

**THE GREEK OCCUPATION OF IZMIR
AND ADJOINING TERRITORIES**

**Report of the Inter-Allied Commission of Inquiry
(May-September 1919)**

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PREFACE

The Greek army started occupying Western Anatolia on 15 May 1919, in the aftermath of the First World War and under the sanction of the Council of the Paris Peace Conference. Although the initial instructions of the Council restricted the occupation zone to the borders of Izmir (Aydın) province, the Greek army started to advance into Anatolia from the first day of their landing in Izmir.

During the incursion of the Greek occupation forces, Greek soldiers and local Greeks committed atrocities against, not only the Turkish population, but also all of the non-Greek communities that had been living peacefully in the region for centuries. These atrocities included massacre, pillage, rape and the destruction of towns and villages.

The severity of the incidents and the reactions of the Turkish and Western witnesses forced the Paris Peace Conference to establish a commission to investigate the claims against the Greek forces. The Inter-Allied Commission of Inquiry into the Greek Occupation of Smyrna [Izmir] and the Adjoining Territories conducted an investigation in the region between 12 August and 15 October 1919. The Commission visited the towns and villages where atrocities were committed, listened to witnesses from all communities, collected evidence and prepared a report.

The first objective of this study is to inform the reader about the formation of the Commission of Inquiry, the Commission's studies in Anatolia, the contents of its report and the ensuing discussion at the Council of the Paris Peace Conference.

Secondly, this study aims to give a brief description of the incidents that occurred during the first four months the Greek occupation, a period corresponding to that investigated by the Commission.

Finally, this is an attempt, with references to international law, to evaluate the incidents that the Commission detailed in its report.

All the events mentioned in this study are based on the official reports of European and American representatives in the region and the Turkish authorities. This study makes extensive use of official sources, such as documents on British foreign policy and papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States. Furthermore, this study uses books and articles in English and Turkish that are the products of intensive archival research and of academic value.

We hope that this book will provide a contribution to academic research on Turkish-Greek affairs.

CHAPTER I

THE GREEK OCCUPATION OF IZMIR

A. Greece's Interest in Turkish Territories

1. First World War Secret Treaties for the Partition of Turkey

During the course of the First World War, the Allies concluded a number of secret treaties intended to shape the post-war world and, more significantly, to share out their possible territorial gains. Five of these treaties were related to the partition of the Ottoman Empire. Three of them concerned the rules and regulations governing the Turkish Straits and the division of various territories. Two of them, the Treaty of London and the Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne, were exclusively dedicated to the partition of the western districts of Asia Minor.

Britain and France paid a high tribute to Italy for her services to the Entente with the Treaty of London on 26 April 1915. According to the secret clauses of the Treaty, Italy would gain full possession of the Dodecanese, which she had held since the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912. Italy would also gain rights in Antalya province on the Asia Minor littoral. Italy's territory in Asia Minor, centered on Antalya and its hinterland, was to be proportional to that of the other Allied Powers. This zone was to be established in conformity with the vital interests of France and Britain. However, if France, Britain and Russia should occupy certain districts of Asiatic Turkey during the course of the war, then the territory adjoining Antalya was to be left to Italy, which reserved the right of occupation.¹

Italy had planned to enlarge her proposed share in Asia Minor, but Britain had already prevented further Italian demands by making previous commitments to Greece.

Greece, after gaining her independence in 1829, expanded her territory three times against the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth

¹ Harry Howard, *The Partition of Turkey. A Diplomatic History 1913-1923*, Howard Fertig, New York 1966, p. 183.

century and the first thirteen years of the twentieth century. She was enthusiastic about taking part in the final apportionment of “the sick man of Europe”. As the traditional Megáli Idéa (Great Idea), a policy committed to creating a larger Greece by including practically all of the regions in which “the influence of Hellenism has been paramount throughout the ages”, became increasingly popular, the Greek Premier Eleutherios Venizelos, sought to fulfil the demands of his country by claiming the lands of “ancient Greek heritage” on the opposite side of the Aegean.

On the one hand, Venizelos was following closely the Italian’s expansionist aspirations for Asia Minor, and on the other hand, he was trying to contact the Allies so Greece could participate in the partition plans. Venizelos first received news from Rome of the partition plans around the middle of December 1914. The Greek minister plenipotentiary in Rome reported the latest news concerning the fate of Asia Minor in a dispatch dated 27 December 1914. He stated the following:

The Italian Government hopes that, in the event of Germany’s defeat, the moment for the partition of Anatolia will arrive, and that then Italy will get her chance of securing a footing there. According to the Italian Government’s forecast, Russia will be awarded the Armenian provinces, thus obtaining an outlet on the Mediterranean opposite Cyprus. France will get Syria, and Great Britain Arabia. There will be plenty of territory left over for Italy west of the Russian zone. The Italians realise, to their great chagrin, that it will not be possible entirely to ignore the claims of Greece, but as everybody wants Smyrna and the Maeander Valley, they feel confident that the region in question will not be given to us. In any case they will do everything in their power to reduce Greece’s share of the Anatolian inheritance to a minimum.²

Venizelos had an interview with Sir Francis Elliot, the British minister plenipotentiary in Athens, on 9 January 1915, on the subject

² A.A. Pallis, *Greece’s Anatolian Venture and After a Survey of the Diplomatic and Political Aspects of the Greek Expedition to Asia Minor (1915-1922)*, Methuen & Co., London 1932, pp. 16-17.

of sending Greek troops to the assistance of Serbia. In this interview, after pointing out the difficulty of persuading the public, Venizelos mentioned this country's prospects of brilliant territorial gains.³

A fortnight later, on 23 January 1915, the British Government offered Greece large concessions on the coast of Asia Minor as an inducement to enter into the war on the side of the Allies. Venizelos welcomed this lucrative business with eagerness. However, before he could give an official answer he had to persuade the Greek army and King Constantine.⁴

Contrary to Venizelos's expectations, King Constantine and Colonel Metaxas, the Chief of General Staff of the Greek army, had deep concerns about Greece's participation in the war. After two attempts ended in failure, Venizelos submitted a new memorandum to the King on 2 March 1915, recommending "the immediate participation of Greece in the Dardanelles campaign of the Allies. Greece would get Smyrna [Izmir] as previously promised as compensation for such a brave move. Even Constantinople [Istanbul] would be annexed to Greece"⁵ Despite these brilliant pledges, the King persevered with his strict attitude against participation in the war and Venizelos was forced to resign on 6 March 1915.⁶

In a situation where Greece had declared and strengthened her neutral stand, Italy insisted on more gains from the post-war spoils. However, Britain and France were against such extra gains. During the war Lord Balfour, Foreign Secretary of Britain had long conversations with Imperiali, the Italian diplomatic representative to London, hoping to settle the pressing Italian claims. Italy demanded the addition of Mersin (Mersina) and Adana to her planned territory in Asia Minor, but France refused this concession. After this disappointment, Italy began to sound out the Allies on getting Izmir added to its assignment of Anatolian territory. Britain strongly rejected such a demand because Izmir could still be offered to Greece as an inducement for her entrance into the War.

³ Ibid, p. 17.

⁴ Lord Kinross, *Atatürk The Rebirth of a Nation*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1964, p. 140.

⁵ Pallis, op. cit., p. 32.

⁶ Kinross, op. cit., p. 140.

The secret Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne signed on 19 April 1917 rewarded the Italian demands. By the terms of this Treaty, Italy recognized the claims of Britain and France to Mesopotamia, and obtained some further concessions for herself in Asia Minor, in the Antalya and Izmir regions. Since Britain and France did not abandon the idea of drawing Greece into the war, Italy's satisfaction would be only temporary.⁷

King Constantine was expelled from Greece in June 1917 as the result of an Allied operation and Venizelos once again returned to power as premier. Venizelos immediately began to pursue an interventionist policy. Greece declared war on the Central Powers on 30 June 1917.⁸

Although Greek participation in the War did not provide a momentous contribution to the Allies' victory, as soon as the War ended, Venizelos claimed the territory promised by the British.

2. Greek Policy after the Mudros Armistice

The Ottoman and British officials signed an armistice at Mudros on 30 October 1918, putting an end to the state of war between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies.

The terms of the Mudros Armistice opened up the Straits, guaranteed access to the Black Sea and provided for Allied occupation of the fortresses along the Dardanelles and Bosphorus. The Turkish forces were to be demobilized immediately, except where necessary to preserve order. The Allies were placed in control of all the railroads.

The most important provision of the Armistice was Article VII. This Article gave the Allies "the right to occupy any strategic points in the event of any situation arising which threatens the security of the Allies".⁹

⁷ Howard, op. cit., p. 186.

⁸ Pallis, op. cit., p. 33; Kinross, op. cit., p. 140

⁹ Ahmet Emin, *Turkey in the World War*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1930, p. 130.

In November 1918, immediately after the conclusion of the Armistice, Venizelos went to Paris to present Greece's territorial claims to the Peace Conference convened by the Allies to prepare draft peace treaties with the defeated powers. Venizelos reasserted Greece's claim to all of Western Anatolia, from opposite Rhodes to the Sea of Marmara, in a letter and memorandum addressed to the British Premier, Lloyd George.¹⁰

When the Paris Peace Conference was convened in January 1919, it appeared that all the Allied Powers agreed that the Ottoman Empire was to be divided into separate elements.¹¹ This was a great opportunity for legitimizing Greece's demands. As a matter of fact, between 3 and 4 February 1919, Venizelos, in a lengthy exposition at the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference, presented the case for the reconstitution of Hellas and the unification of all the Greek-speaking peoples under one flag. According to Venizelos, this claim was based on Point Twelve of the Wilson Principles and on the right of self-determination. He called for the cession to Greece of Northern Epirus, the island in the Aegean, all of Thrace and most radically, Western Anatolia.¹²

To Lloyd George, who considered Venizelos to be "the greatest statesman Greece had thrown up since the days of Pericles", such demands seemed both fair and expedient. The Greeks could serve Britain's interests by replacing the Turks as the protectors of imperial communication lines with India.¹³

Despite Lloyd George's strong desire to recompense Greece urgently, the Supreme Council decided that the matter should be submitted to a Commission of Greek Claims, composed of the representatives of Britain, France, Italy and the United States. The Commission completed its work on 6 March 1919. It accepted

¹⁰ Pallis, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹¹ Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

¹² Laurence Evans, *United States Policy and the Partition of Turkey 1914-1924*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1965, p. 126; Elaine D. Smith, *Turkey: Origins of the Kemalist Movement (1919-1923)*, D.C.: Judd & Detweiler, Washington 1959, p. 8; Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

¹³ Kinross, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

the basic principles of the Greek case with modifications, but with the important reservations of certain members. There was a lot of difficulty concerning Western Anatolia because of the Allies' prior commitments in the secret treaties made during the War. Italy would make no accommodations whatsoever on the grounds that the question was too involved for the general solution of the Anatolian question and because the regions to which Greece aspired had been, to a large extent, the subject of well-known international agreements. The American representative was opposed to the cession of Western Anatolia to the Greeks on general principles. In addition, the American representative stated to the Commission that his country was free of the secret treaties' obligations and could not take them into consideration in the settlement of the question. Both the American and Italian members were opposed to the approval of the Commission report when it was submitted to the central Committee on Territorial Questions on 7 March 1919.¹⁴

The question of the Greek demands simmered in the Central Committee for a number of weeks after the Commission of Greek Claims reported. It was not until the early part of May that it began to assume any significance in the Conference beyond one of principle or the respective interests of the Greeks and the Turks.¹⁵

B. The Expedition to "Mikra Asia"¹⁶

1. The Landing of Greek Troops in Izmir

a. Why Occupation?

The subject of partition of Ottoman territory caused a deep confrontation between Italy and her allies at the Paris Peace Conference. Italy became particularly angry about the possibility of the Greek occupation of Western Anatolia. The Italian delegation left the Conference on 24 April in protest and did not return to Paris until 5 May. Although the Italians engaged in an unprecedented operation and sent a warship to Izmir on 30 April to prevent Greek occupation,

¹⁴ Evans, op. cit., pp. 126-127; Howard op. cit., pp.223.

¹⁵ Evans, op. cit., p.128.

¹⁶ Mikra Asia: Asia Minor in Greek.

the absence of the Italian delegation from the Conference facilitated the hard work of Lloyd George to persuade France and the United States in Greece's favor.¹⁷

As a result of British diplomacy, Greek forces were authorized on 6 May to land on Turkish territory.¹⁸ There were three reasons for allowing Greece to occupy İzmir.

The first reason was to reward Greece for her participation in the War, as previously promised. However, to obtain the approval of the Allies other than Britain, they needed to be persuaded that the majority of the population of the aforementioned region was Greek. As early as February 1919, Venizelos presented to the Paris Conference some statistics about the Greeks inhabiting Western Anatolia, mostly inflated and manipulated by the Greek Patriarchate. Relying on these statistics he claimed that the total population of Greeks in Western Asia Minor, including the Vilayets¹⁹ of Aydın (İzmir) and Bursa (Hüdavendigar) were 1,080,000, while in the same territory the Turkish population was only 943,000.²⁰ However, these statistics were far from reality. Even the actual statistics of the Greek Patriarchate were different from those presented to the Conference. According to the statistics of the Greek Patriarchate which were published in London in 1918, the total number of Greeks in Western Anatolia, including Aydın, Bursa and Biga was 934,061.²¹ On the other hand, according to the Turkish Official Statistics of 1910, which is the only reliable source still being cited by serious researchers, the Greek population of the region was clearly fewer than the Turkish population. The total Greek population

17 Sina Akşin, "Paris Barış Konferansı'nın Yunanlılar İzmir'e Çıkarma Kararı," *Üçüncü Askeri Tarih Semineri Türk-Yunan İlişkileri*, Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Strateji Etüd Başkanlığı, Ankara 1986, p. 176; *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference 1919*, Vol. V. D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 1946, pp. 412-413.

18 Akşin, op.cit., p. 177; *Papers Relating...*, op. cit., p. 484.

19 Vilayet: Province. A large district in the Ottoman administrative structure, similar to the "state" in the United States.

20 Salahi R. Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923*, SAGE, London 1975, p. 6.

21 Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities. The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire*, New York University Press, New York 1983, p. 91.

in the provinces of Aydın, Bursa and Biga was 511,544,²² while the Muslim (Turkish) population of the same provinces was 3,170,705.²³

The second reason was based on humanitarian concerns. Ostensibly, the Greek army would occupy the city and province of İzmir to stop Turkish atrocities against the Greek population in that city and the surroundings. Venizelos reported to the Conference, 12 April, one month before the decision for occupation, "Some serious troubles had been occurring in İzmir and Aydın." He claimed, "Turks had committed some crimes against the Greeks in those regions" and emphasized his "Concern for the furtherance of such atrocities."²⁴

Lloyd George and French Premier George Clemenceau strongly supported these accusations, despite the lack of convincing evidence in order to justify occupation. On 2 May, Lloyd George presented to the Council of Four, the executive organ of the Peace Conference, a document supporting the Greek cause and purporting to be from a Greek Committee in Athens. This document appeared to confirm the existence of atrocities committed by Turkish soldiers on the basis of official messages signed by the Turkish military officers ordering the Turks to exterminate the Greeks.²⁵ On 12 May, Clemenceau once more emphasized the importance of stopping the Turks' atrocities²⁶ and Lloyd George repeated his previous allegations.²⁷

The third and main reason was to prevent the Italian operations in Western Anatolia. Britain and France were against comprehensive Italian expansion despite the fact that some parts of the region had been promised to Italy in secret treaties during the War. In Lloyd George's words, "Any day it might be found that Italy had captured Anatolia and it would be difficult to get them out of there once they had occupied it."²⁸

²² Ibid., p. 93.

²³ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁴ Howard, op. cit., p. 234.

²⁵ Akşin, op. cit., p. 176; *Papers Relating...*, op. cit., p. 412; These documents were proven as forgeries by the Commission of Inquiry, See Appendices, Document 3, Point No:1.

²⁶ Akşin, op. cit., p. 179.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 180.

²⁸ Evans, op. cit., p. 165.