



*Geopolitical  
Aspects  
of Peacemaking  
in the Near East,  
1919-1923*

*From Sèvres to Lausanne*



THE HELLENIC PARLIAMENT FOUNDATION  
FOR PARLIAMENTARISM AND DEMOCRACY



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"ELEFThERIOS K. VENIZELoS" - Chania



Geopolitical Aspects of Peacemaking  
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# Geopolitical Aspects of Peacemaking in the Near East, 1919-1923

*From Sèvres to Lausanne*

Edited by

Helen Gardikas-Katsiadakis and Evanthis Hatzivassiliou



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## INTRODUCTION

In December 2022, at the 100th anniversary of the end of the Greek-Turkish war in Asia Minor, the National Research Foundation “Eleftherios K. Venizelos” and the Hellenic Parliament Foundation co-organized a large conference in Athens on the subject “From Sèvres to Lausanne”. The conference led to the publication of an extensive collective volume that dealt with a wide spectrum of themes, including diplomatic and military developments, the regional aims and strategies of the Greek state but also of Greek local communities, the refugee problem (which had started earlier but peaked, though dramatically, in 1922), public health, domestic political developments, perceptions and historiography.

One of the major aims of that conference was to avoid entrapment in the narrower Greek context; this could have been a possible danger, given the lasting perception of the traumatic outcome of the conflict and the influx in Greece of the huge wave of refugees from Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace. The aim of the conference was to examine the Greek (or Turkish) options within the context of the international environment of the time, an era of radical changes in the structure of the international system in the aftermath of a world war. Many speakers presented this perspective of international interactions. Moreover, the first two sessions of the conference were held in English and focused mostly on the geographical factor in peacemaking in the region then defined as the Near East. These chapters, already included in the collective volume that has arisen from the conference, are presented here as a separate volume.

The importance of geography in history has been stressed by a succession of prominent historians. But in the peacemaking process in the Near East in 1919-1923, geography perhaps played a particularly interesting role. The geographical definitions themselves figure prominently in this volume, since this “Near East” of the past does not exist today. Today we refer to the region as “Southeastern Europe” (for its northern part) and as the “Middle East” for the

rest (and the French term *proche-orient* usually now describes the Middle East). During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the region went through the final and most violent phase of a transition from imperial governance to the era of the nation-state. Almost everything changed: geographical definitions, perceptions, borders, systems of government, not to mention the excessive violence and the movement of populations, which in the Greek-Turkish case assumed an unprecedented “obligatory” form.

The emphasis on the perplexing, difficult, even sometimes treacherous but always challenging interaction between geography and policy-making, in other words the geopolitical tensions, is prominent in the present volume. These challenges are not addressed simply in the context of “technical” issues, determined by the realities of the map and the limits of military technology of a past era; they involve important intellectual options, worldviews, perceptions, the need to match means with aims, the crucial interaction between great and regional powers, as well as between sea routes and hinterlands defining features of the Near East.

This publication is, in other words, an attempt to discuss the background of the peacemaking in the Near East in the aftermath of the Great War. Needless to say, such a topic cannot be settled in a short book; here we simply examine some aspects of a significantly larger process. However, we present this book hoping that it could contribute to an ongoing discussion, more than one century after those momentous events.

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**SÈVRES AND LAUSANNE  
THROUGH ISAAH BOWMAN'S *NEW WORLD***

**Introduction**

The difference between Greece as it emerged from the Treaty of Sèvres and the same country resulting from the Treaty of Lausanne is not simply quantitative. It is not solely a difference in surface, resources, and population. It is also qualitative. These two geopolitical realities correspond to two different ideals of spatial organisation.

With Greece viewed through the lens of a territory as it exists since the Greek defeat in Asia Minor (with the addition of the Dodecanese), the long history leading up to the creation of the Greek State, during which the Greek space was primarily a network of communities dispersed mainly along the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, but also extending into Eastern Europe, North Africa, and Western Asia, is often underestimated. This geographical configuration was first altered in the 19th century when European diplomacy conceived a state territory and the Bavarian administration organised it in a modern way. From that time on and until the Treaty of Lausanne and its geographical consequences, Greek geography was dual in nature. On the one hand, there was the territorial reality. Continuous and more or less ethnically homogeneous, Greece adhered to the Westphalian model of nation, state, and territory coinciding. On the other hand, the Greek communities outside the state territory coexisting with other peoples, continued to thrive, forming a cosmopolitan galaxy with much greater economic and cultural significance than the introverted state. However, the rise of nationalisms eroded the Greek

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galaxy. Simultaneously, the state territory expanded through the integration of the Ionian Islands and the territorial gains of the Balkan Wars. The balance shifted in favour of the state.

The two coexisting realities, sometimes cooperating and sometimes competing, eventually converged after World War I. The Treaty of Sèvres unified the territory with a substantial part of the galaxy. The focal point of this new Greek world was the sea rather than the land. Its network-like geographical structure relied, materially and symbolically, on the network of sea lanes. Its population was not homogeneous. Ethnic and religious heterogeneity was the natural consequence of the Greek spatial expansion.

However, was this persistence of a certain Greek “galactic” tradition compatible with the new realities of the world as it emerged from the Great War? Was the territorialisation of Greece merely the result of strategic and tactical mistakes during the Asia Minor campaign, or of deeper forces surfacing in the chaotic reorganisation of the world after the victory of the Entente? Was Greece of two continents and three seas a chimera, or could something be salvaged from the old Greek/Rum radiation? Did Venizelos fail to understand that he was leading his country against the tide, or was he a visionary far ahead of his time? And what can the Greek geographical reversal tell us about the broader European tragedies of the early twentieth century? To what extent was Greece a laboratory of the European future?

### **Geography in the Balkans and at the Paris Conference**

During the second half of the nineteenth century, European geographers and cartographers took an interest in the complexities of Balkan human geography. Armed with concepts that had little connection to the realities on the ground (ethnicity held little significance in the rural Balkan areas, particularly in Macedonia), they produced “ethnographic” maps, which, unsurprisingly, varied significantly from one another.

This academic curiosity took a geopolitical turn after the defeat of the Ottoman army in the war with the Russian Empire in March 1878. The new political map of the Balkans, drawn on the outskirts of Constantinople and featuring a “Greater Bulgaria”, was heavily influenced by Heinrich Kiepert’s 1877 ethnographic map. Although Greater Bulgaria was replaced by a much smaller version during the Berlin Congress in July 1878, the Balkan national elites recognised that the content of maps could play a decisive role in the drawing of

new borders. A “War of Maps” began,<sup>1</sup> the elements of which are described in detail in H. R. Wilkinson’s *Maps and Politics. A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia*.<sup>2</sup>

After this initial unofficial involvement of maps in politics, scientific expertise would play a much more institutionalised role during the Paris Conference.<sup>3</sup> Even before it began, France, Great Britain, and the United States of America established groups of experts in 1917 to prepare for the negotiations that would take place after the end of the war. France created the “Comité d’Etudes» under the direction of Professor Lavissee.<sup>4</sup> In the United Kingdom, a special organisation was created, managed by Alwyn Parker, the librarian of the Foreign Office. Finally, President Wilson appointed Colonel House as the head of a similar committee, named the “Inquiry”. Since one of the most important issues to be studied was the “territorial question”, the participation and role of geographers proved to be instrumental. Among the experts, Isaiah Bowman, the Geographer of the US Delegation, emerged as one of the most influential.

It is worth noting that, among the European leaders assembled in Paris, Venizelos was likely the most aware of the importance of maps in influencing decisions. Georgios Soteriades’ *An Ethnological Map Illustrating Hellenism in the Balkan Peninsula and Asia Minor*, published in London in 1918 and printed in 50,000 copies, was Venizelos’ response to a series of maps published in *The Daily Telegraph* in 1918 that were unfavourable to the Greek cause. This Greek cartographic campaign proved to be extremely successful.<sup>5</sup>

### **Isaiah Bowman and *The New World***

Isaiah Bowman was born in 1878 in a protestant family of Swiss origin and established in Detroit. A self-made man, he pursued his academic career in

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1. Georges Prévelakis, “Le géographe serbe Jovan Cvijic et la ‘guerre des cartes’ macédonienne”, in: Daniel Balland (ed.), *Hommes et Terres d’Islam*, vol. II (Tehran 2000), 257-276.

2. H. R. Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics. A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool 1951).

3. Dimitri Kitsikis, *Le rôle des experts à la conférence de la paix de 1919. Gestation d’une technocratie en politique internationale* (Ottawa 1972).

4. Michel Foucher, “Sèvres and Lausanne Treaties: a French Geographer’s Analysis”, in this volume, 19-26.

5. Daniel Foliard, “Cartes et contre-cartes à la conférence de paix de Paris (1919-1920): débats cartographiques au sein de la délégation britannique”, *Comité français de cartographie*, 228 (2016), 157.

Harvard and Yale teaching Geology. In 1915 he became President of the American Geographical Society, which, under his leadership, gained important international prestige. Two years later he was invited to join the *Inquiry*. In December 1918 he embarked, together with three trucks loaded with cartographic material, on the USS *George Washington*, the ship which transported the President Wilson and the whole US delegation to Europe. As the “Chief Territorial Specialist of the American Delegation and Executive Officer of the section of Economic, Political and Territorial Intelligence” he furnished many of the documents which were used in the discussions. He could thus play an important role in the drawing of the new European borders. With his efficient cartographic team, he could rapidly furnish maps to the US and also to other delegations “if it suited the American point of view”, as he notes in his journal on January 31, 1919.<sup>6</sup>

Upon returning to the US, Bowman published *The New World*, an impressive volume of 632 pages, featuring 215 maps and numerous other illustrations. In this work, he developed his ideas about major international issues, while also providing a detailed overview of the new geopolitical situation in various parts of the world. With four editions (1921, 1924, 1926, and a fully revised edition in 1928) and translations in French and Chinese, *The New World* became a major reference, found in the libraries of all US embassies and many embassies of other countries.<sup>7</sup> Denounced by German geographers as a pseudo-scientific legitimisation of the Versailles *Diktat*, it indirectly contributed to their reaction in the form of the German *Geopolitik* school led by Karl Haushofer.<sup>8</sup>

The study of this highly influential book by an author who played a significant role in American foreign policy until the end of the Roosevelt era can offer useful insights in answering the questions raised in this article.

### **Ethnic cleansing legitimised**

Wilson’s vision was clear. The territories of the fallen empires should be divided according to the principle of nationalities. Simple in abstract terms, this con-

6. Geoffrey Martin, *The Life and Thought of Isaiah Bowman* (Hamden, CT 1980), 91.

7. Isaiah Bowman, *The New World. Problems in Political Geography* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York, and Chicago 1921, 1924, 1926, 1928) and in French: *Isaiah Bowman, Le monde nouveau, tableau général de géographie politique universelle, adapté de l’anglais et mis au courant des derniers événements internationaux par Jean Brunhes* (Paris 1928).

8. “Isaiah Bowman, adversaire de la *Geopolitik* allemande”, *L’espace géographique*, XXIII, 1 (1994), 78-89.

cept proved extremely complicated in its implementation. The different ethnic and religious groups were intertwined, and it was not easy to draw borders that clearly separated one nationality from another. Moreover, national identities did not always exist in a mature form, especially in rural areas. Precise knowledge of human geography, along with other geographical considerations, was essential in solving the territorial riddles, hence the influence of geographers. However, no geographical expertise could prevent the persistence of significant heterogeneity once the new borders had been decided. What was the way out?

One important school of thought, strongly influenced by Jewish lobbying groups, saw the solution in a system of guarantees for the residual populations, which would be granted the status of protected minorities.<sup>9</sup> Bowman was sceptical. How could protection be guaranteed and implemented? At the same time, the existence of minorities in a State would place limits to its sovereignty:

Has the day of deliverance come for the oppressed minorities of the earth, those who have hitherto been persecuted because of differences between themselves and the majority or ruling class in race, religion, or social customs? How far can the protection be carried? Can the so-called minorities treaties stand, or do they threaten the integrity of the unwilling signatory states—Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Rumania, Jugo-Slavia, and Greece?<sup>10</sup>

In the 1928 revised edition of *The New World*, Bowman compares Europe with the United States:

the minority treaties are in effect a limitation of sovereignty... Were they applied to the United States, they would require every major language group forming the dominant population in a given district of substantial size to receive instruction in its own language in the public schools and to be heard in its own language in courts of justice. It is the exact opposite of this, namely the process of Americanisation, that has largely tended to obscure the differences between European racial stocks in America [...] Experience has shown that the peoples of Europe cannot accommodate themselves to this point of view.<sup>11</sup>

Since minority status and protection could not offer stability, another solution needed to be sought. Already in the first edition of *The New World*, Bowman saw a way out in what was happening in the Balkans:

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9. Mark Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea* (London 2012) 159-162.

10. Bowman, *The New World*, first edition, 14.

11. Bowman, *The New World*, fourth edition, 29.

There promises to be carried out in the Balkans an experiment in the transfer of peoples that will be of great practical interest as a means of reducing the problems of irredentism. By a treaty between Greece and Bulgaria (1919), provision is made for the reciprocal and voluntary migration of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.<sup>12</sup>

In the revised 1928 edition, that is, after the Lausanne Treaty, the solution seems to be confirmed in his mind:

One must consider also the principle of exchange of populations effectively carried out in the case of Greece and Turkey [...] Never before in the history of Europe has there been so close a correspondence between the international boundaries and the lines of ethnic division.<sup>13</sup>

The provisions of the Lausanne Treaty thus offered a remedy for the inextricable problems with which the Chief Geographer of the American Delegation had to cope in Paris. Consequently, what was later termed as “ethnic cleansing” has its origins in the debates of that era, to which Bowman undoubtedly contributed.

Through these passages, a clear geopolitical vision for the regions of Europe and Western Asia that were in the process of reorganisation becomes apparent. A series of small and medium-sized states, with borders “scientifically” defined and with homogenised populations, should take the place of the multi-ethnic empires. Such a transformation would lead to stability, which, in turn, would limit the need for future American intervention, whether humanitarian or military. Wilson’s abstract nationalities principle was finding its concrete expression.

Together with the Jewish diasporic tradition, the network organisation of the Greek space was in stark contradiction with this geopolitical vision. Greece of two continents and five seas, Venizelos’ compromise solution between the Greek galactic tradition and the necessities of Westphalian modernity, was hardly compatible with Bowman’s vision. When the first edition of *The New World* appeared, Venizelos had already been ousted, but his geopolitical project had not yet been defeated. The way that Bowman treats the Greek theme in the 1921 edition is full of ambiguities. He could not openly criticise an important ally, but he could not embrace his cause either. Thus, certain Greek qualities are praised, but not without underlining a vital drawback:

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12. Bowman, *The New World*, first edition, 317.

13. Bowman, *The New World*, fourth edition, 30.





Those two maps come from the first and last editions of *The New World* (1922 and 1928). They reflect the change in the geopolitical situation after the Greek defeat in Asia Minor. The title of the 1922 map, “The Greek World,” disappeared in the new one, without being replaced. Greece, without its foothold in Asia, could not claim a hegemonic regional role. How should one refer to the defeated former ally? The lack of a title indicates Bowman’s embarrassment. At the same time, the new situation was more compatible with the new geopolitical normalcy. The “boundaries claimed by Greece” in the first edition became “boundaries claimed by Greece, 1919” in the new one. The added date shows that the Greek claims were no longer valid. Unlike the first map, which depicted a dynamic but destabilizing Greece, the last map indicates, along with the end of the Great Idea, the end of the “Eastern Question; at least in Bowman’s mind.



there are two qualities that stand out with striking prominence. The first is the capacity of the Greek to absorb the people who invade his lands. The invader, whether it was Albanian or Slav, who penetrated the Greek peninsula, came to have something more than a veneer of Hellenic culture; for it is difficult to resist assimilation into a mode of life, a regional spirit, as distinctive as that of the Hellenic lands. Something of this regional spirit may be at the bottom of the second quality—the tenacity shown in never-fading desire for independence and the reunion of Greek lands, at least about the borders of the Aegean. Doubtless there could more than once have been a realisation of this aim if the Greeks had not lacked that vital thing necessary to national power and welfare—the unity of its people.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, Bowman fails to understand that what he perceived as a major handicap and what he recognised as qualities were actually two sides of the same coin. This same ambiguity is found in the final, synthesising part of the chapter on Greece titled “The Outlook for Greece”. The positive part includes phrases like:

With inspiring sea traditions, Greece is now on the way to becoming one of the strongest minor powers of Europe [...] There is promise of increasing strength in the internal economic situation of Greece [...] Fortunately there is no troublesome land-tenure question.<sup>15</sup>

However, the concluding paragraph is filled with reservations:

It is too late to estimate the political and economic effects of the return of Constantine to the Greek throne [...] The Allies have it in their power to embarrass Greece, if they wish to do so, by refusing military and moral support when clashes occur [...] between Greek civil officials and troops of occupation on the one hand and minority groups in the newly won territories on the other. Whether Allied help will be withdrawn is a matter of vital importance to Greece, whose present territorial status is almost wholly an Allied creation.<sup>16</sup>

This negative diagnosis at the end of the Greek chapter should not surprise the reader. The contradiction between the structure of the Greek space and the needs of geopolitical organisation, as understood by Bowman, had been suggested right from its beginning:

The maritime traditions of the Greeks, their skill as traders, their occupation of the entire Aegean realm, their distribution throughout the Mediterranean and

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14. Bowman, *The New World*, first edition, 315.

15. Op. cit., 327.

16. Op. cit., 327.

Black Sea basins as merchants and carriers, their hold upon the commercial outlets of the lands tributary to these basins, their settlement in patches and fringes of population on the seacoasts of lands inhabited by non-Greek peoples—all these factors converge upon the problems of the moment and render the tracing of Greek boundaries exceedingly difficult if justice is to be done to the nations that border Greece in the Near East.<sup>17</sup>

The same argument is brought up even more explicitly in the chapter on Turkey, titled “Anatolia: Last Remnant of the Turkish Empire”:

It is of course a serious question if Turkey will ratify in good faith the treaty of Sèvres with the Allied powers [...] If the provisions are accepted in good faith, the government of Turkey will be but a shadow.<sup>18</sup>

And

The possession of Smyrna by Greece cuts off the Anatolian hinterland from its natural outlet on the Mediterranean [...] If the new government will turn its attention to internal improvements rather than to external conquest and the rule of non-Turkish peoples in remote regions, Turkey may in time become a strong state. Otherwise it will become a liability, an expensive dependency of the great powers.<sup>19</sup>

Obviously, such “liabilities” were to be avoided at all costs.

### **Greece and Turkey after Lausanne: a paradigmatic case?**

Despite Bowman’s attitude towards Greece and its prospects in the text, the title of the chapter on Greece in the 1921 edition is surprisingly positive: “The Reunited Greek Lands”. In the 1928 edition, we find a slightly, but substantially modified title: “Greek Lands and People”. The unity of the various components of the Greek world disappeared between the two editions. Venizelos’ integrated network of territories bridging two continents and three seas gave way to the Greek introverted territorial state and a rapidly vanishing diaspora.

The events that took place between the two major editions, of 1921 and 1928, created a situation much more compatible with Bowman’s geopolitical vision. Greek exceptionalism was in the process of disappearing. Regional problems that had occupied international public opinion seemed resolved. The out-

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17. Op. cit., 313.

18. Op. cit., 441.

19. Op. cit., 443.

come of the Macedonian question was, in Bowman's mind, the best illustration of the new approach. After analysing its turbulent history, he explained how it had been dealt with:

Quite unexpectedly Greek Macedonia passed out of the realm of dispute with its complete Hellenisation through the settlement of Greek refugees from Asia Minor. Following the expulsion of the Greek population of Smyrna [...] space had to be found for those homeless Greeks who had fled [...] Provision had also to be made for those who had been transferred from Asia Minor and Thrace in exchange for Turks... Macedonia alone was called upon to absorb 300.000 urban refugees, in addition to 116.000 agricultural families. A country of 5.000.000 had to absorb 1.500.000 fugitives. The world had never known so great a displacement of population. Macedonia is covered with new towns, new farms, and farmhouses clustered in villages, and the character of the population is completely changed.<sup>20</sup>

The suffering of the displaced populations appeared as a fair price to pay for the stabilisation of the region and for what is presented as an important progressive step. In fact, in Bowman's book, as well as in many other publications of the time, Macedonia, and especially the part of it integrated into Greek territory, became the showcase of what could be termed "geopolitical engineering".<sup>21</sup> After changing the human content of the region, it had been possible to introduce modern rural and agricultural planning, without encountering the resistance of entrenched economic and social structures. Undoubtedly, the German Geopoliticians/Planners of the Third Reich were inspired by this experience when envisaging the transformation of Eastern Europe's rural areas.

Bowman dedicates limited space to the general state of Greece in the 1928 edition, that is after the Lausanne Treaty. He focuses more on the transformation of Turkey under Kemal Atatürk, which he views quite positively, albeit with certain reservations. He thus dedicates three pages to "The Tribes of Kurdistan".<sup>22</sup>

In any case, when writing about Turkey in 1928, Bowman expressed his opposition to the Sèvres Treaty in no uncertain terms: "The disposition of the main bodies of population about the rim of the Anatolian peninsula, if examined in conjunction with the railroads and port statistics... shows still more

20. Op. cit., 401.

21. The most comprehensive study of the Macedonian experiment is undoubtedly: Jacques Ancel, *La Macédoine. Son évolution contemporaine* (Paris 1930).

22. Bowman, *The New World*, fourth edition, 510-512.

clearly why Turkey felt that the treaty of Sèvres meant economic slavery and political extinction.<sup>23</sup>

Between 1921 and 1928, Greece transitioned from the status of a geopolitical problem to that of a positive example. The shift of interest from Greece to Turkey between the two editions of *The New World* can be illustrated by the number of pages allocated to each country. Greece, having had 15 pages in 1921, falls to 11 pages in 1928. In contrast, Turkey, with 19 pages in 1921, rises to 31 pages in 1928.

It is easy to understand how the Greek-Turkish situation after Lausanne appeared to Bowman as much more aligned with his geopolitical normalcy than what had resulted from the Sèvres Treaty. Two modern territorial states with more or less homogeneous populations could live together in peace, focusing much more on developing their resources than on conquest and expansionist dreams. A significant portion of the Eastern Question seemed resolved.

### **The end of an epoch**

Even if Venizelos had remained in power after Sèvres, Greece still would not have succeeded in extinguishing the rising fire of Turkish nationalism. However, she might have managed to maintain a foothold on the shores of Anatolia. By strongly fortifying it and with substantial military support from an Aegean Sea transformed into a Greek lake, the handicap of lack of strategic depth could have been overcome. Northern Greece also lacked strategic depth; however, she has survived the Bulgarian and Yugoslav threats. The case of Israel is also indicative of the possibility to escape from what may seem like geographical defensive determinism.

However, even with such relative success in Asia Minor, the wider geopolitical destiny of Greece was predetermined. Bowman's vision represented a tide that was moving rapidly forward, as if it were the reaction to a previous era of open spaces and freedom of circulation—the world of the first globalisation. Fragmentation, territorialisation, homogenisation, and the nationalist aversion to diasporas were becoming the new norm. Even the Colonial Empires were challenged and would, sooner or later, disappear. In this context, Venizelos' vision had no real future. It belonged to a world that was ending. Just after the Asia Minor Greek defeat, Arnold Toynbee expressed this shift in no uncertain terms:

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23. Op. cit., 494.

The end of an epoch is nowhere more conspicuous than in Greece. For the past century, or in other words since she became an independent state, Greece has been living more outside her frontiers—partly in expectation of the “unredeemed territories which she hoped eventually to include in her national domain (the supreme goal being Constantinople), and partly on the earnings of her emigrants throughout the world, from the Egyptian Soudan to Russia and from Bengal to Chicago. During the last few years before the European War the remittances from the Greek colony in the United States had reached such a figure that they had notably raised the cost and standard of material living in the mother country, but the moral and intellectual sustenance that Greece used to derive from abroad was no less important than that which could be valued in currency. Her emigrants brought her a knowledge of the world, and inspired the world with sympathy for her by creating personal links of marriage and naturalisation which hardly existed between the West and the non-commercial oriental peoples. Her aspiration to the beauties and memories of Constantinople and to the riches of Western Asia Minor filled her with something of the same hope in the future that the opening of the west has inspired in Americans and Canadians. But the world-wide catastrophes of recent years have now deprived Greece, partly directly and partly indirectly, of almost all these external sources of life and strength. Limits to her territorial expansion northward or eastward respectively have been set by two powers stronger than herself—Jugoslavia and Turkey—and she holds already at least as much as she is likely to retain in the directions of Albania and Bulgaria. Constantinople, Smyrna, Adrianople, Monastir, and Koritsa have definitely passed out of her political horizon; hundreds of thousands of her minorities in these neighbouring regions have been driven in upon her and will henceforth have to be provided for within her comparatively confined territories, and her more distant “Dispersion among the Gentiles” has also been falling into various kinds of adversity. Bolshevism has ruined the Greeks of Odessa and other commercial centres of Russia; local nationalism may ruin those in India and Egypt, if politics take the same course there as in Asia Minor; [...] If Greece is to survive under these new and sterner conditions she will have to turn her energies inwards and to develop resources in her products, position and population which she has hitherto partially neglected for enterprises further afield.<sup>24</sup>

Venizelos followed Toynbee’s advice. In the negotiations that led to the Lausanne treaty, and especially when he returned to power, he did his best to “turn Greece’s energies inwards”. He modernised Greece, not to prepare it for war, but to develop its natural and human resources and to construct stable and modern institutions. He thus created a new ideological tradition that almost all Greek

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24. Arnold J. Toynbee, “The East after Lausanne”, *Foreign Affairs*, 2, 1 (1923), 86-87.

political leaders followed. Constantine Karamanlis' slogan of "Evimeria" (Prosperity) certainly belongs to this tradition.

Can we consider Venizelos' initial policy a mistake? Such a judgment would be anachronistic. It would suppose that the way things turned out, materially and ideologically, was predetermined. However, when Venizelos made the decision to send Greek troops to Smyrna, the perspective of solving the problem of heterogeneity through minority protection was still open. There was a lot of hope surrounding the soon-to-be-created League of Nations. The fragmented, introverted, protectionist, and conservative world that resulted from the way the Entente victory was managed and, even further, from the results of the 1928 economic crisis, had not yet been confirmed.

The risks of Venizelos' policy were high, but so were the stakes. By completely sacrificing its galactic organisation, Greece would abandon ambitions that could inspire future generations. How could Venizelos abdicate from the Greek aspiration to be something more than just another small Balkan country? The evolution of Greece during the last century may not be disappointing, but it does not correspond to what seemed to be its potential during the First World War.

However, the final diagnosis about the fate of the Greek galaxy is not negative. There is no doubt that the defeat in Asia Minor and the inward turn of Hellenism functioned as an "end of the frontier" with important consequences for Greek identity. However, contrary to Toynbee's prediction, Greeks did manage to recreate and maintain an external space. The traditional Greek diaspora did disappear, but the limitations of immigration to the United States were raised, and new diasporic communities were created. The Greek merchant marine prospered to a degree that has no relationship to the size of Greece and its population. Finally, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople continues to play an important role in global politics, reconfirmed in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The galactic organisation of the Greeks proved resilient, just as their capacity for state-building continues to suffer from the lack of "that vital thing necessary to national power and welfare – the unity of its people".<sup>25</sup>

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25. Bowman, *The New World*, first edition, 315.

### **Bowman and the World after *The New World***

In Bowman's experience from the Paris negotiations, as reflected in *The New World*, Population Geography played a central role. The coexistence of different "ethnic" groups in the same territory seemed to him to be the major factor of instability. Venizelos had a different view, as he had experience with the malleability of identities and knew that cultural differentiation is not a threat *per se*. Crete had been an important school of Cultural Geopolitics.

The reification of identities, as reflected in *The New World*, contributed to the European problems that led to the Second World War. The perception of otherness as a threat created xenophobic attitudes that were instrumental in the revisionist strategies of the Nazis (and, of course, in the ultimate crime, the Holocaust). The supposed remedy, the forced transfer of populations (perceived as "civilised", at least in comparison to the expulsion of populations by murder and rape), still had a very high humanitarian cost. Its final result, the de-territorialisation of populations by creating a *tabula rasa* similar to the US West, served as inspiration for authoritarian geopolitical projects.

The Greek-Turkish exchange of populations offered a template for the many other forced migrations that took place during the next decades. It was not only the Nazis who practiced this instrument of "geopolitical engineering". After the Second World War, more than 10 million ethnic Germans were displaced from Eastern Europe. India's partition in 1947 was accompanied by the displacement of 16 million people.

Bowman continued to be involved in population issues after the publications of *The New World*. During the Second World War, he was a major actor in an important and highly confidential research project commissioned by President Wilson. Its purpose was to plan massive population transfers after the end of the war. Named the M-project (M for migration), one of its purposes was to find a territory in order to create a Jewish State.<sup>26</sup> Abolishing the Jewish diaspora by transforming the Jews into a territorial nation was in line with Bowman's aversion to the mixing of different cultures in the same territory.

The trend of territorial homogenisation through ethnic cleansing did not disappear after the end of the Second World War. The tragic fate of Yugoslavia after its collapse showed that Bowman's vision was still alive. However, at the same time, the opposite trend is also in action. Under the influence of demo-

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26. Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton 2009), 111-113.



graphic, economic, geopolitical, and environmental factors, migration flows have developed to an unprecedented degree, facilitated by progress in transportation and communication facilities. Heterogeneity is on the rise again. The enormous sacrifices made to attain territorial homogeneity seem to have been in vain.

When Greece could “pride” itself, until the end of the Cold War, on being almost 100% culturally homogeneous, one could argue that Venizelos’ vision of a large space in which Christians and Muslims could coexist was a residue of a past of empires, a backward-looking, almost nostalgic, approach, in fact, a chimera. We now discover that the real chimera is homogeneity within the state’s territory. The problems of stability cannot be solved in the inhumane manner that Bowman advocated and that the “civilised world” applauded in the 1920s. If Venizelos’ experiment had succeeded, we would be much better equipped to cope with the new population and geopolitical challenges.

In this sense, Venizelos was a true visionary, far ahead of his time. The success of a vision like his might have saved Europe from many of its tragedies and prepared it for today’s challenges. The present Europe’s demographic winter may look very different from Europe’s overpopulation problem of the first decades of the 20th century, which served as an argument in Hitler’s *Lebensraum* propaganda. However, at the root of the problems is the same need to overcome perceptions rooted in 19th-century racist traditions so that we can cope as efficiently and humanely as possible with the present population challenges.

For better or for worse, Greece has been a major laboratory of Cultural Geopolitics, significantly influencing European destinies. The transition from the Sèvres to the Lausanne treaty was an emblematic moment, not only for Greece and Turkey but also for a Europe moving inexorably towards new tragedies.



Michel Foucher\*



**SÈVRES AND LAUSANNE TREATIES:  
A FRENCH GEOGRAPHER'S ANALYSIS**

As a geographer, it seems to me essential, in the analysis of the treaties and of their context, to specify which are the relevant scales in order to fully understand the interplay of the actors who influence the decision in the negotiation of the two treaties, of which only the second lasted. What are the criteria and final objectives sought by the main actors, better said, powers?

In my view, the relevant scale is that of the regional Franco-British rivalry. Paris and London were allies in Western Europe, competitors in the Eastern Mediterranean. They were European powers of the first order, to use Montesquieu's categories, with international interests that were not shared by the two Powers, in the area covered by the treaties in question. Italy and Russia were second-rate powers; the declining Ottoman Empire had become a third-rate power until the adoption of the National Pact.

At this point of my introduction, let me make a personal remark. Insisting on the relevant scale of the negotiation does not mean ignoring the dramatic conditions of these settlements. Allow me here, in the enclosure of the *Vouli ton Ellinon*, a thought for the Greek victims of forced displacements, to preserve the memory of a tragic period for several minority peoples who found themselves on the wrong side of history. As a French geographer, I believe it is useful to share with you the conclusions of the Study Committee (*le Comité d'études*) which brought together French historians and geographers between 1917 and 1920 to prepare the territorial settlements after the anticipated victory of the

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Allied nations. Reading their work, supplemented by the study of positions taken by interest groups (Le Comité pour l'Asie française, L'Oeuvre d'Orient) makes it possible to identify the French vision in the Near East and in Turkey: French Christian imagination, influence, education, hospitals, priority rights for economic concessions, therefore maintenance of privileges and refusal of equality with the Turkish Republic. It means that treaties are not limited to the territorial dimension alone. For France, maintaining the already mentioned vectors of influence is central.

The Quai d'Orsay, the headquarters of the French Foreign Office, had a mentality of masters and ghosts. It was about dismantling what was left of the empire to better restore privileges. As the historian Jacques Tobie notes, "the stillborn masterpiece is, in this respect, the Treaty of Sèvres". There was still a colonial atmosphere in Paris. One proof? The first French Ambassador to Turkey was Albert Sarraut, former Minister of the Colonies (1925). He was appointed after a favorable agreement with France on the reopening of French schools.

### **The French interest in the region**

I propose to deal first with the work and influence of the "Study Committee" (Comité d'études). It was a reflection group created by France in February 1917 in order to contribute to the elaboration of its war aims during the First World War. It was set up at the instigation of Aristide Briand, President of the Council and Minister for Foreign Affairs, by the deputy for Paris Charles Benoist and had as president the historian Ernest Lavisse.

The famous geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache, the founder of the French school of geography, was its first vice-president. During the two and a half years of its activity, the Study Committee submitted to the French authorities nearly sixty memoirs dealing with the future eastern borders of France (Alsace, Lorraine, Sarre, Left Bank of the Rhine, Luxembourg), its allies in Europe (Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Italy, Poland, Romania, Greece) and the Middle East (Anatolia, Syria, Armenia). As requested by Briand, all the reports were made with a view to a military victory for France.

Part Six of the Memoirs is dedicated to Turkey of Europe and Asia with six chapters, namely:

- I. *Constantinople and the question of the Straits*, by C. Diehl (p. 685)

- II. *Constantinople and the Straits, their economic role*, by P. Masson (p. 709)
- III. *Territorial formation of an international Straits state*, by A. Demangeon (p. 751)
- IV. *Smyrna and Hellenism in Asia Minor*, by P. Masson (p. 775)
- V. *The Armenian question*, by A. Meillet (p. 825)
- VI. *The populations of Syria*, by A. Bernard (p. 845)

The Committee was certainly influential in the conception of the Treaty of Sèvres since it was inclined to support a rather maximalist position on the drawing of new borders, which were not always in line with French diplomacy. It had the same proactive position for Germany.<sup>1</sup>

Questions relating to the Ottoman Empire, which in Europe had been reduced to Eastern Thrace since the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, mainly dealt with the Straits. Their fate was separated from the Constantinople dossier: the control of the one did not imply the annexation of the other, as France insisted from the start of the war. In March 1915, discussions between allies formalized, not without haggling over the Rhineland, Russian claims to Constantinople, the Straits and Eastern Thrace. Indeed, it was an obsession of the Russian ally to revise the Paris Convention of 1856 in order to control the Straits and thus guarantee its right of passage to the Mediterranean. In order also to prevent the passage of a possible enemy, the recommended solution was that of an international authority to which all the Mediterranean States of the Entente would join, ensuring the neutrality of the Straits. The Committee clearly affirmed its concern to protect Russian commerce from any German threat.

Regarding more distant territories, in Asia Minor and the Middle East, the discussions focused on the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire which, for the first time, was an objective of the allies. The Committee recommended at least the following successor States: an international State of the Straits, and an independent Armenia, Greece inheriting Thrace and France the mandates already defined. Indeed, these developments are useful in evaluating on the questions of the East. In the first place lay the Sykes-Picot agreements of 1916

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1. The fact that the conclusions of the Comité d'études were not endorsed by the French decision-makers (with the major exception of Romania and Yugoslavia) explain the subsequent refusal of any reference to political geography by the French school of geography.

(recognized at most as a memorandum by the British) which delimited zones of influence and therefore broadly defined Allied war aims in the region.<sup>2</sup>

The French therefore wished to establish their protectorate on the North Syrian coast –including Beirut and Alexandretta– on the rich cereal plains of Cilicia and Armenia, as well as a zone of influence on Damascus, Aleppo and Mosul. With regard to Syria, which the Committee was particularly interested in during its last meetings, the members believed that “what we can and must seek in Syria is above all the development of our intellectual influence”. The prevailing view was that this intellectual influence was already much stronger there than in other French colonies as was noted by the French Society of Geography which has been advocating since 1916 the attribution of Syria to France.

The Charity of the schools of the East (*L'Oeuvre des écoles d'Orient*) was born after the Crimean War when, according to the Treaty of Paris, France was recognized as the protector of Christians in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> The association was intended to support French-speaking schools in Lebanon. It became involved in Lebanon after the massacre of Christians by the Druze (1860) and its director became a fervent defender of the Armenian cause. The issue of French schools became important in the negotiations for the Treaty of Lausanne.

To conclude on the French vision for the region under consideration (I shall name it: “Wider Near East”) it is necessary to point out again the role of the Committees to promote a “colonial atmosphere” more than to convince decision-makers on borders: the Committee of Studies (*Comité d'études*), the Committee of French Interests in the East (*Comité des intérêts française en Orient*) (some of whose members were directly linked to members of the former) and the Committee of French Asia (*Comité de l'Asie française*).<sup>4</sup> French claims were basically justified by the historical mission conferred on France by its traditional protectorate over the Christians of the East and its centuries-old presence in the Levant. Army officers and Catholic circles were included. Influence was yesterday what “soft-power” is today.

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2. Michel Foucher, “Sykes-Picot, un siècle plus tard. Mythes et réalités”, *Telos.eu*, 26 mai 2016.

3. Jacques Thobie, “De Constantinople à Ankara: d’un Empire piétiné à une République respectée (1920-1929)”, *Relations internationales*, 31: *Les nouvelles formes de la diplomatie au XXe siècle* (automne 1982).

4. Jean-Paul Chagnollaud et Sid-Ahmed Souiah, *Les frontières au Moyen-Orient* (Paris 2004).

**Rivalry between allies: a showdown to shape the new regional order**

Let us recall the specificities of the imperialist moment, to borrow the formula of Henry Laurens: the Ottoman space was collectively dominated by Europe, in an already ancient concern for European balance. The survival of the Ottoman Empire was paid for at the high price of the formation of the Balkan states (from the Greek revolt of 1821 to the second Balkan war of 1913), according to the principle of nationalities based on a process of ethno-religious homogenization.

The Sublime Porte played on the rivalries between European countries in an attempt to neutralize them. An example of this was given in 1903 when Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842-1918, deposed in 1909) told the French Ambassador that he regretted the perceived decline of French influence in Syria:

I think I should tell your Excellency, in an absolutely friendly way, that for some years now, I have noticed, not without regret, that while the influence of certain Powers has not ceased to grow in Syria, that of France has declined: this weakening is not without inspiring me with legitimate apprehensions. French influence in fact counterbalanced in this region that of all the other Powers combined and maintained, consequently, a balance which I consider necessary to the interests of my government, and which threatens to be destroyed today for the benefit of your rivals. I have, moreover, always considered without anxiety the action which France has taken in Syria, knowing that it was inspired by the sentiments of the French Government and the principle of its traditional policy towards my Empire, which consists in maintaining the status quo and the integrity of Ottoman territory. I am aware that the aim of your rivals is quite different: the example of Egypt is there to remind me of it.<sup>5</sup>

With Balkan independence, the instruments of collective hegemony – capitulations, protections, religious protectorates were reduced, and the option of a territorial division into zones of influence, i.e. areas of economic preponderance, was affirmed. The hegemonic projects became more national. So, which were the main priorities of the major European powers?

Britain's priorities were Palestine and Mesopotamia, the land and, soon, air bridge of the route to India, in addition to the Suez Canal, the Bab el Mandeb, and the oilfields of Mosul, in Northern Iraq (part of the Ottoman Empire), which were identified by Churchill as a crucial asset for the Royal Navy. Lon-

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5. Henry Laurens, *L'empire et ses ennemis. La question impériale dans l'histoire* (Paris 2009); see Chapter III.

don was able to convince the French to give up Mosul in exchange for a share in the new oil company.

Georges Clémenceau “ceded” Palestine and Mosul to David Lloyd George in 1918. This is a significant episode in the Franco-British rivalry over the Ottoman space and concerns the Mosul vilayet, which France considered a natural extension of its zone of influence in Syria. Lloyd George managed to link his support for Clémenceau and the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine –lost in 1871– by France to future French concessions in the Middle East. At a dinner in London on 1 December 1918, Georges Clémenceau, who had no interest in the Middle East but needed British support in the Peace Conference negotiations, asked about the British position.

“What should we discuss?” Lloyd George replied: “Mesopotamia and Palestine”. “Tell me what you want,” asked Clemenceau. “I want Mosul”. “You shall have it”, the Frenchman assured him, “anything else?” “Yes, I want Jerusalem too”. “You shall have it,” Clemenceau repeated, not without warning his host that his very imperialist Foreign Minister, Stephen Pichon, would create difficulties over Mosul. Georges Clémenceau soon came to regret having been so generous. “I have to tell you that from the day after the armistice, I found you the enemy of France”, Clemenceau accused Lloyd George, who replied: “Well, isn’t that our traditional policy?” The two allies in Europe had once again become rivals in the East. Clémenceau commented: “He has managed to turn me into a ‘Syrian’”.<sup>6</sup>

London created a corridor from Transjordan to Iraq, a prelude to the passage of an oil pipeline from Iraq to the Mediterranean (Haifa) and a series of stopovers for air links from London to Bombay via Gibraltar, Malta, Alexandria, Baghdad, Basra. Palestine was delimited on the basis of a biblical atlas and taking into account the fact that France did not want to have any Jewish colonies on its mandate territory.

These are interests considered vital by the British Foreign Office. At that time, the region was more important for London than for Paris. London had geostrategic objectives, in the context of the Empire, and therefore a global and operational vision.

We do not find an equivalent priority in France, where what mattered for economic and geopolitical reasons were: first, Indochina; second, Maghreb; third, West Africa. In the region, the French priorities were only Lebanon and

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6. James Barr, *A Line in the Sand. The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914-1948* (New York 2011), 63-64, 70.



Syria, that is the question of the Syrian borders which involved negotiating with Mustapha Kemal.

There was an agreement between both great powers that the key concept here is influence, more than direct costly possession. It directly inspired the famous secret Sykes-Picot agreements of 1916.<sup>7</sup> These agreements were not concretely applied except on 700 km of the current routes: the Jordan-Syria border and the western half of the Iraq-Syria dyad. Out of 14,000 km of effective borders in the Middle East and 29 dyads (common boundaries between two contiguous states), French intervention covered 16% of the routes, British intervention 26% and Russian intervention 14.5%. But the motivations of rivalry and the sharing of zones of influence continued to influence subsequent treaties. And we find the diplomat George Picot in direct negotiations with Kemal in 1921 over Syria, even if Picot's dream of an "integral Syria" from Mosul to Gaza did not come true. Clemenceau had "ceded" Palestine and Mosul to Lloyd George in 1918.

We must mention here the negotiation conducted directly between the French special envoy Franklin-Bouillon and Youssouf Kémal Bey, in June 1921, for two weeks in Ankara, to prepare an agreement signed on October 21. It was signed on an equal footing, putting an end to anything reminiscent of capitulations or zones of influence. According to Jacques Thobie, "it is the first agreement with an Entente power that conforms to the diplomatic line of the new Turkey".<sup>8</sup>

The next stage was concluded in Lausanne, and Ismet Pasha, head of the Turkish delegation, had to compromise on Mosul, on the status of the Straits, on the Sanjak of Alexandretta and the control of foreign trade, postponed until 1929.

## Conclusions

Moreover, not all borders in the East are of colonial origin and of late delimitation. Several major dyads owe nothing to exogenous interventions. The Peace of Zuhab of 1639 set the boundaries between the Persian and Ottoman empires, those of Iran with Turkey and Iraq. The Muslim empires had a very precise practice regarding borders and their fiscal functions. The intrinsic unity of the "Arab world", conceived in the unitary rhetoric (caliphate and ummah,

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7. Foucher, "Sykes-Picot".

8. Thobie, "De Constantinople à Ankara".

Arab nation and Sunnistan), was a dream, disappointed after 1916, due to the establishment of distinct states. Several authors, such as Henry Laurens,<sup>9</sup> believe that the borders resulting from external arbitrations have, over time, been consolidated, most often in the context of authoritarian political regimes.

The map of the region was profoundly altered. A new Franco-British regional order was established. Everything was decided in London and Paris, not in Arabia, which had been recognised as a Saudi Kingdom under Ibn Saoud against the Hussein family, and in Turkey, which had become a republic under Mustapha Kemal. As for Eleftherios Venizelos, although he had lost the elections in 1920, he participated in the 1923 treaty negotiations in order to transform the military defeat of 1922 into a diplomatic success (with Greece retaining Western Thrace and the islands of the north-eastern Aegean), and signed the treaty on behalf of Greece.

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9. Laurens, *L'empire et ses ennemis*.



**AN INEVITABLE CATASTROPHY?  
THE DICTATIONS OF GEOGRAPHY, THE *LONGUE DURÉE*  
AND THE GREEK OPTIONS OF 1915-22**

The study of grand strategies is always a difficult affair, especially when it also requires the examination of long-term trends and of sudden, violent transitions, as was the case of the Near East in the early twentieth century. In this chapter, it will be attempted to sketch the strategic options of the Greek governments with regard to their war aims in 1915-22.<sup>1</sup> To this end, however, it will be necessary briefly to review the Greek geography of that time, itself the product of long historical evolution.<sup>2</sup> It will be argued that the harsh geopolitical realities created for the Greek policy-makers a problem that could appear unsolvable. The Greek world consisted of small, largely coastal communities, scattered all over the Eastern Mediterranean, and lacking geographical continuity, backbone and strategic depth.<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres mirrored the

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1. Greece formally entered the war in 1917, but the issue of its war aims was being hotly debated since its invitation by the allies to participate at the Dardanelles campaign in early 1915. This issue caused the painful National Schism which burdened Greek politics both in the Asia Minor campaign of 1919-22 and in the decades that followed.

2. For the impact of geography in international history see mostly, Pierre Renouvin and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Introduction à l'histoire des relations internationales* (Paris 1966).

3. It is telling that even in post-1913 mainland Greece, there are very few areas (only in Thessaly and in Western Macedonia) that lie beyond the relatively short straight-line distance of 100 kms from the sea. See among others, Georgios S. Ploumidis, *Γεωγραφία της Ιστορίας του νεοελληνικού χώρου* [Geography of history of the Greek space] (Ioannina 1993); Elias Dimitrakopoulos, *Τα χερσαία σύνορα της Ελλάδας* [Greece's land bor-

attempt of Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos to provide an answer to this problem, but after his electoral defeat of November 1920 he was replaced by political forces who lacked his clear understanding of the international system, and their strategies proved inadequate. Thus, the chapter will also inevitably discuss whether the violent expulsion of the Greek populations of Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace was an inevitable readjustment of Greek geography, imposed by the harsh realities of geopolitics and international balances.

As a study of grand strategy, this analysis will focus on worldviews, perceptions (including threat perceptions) and aims; it will not provide a factual account of Greek foreign policy in this period. Similarly, the examination of the historical geography of the Greek world will attempt to point to some salient long-term trends, and it would be impossible to provide a full account of the complicated histories of its communities or political expressions. The term “Greek world”, preferred in this article over the simpler “Hellenism”, is admittedly (to some extent at least) a vague concept, as happens with all terms that refer to such long historical presences. In this analysis, the “Greek world” will define the Greek civilization as it has evolved through its many centuries of existence. It thus refers to cultural communities and does not imply or presuppose biological continuity.

### **The geopolitics of the Greek world and the dilemmas of the early twentieth century**

The region that was once called, in English-language bibliography, the “Near East” or the “Levant” does not exist today. Its unity (if ever there had been such a unity) has been broken, and a part of it, the Balkans, has become “Southeastern Europe”, while other parts have acquired different social characteristics and are usually described as the “Middle East”. This means that in our days and especially in the English language, beyond Europe there is an East which, uniquely, starts from its middle, simply because what in previous eras was “near” has

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ders] (Thessaloniki 1991); George-Stylios Prevelakis, *Τα ξύλινα τείχη: γεωπολιτική των ελληνικών δικτύων* [Wooden walls: geopolitics of the Greek networks] (Athens 2020); John S. Koliopoulos and Thanos Veremis, *Greece: the Modern Sequel. From 1831 to the Present* (London 2002), 327-347; Evanthi Hatzivassiliou, “Η γεωγραφία και οι μεταλλαγές της: μια χώρα στο σταυροδρόμι κόσμων” [Geography and its transformations: a country at a crossroads], in Panos Kazakos et. al., *Η Ελλάδα στον κόσμο της: μεταξύ ρεαλισμού και ανεδαφικότητας στο διεθνές σύστημα* [Greece in its world: between realism and impracticality in the international system] (Athens 2016), 103-125.

been transformed.<sup>4</sup> This older Near East went through a huge transformation in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Since the times of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC if not from the times of Cyrus the Great of Persia in the sixth century BC, namely for 2,500 years, this region had been governed on the model of imperial governance, under the Persian, Macedonian/Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman empires, while even the Crusader states and the Venetian *Stato da Màr*, although not formally imperial structures, had some similar (mostly, multiethnic) characteristics. But this model was abandoned in the late modern era. This transition from imperial governance to the nation-state was a change of gigantic proportions that had started earlier but peaked in the years 1912-23. The Greek world needed to adjust to this momentous development.

Since early antiquity, the Greek communities tended to develop in a very particular geographical pattern: they usually controlled small coastal areas and remained, at least initially, politically and militarily viable thanks to their supremacy over the poorly organized peoples of the interior.<sup>5</sup> The imperial experience after Alexander's death in 323 BC did not fundamentally change this geopolitical tendency of the Greek world. The Greek civilization managed to use the wider multiethnic contexts of empires in order to take advantage of its cultural radiation, a form of "soft power", to remain viable in its coastal bases and even, under the aegis of Roman authority, to Hellenize larger communities of the interior, especially Asia Minor during late antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Thus, imperial governance was an umbrella under which the Greek world continued to follow patterns of survival and development that had largely been shaped in the past.

Admittedly, during the Byzantine years it appeared that this model was no longer needed, if only because the Eastern Roman Empire was solidly entrenched in the huge landmass of Asia Minor, from the Taurus mountains to the coast of Pontus. Yet, first the arrival of the Slavs in the Balkans, and mostly the

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4. The term *Proche Orient* still survives in the French language, although even in French it usually describes what in English is called the Middle East.

5. See among many others, Wolfgang Schuller, *Griechische Geschichte* (München 1991); Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making, 1200-479 BC* (London 1996); J. Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas: Their Early Colonies and Trade* (London 1964).

6. See for example, G. W. Bowersock, "Οι ελληνικοί πολιτικοί θεσμοί κατά την περίοδο της Ρωμαιοκρατίας" [Greek political institutions during Roman rule], and Th. Sarikakis, "Μικρά Ασία" [Asia Minor], in [Ekdotike Athenon], *Ιστορία του Έλληνικού Έθνους* [History of the Greek Nation], vol. 6 (Athens 1976), 112-137 and 212-225. See also analysis of developments per geographical area in many other chapters in the same volume.

loss of the heartland of the Anatolian plateau in the eleventh century, followed by extensive conversions of the population to Islam from the thirteenth century, meant that the Greek world slowly reverted to its fundamentally coastal character.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in the history of the Greek world and in terms of geopolitics, the Byzantine years represent an interval – a long one, but still an interval – that did not fundamentally reverse its more permanent characteristics. As has been perceptively noted for the early modern Greek world, its historical boundaries “do not coincide [...] automatically (‘mechanically’) with larger geographical units”; on the contrary, the Greeks now used the new commercial roads, maritime or through land, as well as the imperial or quasi-imperial contexts of the Ottomans and the Venetians to develop their economic activities.<sup>8</sup>

Inevitably, this idiosyncratic geographical development was mirrored in the political organization of the Greek world. Professor George Prevelakis has noted that, contrary to the tree-like organization of Rome or of modern Western Europe (involving a political backbone and a hierarchically superior decision-making centre), the Greek world had thus acquired a “galactic” organization, with no political centre and with communities dispersed in the Eastern Mediterranean (and elsewhere). The advantage of this organization was that one of its parts could be destroyed without affecting the viability of the others, whereas in the case of the tree-like organization, the destruction of the trunk would entail the demise of the whole structure. The disadvantage, of course, was that a galactic-type structure never deals with an opponent with its full strength, if only because there is no decision-making centre to coordinate the activity of all its parts; it is also more susceptible than the tree-like structure to internal disagreements.<sup>9</sup>

However, after two and a half millennia of imperial governance in the Eastern Mediterranean, all these configurations tended to change during the entry into the era of the nation-state. The ascent of the other Balkan nationalisms in the nineteenth century – first the Serb and then the Bulgarian nationalism, and lastly the Turkish – radically changed the scene.<sup>10</sup> After the mid-nineteenth

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7. See among others, Johannes Koder, *Der Lebensraum der Byzantiner: Historisch-geographischer Abriss ihres mittelalterlichen Staates im östlichen Mittelmeerraum* (Graz 1984); Speros Vryonis Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley 1971).

8. Ploumidis, *Γεωγραφία της Ιστορίας*, 36-38, 60-67.

9. Georges Prévelakis, “Les espaces de la diaspora hellénique et le territoire de l’État grec”, *L’espace géographique*, 23 (1994), 193-202.

10. On the rise of Balkan nationalisms and the dilemmas of Greek policy, see Doug-

century, the Greek world, and especially the leaderships of the new-born Greek kingdom found themselves in a desperate situation: the Greek communities were spread across a huge area from the Adriatic to the Pontus in the southern coast of the Black Sea, and from Macedonia through Asia Minor to Cyprus; there was no geographical continuity and no hinterland; there were now multiple opponents (the Ottoman Empire and the rising Balkan states, primarily Bulgaria); and the means of the Greek state were clearly inadequate to act in all these areas. On top of that, it was becoming clear that in the new epoch, if an area did not become part of the Greek state but was included in another “hostile” nation-state, its Greek population would find themselves in the unenviable position of a relatively rich and targeted minority, the survival of which could be very uncertain in a country that would try to nationalize its economy and its society. The expulsion by Bulgaria of the Greeks of Eastern Rumelia (Southern Bulgaria) in the first decade of the twentieth century, at the time of the Greek-Bulgarian confrontation over Macedonia, spoke for itself.<sup>11</sup> This was a textbook example of a desperate situation in the history of international relations: Athens suffered both from overstretch and from the lack of adequate means to accomplish its extensive aims. Moreover, it was pressed by the maximalism not only of the public opinion within the Greek state, but also by the expectations of numerous Greek communities outside the borders, who were waiting for –indeed, demanding– their liberation, often ignoring the fundamentals of realist policies.

Under the leadership of Eleftherios Venizelos during the Balkan Wars, Greece proved almost unexpectedly successful, acquiring Epirus, Greek Macedonia, the Eastern Aegean islands and Crete.<sup>12</sup> But the Balkan Wars were part

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las Dakin, *The Unification of Greece, 1770-1923* (London 1972); M. Th. Laskaris, *Τὸ Ἀνατολικὸν ζήτημα, 1800-1923* [The Eastern Question], vol. 1 (1800-1878) (Thessaloniki 1978), 228-301; Evangelos Kofos, *Greece and the Eastern Crisis, 1875-1878* (Thessaloniki 1975); Spyros Sfetas, *Ελληνοβουλγαρικές αναταράξεις, 1880-1908: ανάμεσα στη ρητορική της διμερούς συνεργασίας και στην πρακτική των εθνικών ανταγωνισμών* [Greek-Bulgarian upheavals, 1880-1908: between the rhetoric of bilateral cooperation and the practice of national antagonisms] (Thessaloniki 2008).

11. Spyridon G. Ploumidis, *Εθνοτική συμβίωση στα Βαλκάνια: Έλληνες και Βούλγαροι στη Φιλιππούπολη, 1878-1914* [Ethnic coexistence in the Balkans: Greeks and Bulgarians in Philippoupolis] (Athens 2006).

12. Constantinos Svolopoulos, *Η ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική* [Greek foreign policy], vol. 1 (Athens 1992), 70-74 and 88-93; *ibidem*, *Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος: 12 μελετήματα* [Eleftherios Venizelos: 12 studies] (Athens 1999), 51-68; Helen Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *Greece and the Balkan Imbrogio: Greek Foreign Policy, 1911-1913* (Athens 1995).

of an ongoing transformation, not the happy end of the road. The eruption of the Great War would bring all these dilemmas to the forefront, if only because it raised the possibility of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and its succession, namely, the crux of the Eastern Question. This would also create huge dilemmas about the future of its Greek communities.

In this context, one does not need to be an extreme realist to pose some simple questions. Were these Greek communities viable in the new era that was dawning? Is it perhaps possible that some or many of them were simply untenable and doomed to expulsion? And if so, which were these parts of the Greek world that were the least viable? For example, Pontus on the southern Black Sea coast, an area with a long presence of Greeks, was too far from the Greek state, while the Greeks did not form a majority of the population and therefore could not claim the creation of their own nation-state according to the principle of self-determination; the Pontic Greeks were in deep trouble from the moment their major supporter, tsarist Russia, collapsed in 1917-18. Ionia – the area of Smyrna/Izmir – was close to the Greek territories, but it was difficult to believe that its Greek population would be able to survive if it remained under Ottoman sovereignty, especially after the start of its persecution by the Young Turks as early as 1914.<sup>13</sup> A similar problem could appear in the case of the Greeks of Constantinople/Istanbul, who were not the majority of the city's population, but lived in a place which had been central to Greek irredentist aspirations since the time of its fall to the Ottomans in 1453. Cyprus, on the contrary, was seen by the Greek policy makers in a different light: under the most liberal of the great powers, Britain, Athens considered that Cyprus' Greek population did not face an existential danger and could wait. Similar was the case of the Greeks of the Dodecanese islands, under Italian control since 1912.

### **“Never alone”: the grand strategy of Eleftherios Venizelos, 1915-20**

Even at the time of his triumph in the Balkan Wars, the Greek Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, knew that the game was still on. Bulgaria kept harbour-

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13. Yiannis G. Mourellos, “The 1914 Persecutions and the First Attempt at an Exchange of Minorities between Greece and Turkey”, *Balkan Studies*, 26 (1985), 389-413; Paschalis M. Kitromilides and Alexis Alexandris, “Ethnic Survival, Nationalism and Forced Migration: The Historical Demography of the Greek Community of Asia Minor at Close of the Ottoman Era”, *Bulletin of the Centre of Asia Minor Studies*, 5 (1984), 9-44.



ing ambitions for Greek Macedonia. The Ottoman Empire wanted to retake the Eastern Aegean islands, and planned a war with Greece; in fact, the Ottomans had just purchased two large super-dreadnoughts from Britain; if these warships reached the region, they would have reduced the whole Greek navy to a coastal defence force, unable to dare leave its harbour.<sup>14</sup>

It says much about the grand strategy of Venizelos that at that time, until mid-1914, he tried at all costs to avoid a Greek-Turkish war: in order to appease the Ottomans, he even accepted the prospect of a voluntary exchange of the Muslims of Greece with the rural Greek population of Western Asia Minor.<sup>15</sup> Venizelos always had a priority in his foreign policy: never to go it alone; never to engage in duels, especially against opponents who were either militarily more powerful (Bulgaria) or larger or both as was the Ottoman Empire. Venizelos always tried to face opponents as a member of a great international coalition. It was essentially a strategy of a small state, aware of its weakness. Thus, he joined the First Balkan War on the side of the coalition of the Balkan states – four against one, the Ottoman Empire; in 1913, realizing that Bulgaria was discontented with its gains, he concluded a military alliance with Serbia in order not to face the Bulgarian attack alone; eventually, the Greeks and the Serbs were also joined by the Romanians and the Ottomans, resulting once more in a struggle of four against one, Bulgaria.<sup>16</sup> True to this policy, Venizelos would not face the Ottomans alone until mid-1914.

This was why the outbreak of the Great War was so important. Venizelos believed that the Entente was going to win the war since it enjoyed a preponderance of resources, both human and material; and it was obvious that the Ottoman Empire was going to join the Central Empires, as it did almost immediately, in November 1914. Venizelos thus saw the prospect of facing the Ottoman Empire not in terms of a duel, but as a member of a grand coalition, in the context of a world war. Now, claiming Ionia seemed to be a *realistic* policy.

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14. Zisis Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy and Policy, 1910-1919* (London 2005), 21-22 and 83-87.

15. Mourellos, “The 1914 Persecutions”.

16. For an analysis of the “never alone” policy, see among others, Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, “Ο Πρώτος Παγκόσμιος Πόλεμος και η ‘Εγγύς Ανατολή’: η ανατροπή των γεωπολιτικών δεδομένων του ελληνικού κόσμου και τα διλήμματα της προσαρμογής” [The First World War and the “Near East”: the upsetting of geopolitical realities and the dilemmas of adjustment], in Athanassios Markopoulos and Evanthis Hatzivassiliou (eds), *1914-1924, the Years of Upheaval: Europe and Greece* (Athens 2017), 145-166.

The Great War raised the prospect of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; this could happen irrespective of Greek desires or initiatives. Thus, the future of the Greek communities of the wider region would now be decided. Moreover, Venizelos held that entry into the war on the side of the Entente would offset the danger of a postwar emergence of a strong Bulgaria with hegemonistic and revisionist ambitions in the Balkans. Therefore, Venizelos immediately supported the prospect of Greece's entry into the war on the side of the Entente. The problem was that King Constantine and his supporters reached exactly the opposite conclusions. Constantine, a soldier who had been trained in Germany, did not believe that the German army could be defeated in the battlefield, a projection that at that time seemed reasonable, given that the Germans managed to defeat the Russians and even in March 1918 were launching an all-out attack to win the war. According to Constantine, siding with the Entente meant that Greece would find itself in the side of the vanquished in the war. The disagreement between Venizelos and the King was arguably unbridgeable, the dilemmas were existential, and decisions had to be made by a small country, quickly in the midst of a world war, and as huge forces converged in the region. This was why this disagreement resulted in the onset of the National Schism which became a zero-sum game between the two camps. They both cared for the survival of the nation, they both supported the *Megali Idea*, but they both thought that the other side's policy would bring about a national disaster.<sup>17</sup>

Last but not least, there was a huge difference of worldviews between the two sides. This is equally important in order to evaluate Venizelos' methodology in international affairs. Venizelos had to make hard decisions. Some of them entailed the permanent loss of a territory, a loss that he could accept as necessary in order to acquire other areas, perhaps more important or more attainable. Venizelos pursued a kind of Napoleonic strategy: all his available resources had to come to bear in the right timing and on a single point, the one that would determine the outcome of the conflict. Greece did not have the means to pursue multiple aims simultaneously; if it tried to do so, it would simply duplicate the mistake of Bulgaria in 1912, the most powerful Balkan state

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17. For the dilemmas of this era see among others, George Leon [=G. B. Leontaritis], *Greece and the Great Powers, 1914-1917* (Thessaloniki 1974); Yiannis G. Mourélos, *L'intervention de la Grèce dans la Grande Guerre, 1916-1917* (Athènes 1983); Giorgos Th. Mavrogordatos, *1915: ο Εθνικός Διχασμός* [1915: the National Schism] (Athens 2015); Costas M. Stamatopoulos, *De la royauté hellénique* (Athènes 2017); Antonis Klapsis and Manolis Koumas, *Ο Εθνικός Διχασμός* [The National Schism] (Athens 2019).

militarily, which had tried to get both great prizes of the Balkans, Constantinople and Thessaloniki, and had ended up by losing both.<sup>18</sup> Only if Greece concentrated its limited resources on certain fields – those that were deemed more important or more feasible – could it aspire to succeed. This is something that Venizelos had done in previous instances: for example in 1912, during the Balkan wars, when he ordered the army to turn eastwards and take Thessaloniki (before the arrival of the Bulgarians), and the Serbs managed to get Bitol; in 1913 he effectively relinquished Northern Epirus (Southern Albania) in order to keep the islands of the Eastern Aegean; in 1915 he was even ready to discuss cession of Greek Eastern Macedonia to Bulgaria in order to secure promises for compensation in Ionia (it could be argued that in that case he was trying to call Bulgaria's bluff that it would join the allies, but it was still a very risky policy). In 1919 he had to make a choice between Smyrna or Constantinople. He understood that he had to decide, otherwise he would lose all.<sup>19</sup> His readiness to make such hard choices embittered even some of his idealist admirers. One of his earlier supporters, disappointed by Venizelos' stance in the 1931 Cyprus revolt, the Cypriot-born Alexis Kyrou, later wrote:

Equally strange was the ease with which the undoubtedly most dynamic of the leaders of modern Hellenism, was drawn, in the pursuit of grandiose politics, to play with parts of the national territory, as if they were chess pawns.<sup>20</sup>

But the anti-Venizelists were idealists and maximalists and could not bring themselves to come to terms with permanent losses. Of particularly symbolic importance was the issue of Constantinople, the crux of Greece's irredentist dreams. Venizelos understood that this was a place of high strategic and symbolic value internationally, and anyway the Greeks were not the majority of the city's population; he realized that the allies were not going to give it to him. Thus, he did not claim it even during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919-20; he opted to go for Smyrna. Constantine, on the contrary, was the king reputed to be destined to "retake" Constantinople; he had been proclaimed king by "his"

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18. Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London 2000).

19. For an overall assessment of Venizelos' diplomatic strategy in these years see also Michael Llewellyn Smith, "Venizelos' Diplomacy, 1910-23: From Balkan Alliance to Greek-Turkish Settlement" in Paschalis M. Kitromilides (ed.), *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship* (Edinburgh 2008), 134-192.

20. Alexis A. Kyrou, *Όνειρα και πραγματικότητα: χρόνια διπλωματικής ζωής (1923-1953)* [Dreams and realities: years of diplomatic life] (Athens 1972), 6.

army in 1913, as “Constantine XII”, the successor of Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologus who had fallen on the walls of the city in 1453. One of the reasons that Constantine was skeptical about siding with the Entente was that in the scenario of its victory Russia would surely acquire Constantinople. This difference of worldviews will also appear below.

### Three concentric circles: Venizelos and the Treaty of Sèvres

Venizelos’ activity during the Paris Peace Conference once more reflected his permanent strategic priority of never going it alone. His decision to send the army to Smyrna in spring 1919 was based on the ability of his country to secure the support or at least the acquiescence of many great powers. Still, the basis of his decision lay in the hard reality that there was little prospect for the survival of the Greek populations of Ionia if the Greek state did not expand there.<sup>21</sup> In this context, his decision arguably was inevitable: if the victorious Greece of 1919, with the support of the allies, did not go to Smyrna against a defeated Turkey that was being dismembered, the Greek population of the area would be destroyed and everybody – both in Greece and internationally – would have spent the following years wondering about the strategic myopia or stupidity of Venizelos.

But there was more in this than a decision to send the army to Smyrna. As a liberal, Venizelos was not a fatalist. He thought that the victorious Greece of 1919 should attempt to ensure the survival of many of these Greek communities, although this was not going to be an easy task. In the Paris Peace Conference, he put forward such a comprehensive plan. Venizelos’ memorandum on the Greek national claims in the Peace Conference (December 1918), and the provisions of the Treaties of Neuilly and Sèvres (with Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire respectively) depict on the map the issues of Greek interest.<sup>22</sup>

In 1918-20, Thrace, Eastern and Western, was next to Greek territory; under the sovereignty of defeated powers (Bulgaria in Western and the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Thrace), it could be claimed by Greece. Similarly, Ionia

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21. N. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (Thessaloniki 1979); Constantinos Svolopoulos, *Η απόφαση για την επέκταση της ελληνικής κυριαρχίας στη Μικρά Ασία: κριτική επαναψηλάφηση* [The decision on the extension of Greek sovereignty in Asia Minor: a critical reevaluation] (Athens 2009).

22. On Venizelos’ memorandum, see also Svolopoulos, *Η ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική*, 142-145.

– the Zone of Smyrna, although insecurely delineated from the interior of Asia Minor – could be claimed by Athens. The Dodecanese and Cyprus, island territories under the control of Western/victorious powers, could not be directly claimed. Yet, in the future a Greece with its power elevated could aspire to get them. In Constantinople the Greek community and the Patriarchate would survive not through annexation to Greece, but thanks to a, practically, international regime. As for Pontus, the geopolitically most difficult case due to its great distance from the other areas, the survival of its Greek communities would come through its inclusion into the Greater Armenian state that was to be set up.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, there were three concentric circles in Venizelos' planning. In the inner circle there were areas that could be incorporated in the Greek state: Thrace and Ionia. In the middle circle there were areas which Greece could hope to acquire, if it managed to implement the Treaty of Sèvres and become a regional power: Dodecanese and Cyprus; thus the Greek-Italian treaty on the Dodecanese, concluded together with Sèvres, provided that the Dodecanese would be given to Greece with the exception of Rhodes, which would also be ceded to Greece if the British decided to give Cyprus to Athens.<sup>24</sup> And in the outer circle there were areas which Greece would not acquire, but it could hope to protect their Greek communities functionally, if it managed to implement the Treaty and become a regional power: Northern Epirus (Southern Albania), Pontus, Constantinople.

Was it then that Greece bit more than it could chew? There are people – officials of that time or scholars of today – who suggest that Venizelos was essentially an opportunist who embarked on a venture that exceeded Greece's means; the more successful he was in the Paris Peace Conference, the more overstretched his country was becoming, and the more he was trapping Greece into an impossible situation.<sup>25</sup> Thus, for example, he ignored the strategic objections that had been put forward in 1915 by the then acting head of the General Staff, Colonel Ioannis Metaxas, who had indicated that a small bridgehead in the huge landmass of Asia Minor would not be tenable either economical-

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23. On options for Pontus, see the analysis in Eleftheria Kyfonidou, *Ποντιακό Ζήτημα: στρατηγικές επιλογές και αδιέξοδα, 1917-1922* [The Pontic question: strategic options and dead-ends] (Ioannina 2022).

24. Svolopoulos, *Η ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική*, 154-155.

25. See mostly, Costas M. Stamatoropoulos, *1922: Πώς φτάσαμε στην καταστροφή* [1922: How we reached the catastrophe] (Athens 2020).

ly or militarily, as there was no natural border with the hinterland, while the rivers in this area flow from East to West towards the sea, providing routes of invasion rather than a natural border; Metaxas had also noted that throughout history, it was the owner of the central Anatolian plateau who invariably and inevitably managed to impose their rule on the coast.<sup>26</sup> This is the thesis of the “inevitable disaster”. However, it is important to keep in mind that in Venizelos’ thinking, the implementation of the Treaty was fully dependent on the measure of international support that Greece would be able to muster. It was not going to be easy; but he thought it was not impossible. This, on the other hand, invited another important argument that the Greek leaderships, including Venizelos, grossly overestimated the potential value of their great power connections, mostly with Britain, in undertaking such a difficult venture.<sup>27</sup>

Let us then go back to Prevelakis’ analysis of the Greek geography and political organization, which seems to be fully vindicated by the developments of 1915-22. It could be argued that Venizelos’ Athens tried to act as a “national centre” in an attempt to coordinate (and, *wherever possible*, to safeguard) what Prevelakis has described as the “galactic” structure of the Greek world. Venizelos realized that the Greek world could not, in its entirety, be turned into a conventional nation-state or tree-like political organization. His strategy arguably was the only way to safeguard the “open” nature of its organization (which we now term “galactic”). Equally importantly, another salient characteristic of this “galactic” organization also appeared in these years, namely, its difficulty to coordinate and its tendency to produce internal disagreements. Thus, Venizelos had to implement this strategy in the face of strong demands (more often than not, unrealistic) from parts of the Greek world who wanted the “national centre” to prioritize them. Thus, he had to brush aside calls for the creation of a Pontic state which would be supported militarily by Greece (a task certainly beyond Athens’ capabilities).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the Greek Cypriots sent a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference demanding from him to claim Cyprus. The Greek

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26. Athens, Benaki Museum, Historical Archives, Eleftherios Venizelos Archive, file 312-078, Metaxas, memorandum to Venizelos [On Asia Minor], 14 January 1915; also available in <http://www.venizelosarchives.gr/rec.asp?id=35677>, accessed 23 December 2022.

27. See mostly, Sotiris Rizas, *Το τέλος της Μεγάλης Ιδέας: ο Βενιζέλος, ο αντιβενιζελισμός και η Μικρά Ασία* [The end of the Megali Idea: Venizelos, anti-Venizelism and Asia Minor] (Athens 2015).

28. Kyfonidou, *Ποντιακό Ζήτημα*.

Cypriots failed to understand that Venizelos could not confront Britain (on the contrary, he needed London's support for his other aims). Mostly, the Greek Cypriots, inexperienced in international affairs, evidently failed to understand that in Paris the allies were preparing peace treaties with the *vanquished* of the Great War, and that – last time that Venizelos had looked – Greece had not defeated Britain in the war, in order to make such a claim. Venizelos advised them not to place their claim in the Peace Conference, but to discuss it with the British authorities in London – which was seen, not inaccurately, as a rejection of their demand.<sup>29</sup> Once more, therefore, he had to make harsh choices. It is indeed interesting that “complaints” about Venizelos’ decisions on these two territories are being voiced even today in public discourse. The “galactic” nature of the Greek world is fully evident in the intra-Greek deliberations of that crucial era.

### The anti-Venizelist lack of a grand strategy

However, Venizelos lost the general elections of November 1920 which he proclaimed in the certainty that he would win, immediately after his diplomatic triumph in the Treaty of Sèvres. His electoral defeat was followed by a huge disaster for Greek policy, namely, the definite breakup of the large international coalition which Venizelos had relied upon in order to claim Smyrna.

The anti-Venizelist leaders, primarily Dimitrios Gounaris,<sup>30</sup> were prominent, experienced politicians. However, they lacked Venizelos’ comprehensive understanding of the international system. When they won the November 1920 elections, they believed that they would retain international support for the Asia Minor endeavour.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, it was unthinkable for them

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29. Christina-Evelyn Christodoulidou, “Η Κυπριακή Πρεσβεία στη Διάσκεψη της Ειρήνης, 1918-1920” [The Cypriot mission to the Peace Conference], in Giorgos Kazamias and Petros Papapolygiou (eds), *Ο Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος και η Κύπρος* [Venizelos and Cyprus] (Athens, 2008), 129-153; Robert Holland and Diana Markides, *The British and the Hellenes: Struggles for Mastery in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1850-1960* (Oxford 2006), 180. It should be noted that Italy had indicated since 1912 that it did not regard its possession of the Dodecanese as permanent, and therefore Venizelos could discuss their status with Rome. Thus, there was a crucial difference of international status with Cyprus.

30. The best analysis is Marianna Christopoulou, *Δημήτριος Γούναρης. Πολιτική Βιογραφία* [Dimitrios Gounaris. A political biography] (Athens 2017).

31. See among others, Spyridon G. Ploumidis, *Η “σιδηρά” δεκαετία: οι εθνικοί πόλεμοι της Ελλάδας (1912-1922)* [The “iron” decade: Greece’s national wars] (Athens 2022).

not to restore Constantine to the throne, the King who had been deposed and exiled in 1917 by the foreign allies of the “tyrant” Venizelos; this was a matter of principle for them. They disregarded the official warning of the allies not to bring Constantine back. By doing so, they alienated the French, and they gave an opportunity to the Italians. They caused the definite dissolution of Venizelos’ great international coalition, or at least they gave the others the pretext to do so, something that Venizelos would have never done. Last but not least, the anti-Venizelists, as idealists, were also maximalists: they could not make hard choices; they would try to claim all, and they would end up by losing all.

Thus, by early 1921, the anti-Venizelist government discovered that Greece was becoming internationally isolated and economically weak, while the emerging opponent, Mustafa Kemal’s nationalist movement, was gaining strength and international support.<sup>32</sup> It was at that time that they decided to respond by launching a large-scale military offensive. Their aim was not to conquer and retain the extensive areas all the way to the gates of Ankara (with negligible Greek populations) which they occupied. The aim was to trap and destroy Kemal’s forces. This was the only way for them to secure a military victory and thus restore the international coalition of which they themselves had caused the dissolution. In other words, they tried to deal with the dead end which they had created, by undertaking an impossible endeavour. Kemal’s forces would not remain immobile and get caught. Napoleon had not succeeded in this game in Russia, and Gounaris was less likely to succeed in Anatolia. The Greek army rushed forward and gave successive battles in pursuit of the ghost of Kemal’s forces, who were always able to fade behind the horizon, and finally to deny Ankara to their opponent.<sup>33</sup> But even if the Greek army had taken Ankara, Kemal could continue his struggle, and the Greek army would have nowhere to go. In other words, the 1921 offensive was a desperate search for a “decisive battle”, a *deus ex machina* that would have destroyed or fatally disorganized the opponent, and would thus restore favourable international conditions. Usually, such a strategy is a sign of weakness: the party that pursues it tries to reverse a correlation of forces that becomes increasingly unfavourable.

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32. Theodosios Karvounarakis, *The Third Conference of London (February-March 1921) and the Greco-Turkish Dispute over Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace* (Athens 2008).

33. See mostly, Michael Llewellyn-Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor, 1919-22* (London 1973); on the military operations, see Nikos Kanellopoulos, *Πέραν του Σαγγαρίου: η κορύφωση της Μικρασιατικής Εκστρατείας* [Beyond Sangarios: the peak of the Asia Minor Campaign] (Athens 2020).



But all these considerations simply point to the fact that the anti-Venizelist governments suffered from a fatal lack of a coherent international strategy. To a large extent, their problem was self-inflicted, and no other solution was available than a military operation of an enormous scale, which was suggested by their military; they had little understanding of the realities of war, as they admitted in their private meetings; and even their most able member with military experience, Ioannis Metaxas, was warning them that they were making a big mistake even in their tactical planning of the operation.<sup>34</sup> In the end, the Greek army remained in its forward positions, overstretched and stagnated for about one year from mid-1921 until mid-1922, away from its bases and easy prey to the final Turkish attack of August 1922. It was the inability to understand geography, modern warfare and the international system, together with the deep National Schism, that brought about the final outcome of 1922.

## Conclusions

Historians rarely accept arguments about inevitability, but in the Greek case of 1922 many of them could be tempted to do so. The geography of the Greek world suggested that it would be extremely difficult to safeguard all these communities in the Eastern Mediterranean in the era of the nation-state. After all, even in the post-war era, other communities such as the Istanbul or the Alexandria Greeks finally fled from nation-states trying to nationalize their economies and their societies. The “Levant” that had created or sustained them was no longer there.

Still, in 1919-20 Venizelos had devised a plan which, he hoped, could provide for a different historical path. He hoped to achieve a strategic upgrading of his country by the acquisition of two pivotal areas, Eastern Thrace and the Zone of Smyrna, by the emergence of a strategic partner, Armenia, and by turning Greece into a regional power which would be able to protect those Greek communities who would not be included in the Greek state. Of course, Venizelos is reputed to have constantly been excessively optimistic; his plan required that Greece would gain and retain a large measure of international support, which could not be taken for granted. One cannot assume that his plan would have worked even if he had remained in power after 1920. But one is also tempted to assume that Venizelos would not have lost international support as crushingly

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34. [Ιωάννης Μεταξάς], *Τὸ προσωπικό του ἡμερολόγιο* [Metaxas: his personal diary], ed. by Ch. Christidis, vol. 3 (Athens 1952), diary entries of 25 and 29 March 1921, 71-101.

as his political opponents did; and if he had remained in power, even if Greece lost, it would not have lost in this way. This, I think, is as far as a historian can go, discussing the question of inevitability.



## ITALY'S POLICY TOWARDS THE GREEK-TURKISH CONFLICT

In order to analyse Italy's policy towards the conflict between Greece and the Turkish forces of Mustafa Kemal during the immediate post-First World War period that ended with the signing of the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, it is of some help to regard as a starting point Italy's war against the Ottoman Empire for the conquest of Libya.<sup>1</sup> Actually some authors have argued that Italy contributed to the crisis which led to the First World War when, in October 1911, the Giolitti government declared war on Turkey and invaded the last Ottoman territories in Northern Africa. The Italian-Turkish war would have contributed in weakening the Empire and in the creation of the Balkan alliance that led to the Balkan wars and the end of Turkish presence in the European continent, so fuelling further tensions in the Balkans, especially the increasing rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

The collapse of the Ottoman empire in Europe favoured Italy's ambitions in the Balkans, especially as far the new independent Albanian state was concerned, but such aspiration clashed with Vienna's expansionist policy in the area. In spite of that Italy played no relevant role in the diplomatic process that was at the origins of the First World War, due to the murder of the heir to the Hapsburg throne, Franz Ferdinand, at Sarajevo.<sup>2</sup> In August 1914 the Italian government, led by the conservative Liberal Antonio Salandra, choose neutrality. Very early, however, Sidney Sonnino, who in October 1914 had been appointed

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1. For a general overview, see Fiorella Perrone, *La politica estera italiana e la dissoluzione dell'impero ottomano (1914-1923)* (Lecce 2010).

2. See the scant references to Italy in well-known studies such as: Sean McMeekin, *July 1914. Countdown to War* (London 2014); Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London 2013).

Foreign Minister, due to the death of Antonino di San Giuliano,<sup>3</sup> started secret contacts with both the Central Empires and the Triple Entente in order to bargain Italy's participation in the war on one side or the other. The members of the Entente were ready to offer Italy significant territorial and political concessions. The final outcome of the negotiations was the secret London Treaty, signed in April 1915. Most clauses of the agreement dealt with Italy's goal of imposing its sovereignty over the Italian speaking territories of the Hapsburg Empire (Trentino, Trieste, Dalmatia and the Istrian peninsula) and of achieving a hegemonic role in the Adriatic and Albania. But Rome's ambitions were not limited to the Adriatic and the Balkans, as they also involved the Eastern Mediterranean. Due to the Lausanne Treaty of 1912 which had marked Italy's victory over Turkey, Italy had achieved the control of Libya, though, at least formally, the Ottoman Empire still had some religious and juridical rights on this territory; moreover, during the war, Italian troops had occupied the Dodecanese islands, including Rhodes. According to treaty, Italy would maintain control of these islands till the complete evacuation of the last Turkish military advisers who were stationed in Libya and helped the Arab guerrilla forces, who were opposing the Italian colonial rule. This situation was not yet solved in 1915.

Last but not least, the Lausanne Peace Treaty had granted Italy certain economic rights in the Anatolian region of Antalya.<sup>4</sup> Due to the London Treaty, Italy was committed to declare war, not only on Austria-Hungary and Germany, but also on Turkey. As compensation at the end of the conflict, Italy would have received full sovereignty over Libya (article 10) and the Dodecanese (article 8). Of some relevance was article 9, which confirmed Antalya as an Italian sphere of influence. The borders of this zone would be determined through an agreement with Britain and France. If, in case of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain, France and Russia would have occupied Turkish territories, Italy would have a right to the occupation of the Mediterranean coastal areas which bordered the region of Antalya.<sup>5</sup>

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3. On Salandra, see Federico Lucarini, *La carriera di un gentiluomo. Antonio Salandra e la ricerca di un liberalismo nazionale* (Bologna 2012); on Sonnino, see Pier Luigi Ballini (ed.), *Sonnino e il suo tempo (1914-1922)* (Soveria Mannelli 2011); on di San Giuliano see Giampaolo Ferraioli, *Politica e diplomazia in Italia tra XIXe XX secolo. Vita di Antonino di San Giuliano (1852-1914)* (Soveria Mannelli 2007).

4. Nicola Labanca, *La guerra italiana per la Libia (1911-1931)* (Bologna 2012); Luca Micheletta and Andrea Ungari (eds), *L'Italia e la guerra di Libia cent'anni dopo* (Rome 2013).

5. Antonio Varsori, *Radioso maggio. Come l'Italia entrò in guerra* (Bologna 2015). On

On the 20th of August 1915 Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire, but there was no direct Italian involvement in the military operations against Turkey, with the exception of the skirmishes with the Arab guerrilla forces in Libya, which, however, compelled the Italians to limit themselves to the control of some coastal towns, leaving the rest of the Libyan territory to the Arab forces.<sup>6</sup> In spite of what had been agreed in the London Treaty Italy declared war on the German Empire only in 1916, so irritating the powers of the Entente, which regarded Italy's involvement in the war as a limited conflict between Rome and Vienna. In the meantime Britain and France, with Russia's consent, through the Sykes-Picot agreement decided the partition of the Middle East which was under Ottoman sovereignty. Italy was not informed and was left out of this important agreement.<sup>7</sup> Only after the declaration of war against the German Empire did the Italian authorities become involved in the negotiations among the Entente powers about the fate of the Ottoman Empire. Now Italy put forward new ambitious claims, which included the confirmation of the control of the coastal Mediterranean areas of Aydin, Konya and Adana, which bordered the region of Antalya, with the inclusion of the important town of Smyrna. The control of some of these areas, however, was also a Russian goal.

The negotiations proved to be very difficult and complex due to the opposition by France and Russia to some Italian claims. At last on the 19th of April 1917, the representatives of Italy, France and Britain met in Saint Jeanne de Maurienne. On the occasion of this conference the Italian Foreign Minister Sonnino appeared to achieve most of Italy requests, including the occupation of Smyrna. This secret agreement, however, was subject to Russia's consent, which never materialised due to the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>8</sup> Till then Greece had played no relevant role in Italy's policy towards the future of the Ottoman Empire, also due to the uncertain Greek attitude to the war. There had been, however, some contrast between Rome and the Venizelos' government

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Italy's ambitions in Anatolia, see Marta Petricioli, *L'Italia in Asia Minore. Equilibrio mediterraneo e ambizioni imperialiste alla vigilia della prima guerra mondiale* (Florence 1983).

6. Gastone Breccia and Stefano Marcuzzi, *Le guerre di Libia. Un secolo di conquiste e rivoluzioni* (Bologna 2021).

7. On the difficult relations between Italy and the powers of the Entente, see Luca Riccardi, *Alleati non amici. Le relazioni politiche tra l'Italia e l'Intesa durante la prima guerra mondiale* (Milan 1992).

8. See the well-known study by Mario Toscano, *Gli accordi di San Giovanni di Moriana* (Milan 1936). The Russian representative was not present at the Saint Jeanne de Maurienne conference due to the confused domestic situation in Petrograd.

as a consequence of Greece's ambitions towards Southern Albania, which Italy regarded as its sphere of influence, also on the basis of the London Treaty. But in October 1918, on the eve of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Italian government became aware of Greece's aspirations for the control of the areas of the Anatolian peninsula inhabited by Greek communities, including Smyrna. It was evident that, as a counterbalance to Italy's imperialistic ambitions, the British and the French supported Greece's aspirations. In a telegram which Sonnino sent to Guglielmo Imperiali di Francavilla, the Italian Ambassador in London, on the 11th of October, the Italian Foreign Minister pointed out that the Allies had to be faithful to the Saint Jeanne de Maurienne agreement, that Italy would not relinquish its claims on Smyrna and objected to the presence of Greek troops in Anatolian areas, which would be part of Italy's sphere of influence.<sup>9</sup> Sonnino appeared to forget the attitude of the US administration which was interested in the fate of the Ottoman Empire on the basis of the principle of nationality and self-determination and had a negative view of Italy's imperialistic aspirations.<sup>10</sup>

With the end of the hostilities and the opening of the Versailles peace conference, the Italian delegation, led by the new Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and the Foreign Minister Sidney Sonnino, confirmed the goals, which had been laid out in both the London Treaty and the Saint Jeanne de Maurienne agreements on the basis of traditional power politics and compliance with international treaties. But the Italian delegation also put forward a claim over the town of Fiume (Rijeka) on the basis of the principle of self-determination, due to the attitude of the local Italian population. Such a contradictory attitude led to a fierce disagreement with President Wilson, who supported the claims of the new Yugoslav state and had a negative views of Italy's imperialistic ambitions.<sup>11</sup> Italy's claims over the Anatolian peninsula were not a major concern in the dispute between Wilson and the Italian leaders, but the US President had a critical opinion also of this Italian goal. Moreover the Greek delegation put

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9. Sidney Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916-1922*, ed. by Pietro Pastorelli (Rome-Bari 1975), Doc. No. 356, Sonnino to Imperiali, 11 October 1918.

10. On the relations between Italy and the US see Daniela Rossini, *Il mito americano nell'Italia della Grande Guerra* (Rome-Bari 2000) and Paolo Soave, "Italia e Stati Uniti dalla guerra alla pace. Una cooperazione difficile", in David Burigana and Andrea Ungari (eds), *Dal Piave a Versailles. Atti del Convegno Padova 4-6 giugno 2018* (Rome 2020), 343-359.

11. On Italy's international role in the post First World War period see Antonio Varsoi and Benedetto Zaccaria (eds), *Italy in the New International Order, 1917-1922* (Cham [Switzerland] 1922).

forward its claims on the areas inhabited by strong Greek communities – part of the policy of the “Megali idea” – Smyrna in particular. In this context, both the British and the French, who were suspicious of Italy’s interest in the partition of Anatolia, supported Venizelos’ claims. Besides the Saint Jeanne de Maurienne agreement had a very limited validity due to the missing Russian signature of the treaty. Last but not least, the Italian Government feared that Greece, with Britain’s and France’s support, could send occupation forces to the contested areas of Anatolia, in particular Smyrna.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, due to the Mudros armistice, the victorious powers had sent their troops and political representatives to Constantinople.<sup>13</sup>

The Italian government had appointed as Italian High Commissioner, Count Carlo Sforza, a young, energetic and ambitious career diplomat, who would play an influential role in Italy’s position towards the Greek-Turkish conflict. Sforza, who during the war had been the Italian representative to the Serbian government-in-exile, almost immediately realised the existence of a strong Turkish nationalist movement, which opposed both the weak Ottoman leadership, too subservient to the Allies’ will, as well as the great powers’ and Greek ambitions of partitioning Anatolia. Such an opinion was confirmed by a secret meeting meeting Sforza had with Mustafa Kemal who was emerging as the leader of the Turkish nationalist movement. In his reports to Rome Sforza pointed out the strength of the nationalist movement of Union and Progress (CPU) and the influence it exerted on the Ottoman government. Moreover, he informed Sonnino that the Turkish authorities showed a friendly attitude towards Italy, a feeling mostly motivated by their strong hostilities towards Greece.<sup>14</sup> It was the beginning of an ambiguous policy pursued by the Italians

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12. On the Greek position, see Michael Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision. Greece in Asia Minor 1919-1922* (London 2000), 1-85. On the collapse of the Ottoman Empire see Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans. The Great War in the Middle East 1914-1920* (London 2015).

13. On Italy’s attitude towards Turkey in this period see Fabio Grassi, *L’Italia e la questione turca (1919-1923). Opinione pubblica e politica estera* (Turin 1986); see also Valentina Sommella, “La diplomazia italiana e la questione turca alla conferenza di Versailles”, in Burigana and Ungari (eds), *Dal Piave a Versailles*, 377-397.

14. Giancarlo Giordano, *Carlo Sforza: la diplomazia 1896-1921* (Milan 1987), 88-105. On Sforza’s pro-Turkish attitude see for example “Archivio Storico Ministero Affari Esteri” (Historical Archives Italian Foreign Ministry hereafter: ASMAE), Sforza papers, letter, C. Sforza to General Elia (Rhodes), 11.2.1919. I thank Dr Ersilia Fabbriatore, archivist of the Italian Foreign Ministry Archives for the help in the research at the Foreign Ministry Archives.

towards the Greek-Turkish conflict: the Italians affected some sympathy towards the Turkish nationalists, but also tried to maintain good relations with the Ottoman authorities, while not excluding a search for some compromise with Greece, though Italy main goal was the achievement of a wide sphere of influence in Anatolia on the basis of the London Treaty and the Saint Jeanne de Maurienne agreement.<sup>15</sup>

In Paris the growing differences of opinions between Wilson and the Italian delegates led to an open conflict and Orlando and Sonnino left the conference in protest against Wilson's direct appeal to the Italian people. The Italian Foreign Minister, who was increasingly worried about Greece's moves, which enjoyed the support of Britain, especially of the Prime Minister Lloyd George, favoured the despatch of an Italian expeditionary force to Anatolia, which in May 1919 landed at Bodrum.<sup>16</sup> Almost immediately, the local Italian military leaders disapproved of the activities by the Greek troops, who were occupying large areas of the Anatolian peninsula. In their reports to Rome, Italian officers denounced the Greek troops' persecution against the Turkish community and the support of the violent activities by local Greek para-military groups. On its part the Italian expeditionary force tried to maintain a neutral attitude in the conflict between the Greeks and the Turks, though sometimes it showed a sympathetic attitude towards the latter.<sup>17</sup>

In the meantime, the decision of Orlando and Sonnino to leave the Paris conference proved to be a complete failure: the negotiations among the victorious powers went on and the Italian delegation was compelled to return to Paris in a weaker position. On its return it was regarded with contempt by the Allies. On his part Venizelos had been able to strengthen Greece's position in his contacts with the Americans, the British and the French. In late June, the Orlando government was compelled to resign, a new cabinet was formed under the pre-

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15. The Italian authorities were fully aware of the role played by Mustafa Kemal and they had secret contacts with some Turkish nationalists, see for example ASMAE, Sforza papers, letter, Tittoni (Italian Delegation Paris) to Sforza (Italian Foreign Ministry), 4.11.1919. For a synthetic assessment of Italy's policy see Giorgio Del Zanna, "L'Italia in Oriente alla fine dell'Impero Ottomano", in Pier Luigi Ballini and Antonio Varsori (eds), *1919-1920 I trattati di pace e l'Europa* (Venice 2020), 117-132.

16. Sidney Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916-1922*, Doc. No. 439, Sonnino to Sforza, 23.3.1919.

17. Giovanni Cecini, *Il corpo di spedizione italiano in Anatolia (1919-1922)* (Rome 2010), 101-140. The Italian Government position was clarified in a memorandum to the commander in chief of the Italian expeditionary force, see ASMAE, Sforza papers, memorandum by the Italian Foreign Ministry to the Minister of War, no date, but Spring 1919.



miership of Francesco Saverio Nitti, a moderate Liberal politician and an economist, who was more interested in solving Italy's serious domestic problems and had a critical view of the previous governments' imperialistic ambitions.<sup>18</sup>

Another liberal politician and former Ambassador in Paris, Tommaso Tittoni, was appointed Foreign Minister, while Carlo Sforza was promoted to the role of Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs. In this new role Sforza confirmed his pro-Turkish views. Nitti left the conduct of Italy's foreign policy in the hands of Tittoni, though he demonstrated his willingness to oppose an excessively imperialistic and expensive foreign policy. Nitti therefore cancelled the project of an Italian military expedition to Armenia and ordered the evacuation of the Italian troops stationed in Valona (Vlora) surrounded by Albanian nationalists.<sup>19</sup> Nitti and Tittoni thought that in order to solve the Adriatic question – in the meantime Gabriele D'Annunzio had occupied Fiume creating a serious threat to the Liberal regime<sup>20</sup> – a rapprochement was necessary between Italy and the Allies, especially the French and the British, who had a sympathetic attitude towards Greece and pushed Italy to bi-lateral negotiations with the Yugoslav government on the Adriatic question.<sup>21</sup> In this context, an agreement with Venizelos was perceived as a useful move, in spite of the fact that in the Aydin at the margins of the fighting between the Greeks and Kemal's nationalist forces there had been some local skirmishes between the Greek troops and the Italian expeditionary force.

In July 1919, Tittoni and Venizelos reached an agreement, through which the Greek government would have recognised the Italian spheres of influence in Anatolia, and the Greek troops would have ceased their operations in order to occupy further Turkish territory, on their part the Italians recognised Greece's aspirations on Southern Albania, on Smyrna and the Thracian region. Last but

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18. On Nitti's attitude see Francesca Canale Cama, *Quella pace che non si fece. Francesco Saverio Nitti e la pace tra Europa e Mediterraneo (1919-1922)* (Soveria Mannelli 2020).

19. Op. cit., 33-35.

20. Paolo Alatri, *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica 1919-1920* (Milan 1959); Giustina Manica (ed.), *Fiume e fiumanesimo nei cento anni dall'impresa di D'Annunzio* (Florence 2023).

21. Massimo Bucarelli and Benedetto Zaccaria, "Encroaching Visions. Italy, Yugoslavia and the Adriatic Question, 1918-1920", in Varsori and Zaccaria (eds), *Italy*, 229-264; Italo Garzia and Luciano Tosi, "L'Italia e la questione adriatica da Orlando a Nitti. Aspetti politici, diplomatici e militari", in Burigana and Ungari (eds), *Dal Piave a Versailles*, 101-123. In general see Marina Cattaruzza, *Italy and Its Eastern Borders, 1866-2016* (New York – London, 2016).

not least the Dodecanese islands, with the exception of Rhodes, would be given to Greece.<sup>22</sup> But the implementation of the Tittoni-Venizelos agreement immediately proved to be very difficult: disputes emerged on the definition of the borders between the Greek and the Italian zones of occupation, moreover, the Italian troops tried to maintain a neutral attitude in the conflict between the Greeks and the Turks. In September, a minor episode led to an open confrontation between Italian and Greek troops.<sup>23</sup> Eventually the Turkish authorities were informed of the Greek-Italian agreement and there was some resentment against the Italian government. So, the Nitti government tried to renew friendly contacts with Turkey, both the Ottoman government in Constantinople and the movement led by Mustafa Kemal, which between late 1919 and 1920 was becoming stronger and was creating serious problems to the Greek troops.<sup>24</sup>

In early 1920, the victorious powers began negotiations about the peace treaty with Turkey. The Nitti government appeared to renounce a direct control of the areas of Anatolia, which had been recognised to Italy due to the London Treaty and the Saint Jeanne de Maurienne Treaty. Instead, it claimed a wide zone of economic influence and the control of the coal mines of Heraclea (now Karadeniz Ereğli). We cannot go into detail about the negotiations which led to the Treaty of Sevres, but the new Italian Foreign Minister Vittorio Scialoja, who had replaced Tittoni in the Nitti government, appeared to favour a peace which would not be perceived as punitive by the Turks;<sup>25</sup> such a position was shared by France, but was opposed by Britain, which strongly supported Greece's goal of the "Megali Idea". In spite of the doubts nurtured by both the French and the Italians and the concerns expressed by both the Italian military authorities in Anatolia and the High Commissioner in Constantinople, the British position prevailed, especially regarding the Greek control of Smyrna and the creation of an Armenian independent state, which included Erzerum.<sup>26</sup>

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22. See *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (hereafter: DDI), Series VI, 1918-1922, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2017. See also Sommella, "La diplomazia italiana", 384-390.

23. Cecini, *Il corpo di spedizione*, 363-370.

24. For this partial change in Italy's attitude see ASMAE, Sforza Papers, tel. De Martino (Italian delegation Paris) to Italian Foreign Ministry, 20.12.1919.

25. On Italy's attitude on the occasion of the Sevres Treaty see ASMAE, Sforza papers, tel. De Martino (Italian Delegation Paris) to the Italian High Commissioner (Constantinople), 22.1.1920, strictly confidential; tel. 5005 Scialoja (Italian Foreign Ministry) to Italian Embassy (London), 10.6.1920.

26. On the difficulties in the relations between London and Rome see Luca Michelet-

Nevertheless the Treaty recognised the Italian sphere of influence in the region of Antalya and the economic interest on the Heraclea mines.<sup>27</sup> The issue of the Italian sphere of influence was solved also through an important tripartite agreement among Italy, France and Britain which defined the respective areas of influence.<sup>28</sup> In the meantime, in June 1920, the Nitti government was compelled to resign and Giovanni Giolitti came back to power. In this context, Sforza was appointed Foreign Minister. From the period he had spent in Constantinople he had favoured a pro-Turkish policy and on the occasion of an inter-allied conference in Boulogne-sur-Mer (June 1920) he tried to convince Lloyd George to pursue a more moderate policy and to avoid a strong British commitment to the Greek aspirations. Sforza was convinced of the strength of the Turkish nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal and advocated a compromise solution with the Turks but to no avail.<sup>29</sup> Though signed by the Ottoman government in Constantinople, the Sevres Treaty was rejected by the new nationalist government in Angora. By that time there was an open conflict between the Greek occupation army and the Kemalist forces. The worsening of the situation in Anatolia led to a complete reversal of the Italian position: in late July 1920, Sforza denounced the Tittoni-Venizelos agreement as no longer valid and stated in the Parliament that Italy would be satisfied with the economic influence which had been recognised in the Treaty of Sevres.

Moreover Italy immediately recognised the Ottoman government in Constantinople and appointed Camillo Garroni as Italian Ambassador. The Italian government hoped to convince the Ottoman government to accept the tripartite agreement, which would strengthen Italy's interest in the Anatolia peninsula. But Sforza could not ignore the new authority which was emerging in Angora under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal and tried to convince the Allies to open contacts with Mustafa Kemal. Such a proposal however, was opposed by the British who were fully committed to the support of the Greeks. In fact Sforza hoped that such a public attitude by the Italian government would suffice to

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ta, *Italia e Gran Bretagna nel primo dopoguerra. Le relazioni diplomatiche tra Roma e Londra dal 1919 al 1922*, 2 vols (Rome 1999).

27. For the Italian position, see Fiorella Perrone, *La politica estera*, 194-204; for the Greek position, see Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 143-205.

28. Perrone, *La politica estera*, 186-193. On the relevance the Italians attributed to the Tripartite agreement see ASMAE, Sforza papers, tel. 1421, Italian Foreign Ministry to Scialoja (Paris), 14.2.1920; memorandum by the Italian Foreign Ministry to the Foreign Minister, 18.6.1920.

29. Giordano, *Carlo Sforza*, 145-146.

appease the nationalist government in Angora. But in late 1920 the Kemalist government expressed its hostility to the Italian position as, in its interpretation, Rome was trying to defend some of its expansionist intentions in Anatolia. At the same time in order to appease also the Greek authorities, in letters exchanged between Venizelos and the Italian Ambassador in Paris, Bonin Longare, the Italian government confirmed the cession of the Dodecanese islands to Greece, with the exception of Rhodes. Furthermore, such an agreement was tied to the future of Cyprus.<sup>30</sup>

The electoral defeat of Venizelos in Greece in November 1920 and the return to Athens of King Constantine appeared to change the political scenario as far as the future of the former Ottoman Empire was concerned.<sup>31</sup> Both France and Italy favoured a revision of the Treaty of Sevres to appease the Turks, who would have accepted the tripartite agreement on the spheres of influence in Anatolia. With the French support Sforza aimed at mediating between the British and the Greeks on one hand and the Turkish nationalists on the other; Italy put forward the proposal following which Smyrna would become a Greek economic area of influence. In February 1921 in London, the delegations of the three Allied powers met with the representatives of Greece and of the two Turkish governments, but the conference ended in a complete failure. It is very likely that Sforza was convinced that the Kemalist government would become the most important and powerful Turkish actor. Therefore, after the failure of the London conference, the Italian Foreign Minister signed an agreement with the Kemalist representative Bekir Bey. On the basis of this document the two contracting parties agreed on the development of forms of joint cooperation. It was evident that Sforza was trying to save something of the tripartite agreement, especially of Italy's economic influence in Anatolia, But the Sforza-Bekir Bey agreement was rejected by the National Assembly in Angora.

In the meantime, the Italians, who were more and more worried about being drawn into the Greek-Turkish conflict, decided the evacuation of all the Italian troops still stationed in the Anatolian peninsula.<sup>32</sup> In June 1921, due to a further governmental crisis Giolitti resigned and a new cabinet led by Ivanoe Bonomi was formed with Pietro Tomasi della Torretta as Foreign Minister. It was short-lived due to the growing domestic problems caused by the rising of the Fascist movement. In such a difficult internal situation the new Italian

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30. Perrone, *La politica estera*, 205-224.

31. Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 160-179.

32. Cecini, *Il corpo di spedizione*, 408-412.

government aimed at a partial rapprochement with Britain and at playing the role of mediator between the Turks and the Greeks.<sup>33</sup> It is of some significance that in the Italian opinion the Greeks would have been able to maintain the control of Smyrna. But in late 1921 the French reached an agreement with the Kemalist government, through which Paris gave up any claim on Anatolia. So the tripartite agreement appeared to lose most of its validity.<sup>34</sup> The weak Facta government, which succeeded the Bonomi cabinet and paved the way to Mussolini's accession to power, played no role in the aftermath of the Greek army's defeat and the reconquest by the Turkish nationalists of the whole Anatolian peninsula.

Nevertheless the Facta government denounced the Bonin-Venizelos agreement, thus emphasising Italy's goal of maintaining at least the control of the Dodecanese islands. The new military situation led to negotiations about a new peace treaty which would deal with the settlement of the whole Eastern question. It was the new government led by Mussolini to deal with this issue. The position of the Fascist cabinet was not too different from the policies pursued by the previous Liberal ones: Italy aimed at aligning its policy with that of Britain and France, so hoped to maintain some economic interests in Anatolia and the full sovereignty over the Dodecanese islands. As a tactical move the Italian government put forward the proposal of a revision of the agreement on the mandates on the Arab territories of the former Ottoman Empire; a request which was duly rejected. In fact the Lausanne Treaty recognised the Italian sovereignty over the Dodecanese islands, but in the following months there were frictions between Italy and Britain, as the latter supported Greece's claims on the islands. However at the end also London accepted such a solution which meant the conclusion of Italy's involvement in the settlement of the former Ottoman Empire.<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion, Italy's ambitions at exerting some influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Anatolian peninsula had deep roots that dated back

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33. See the documents in DDI, Series VI, 1918-1922, vol. VIII, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2017.

34. Perrone, *La politica estera*, 277-280.

35. See DDI, Series VII, 1922-1935, vol. I, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato; for an interpretation of Mussolini's foreign policy see Francesco Lefebvre D'Ovidio, *L'Italia e il sistema internazionale. Dalla formazione del governo Mussolini alla grande depressione (1922-1929)*, vol. I (Rome 2016). For some evaluation about the Lausanne Treaty, see Jay Winter, *Il giorno in cui finì la grande Guerra. Losanna 24 luglio 1923. I civili ostaggio della pace* (Bologna 1923).

to the Italo-Turkish war and the Italo-Turkish Treaty signed in Lausanne in October 1912. These aspirations were reinforced by the London Treaty of 1915, which recognised the region of Antalya as an Italian sphere of influence, and the Saint Jeanne de Maurienne Treaty which expanded Italy's ambitions to other areas of Anatolia, especially the city of Smyrna. But in the post-war period Italy's claims clashed on one hand with the negative attitude by its Allies, on the other with the Greek policy based in the "Megali Idea". In this context the various Italian governments tried to achieve some bargaining chips through the occupation of some areas of Anatolia and to pursue an ambiguous and sometimes contradictory policy, which alternated some "avances" to the Turks and agreements with the Greeks; also as far as the Turks were concerned, Italy tried to reconcile the relations with the official government in Constantinople with some contacts and partial agreement with the Angora nationalist government led by Kemal Pasha.

At the same time in Anatolia the Italian expeditionary force usually tried to maintain a sort of neutral position between the two rivals, though on some occasion the Italian officers "on the spot" showed a more favourable attitude towards the Turks. The Greek-Turkish war and the final Turkish victory led the Italian government, now under the premiership of Mussolini, to a reassessment of Italy's goals, which now focused on the recognition of the sovereignty over the Dodecanese, an issue which involved more Athens and Rome rather than Rome and Angora. During the Fascist period the relations between Italy and Greece were marked by periods of tensions and the final outcome would have been the Fascist aggression against Greece in October 1940. On the other hand, relations between Italy and Kemal's Turkey were usually positive though on the basis of an equal partnership. The Second World War and Italy's defeat marked the end of any Italian ambition at playing some imperialistic role in the Mediterranean. On the contrary, both Greece and Turkey were regarded as two friendly allies in the Cold War and in the western system: in 1950, Count Sforza, now Foreign Minister of Republican Italy, in spite of British and French doubts, was a strong advocate of both countries' application to the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>36</sup> But this is a different story.

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36. Antonio Varsori, "Italy's Reaction to Turkey's and Greece's Application to the Atlantic Pact", in CEHD (sous la direction de), *L'Europe et l'OTAN face aux défis des élargissements de 1952 et 1954* (Bruxelles 2005), 57-70.



**TURKISH-GREEK NAVAL ARMS RACE FROM MUDROS  
TO LAUSANNE... AND BEYOND**

Sea power played a significant role in shaping the Ottoman/Turkish-Greek relations since the Greek struggle for independence after 1821. To begin with, at the battle of Navarino, the Ottoman fleet was decimated by the joint Anglo-French-Russian armada. This intervention of foreign powers severely crippled the Ottoman Empire's ability to tackle the Greek uprising from the sea. It should be noted that since then foreign powers rarely played such direct and decisive roles in the Ottoman/Turkish-Greek naval encounters. Nevertheless, their involvement occasionally tilted the scales in favour of one or the other as suppliers of warships, engineers, advisors and trainers and most importantly providers of much needed loans for their ambitious and expensive naval building programs. In that respect, Britain understandably stands out among the rest. During the period under review, its role in the complicated naval relations between the two countries mirrored the evolution of its global role from the top sea power into the most committed advocate of naval disarmament in the aftermath of the First World War. Consequently, London strove to shape their naval procurement choices through either granting or denying loans or international status that Turkey and Greece pursued until the 1930s. From Mudros to Lausanne and beyond, naval considerations figured prominently in the diplomatic bargaining between the two countries. This paper aims to revisit this relatively underappreciated topic that manifested itself in a succession of international agreements that shaped the Turkish-Greek relations throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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### **The *Averoff***

For the purposes of this paper, the origins of the Greek-Turkish naval arms race will be traced as far back as the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The promise of the 1908 Revolution received two early blows with the loss of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Austria-Hungary (1908) and the proclamation of the union of Crete with Greece (1909). The relative liberalization of the Ottoman polity after 1908 offered conditions conducive for the rise of navalism (or naval-mindedness) in the Ottoman public. Building a large navy hence seemed to offer a quick-fix solution to stop further territorial losses and the consequent erosion of the Empire's international status. The Young Turk leadership had already requested from London a naval mission to oversee the Ottoman naval modernization.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Ottoman public was mobilized to raise money to help the state to purchase new warships, the dreadnoughts in particular, to boost the Empire's sea power materially and symbolically after decades of neglect under the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II.<sup>2</sup> In essence, the Ottoman public naval mindedness emerged in response to the role played by a prominent Greek merchant in the procurement of an armored cruiser for the Greek Navy in 1909. The armored cruiser, built by Italian shipyard Orlando, was named after Giorgios Averoff who footed a substantial portion of the bill for the cruiser *Averoff*. This cruiser continued to haunt the Ottoman/Turkish thinking particularly after the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913.<sup>3</sup>

In the Ottoman/Turkish narratives of the naval campaigns during the Balkan Wars, the *Averoff* merits special attention for securing the Greek superiority in the Aegean which in turn enabled Greece to take over the islands. The significance attributed to the role played by a single warship added urgency to the

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1. Chris B. Rooney, "The International Significance of British Naval Missions to the Empire", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1 (1998), 1-29.

2. The issue of "neglect" is hotly debated even to this day. While for some the neglect was by choice, for others it was by necessity. Nevertheless, in the Sultan's thinking railways enjoyed priority over the fleet as a means of improving the Ottoman defense capabilities but also as a way of securing the Empire's administrative and military penetration into its distant provinces. For a balanced treatment of the issue of "neglect" during Abdulhamid II's reign, see Evren Mercan, *II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Deniz Stratejisi* [Naval Strategy of Abdulhamid Era] (İstanbul 2018).

3. Zafer Toprak, "Balkan Defeat, Question of Identity and Battleship Averoff", in Ekrem Işın (ed.), *The Logbook of the Ottoman Navy: Ships, Legends, Sailors* (İstanbul 2009), 77-87.



Ottoman pursuit of acquiring warships that would overpower the *Averoff*. At the time of the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman Navy had already one dreadnought battleship (*Reşadiye*) on order with Vickers in 1911. The British shipyard suspended work on the *Reşadiye* during the Balkan Wars on account of a strike in the shipyard. However, the real reason was the concern that the war would lead the Empire to default on payments for the first Ottoman dreadnought.<sup>4</sup>

The first Ottoman order for dreadnought battleships added momentum to the naval arms race between the two countries. The answer of Athens to *Reşadiye* came in the shape of a battlecruiser ordered in the German Vulkan shipyard in 1912. She was named *Salamis* and interestingly was to be armed with main guns ordered from Bethlehem Steelworks in the US. It should be noted that this regional naval arms race was taking place against the background of the pre-war Anglo-German rivalry in the world seas. Germany's ambitious naval building programs posed a serious challenge to the British mastery at sea. Consequently, dreadnought battleships and battlecruisers building for other powers were a cause for concern for the British. Winston Churchill, the First Lord of Admiralty, never shied away from expressing his disdain for regional naval arms races. He is quoted to have said: "It is only a sports for them, while it is a matter of life and death for us."<sup>5</sup> He was particularly worried about foreign warships being added to the German fleet in a very tight race for dreadnoughts.<sup>6</sup>

### **The *Reşadiye* and the Sultan Osman**

After the Balkan Wars, the Young Turk leaders viewed redressing the naval balance of power in the Aegean in the Empire's favour as the only way to reclaim the islands that had been captured by Greece. This goal justified extraordinary spending on additional dreadnoughts, which was sure to stretch the country's budget to its limits. In the immediate aftermath of the Balkan Wars, a dreadnought battleship became unexpectedly available as her original buyer, Brazil, ran out of money due to a sudden drop in coffee prices. The battleship *Rio de Janeiro* was supposed to provide the Brazilian Navy with a decisive edge over its regional rivals, Chile and Argentine. Brazil had already commissioned two dreadnought battleships, whereas both Chile and Argentine had two dread-

4. Serhat Güvenç, "The Ottoman Navy in the Age of Dreadnoughts: 1909-1914", in Işın (ed.), *The Logbook of the Ottoman Navy*, 44-63.

5. Paul G. Halper, *A Naval History of World War I* (Annapolis 1994), 16.

6. Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1914*, vol. I (New York 1928), 221-222.

noughts on order each with the British and American shipbuilders respectively.<sup>7</sup> At that time, *Rio de Janeiro* was the largest, but not necessarily the most powerful, battleship ever built.<sup>8</sup> British shipbuilder, Armstrong received offers from potential customers including Russia, Greece and the Ottoman Empire. In the end, the Ottomans managed to outbid the others with the help of a high-interest-bearing loan from French banks in December 1913.<sup>9</sup>

The second Ottoman dreadnought, named *Sultan Osman*, was to be delivered in June 1914 around the same time when *Reşadiye* was scheduled to arrive in the Ottoman Empire. With two powerful dreadnought battleships, the Ottoman Navy expected to regain superiority over its nemesis in the Aegean. Then, the Young Turks would deal with the Greek government from a position of strength on the islands in the Aegean, whose legal status was yet to be finalized through diplomatic negotiations after the Balkan Wars. These two battleships would be sufficient to coerce Athens to return the islands to the Ottoman Empire. The Union of Progress Committee (UPC) leadership planned to rush them into service before Greece consolidated its hold on those islands.<sup>10</sup>

That was basically the plan. However, the Ottoman plan failed to materialise the course of history when the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914 altered the international context dramatically. The European great powers were braced for a short yet decisive conflict to settle their differences. In an attempt to consolidate the Royal Navy's lead in the dreadnought race with Germany, Winston Churchill seized the two Ottoman dreadnoughts nearing completion in the British shipyards on 1 August 1914. The idea of adding foreign warships under construction in Britain had been around for some time.<sup>11</sup> Although there is no evidence to suggest a link between the two, Churchill's decision came just a day before the conclusion of the secret German-Ottoman Treaty of Alliance on 2 August 1914. The *Reşadiye*

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7. Mark Lardas, *South American Battleships 1908-59: Brazil, Argentina nad Chile's Great Dreadnought Race* (New York 2018).

8. Seward W. Livermore, "Battleship Diplomacy in South America", *The Journal of Modern History*, 1 (1944), 32; David Toplis, "The Brazilian Dreadnoughts, 1904-1914", *Warships International*, 3 (1988), 243-245.

9. Güvenç, "The Ottoman Navy", 56.

10. Serhat Güvenç, *Birinci Dünya Savaşına Giden Yolda Osmanlıların Drednot Düşleri [Ottoman dreams of dreadnots on the road to the First World War]* (İstanbul 2009), 51.

11. "Admiralty Staff Memorandum on the Mediterranean Situation", 21 June 1912, in E. W. R. Lumby (ed.), *Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean: 1912-1914* (London 1970), 32-35.

was commissioned into the Royal Navy as *HMS Erin*, the *Sultan Osman* as *HMS Agincourt*.

### **The *SMS Goeben* (*Yavuz Sultan Selim* or *Yavuz*)**

Within a week, an opportunity to make up for the Ottomans' loss would arise when the two German warships, the battlecruiser *SMS Goeben* and the cruiser *SMS Bresslau* showed up off the Dardanelles while being chased relentlessly by the British Mediterranean Fleet. The two warships were let into the Sea of Marmara and transferred nominally from the German Navy to the Ottoman Navy as *Yavuz Sultan Selim* and *Midilli* respectively on 10 August 1914. The two cruisers would later take part in the Ottoman raid on the Russian ports in the Black Sea on 29 October 1914. Thereafter, they were considered as symbols of Ottoman Empire's entry into the First World War. *SMS Goeben* would become nearly an obsession for Winston Churchill himself. He later wrote: "For the peoples of the Middle East, *SMS Goeben* carried more slaughter, more misery and more ruin than has ever been borne within the compass of a ship."<sup>12</sup>

*SMS Goeben* was a critical asset for the Ottoman Navy and posed a serious risk for the Allied Powers' Dardanelles campaign in 1915. Churchill planned to put the Ottoman Empire out of the war with a single knock-out blow by an Allied fleet that was supposed to push through the Dardanelles all the way to the Ottoman capital of Istanbul. He was confident that even a fleet made up of mostly old pre-dreadnought battleships would be sufficient to bring down a "second rate" opponent. Only two dreadnoughts were assigned to the Allied fleet: the battleship *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and the battlecruiser *HMS Inflexible*. While *HMS Queen Elizabeth* served as the flagship of the Allied fleet, she was not allowed to go through the Straits. *HMS Inflexible* was included in the fleet to engage the highly capable *SMS Goeben*.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of 1915, the Dardanelles campaign failed ultimately. So did the *HMS Inflexible*'s special mission. However, *SMS Goeben* was not off the hook yet. In 1917, a giant Hadley Page O/100 bomber was deployed to Lemnos. This island which legally remained in the enemy territory status, had conveniently been placed at the disposal of the Allied Powers by Greek Prime Minister Venizelos for the campaign. Operating from the Mudros Airfield, the Hadley Page

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12. Quoted in Geoffrey Bennet, *Naval Battles of the First World War* (London 2001), 14.

13. Robin Prior, *Gallipoli: The End of the Myth* (London 2010), 42.

bomber flew to Istanbul on a special long-range mission to sink *SMS Goeben* which was moored at Istinye Bay in the Bosphorus. The sight of a giant aircraft over the sky caused great panic among the residents of the city. The British bomber scored direct hits on, and sunk, an Ottoman destroyer but the “notorious” battlecruiser survived the raid intact.<sup>14</sup>

Both *SMS Goeben* and *SMS Bresslau* had operated in the Black Sea relatively freely until the Russian Navy’s commissioning of *Imperatritsa Mariya* class dreadnought battleships.<sup>15</sup> After that they spent the rest of the war in the Sea of Marmara. In the last year of the war, the two warships undertook a daring raid against the allied targets on and around Imbros. Arguably, the most valuable allied asset lost during the raid was *HMS Lord Reglan*, hammered by the main guns of both ships yet sent down with a direct hit from *SMS Goeben*. On their way back, the two warships ran into sea mines. *SMS Bresslau* received substantial mine damage and subsequently sank, whereas *SMS Goeben* survived a number of mine explosions and headed to the Dardanelles with serious damage to her hull. She went aground in the Dardanelles after having been bombed by the Allied aircraft relentlessly for six consecutive days. Reportedly, of the 180 bombs dropped on her, only two scored.<sup>16</sup>

Having survived the mines and the air raids, she was towed back to Istinye where she received rather rudimentary repairs and remained moored until the end of the hostilities. Interestingly, this final engagement of *SMS Goeben* in the Aegean set the seal on this phase of the Ottoman-Greek naval arms race. *SMS Goeben*, which was a substitute for the Ottoman dreadnoughts seized by the British, sank *HMS Lord Reglan* which at the time of the engagement was armed with the 14-inch twin turrets built originally for the Greek battlecruiser *Salamis*. Churchill did not allow their transfer to Germany from the US and hence commandeered them to arm the *HMS Abercombie* class monitors. *HMS Lord Reglan* was one of the four monitors in that class.<sup>17</sup>

Ten months after this indecisive engagement, the Ottoman government accepted defeat in the war. The armistice that formalized the Ottoman defeat was signed by Minister of Marine Rauf [Orbay], who was captain designate of the

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14. Emin Kurt and Mesut Güvenbaş, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda İstanbul’a Yapılan Hava Saldırıları* [Air attacks on Istanbul during World War I] (İstanbul 2018), 99-117.

15. Peter Hore, *The World Encyclopedia of Battleships* (London 2005), 178.

16. Aydın Eken, “Goeben’den Yavuz’a Şanlı bir Tarih” [A Glorious History from Goeben to Yavuz] *Deniz Mecmuası*, 16 (2019), 39-40.

17. Ian Boxtton, *Big Gun Monitors* (Yorkshire 2008), 12-37.

dreadnought battleship *Sultan Osman*. He signed the armistice aboard *HMS Agamemnon* in the Bay of Mudros in Lemnos a day after the fourth anniversary of the Black Sea raid of the Ottoman fleet. Hence, the end of the hostilities with the Ottomans involved a great deal of naval symbolism. Under the terms of the Mudros Armistice, the Ottoman Navy was reduced merely to the status of a constabulary navy. Article VI reads:

Surrender of war vessels in Turkish waters or waters occupied by Turkey, these ships be interned at such ports as may be directed, except such small vessels as are required for police or similar purposes in Turkish territorial waters.

A few days later the German crew handed over *SMS Goeben* to the Ottoman naval authorities. Within two weeks from the Mudros Armistice, a combined Allied fleet arrived in the Ottoman capital and lay anchor in the Bosphorus. Included among them were the cruiser *Averoff*, the light cruiser *Helle*, and the battleships *Kilkis* and *Lemnos* of the Greek Navy.

### **Disarmament: Universal or Naval Only?**

In his address to the joint session of the Congress on 8 January 1918, US President Woodrow Wilson set forth his Fourteen Points as the basis for the post-war settlement. His fourth point stipulated that “Adequate guarantees will be given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.” Disarmament was presented as a general principle but its implementation would begin with the defeated powers. Accordingly, the Paris Treaties of 1919 provided for not only disarming the defeated powers but also the demilitarization of certain parts of their territories. The Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of Sevres in August 1920 with allied and associated powers almost a year after the Turkish National Struggle was launched in May 1919. The stillborn Treaty of Sevres provided for extremely strict limits on the number and type of units the Ottoman Navy could possess. Article 181 reads:

From the coming into the force of the present Treaty all warships interned in Turkish ports in accordance with the Armistice of October 30, 1918 are declared to be finally surrendered to the Principal Allied Powers.

Turkey will, however, retain, the right to maintain along her coasts for police and fishery duties a number of vessels which shall not exceed:

7 sloops

6 torpedo boats

These vessels will constitute the Turkish Marine, and will be chosen by the Naval Inter-Allied Commission of Control [...] from amongst the following vessels:

Sloops: Aidan [Aydın]Reis, Hizir Reis, Burock [Burak] Reis, Kemal Reis, Sakis [Sakız], Isah [İsa] Reis, Prevesah (Preveze)  
 Torpedo Boats: Sultan Hissor [Hisar], Ack [Açık Hisar], Drach [Draç], Younnous (Yunus).

Article 182 laid out very specific conditions under which those units could be replaced:

Turkey is forbidden to construct or acquire any warships other than those intended to replace the units referred to in Article 181. Torpedo-boats shall be replaced by patrol launches.

The vessels intended for replacement purposes shall not exceed: 600 tons in the case of sloops;

100 tons in the case of patrol launches.

Except where a ship has been lost, sloops and torpedo-boats shall only be replaced after a period of twenty years, counting from the launching of the ship.

This Treaty would have officially cancelled out the sea power credentials of the Ottoman Empire and ruled out prospects for its involvement in any naval arms races, had it gone into effect. It never did...

The Ottoman-Greek naval arms race had evolved into a dreadnought race on the eve of the First War. Of these dreadnoughts, only the battlecruiser *SMS Goeben (Yavuz)* survived the war in Ottoman hands. She was towed to the Gulf of İzmit and she remained interned there for a while. She was brought back to Istanbul again in 1922. The crippling damage she had received during the Imbros Raid in January 1918 turned out to be a blessing in disguise. She was spared from the fate that befell most interned German Imperial Navy warships which were either scuttled at Scapa Flow by their own crews in June 1919 or sunk as target ships in naval exercises in Britain and the US.

### **Naval Disarmament**

In addressing the question of disarming the defeated powers, the victorious powers placed great emphasis on naval strength in the aftermath of the war. The Anglo-German naval arms race was considered among the root causes of the First World War. Therefore, preventing future arms races seemed to offer a practical measure to reduce the risk of confrontation among the Great Powers. That was the general idea, regardless of differences in their individual strategic and economic motivations.

At the time, Britain, the US, France, Italy and Japan were the top five naval powers of the world. Their representatives met in Washington to discuss ways

of limiting the potential for naval arms races. The negotiations focused on capital ships (battleships, battlecruisers and aircraft carriers) and resulted in a ten-year agreement on limiting the number and tonnage of such capital ships for each party. The Washington Naval Treaty was thus signed in February 1922.<sup>18</sup>

During the Washington Conference, the British delegation proposed the extension of naval limitations to lesser powers. Consequently, it was decided that a conference of experts was to be held in Rome in February 1924. The League of Nations Disarmament Commission then extended invitations to non-members such as Turkey and the Soviet Union in October 1922. The invitation coincided with the signing of the Mudanya Armistice between the Turkish Nationalist Government in Ankara and Greece that set the terms and timetable for the withdrawal of Greek occupation forces from Turkey. In contrast to the Mudros Armistice of 1918, the Mudanya Armistice did not contain any naval provisions. There is no record of Ankara's official response to the invitation by the League of Nations to participate in naval disarmament arrangements.<sup>19</sup>

### The Lausanne Conference and the Treaty

In terms of naval matters, two issues stood out among others for the Turkish delegation to the Conference. The first one was the payments made for the two Ottoman dreadnoughts that were seized by the British in August 1914. The Turkish hopes for repayment were dashed by the uncompromising British stand. Eventually, the Turkish diplomats relented and agreed that that money would be counted towards the outstanding Ottoman debts. The second issue was the fate of the battlecruiser, *SMS Goeben*. The head of the Turkish delegation, İsmet Paşa [İnönü] brought up the issue a number of times during the negotiations, not very assertively and without naming the particular warship in question. He nevertheless voiced the Turkish expectation that all interned naval units would be returned on occasion.<sup>20</sup> Having picked up İsmet Paşa's hint, his British counterpart, Sir Horace Humboldt, who succeeded Curzon as

18. Carolyn J. Kitching, *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament: 1919-1934* (London 1999), 57-58.

19. Dilek Barlas and Serhat Güvenç, *Turkey in the Mediterranean during the Interwar Era* (Indianapolis 2011), 57-58.

20. *Lozan Barış Konferansı: Tutanaklar ve Belgeler* [Lausanne Peace Conference: minutes and documents], trans. Seha L. Meray, set II, vol. 1, book 2 (Ankara: 1970), 159

head of the British delegation, referred to *SMS Goeben* as among the warships to be returned.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to these two issues, the Greek and Turkish delegations held separate discussions on the terms for the release of vessels of war they had seized from each other after the Mudros Armistice in October 1918. During the Turkish War of Liberation, the Turkish Nationalist Forces operated a motley collection of vessels mostly for smuggling arms from Istanbul. Occasionally they transported arms and military equipment from the Soviet-controlled ports in the Black Sea too. The Greek Navy, for its part, maintained varying levels of presence in the Turkish waters during the Allied occupation.<sup>22</sup>

The Turkish and Greek diplomats agreed to release the warships they had seized from each other after October 30, 1918 under Protocol D attached to the Treaty.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the Allies finally agreed to return all warships interned after that date under Protocol XIV. This protocol specifically mentions the name of the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* among the warships to be returned.<sup>24</sup>

Overall, the Treaty of Lausanne did not introduce a legal framework that would reduce the probability of a new naval arms race in the Aegean. Moreover, Turkey recognized Greek sovereignty over the Eastern Aegean islands lost during the Balkan Wars on the condition of their demilitarization. This indeed legally removed one of the root causes of the naval arms race between the Ottomans and the Greeks before the First World War, but did not necessarily rule out prospects for a new competition in the Aegean.

Later, during the Conference of Experts at Rome in 1924, Athens declared its readiness to accept a 35,000-ton limitation for capital ships<sup>25</sup> as a part of a naval holiday until 1931 provided that

- Turkey's tonnage would not exceed that of Greece
- Greece would reserve the right to acquire a battlecruiser in place of the *Salamis*.<sup>26</sup>

21. Op. cit., 169.

22. Saim Besbelli and İhsan Göymen, *Türk İstiklal Harbi 5: Deniz Cephesi ve Hava Harekatı* [Turkish War of Independence 5: Naval front and air operations] (Ankara 1964), 47-49.

23. *Lozan Barış Konferansı*, set II, vol. 1, book 1, 179.

24. *Lozan Barış Konferansı*, set II, vol. 2, 117.

25. The Treaty of Washington allowed the US and Britain a 500,000-ton for capital ships, Japan 300,000 tons; France and Italy 175,000 tons each.

26. In 1927, the shipbuilder Vulcan demanded compensation for building costs from the Greek government. Greece's reluctance led to a dispute which was subsequently sub-



In view of the prospective refurbishing of the battlecruiser *Yavuz Sultan Selim*, Greece revised its proposal for a 10-year naval holiday. Consequently, a third reservation was added to the above, that Greece would be allowed to build two new cruisers to replace the ageing battleships, the *Kilkis* and *Lemnos*.

For its part, the new republican regime in Ankara was not interested in any multilateral naval disarmament arrangement that did not include the Soviets. Moreover, as İnönü noted in his introduction to the Turkish translation of the proceedings of the Lausanne Conference, the demilitarized status of the Turkish Straits precluded Turkey's participation in any scheme for naval limitations.<sup>27</sup> In response to an inquiry from the government, Chief of Staff Marshall Fevzi [Çakmak] advised against any naval agreement at least until the Turkish Navy reached parity with the Greek Navy. A new naval program had already been devised for refurbishing the battlecruiser *Yavuz Sultan Selim* and for the procurement of two to four destroyers to escort her and submarines and submarine-chasers.<sup>28</sup>

Foreign shipbuilders were invited to bid for Turkish naval tenders in the 1920s. The first naval contract for submarines was awarded to a Dutch shipyard offering German designs subsidized with German secret funds.<sup>29</sup> The contract for refurbishing *the Yavuz Sultan Selim* went to a French bidder, while the floating dock to accommodate this battlecruiser was to be designed and built by a German contractor in Turkey. Repairing the *Yavuz* in a foreign shipyard abroad was too big a risk for the Turkish government. She was not allowed to leave Turkey's territorial waters to avoid interference by a hostile foreign power until she was restored to full operational status. Thanks to the *Yavuz*, Turkey would remain in the league of dreadnought-operating powers of the world. This battlecruiser would indeed enable Ankara to punch above its weight diplomatically. Finally, in 1928, the Republic of Turkey decided to order two destroyers, two submarines and three submarine chasers from Italian shipyards.

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mitted to arbitration. Norwegian Admiral Scott Hansen suggested Greece's purchase of the cruiser with minimum armaments installed to settle the issue. Athens did not consider this suggestion until May 1929. "Yunanlılar Salamisi Alırlarsa" [If the Greeks take Salamis], *Cumhuriyet*, 15 June 1929; "Greek Battle Cruiser Salamis: Pre-War Contract Binding", *The Times*, 12 December 1925; "The Salamis Case: Neutral Admiral's Report", *The Times*, 15 June 1928.

27. *Lozan Barış Konferansı*, set I, vol. 1, book 1, 152.

28. Barlas and Güvenç, *Turkey in the Mediterranean*, 59.

29. See Allison Winthrop Saville, "The Development of the German U-Boat Arm, 1919-1934" (PhD thesis, University of Washington, 1964).

This choice surprised many foreign observers, while for Athens it meant the revival of Turkish ambitions to reclaim the islands in the Aegean. For instance, the US Mission in Istanbul concluded:

This Turkish naval order is important in the sense that it will be a starting point of a struggle for naval armament between Turkey and Greece, the only struggle which for the moment can envisage a Turkish naval reorganization. It is a cloud which rises on the political horizon of the Orient [...] One of these days, the Aegean islands, especially Chios and Mytilene will be in danger [...] Turkish circles have it that the creation of a navy (an absolute right of Turkey, to be well understood) does not allude to any individual and that it has for its object nothing else but the defense of the country's coasts, which are very numerous in Turkey... It is to ignore the nature of the human heart, and in particular the Turkish character, to believe that such will always be the thought of government in Ankara. Physiology teaches us that it is the organ which creates the action. This is also true in politics as well as in the life of people. The Turko-Greek naval concurrence will infallibly bring about a war in the more or less near future.<sup>30</sup>

Fortunately, such nearly apocalyptic and extremely essentialist predictions never materialized. Ironically, Italian leader Mussolini helped Ankara and Athens mend fences. Italy suddenly became the favored supplier of naval arms to the two countries. Rome did not choose to exploit the differences between the two countries but encouraged a reconciliation to redefine Mediterranean geopolitics. At any rate, Turkey and Greece could not afford another arms race when the World Economic Crisis of 1929 already strained their finances. Hence, Greek Prime Minister Venizelos and Turkish President Atatürk embarked on normalization of the relations. In 1930, a number of diplomatic accords were signed to settle the old scores that had defied solution since the Treaty of Lausanne. The sea-change in 1930 made the long-expected naval holiday a reality. Turkey and Greece pledged not to increase their respective fleets without giving 6-month notice to the other. The two old-time enemies finally got caught up with the spirit of global naval disarmament.<sup>31</sup> Concluding a regional naval holiday with Greece contributed to Turkey's international normalization

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30. Washington DC, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), NND 740058, RG 165, Box 925, 29 May 1929. For the Greek press Yavuz's re-commissioning symbolized the revival of Turkish revisionism aimed at taking over several islands in the Aegean from Greece. See London, The National Archives, The National Archives, FO 371/13656 C7131/752/19, 12 September 1929.

31. See Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, "The 1930 Greek-Turkish Naval Protocol", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 1 (1998), 89-111.

as well. From then on, navies turned into means of solidifying Turkish-Greek cooperation against Italian revisionism in the Mediterranean rather than symbols of hostility between the two countries.

Arguably, the Turkish fleet's visit to Malta represents another turning point in Turkish-Greek naval relations. The Republican fleet was dispatched to Malta to show Turkey's naval strength in an attempt to enlist British support against Italy. It was ironic that "the curse over the Orient", *SMS Goeben*, now led as the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* the German and Italian built destroyers, submarines and submarine chasers of the Republican fleet into the home of the British Mediterranean Fleet. The altered identity of the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* perfectly mirrored the change in the character of Anglo-Turkish relations on the eve of the Second World War. It was a historical visit from a number of aspects. But as noted by a Turkish daily, it marked the farthest journey that the Turkish navy had ever made into the Mediterranean since the Battle of Navarino in 1827. *En route* to its home base from Malta, the Turkish fleet made a port call at Faleron. While the Turkish crew paid their tributes to their hosts by laying a wreath on the Unknown Soldier Monument, King George of Greece boarded the *Yavuz* for a visit.<sup>32</sup>

Another example of how warships turned into symbols of goodwill rather than hostile intentions was Greek dictator Metaxas' short visit to Turkey on board the cruiser *Averoff* in October 1937.<sup>33</sup> Thereafter both the *Yavuz* and the *Averoff* became welcome sights in Greece and Turkey respectively.

## Conclusion

The trajectory of Greek-Turkish naval encounters in the first half of the twentieth century is a proof that international law could exert a modest influence on the naval competition between the two neighbors. However, in the 1920s and 1930s, the leaderships in both countries were willing and able to go beyond existing legal arrangements in curbing their nations' naval ambitions that had contributed substantially to the outbreak of the previous war.

There are probably no clearer indicators of the radical transformation of mutual perceptions in the two countries than the Turkish naval war games in

32. Mustafa Hergüner, "Cumhuriyet Donanmasının Yabancı Ülkelere Yaptığı İlk Geziler" [The First trips of the republican navy to foreign countries], *Askeri Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1/2 (2003), 157.

33. "Greece and Turkey Reaffirm Close Ties", *The New York Times*, 23 October 1937.

1939. They were based on the scenario that assumed joint naval action of the “red” and the “yellow” under a single command against the threat of the “blue” nation from the South. The “red” denoted Turkey, the “yellow” Greece and the “blue” Italy.<sup>34</sup> This mindset marked the definite end of the naval rivalry that survived many post-War treaties, from Mudros to Lausanne.

Of the warships whose names appear in this paper, only one has survived. That is the cruiser *Averoff* which is currently preserved in good condition in the Bay of Faleron near Athens. She remains a first-hand witness to the ups and downs in the relations between the two nations at sea.

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34. Deniz Harp Akademisi, 1939. *Deniz Harp Oyunu* [1939. Naval warfare game] (İstanbul 1939), 41.





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