddenly begun to discover themselves.

To the Turkish soldiers in defeat, Mustafa Kemal was not just a hero; he was the only hero who had hurled the British out of Gallipoli and cheated them of their prey in Syria.

Mustafa Kemal's efforts to boost up the morale of the Turkish nation were fruitful and the nation from one end to the other end of Anatolia was now united. All decisions were taken jointly by Mustafa Kemal and his commanders. The resistance committees were established in every district and every community.

As early as June 1919 Mustafa Kemal building the morale of Turkish nation said: The nation's independence will be regained with the determination of the nation itself. I will work with devotion toward this end. I will not leave the nation alone in its fight.

The first Congress met at Erzurum on 23rd July 1919. The Congress unanimously elected Mustafa Kemal as President of Congress. From Erzurum, in the name of the Sultan he sent orders to the military commanders to delay the handing over of arms to the English and to call back the men to the colours. He instructed the Civil authorities to form local committees in the towns and villages for enlisting volunteers and to hold meetings of protest against the occupation of Izmir by the Greeks. The Congress prepared the first draft version of declaration which was later to be known as "the National Pact." The Congress also decided that the Motherland was an indivisible whole within national frontiers, and that no foreign mandate or protectorate will be acceptable. A standing committee of nine members was elected and this, in turn, elected Mustafa Kemal as its President.<sup>5</sup> Thus Mustafa Kemal had won the first round of the fight.

The Congress at Sivas was held on 4th September 1919 which gave authority to Mustafa Kemal to take charge of the forces and to direct them towards a predetermined object.

---

<sup>5</sup> Atatürk, *op. cit.*, p. 73, *Gazinin Hayatı*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

The Congress at Sivas and all the army commanders sent telegrams to the Sultan-Caliph and demanded the resignation of the treacherous Damad Ferid Pasha's cabinet and elections for a parliament to be held forth with.

Within a little over four months of his landing in Samsun, Mustafa Kemal had brought down the Istanbul Government which had dismissed him from the army and the Grand Vizier whom the Allies were using.

Mustafa Kemal made Ankara the Centre of War of independence because of the exceptional loyalty of its people, and those of the surrounding villages, to the Nationist cause. The people of Ankara had already shown a similar spirit of patriotism at the time of Young Turk Revolution.

The Government of Istanbul at last recognized the power of the nationalists, and arrangements for elections were made. The elections gave the nationalists a large majority. Mustafa Kemal was elected representative from Erzurum.

Last Ottoman Parliament met in Istanbul in January 1920. Greatest service rendered by this Parliament was to rectify "the National Pact". Allied Powers being annoyed at the decision of the Parliament proclaimed martial law in Istanbul. On the advice of the Allies, the Sultan dissolved the parliament on April 11, 1920.<sup>6</sup> The Government of Istanbul obtained a *fatwa* from the Shaikh-ul-Islam wherein it was declared that the killing of rebels, ordered by the Caliph, was a religious duty. A week later a Court of Martial passed a death sentence against Mustafa Kemal and other nationalist leaders in absentia.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, Mustafa Kemal announced for elections to a new assembly which was later on known as the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. On 23rd April 1920, Mustafa Kemal was elected its President.

Accordingly, as President of the Assembly, Mustafa Kemal took upon himself the office of the Prime Minister as well as of the head of the State.

---

<sup>6</sup> Philip P. Graves, *Britain and Turk*, London 1941, p. 200, *Atatürk, op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London 1961, pp. 246-247, quoted by Muhammed Rashid Feroze, *Islam and Secularism in Post-Kemalist Turkey*, Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad 1976, pp. 78-79.

The Ottoman Sultan Vahideddin under the pressure of the Allies on 10th August 1920 signed the Treaty of Sevres.<sup>8</sup> Under this treaty, it was agreed to give Smyrna (Izmir) and a portion of Thrace to Greece; the creation of an Armenian state on the Kurdish regions was also agreed; the straits with Istanbul and the Eastern and Western coasts were to be kept under the Allied control; no fleet or air craft, no army but a land force of 15000 was allowed to be maintained by Turkey. Had this treaty been implemented, it would certainly have reduced Turkey to the size of its dry central provinces surviving as a landlocked colony of the West. The Grand National Assembly at Ankara decided that the treaty did not commit it in any respect. The treaty was called a cruel sentence of death for Turkey. The G.N.A. condemned those who had signed the treaty and declared them traitors.

There remained the military task of expelling the invaders. The Greco-Turkish war continued from 15th May 1919, from the occupation of Izmir by Greeks until August 1922. The Greco-Turkish war falls into three stages, covering roughly the campaigns of 1920, 1921 and 1922. In the first campaign the nationalist were badly defeated, and the Greeks advanced far into Anatolia. The causes of defeat were shortage of material as well as that the army was not well equipped and short in number. The first battle of İnönü had shown that the Turkish army could not be over thrown with one blow.

Mustafa Kemal was an outstanding soldier-statesman of the first half century of the twentieth century. He revived the old military spirit of the Turk. He built a new army based on the modern art of warfare.

After the Bolsheviki revolution in Russia, policy of non-intervention in other countries internal affairs was adopted. Russia, therefore, signed a peace treaty with the government of the nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal on 16th March 1921. Under this treaty the Turkey gained back the Turkish territory which had been occupied by Russia in the past. This treaty enabled the Government of the Nationalist to receive material aid, money and all kinds of war equipment from Russia.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> *Atatürk, op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> Lord Eversley, *The Turkish Empire. Its Growth and Decay*, Lahore 1959, p. 422. Yılmaz Altuğ, *Türk Devrim Tarihi Dersleri, 1919-1938*, 1980, p. 136.

The Peace Treaty was Mustafa Kemal's first big success in the field of Foreign Policy.

Another great political achievement of Mustafa Kemal was a peace treaty with France signed after long discussions and arguments on 20th October, 1921. By this treaty, Turkey got back all her remaining territories which were still occupied by France. This treaty increased the image of the Nationalist Government and provided an opportunity to deal with the Western Powers in a better way.

Like France, Italy too had become now an ally. She withdrew her troops from Anatolia and promised to support nationalist claim at the peace conference and asking for no economic benefits in return.

In January and again in March 1921 the Turkish army led by Ismet Pasha defeated the Greeks at İnönü. The second victory at İnönü had important political consequences. It increased the people's confidence in the Government of G.N.A. and fortified the faith of Mustafa Kemal and his supporters in final victory.

The decisive battle between the Turkish and Greek forces was fought near Sakarya River. This decisive battle of Sakarya lasted for twenty two days, from 23rd August to 11th September, 1921, and it sealed the fate of the Greek army in Anatolia. The Greek forces had been completely driven into the sea.

The Greeks after a fatal defeat were compelled to vacate the occupied territory. Ultimately, the treaty of Mudania was signed with Greeks on October 11, 1921.

The Treaty of Lausanne, which nullified the Treaty of Sevres, was signed on July 24, 1923 which recognized the nationalist Government under Mustafa Kemal. This treaty marked the successful conclusion of the war of independence which the Turks had fought under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal against the victorious Allies of First World War.

The War of independence ended in victory for the Nationists both over the Allies, who were driven from the Turkish soil, and over the Istanbul Government of the Sultan Caliph.

The Istanbul Government was now little more than a shadow of cabinet with an unpopular Ottoman Sultan-Caliph as its head.



The second G.N.A. met on 11th August 1923 and ratified the Treaty of Lausanne. On 29th October, 1923, the G.N.A. proclaimed Turkey a Republic and Mustafa Kemal was elected as its first President. On 3rd March, 1924 the Caliphate was formally abolished and all the remaining members of the Ottoman dynasty were expelled for ever from Turkey.

Kemal Atatürk after establishing Republic in Turkey, embarked upon some fundamental reforms to set Turkish nation on the path of contemporary civilization: this was generally received in the West with admiration and esteem. News and articles in the newspapers and books regarding the unique role of Kemal Atatürk in the world history was highlighted. Between 1923 and 1930, the interpretations were yet superficial. However, his ideas and philosophy of revolution seem to have been appreciated better between 1931 and 1938.

Mustafa Kemal had four phases of his political career. He concentrated first on defending the sovereignty of Turkish nation (1919-22), then on erecting the institutions of the newly established state of modern Turkey (1922-24), then on cultural-legal reforms (1924-28), and finally on education and industrialization leaving matters of social equalization and agricultural development to a later generation.

In the monumental account of his achievements, the six day speech of 1927,<sup>10</sup> Mustafa Kemal clearly said: "He would undoubtedly have been of little advantage if we would had made clear to the public at the very beginning all the implications of a resolution of such far-reaching importance. On the contrary, it was necessary to proceed by stages, utilizing all opportunities to prepare the feeling and spirit of the nation and to try to reach our aim by degrees. This is actually what happened. If our attitude and our actions during nine years are examined in their logical sequence, however, it becomes evident that our general behaviour has never been deviated from the lines laid down in our original resolution, nor from the purpose we had set out to achieve".

As for the impact of Atatürk's achievements and ideas and reforms in the world, there were different reactions in western and eastern countries.

---

<sup>10</sup> *A speech delivered by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk 1927*, Islamabad 1963, p.568.

The fact that Atatürk, after he saved his country, embarked upon some fundamental reforms to set Turkish nation on the path of contemporary civilization was generally received in the West with admiration and amazement.

The great English historian Toynbee was one of the authors who understood well from the very beginning the phenomenon of Atatürk; his books *'The Western Question in Greece and Turkey'* published in 1922 and *'Turkey'* published in 1926 are reflective of his sound evaluation. The Kemalist revolution was the culmination of the modernization efforts that had begun with Sultan Selim III and Sultan Mahmud II, with the Tanzimat reformers, and with Şinasi.<sup>11</sup>

Kemalism also was the first movement that tried to transcend the limitations of the earlier modernization effort; it thus became the prologue to further transformation, the completion of which lied in the future.

Atatürk, while enforcing revolutionary principles during the struggle for independence and liberty and later during the Republican period, was extremely careful to justify them with traditionalist arguments, as in the case of his speech advocating the abolition of the Sultanate.

Mustafa Kemal united all civil and military authorities under his leadership in pursuit of the retention of the very Turkish homeland. The establishment of civil institutions of government in 1920 and the drafting of a constitution in 1921 preceded the launching of the most important military operations.

Under Mustafa Kemal's leadership, the 1920 revolutionaries limited Turkish political aims, accepted the new national frontiers, demanded complete independence and decided to establish an enduring structure.

The Kemalist government under the guidance of Atatürk was fully committed to modernization. While the Turks were fighting the Western Powers tooth and nail for their political and economic independence, they were constructing their national institutions from top to bottom on Western lines.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 620. Walter F. Weiker, *Political Tutelage and Democracy in Turkey*, Leiden 1973, pp. 50-61. Stanford, *op. cit.*, pp. 365-367.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Atatürk, *Söylev (Nutuk)*, vol. I, Ankara 1966, p. 11.

Kemalist nationalism was not racist and not based on persecuting nationalism. Its aim was to protect Turkish independence while being at the same time committed to the idea and reality of the interdependence of other nations. Atatürk was not expansionist; on the contrary he supported the independence and sovereignty of other countries.

Atatürk believed: "If one strives for the happiness of the nations of the world, it will inevitably result in one's own nation's security and happiness". Atatürk also said that "One should think of humanity as one 'body' and each nation as one organ of the body. All the organs would be affected by the pain which might be even on the tip of a finger."<sup>13</sup>

Mustafa Kemal did not believe in militarism for its own sake. Although he was himself a general, but he did not want to be a dictator. For him strong army was needed to provide adequate self-defence and protect the independence of modern Turkey and not for imperialistic adventures.

Kemal Atatürk's foreign policy was based on the motto "peace at home and peace in the world." In fact Kemalist policy with other countries was that of co-existence. Mustafa Kemal actually wanted peace at home and peace in the world so as to concentrate on his supreme goal which was the realization of the complete modernization of the Turkish Republic. On the other-hand, Kemal Atatürk's foreign policy was characterized by its insistence that Turkey should enjoy complete independence within her new frontiers.

Mustafa Kemal was victor and undisputed master in his own particular world. Yet he had no wish to be a dictator. The dictatorship was to him a necessary evil, which would have to stay until the people were ready to govern themselves. A soldierly disciplined and well-led national State was his creed.

The man who had been offered crowns and phantom empires, and whom they had wanted to surround with a semi-deistic nimbus, had not been swept off his feet.

Turkey for the Turks that was the principle of Kemalist policy. In accordance with this principle, Kemalism respected the vital interest of other nations. Turkey under Atatürk had been freed from the fetters of foreign interests, and in foreign policy it was determined to remain equally free. Mustafa Kemal strictly avoided being drawn into any sort of "Group of Powers."

---

<sup>13</sup> Enver Ziya Karal, *Atatürkten Düşünceler* (Thoughts from Atatürk), Ankara 1958, p.130.

Paying tributes to Kemal Atatürk, a great historian of twentieth century Lord Kinross says: "Kemal Atatürk had created a new Turkey. He had left it in the hands of an experienced leader, an efficient administration and a flexible parliamentary system, capable of evolution in more liberal terms when the time became ripe. He had transported his country from the Middle Ages, to the threshold of the modern era and a stage beyond. It is now the task of his successors, covering new ground and filling in ground behind him, to carry it on a stage further."<sup>14</sup>

Summing up it can be said that Kemal Atatürk has become immortal for playing a Unique Role in the World History. He was not only a distinguished Turkish soldier, but also a great statesman and reformer, who changed the destiny of his nation and left an abiding impression on the comity of nations. He was not only a harbinger of awakening but, under his dynamic leadership, the War of Independence of Turkey sounded the death-knell of Colonialism in Asia. Kemal Atatürk was the first and most successful freedom fighter, who generated hope in those nations who were under the European Colonial Powers.

For the Turks, Kemal Atatürk was a liberator, a great reformer and a builder of modern Turkey.

Kemal Ataturk is considered to be a hero of those nations of the world, who have been subjected to various forms of colonialism.

Atatürk's policy was peace at home and peace in the world. This policy paid dividends, and he became the symbol of the renaissance of Modern Turkey. Kemal Atatürk gained universal respect because of his dynamic personality, proverbial courage, and initiative which not only saved Turkey from humiliating defeat but brought Turkey among the list of modern countries of the world.

A footnote may be added by way of tribute to the foresight of Atatürk. The World War I saw the demise of two empires –the Ottoman and the Czarist Russia, and the birth of two entirely new States– the Kemalist Turkey and the Communist U.S.S.R. The latter was anti-God and governed by absolute Party Dictatorship; the Kemalist Turkey was not anti-God but secular; also it was governed by nationalist ethos of mutual trust and confidence. Therefore, while the communist state succumbed and disintegrated, the Kemalist Secular Turkey, well anchored in faith, has continued to survive in strength with ever bright future.

---

<sup>14</sup> Lord Kinross, *op. cit.*, p. 503.