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PEACEFUL FOREIGN RELATIONS : AN ACHIEVEMENT OF ATATÜRK

Roderic H. DAVISON

One of the most important reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was to lay the foundation for peaceful foreign relations for the new Turkish Republic. Sometimes this achievement is overlooked when the reforms initiated by Atatürk are enumerated. The achievement may be overlooked, in part, because peace can be regarded as something negative —the absence of war— rather than as something positive. The achievement of peaceful foreign relations may also be overlooked, in part, because no one dramatic event marks the change. The adoption of the hat, the adoption of a new civil law code, the adoption of a new Turkish alphabet, are in themselves much more dramatic events than the evolution of attitudes and policies leading to peaceful foreign relations.

Yet, when viewed in historical perspective, the change from frequent warfare under the Ottoman regime to lasting peace under the Turkish Republic is as impressive, and as dramatic, as any other change. The Ottoman Empire had never, in its six-century history, had a period of peace more lasting than the famous "long peace" of the eighteenth century, from 1739 to 1768, a stretch of 29 years¹ In the half-century before the Republic was established the Ottoman Empire was at war on seven different occasions: against Serbia and Montenegro (1876), against Russia and Romania (1877-78), against Greece (1897), against Italy (1911-12), against Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro (1912-13), against Bulgaria (1913), and against Russia, Britain, and France (1914-18). Italy, the Arabs of the Hijaz, and Greece also joined in the last of these wars, the Great War, at various later dates. This list of wars, moreover, does not include the Austrian military occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878), the French military occupation of Tunisia (1881), and the British

¹ Even this period of peace was broken by war with Iran, 1743-46.

military occupation of Egypt (1882). On these occasions the diplomatic situation prevented any Ottoman military counter-action.

To this series of wars in the time of the Ottoman Empire must then be added the War of Independence between 1919 and 1922, when Atatürk led the national resistance against Allied occupation and Greek invasion. War had thus been almost continuous from 1911 to 1922.

Thereafter, beginning in 1923, Turkey was involved in no wars at all. The newly established Republic was at peace until Atatürk's death in 1938. The period of peace continued, furthermore, long after that date. The policy of peaceful foreign relations established by Atatürk has served the Republic well.

The peaceful nature of Turkey's foreign relations in Atatürk's time is symbolized by the large number of friendly agreements signed by the Republic with other governments. The *Treaty Series* published by the League of Nations contains a large number of treaties and conventions signed by Turkey in the 1920s and the 1930s. Many are treaties of friendship and commerce, others of arbitration, others of neutrality, and of various other sorts. To the end of 1937, less than a year before Atatürk's death, the number of such treaties had risen to 257.² In addition, Turkey was one of the first states to sign and ratify the Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928, renouncing war as an instrument of national policy.³ But these acts of diplomacy were built upon foundations which had already been laid by Atatürk and his associates in the course of the War for Independence and during the earliest days of the Republic. It is possible to identify eight bases for the foreign policy of peace. They mark a sharp break with the policy of the Ottoman Empire.

The first of the bases for peaceful relations was the severe limitation of Turkey's territorial claims. When the National Struggle was beginning Mustafa Kemal and the Nationalists worked out a simple program of basic aims which they adopted as the National Pact. The first article of the Pact deliberately limited Turkish territorial claims to the compact area then within the armistice lines, approximating the boundaries of modern Turkey. This much, the Nationalists insisted, must be "a whole, which can be divided for no cause whatever in law

² Cemil Bilsel, "La vie internationale de la Turquie: Droit international public," in H. Lévy-Ullman and B. Mirkine Guetévitch, eds., *La Vie juridique des peuples, VII: Turquie* (Paris, 1939), pp. 364-65.

³ *ibid.*, p. 364.

or in fact."⁴ In short, this much territory constituted a non-negotiable minimum. The rest of the old Ottoman Empire, however, they would relinquish to the peoples who lived there.

This position stands in stark contrast to the insistence of Ottoman patriots in the later nineteenth century that the Empire must be preserved intact, despite the difficulties arising from rebellion of minorities within the Empire and great power pressures from without. These Ottoman patriots created what might be called an "Ottoman Pact," although they did not give it that name. Article One of the 1876 constitution stated that the Empire was "a single entity which can be divided at no time and for no cause whatever."⁵ Both the concept of territorial indivisibility and the wording of each article were remarkably similar in 1876 and in 1920. But the non-negotiable territorial minimums of 1876 and 1920 were vastly different. The National Pact of 1920 was much more realistic. Mustafa Kemal looked upon the burden of empire that the Turks had borne for so long as insupportable, a draining of his people's blood. "Do you know," he asked a proponent of a big Islamic empire, "how many sons of Anatolia have perished in the scorching deserts of the Yemen?"⁶ The Ottoman conquests and policy of expansion had invited counterattack and rebellion, he said, and "had the ultimate result of burying the Ottoman Empire, in the same way as many others, under the pall of history."⁷ Extensive territorial claims would bring difficulties and war. Limited claims would promote peaceful foreign relations.

The second basis for peaceful foreign relations was the approximate achievement of these limited territorial aims in a peace treaty that was negotiated, rather than imposed. The Sultan's government had signed the Treaty of Sèvres, imposed by the Allies in 1920. Mustafa Kemal and his associates refused to accept this treaty, and intended to revise it. The intention became fact in 1923 at Lausanne, after the successful ending of the War for Independence. No other state defeated in World War I managed to upset the victors' peace treaty. The Germans, despite their strong protests, were obliged to accept the Versailles treaty without being allowed any genuine negotiation. Similarly, Austria, Bulgaria, and Hungary had to bow to the imposed treaties of St. Germain, Neuilly, and Trianon. Only the Turks

⁴ T.T.T. Cemiyeti, *Tarih*, IV: *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti* (İstanbul, 1934), p. 46 note.

⁵ *Kanuni Esası* in Ahmed Midhat, *Üss-i inkılâp* (İstanbul, 1294-95), II, p. 355.

⁶ Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), *A speech Delivered by Ghazi Mustapha Kemal, President of the Turkish Republic*, October 1927 (Leipzig, 1929), p. 592.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 377.

succeeded in sitting down at the conference table with the erstwhile victors and working out mutually acceptable terms.

The process was risky. At one point the Lausanne peace conference was almost aborted. Ismet, the chief Turkish negotiator, was willing to make some compromises, but not on matters essential to Turkish independence and sovereignty. There was an interlude of over two months when the conference was broken off. Although some extreme nationalists in Ankara opposed further negotiation, the more moderate views of Mustafa Kemal prevailed. The Turks resumed the conference at Lausanne. Three more months of negotiation produced the treaty. The Turks did not gain everything they desired, but gained enough to safeguard the independence and integrity of Turkey within boundaries that were close to those set down in the National Pact. "I was certain that we would achieve a positive result," said Mustafa Kemal later. "What we demanded from the Conference was nothing more than a confirmation in a proper manner of what we had already gained. We only claimed our well-known and natural rights."⁸

After Lausanne, Turkey alone among the defeated nations of World War I was not a revisionist. A peace treaty freely negotiated and freely accepted laid the basis for peaceful foreign relations.

A third basis for peaceful foreign relations was Turkish success in achieving equality of treatment in the community of nations. The insistence on equality was implicit in the position of the Turkish nationalists and in the negotiations of Ismet at Lausanne. Foreign limitations on Turkey's freedom of action would not be accepted. Financial, judicial, and political affairs must be free of outside interference. Atatürk's viewpoint, which Ismet reflected at Lausanne, was that independence and sovereignty were absolute necessities for equality of treatment. When Ismet insisted on independence and sovereignty, he aroused the antagonism of Lord Curzon, British Foreign Secretary. "Ismet," said Curzon, "you remind me of nothing so much as a music box. You play the same old tune day after day until we are all heartily sick of it — sovereignty, sovereignty, sovereignty."⁹ But Ismet persisted, and generally achieved his aim, making the minimum compromises where necessary. The greatest limit on Turkish

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 587. On Lausanne, see R.H. Davison, "Turkish Diplomacy from Mudros to Lausanne," in Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds., *The Diplomats, 1919-1939* (Princeton, 1953), pp. 172-209.

⁹ Joseph C. Grew, *Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years* (New York, 1952), I, p. 525.

sovereignty in 1923 was the provision that the zone of the Straits should be demilitarized. This was altered only in 1936.

The significance for Turkey of equality among sovereign nations is clear when seen against the Ottoman background. The Ottoman Empire had been formally admitted to the Concert of Europe in 1856, after the Crimean War, but continued to be treated like a poor relation. The European powers insisted on privileges for their nationals in the Ottoman Empire — exemption from various Turkish taxes, exemption from many laws, privileges in the courts. The privileges, once freely granted by Ottoman sultans, were written into treaties known as "capitulations." Foreign embassies often extended these privileges to Ottoman subjects who were "protected" but had never seen the protecting country. Ottoman state finances were in part controlled by the representatives of European bondholders through a Public Debt Administration. In general, European powers looked on the Ottoman state as an inferior and continued to interfere in its affairs despite their promise in 1856 not to do so. In such a situation of inequality there were naturally constant irritations between the Ottoman state and other powers, making peaceful relations more difficult.

After Lausanne, Turkey's situation was markedly different. Mustafa Kemal, summarizing in 1927 the humiliation of foreign control in the Ottoman Empire, said that the Empire was regarded as being beyond the pale of international right and was, as it were, under the tutelage and protection of somebody else."¹⁰ In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne (art. 28) specified that each signatory "accepts... the complete abolition of the Capitulations in Turkey in every respect." The preamble of the treaty, furthermore, incorporated the basic principle on which Atatürk and İsmet İnönü had been insisting: that friendly relations "must be based on respect for the independence and sovereignty of states."¹¹ The foreign controls, what İsmet at Lausanne had called "servitudes," were effectively abolished. From 1923 on it was much easier for the Turkish Republic to shape a peaceful foreign policy since it had been accepted in the international community as a sovereign state, an equal among equals.

A fourth basis for peaceful foreign relations was the cultivation of a homogeneous state. The Ottoman Empire had been extraordinarily heterogeneous. It contained peoples of many tongues and many religions. Only fifty years before the Republic came into existence, the

¹⁰ Atatürk, *Speech*, p. 586.

¹¹ Text in League of Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 28 (1924), pp. 11-113.

best estimates put the population of the Ottoman Empire at approximately 36,000,000. Of this number, only a little more than one third, or about 13,500,000 may have been Ottoman Turks.¹² Turks, then, were a minority in their own Empire, which also contained large groups of Arabs, Romanians, Greeks, Serbs, Bulgars, Armenians, Kurds, Albanians, to mention only the biggest non-Turkish minorities.

A peaceful foreign policy was difficult if not impossible, when the Empire was so constituted, in an age of growing nationalism. The various linguistic groups aspired to independence. Revolts ensued which often became sizable wars against Ottoman forces. More serious, European powers were tempted to intervene diplomatically and sometimes militarily, using the national cause of one of the groups as a reason or an excuse for war against the Ottoman Empire. Ethnography in the later days of the Ottoman Empire was usually subversive of peace. Probably only at the end of the Balkan Wars in 1913 did the Turks become a majority in what was then left of the Ottoman Empire.

Atatürk recognized the difficulty, and the illogic, of the Ottoman position. Foreign policy is based on the internal composition of the state, he said. "In a State which extends from the East to the West and which unites in its embrace contrary elements..., it is natural that the internal organization should be defective... In these circumstances its foreign policy, having no solid foundation, cannot be strenuously carried on."¹³ For Atatürk, a successful policy would be based on homogeneity. The losses in World War I, especially loss of the remaining Arab provinces, presented him with a smaller and homogeneous state which he regarded not as a disadvantage, but as an advantage. A more successful foreign policy could result. "In order that our nation should be able to live a happy, strenuous, and permanent life, it is necessary that the State should pursue an exclusively national policy and that this policy should be in perfect agreement with our internal organization."¹⁴ On another occasion, speaking of the Turkish Revolution, Atatürk said that now the people "are held together only by the bond of Turkish nationality."¹⁵

The state which emerged in 1923 was relatively homogeneous. The first census, of 1927, showed a population of only 13,648,270, but over 90 per cent were Turkish-speaking. The minority problem which had

¹² A. Ubicini and Pavet de Courteille, *Etat présent de l'Empire ottoman* (Paris, 1876), p. 18 and n. 1, and p. 69. The estimate of Turks may be slightly high.

¹³ Atatürk, *Speech*, p. 378.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Herbert Melzig, ed., *Atatürk Dedi Ki* (Ankara, 1942), p. 283.

led to internal discontent and to great power interference, and often to war, was a thing of the past. It is remarkable that in the days of the Ottoman regime, almost all its foreign relations were concerned with its own domestic situation, often with provinces where minorities were dominant. In Atatürk's Republic, for the first time, Turkish foreign relations could be largely concerned with external rather than internal matters. The homogeneity, the nationalist basis for policy, led to more peaceful relations.

A corollary to the acceptance of homogeneity and a geographically compact state was the muting of irredentism. This may perhaps be considered a fifth basis for peaceful relations, since its effect is so important. Many modern nations, both large and small, have succumbed to the allure of trying to annex or to regain "unredeemed" territories currently under alien rule. The Turkish Republic under Atatürk largely avoided such irredentism. Turks never seriously thought of trying to reconstruct the old Ottoman Empire — to incorporate again Hungary, Albania, Palestine, the Yemen, Algeria, and other such lost territories. Atatürk ridiculed such a multinational state.

There were, however, bits of territory still outside the frontiers, after the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, that many Turks felt were rightfully theirs. The status of Mosul was left undecided in that treaty, and Turks felt that it should be theirs. Some of the deputies in Ankara criticized the cession of the Dodecanese to Italy, of part of Thrace to Greece, and of Alexandretta (the Hatay) to Syria. Niyazi of Mersin called Alexandretta (Iskenderun) "a Turkish Alsace-Lorraine."¹⁶ But no wars resulted from these situations. Relations with Greece were gradually bettered, and by 1930 were on a cordial footing. Mosul was awarded by the League of Nations to British-mandated Iraq in 1925, an unhappy result for Turkey but one which she accepted in a treaty with Britain the following year. The Hatay, alone among the bits of unredeemed territory, had a special status for its Turkish population on the basis of the Ankara treaty of 1921 signed with France. When, in 1936, France made preparations to give independence to Syria and to put Alexandretta under Syrian administration, Turkish opinion became alarmed. Atatürk declared in the Grand National Assembly that the situation in Alexandretta "preoccupied the Government night and day."¹⁷ In the last year of Atatürk's life a peaceful compromise arrangement worked out with France put the Hatay under joint

¹⁶ *Oriente Moderno* III: 4 (15 September 1923), pp. 208-09.

¹⁷ Bilisel, "La vie internationale," p. 370.

Turkish-French administration. In the year following his death, the region was joined to Turkey as the result of the vote of the local assembly. This was the only territorial acquisition of Atatürk's Republic, and it was accomplished by negotiation, not military action.

Irredentism it applied to Turkish speakers who lived in various Balkan countries, in nearby islands, and in vast communities in Iran, Russia, and China was also severely muted. Pan-Turkish or pan-Turanian sentiment existed in Turkey, but it was not encouraged. So early as 1921 Mustafa Kemal was warning against the illusion of pan-Turanism, pointing out that it was unworkable and that professing pan-Turanism simply created more enemies for Turkey. "Instead of increasing our enemies and the pressure upon us by adopting ideas we did not accept and we are unable to accept, let us return to our natural limitations, to our legitimate boundaries."¹⁸ The potential pan-Turkish irredentism was curbed. Instead of an expansionist irredentism, a reverse process occurred — an ingathering of ethnic Turks who immigrated from Balkan or from Asian countries, or from Russia. The peaceful nature of Turkey's foreign relations was not broken by irredentism.

A sixth basis for peaceful relations, somewhat parallel to the preceding one, was the refusal to follow a pan-Islamic policy. Mustafa Kemal was willing to have pan-Islamic support for his fight for an independent Turkey. In 1921 he sponsored a plan for a pan-Islamic congress to meet at Ankara; the Grand National Assembly, to which he presented the plan, approved it in principle.¹⁹ Two years later Kemal appealed to the Muslims of the world for aid in building the new Turkey and for contributions to the Red Crescent to assist in resettling 600,000 Turks being brought in from Greece according to the exchange agreement signed at Lausanne.²⁰ But he was quite unwilling that the new Turkey should put itself at the head of any pan-Islamic movement or attempt to control the Muslim world. Pan-Islamism, he said, was, like pan-Turanism, an illusion, impractical, an ideology that would just create enemies for Turkey.²¹ When he made his six-day speech

¹⁸ Melzig, Atatürk Dedi Ki, pp. 138-39.

¹⁹ *Bulletin périodique de la presse turque*, no. 13, 22 April, p. 3, reporting events of March 1921 and quoting from *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* of 11 March.

²⁰ *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, 28 September 1923, cited in Gotthard Jäschke, *Die Türkei seit dem Weltkriege: Geschichtskalender, 1918-1928* (Berlin, 1929), p. 76; *Oriente Moderno* III: 5 (15 October 1923), pp. 270-71.

²¹ Speaking to the Grand National Assembly, 1 December 1921, in Melzig, *Atatürk Dedi Ki*, p. 138.

in 1927 he derided the sultan (evidently meaning Yavuz Sultan Selim), who had gained control of Syria and Egypt, took the title of Caliph, and "hoped to unite the whole Islamic world in one body, to lead it and govern it." "There is nothing in history," he declared in the same speech, to show how the policy of Panislamism could have succeeded or how it could have found a basis for its realization on this earth."²² By abjuring a pan-Islamic policy Atatürk avoided much potential international friction and possible threats to the peace.

A seventh basis for peaceful foreign relations was Atatürk's emphasis on domestic reform and development, rather than on foreign adventure. It is true that scholars have sometimes spoken of the "primacy of external over internal policy" in Turkey.²³ But this has been true only on some occasions. Once the sovereignty and independence of Turkey were secure, the major emphasis in the new Republic was on domestic change. The many reforms of Atatürk bear witness to this. So also do some of his own declarations. In 1927 he said, "When I speak of national policy, I mean it in this sense: To work within our national boundaries for the real happiness and welfare of the nation and the country by, above all, relying on our own strength in order to retain our existence."²⁴ The concept of national security is clearly expressed, but the source of welfare and happiness for the nation will be "work within our national boundaries." This is the primacy of domestic development, a thought which Mustafa Kemal had earlier expressed in one of his most famous speeches, to the İzmir Economic Congress in 1923: "Those who make conquests with the sword must of necessity succumb to those who make conquests with the plow, and therefore must relinquish their positions. And that was the very thing that happened with the Ottoman Empire. The Bulgarians, the Serbians, the Hungarians, and the Greeks held on to their plows and so preserved their existence and became strengthened, but our nation followed in the path of its conquering leaders, and one day succumbed because it had not worked within its own mother country. This is a truth that is the case in every period of history and in every place in the world... In the struggle between plow and sword the plow is victorious in the end."²⁵ Without question, peaceful foreign relations would

²² Atatürk, *Speech*, pp. 377, 378.

²³ The phrase is from D.A. Rustow, "Foreign Policy of the Turkish Republic," in Roy C. Macrides, ed., *Foreign Policy in World Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1958), p. 317.

²⁴ Atatürk, *Speech*, p. 379.

²⁵ Melzig, *Atatürk Dedi Ki*, p. 220.

assist in domestic development, and concentration on domestic development would help to ensure peaceful foreign relations.

Finally, an eighth basis for peaceful foreign relations was an effective armed force. This was not a force for aggression, as Atatürk many times made clear. Its mission was defense, to preserve the national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. When Mustafa Kemal said that at Lausanne Turkey had claimed only her natural rights, he added that "we had the power to preserve and protect those rights. Our strength was sufficient for this purpose."²⁶ Kemal was himself a soldier, heir to the tradition among Turks, that prized the warrior virtues. These virtues were recognized by others, too, outside of Turkey. When, in 1932, Turkey was admitted to membership in the League of Nations, the Australian delegate spoke not only of the Turkish characteristics of moral strength, high civilization, and sincerity, but added: "In my capacity as a soldier in the Great War, I served in Gallipoli, in Palestine, in the Sinai desert and in Syria and I admired the Turkish soldier for the stoic heroism he displayed in defense and for the keenness of his attack."²⁷ Atatürk often praised the Turkish soldier, too, but declared that his task was defense, not aggression.²⁸ He contrasted the new army of the Grand National Assembly to the old Ottoman army that marched on Vienna: the new one would not be "an instrument of greed to carry out invasions or to destroy empires or to create empires."²⁹ "As long as the existence of the nation is not exposed to danger, war is a crime," he said.³⁰ If independence, sovereignty, and integrity were assured through the armed forces, peaceful relations would be the normal Turkish policy.

Resting on these bases, the foreign policy of the Turkish Republic under Atatürk was consciously aimed at the preservation of peaceful relations with all other states. It may be that Atatürk considered the possibility of war on one occasion, at least. He himself later said that, when the Mosul question was at a critical stage, and Britain had assumed a rather unyielding position, "we had decided, if necessary,

²⁶ Atatürk, *Speech*, p. 587.

²⁷ Bilsel, "La vie internationale," p. 367.

²⁸ See Atatürk's last message to the armed forces, 29 October 1938, in Melzig, *Atatürk Dedi Ki*, pp. 333-34.

²⁹ Speaking to the Grand National Assembly, 18 April 1938/1922, *ibid.*, pp. 154-55.

³⁰ Herbert Melzig, ed., *Thus Spoke Atatürk* (Istanbul, 1943), p. 7.

to enter into war."³¹ But, in the end, the path of negotiation was followed. Negotiation was the path followed in other important international questions as well. The outstanding example comes from the later years of Atatürk's life, in 1936. The Turkish government then asked for the revision of the Lausanne agreement on the Straits. The resulting negotiations at the Montreux conference returned to Turkey the right to fortify the Straits zone and gave to her the supervision of Straits regulations. This peaceful revision by the process of negotiation won for Turkey considerable approval, particularly when it was contrasted with the warlike revisionism of Mussolini's Italy in its attack on Ethiopia and of Hitler's Germany in its reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was a professional soldier by training. He had been in battle, at Gallipoli, at the Sakarya, and elsewhere. But he had always in view the desirability of peace. While the War of Independence was being waged, he could say, "We are not war-mongers. We are peace-lovers."³² In a way, it was appropriately symbolic that Turkey should have been elected a member of the League of Nations Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference of 1932-33.³³ Under Atatürk's guidance the Republic of Turkey proceeded to build peaceful foreign relations. He had laid the foundations. His oft-quoted dictum, "Peace at home, peace in the world," was more than a slogan — it was policy. Peace abroad became the guardian of progress at home. A peaceful foreign policy was the guardian of domestic development.

³¹ Atatürk, *Speech*, p. 689. Atatürk is referring here to October of 1924. In December 1925 also there were press reports that the Turkish government had considered and rejected war against England: Arnold Toynbee, ed., *Survey of International Affairs*, 1925, I, pp. 525-26.

³² Melzig, *Atatürk Dedi Ki*, p. 130.

³³ Bilsel, "La vie internationale," p. 366.