

The Treaties of the Aegean Sea Clash of Nationalisms

Nicholas G. Karambelas

Most contemporary writing about the Aegean Sea involves the legal and political issues that arise from the Treaty of Lausanne of 1912, the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, the Protocols to the Treaty of Lausanne and the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947. There are few articles on the historical context within which these treaties were made. The historical context means the assumptions and objectives of the negotiators, military conflicts and the facts on the ground. In other words, it involves the then prevailing international ethos. That ethos was nationalism.

The Aegean Sea

After a millennium of earthquakes, rising sea levels, even meteor strikes, the present coastline of the Aegean Sea took its present form probably around 7000 B.C. It can be described as an “elongated embayment” with an archipelago. Attracted by good natural ports, a temperate climate and fertile coastlines, people from Mesopotamia moved onto the Aegean coastline and Aegean islands in the late Neolithic Age, around 8000 B.C. Remains of Neolithic settlements have been found in these areas.

Tradition relates several different sources for the derivation of the name “Aegean.” Some ancient sources identify Aegae, the queen of the Amazons, who died in the Aegean Sea as the derivation. The most familiar story is that it is named after the Athenian king, Aegeus, who was the father of Theseus. Theseus was returning from Crete where he had killed the Minotaur. The sails of his vessel had been shredded in a storm. Upon seeing the crippled vessel, Aegeus despaired and drowned himself in the sea that now bears his name.

A fundamental principle of international affairs is that geography is destiny. From the Trojan War, the imperialistic ventures of the Athenian city-state, the sea raiders from Laconia, the Greek War of Independence through World War I & II, the Aegean Sea and its islands have been the scene of countless battles. They have also been the pathway of trade from the days of the Jason and the Argonauts, Roman shipping, the commerce of the Byzantine Empire, the ships of Venice, and the ventures of the Greek merchants and

Greek ship-owning families, the Crusader states, the maps of Piri Reis who was an admiral in the Ottoman Navy, the Greek War of Independence through World Wars I & II, the Aegean Sea and its islands have been the scene of countless battles.

Nationalism

Nationalism is a force in politics, international relations and history. For decades, academics, historians and political scientists have attempted to determine a concept of nationalism that would be generally accepted. The fundamental result of these efforts is “we know it when we see it.” Some commentators assert that the term must first be defined before nationalism can be defined. These commentators spend their efforts primarily on defining the nation rather than defining nationalism.

This author argues that nationalism arises from a group of people who adhere to a common and unique belief system, who speak a common language, and who occupy a defined geographical location. The belief system derives from religious impulses or irrational reverence for some myth or mythical figure. Nationalism arises when the belief system is asserted against or challenged by the belief system of another group of people who are in a nearby geographical location. These competing nationalisms result in wars, suffering and treaties. The key to nationalism is to identify competing belief systems between or among groups of peoples who live close to one another and speak different languages.

Ottoman-Turkish Nationalism

The Ottoman Empire evolved from tribes of Turkic peoples who migrated west across the Asian steppe during the 11th Century. It may seem anomalous to refer to “Ottoman nationalism.” The Ottoman Empire was composed of national groups against which the Empire fought. The sultans repressed competing nationalisms within the Empire. As the Ottoman Empire grew, the migrating Turkic peoples began to assert a nascent form of nationalism. The founder of the Empire was Osman I, from whose name “Ottoman” derives. There is little information about him in the historical record except that he was a chieftain who apparently unified the Turkic peoples. The warrior and conqueror ethos attributed to Osman I and the Turkic peoples whom he led were revered and emulated by the sultans. It was on this ethos that the power of the Empire and the legitimacy of the sultans was based. This power and legitimacy were fused with a religious impulse when the Ottomans converted to Islam in the 12th Century. The Sultan became the *caliph*, the successor to Muhammad, and “the shadow of Allah on earth.” The result of this fusion was a political and military force not seen in the Middle East since Alexander the Great.

The Turkish nationalism that grew from the decaying Ottoman Empire in the late 19th and early 20th Century was complicated. Not only did it embody the ethos of the Ottoman Empire but also the ideological precepts of 19th Century European nationalism. The seminal event in the transition of Ottoman nationalism to Turkish nationalism was the coup in by German-educated Turkish officers in 1908 referred to as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). These officers gradually assumed effective political and military power in the Empire. Although not an original member, Kemal Mustafa, later known as Ataturk, achieved their objective of turning Empire into a modern European nation.

There are two primary differences between Ottoman nationalism and Turkish nationalism. Ataturk rejected the imperialist impulse of the sultans and created a compact nation-state called the Republic of Turkey in which only ethnic Turks could be citizens. The other difference is more controversial. It is a common perception that Ataturk exorcised Islam from the political and cultural life of Turkey. He is credited with removing Islam as the organizing principle of governance and as the basis for the legitimacy of the nation-state, symbolized by moving the capital from Constantinople-Istanbul to the Anatolian town of Ankara.

This perception is not entirely accurate. Ataturk did not eliminate Islamic authorities but adapted them to the Turkish nation-state. Although he replaced the Arabic script, in which the Turkish language was written, with the European alphabet, the majority of Turks could not read the Arabic script anyway. He imposed a legal system based on the European civil code but retained certain Islamic principles. He instituted a parliament, but it had less power than the Ottoman assemblies of the late 19th Century. Most significantly, Ataturk retained the Sultanate, with substantially all of its powers, with himself as the *de facto* sultan. He also retained the palace guard of the Sultans, similar to the Janissaries, in the form of the Turkish military.

In most fundamental respects, Ataturk essentially continued the political culture of the Ottoman Empire. A compelling symbol of the fusion of Ottoman nationalism and Turkish nationalism is the Tomb of Suleyman Shah. Tradition has it that this is the grave of the grandfather of Osman I. The Tomb is located in Syria was had been under the control of the Ottomans since 1236. Ataturk reaffirmed Turkish control over the Tomb and that the Tomb is the property of Turkey. Today that military garrison at the Tomb, Ataturk maintained a Turkish military garrison to protect the Tomb. Today, that garrison still protects the Tomb.

Byzantine -Great Idea -Greek Nationalism

The English historian Edward Gibbon opines that the Roman Empire fell *circa*. 476 AD. However, only the western Roman Empire fell. It eventually evolved into a Catholic

empire with its capital in Rome. The eastern Roman Empire survived, with its capital in Constantinople. Almost parallel with the evolution of the Catholic empire, the eastern remainder of the Roman Empire evolved into the Byzantine Empire along divergent political and religious lines. This divergent evolution culminated in 1053 with the Great Schism. Five hundred years before the Protestant Reformation, Christianity was divided. After the Great Schism, the *lingua franca* of the Byzantine Empire became Greek. The Byzantine Empire was the natural heir to the legacy of ancient Hellenism.

For many reasons, including disputed religious beliefs within Orthodoxy and the invasion/occupation by the Crusaders in 1204, the Byzantine Empire gradually weakened. Again, geography is destiny. The rising Ottoman Empire, by then Muslim, incrementally encroached on the territory of the Byzantine Empire. In 1271, this encroachment culminated in the Battle of Manzikert, in which the Byzantine lost control of Anatolia to the Ottomans. The battle was a seminal event that eventually led to the end of the Byzantine Empire when Constantinople fell to Sultan Mehmet II in 1453.

The legacy of the Byzantines was a people which was at once Orthodox Christian, Greek speaking, conscious of its Hellenic heritage and living on the ruins of Ancient Greece within the Ottoman Empire. To rule over its non-Turkish subjects, the Sultans allowed them a measure of autonomy. They instituted the millet system that authorized local Orthodox prelates to govern the adherents within their jurisdiction. As long as the pasha received his taxes and the millet residents remained quiet, the system worked.

But as it frequently does, the law of unintended consequences took effect. The churches preserved and perpetuated Orthodoxy and Hellenic traditions. By the 19th Century, an educated merchant class of influential Greeks had arisen in Europe. Influenced by the nationalist uprisings in Europe, these diaspora Greeks sought to inspire nationalist uprisings among the Greeks living in the Ottoman Empire. These efforts were manifested through secret societies. The most notable was the Philiki Etairia (Society of Friends) formed by diaspora Greeks in Vienna. Attempts at a Greek national uprising were made as early as 1770. Ultimately, as a result of the uprising in 1821, the modern Greek state was established in 1830. It was endowed with a measure of autonomy but was effectively under the suzerainty of the European Powers, Russia and particularly Great Britain. When early attempts at a liberal democracy failed, Queen Victoria appointed Otto, the son of King Ludwig of Bavaria as King of Greece.

The territory of the Greek state was limited to the Peloponnese, Attica, a swath of land west along the northern edge of the Gulf of Corinth and some adjacent small islands. Most of the Greek population of the Ottoman Empire lived outside of the borders of the new Greek state. King Otto reigned for 20 years but abdicated as the Greeks, influenced by the liberal movements of the mid-19th Century, demanded a constitution. But, once

again, they were unable to establish a liberal democracy. Once again, Queen Victoria appointed a monarch. This time it was a prince of the Danish royal family, with whom she was related by marriage.

Unlike King Otto, King George I was anointed as King of the Hellenes and not of the Greeks. This difference in the title is significant. The title "King of Greeks" meant sovereignty only over those Greeks who lived within the borders of the Greek state which had been established in 1830. The title "King of the Hellenes" meant sovereignty over Greeks who lived anywhere outside of the borders of the Greek state. The ideological basis of this new modern Greek nationalism was the Great Idea (*Megali Idea*). The objective of the Great Idea was to "redeem" the Greeks who lived outside of the borders of the Greek state. This was to be accomplished not by bringing them into the borders of the Greek state but by expanding the borders of the Greek state to encompass those Ottoman territories in which Greeks lived. The legitimacy of the Great Idea derived from the perception that the Greeks within the Ottoman Empire were oppressed because they were Greeks and could never be free. Moreover, the Ottomans were perceived as intruders on land that had been Greek since at least nationalism never contemplated taking control of territory in which there were no Greek people. Not only was the Great Idea a nationalist ideal, it became fundamental to Greek domestic and foreign policy for at least four generations.

The Clash of the Two Nationalisms

In retrospect, it seems inevitable that Turkish nationalism and Greek nationalism would clash. It also seems that neither nationalism could exist without the other. The national objective of the Ottomans was to maintain the integrity of the Empire. To the Turks the Great Idea was a criminal enterprise meant to subvert the Empire and foment revolution among its Greek subjects. To the Greeks, the Great Idea meant liberation and the recovery of lands lost to the Ottoman interlopers. The two antagonists accomplished some territorial and demographic adjustments through diplomatic means rather than warfare. However, the Turkish objective of maintaining the Empire, and, later, an ethnic Turkish state and the Greek objective of "redeeming" Greek people and territory at the expense of the Turks most often resulted in warfare. In effect, the two nationalisms came to define and express each other in terms of opposition to each other.

The most virulent clash occurred within the context of World War I. During her long reign, the policy of Queen Victoria was to place family members who were related to her and to each other on the thrones of Europe. In this way, any international crisis could be handled as a family matter. Fortunately for Queen Victoria, she did not live to see a family spat turn into World War I.

The Treaties in Perspective

The various treaties signed regarding the Eastern Mediterranean noted above are treated, as a matter of law as sequential texts. The legal text of each treaty sets forth the rights and obligations of the signatories. As a matter of history, they are one treaty composed of three parts. From 1912 to 1947, the treaties settled related military conflicts, forced an unconscionable exchange of populations and allocated sovereignty over the same territory, the Aegean islands. The Treaties also set the national boundaries in the Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean and especially in the Middle East. The world lives with these boundaries today.

The legal texts are meaningful only within and with reference to the historical context. The events that gave rise to each treaty informed the work of the attorneys and diplomats who drafted the legal text. The historical context consists of the expectations, prejudices, moral choices, strengths, weaknesses and foibles of the negotiators and the parties. All of these elements are circumscribed by the prevailing international ethos at the time which was nationalism. It was the clash of the two nationalisms that defined the rights and obligations set forth in the final legal texts The Treaty of Ouchy and the Dodecanese Islands.

The history of the treaties begins with the Italo-Ottoman War which began in 1911 and ended in 1912. Some historians believe that this war was the first act of World War I. Ironically, Greece was not involved in the war nor a signatory to the Treaty. Greeks made up the majority of the population of the islands of the Aegean Sea that were part of the Ottoman Empire. The islands were not directly involved in this Italo-Ottoman War, but they were deeply involved in the settlement of the war.

The cause of the conflict was a clash between the rising of an imperialist ambitions Italy against the weakening Ottoman Empire. Libya was and had been a part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries. Even since Italy had been unified in 1860, it had coveted Libya. Italian mercantile interests had gradually established themselves in Tripoli. The Ottomans responded by imposing increasingly strict restrictions on the activities of the Italian merchants. The European Powers, who were allied in the Triple Entente, supported the ambitions of Italy in Libya as a means to further weaken the Ottoman Empire. Using the pretext of protecting Italian citizens and believing it would be a "cake walk," Italy invaded Tripoli in September 1911.

Unexpectedly, the Ottomans, along the local Arab people, resisted for over a year. Using its navy, Italy occupied the Dodecanese islands in order to bring the war closer to Constantinople. With the Treaty of Ouchy (also known as the 1912 Lausanne Treaty), the war ended in October 1912. Italy was granted control over Libya, although the Arab peoples engaged in a guerilla war against the Italians well into the 1920s. Italy was

supposed to return control over the Dodecanese to the Ottomans. However, due to ambiguous wording in the Treaty, Italy remained in effective control of the Dodecanese. The northern Aegean Islands were not included in the Treaty.

During the negotiations for the Treaty of Versailles, the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and the Italian Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni concluded a secret agreement by which the two nations would adjust territorial claims and make diplomatic commitments to each other. Italy would cede the Dodecanese to Greece with the exception of the island of Rhodes. Events overtook the terms of the agreement and it was never implemented.

The Treaty of London of 1913, the Treaty of Athens of 1913, and the Northern Aegean Islands

The First Balkan War began the day after the Treaty of Ouchy was signed. Greece, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia entered into a wary alliance against the Ottoman Empire. Most of the hostilities occurred in Thrace. Ostensibly, to prevent the Ottomans from transporting armies from the coast of Anatolia north to Thrace, the Greeks occupied the Northern Aegean Islands. This strategic maneuver also was made in furtherance of the objectives of the Great Idea. The majority of the peoples of each island was Greek. The Treaty of London of 1913 settled the First Balkan War. Greece occupied the islands in fact, but the only reference to the islands in the Treaty is an article which states that the fate of islands will be decided by the signatories to the Treaty. The Treaty of Athens of 1913 between Greece and the Ottoman Empire repeated this article. World War I ended any further actions with respect to the islands until the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923.

The Treaty of Sevres of 1920

Towards the end of World War I, with the belligerents exhausted, attempts were made to end it by diplomatic means. The Treaty of Sevres was one of several treaties that grew out of these diplomatic efforts. The effect of the Treaty would have been to allocate to the Allies sovereignty or spheres of influence in Anatolia and the Near East.

Consistent with the objectives of the Great Idea, in 1920, the Greek army had taken control of Smyrna and with its majority Greek population. The Treaty granted control over Smyrna and its environs to Greece as the protector of the people. But Smyrna remained under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. In a referendum to be held five years after the date of the Treaty, the population was to decide whether or not to join the Greek state. The Treaty would have confirmed Greek sovereignty over the northern Aegean Islands as well as the islands of Imvros and Tenedos, which are located at the entrance to the strategic Dardanelles. Italy was to receive a sizable portion of southeastern

Anatolia. Sovereignty over the Dodecanese was vested in Italy.

The Treaty never entered into force and law. By the time the terms of the Treaty were being negotiated, there were two governments in Turkey, the Sultan's and, the nationalist government led by Ataturk. Under pressure from the Allies, particularly Great Britain, the Sultan signed the Treaty. In 1922, the military forces of Ataturk defeated the Greek army which had attempted to reach beyond its allotted territory in and around Smyrna to seize Ankara. The victorious Turkish forces pillaged Greek villages and burned to the ground all of Smyrna other than its Turkish quarter. This Greek defeat was the first and most visceral clash between Greek nationalism which aspired to the ideal of the Great Idea and Turkish nationalism which aspired to a nation state composed of ethnic Turks. To this day, the Turks refer to this conflict as the Turkish War of Independence. The Greeks refer to it as the Great Catastrophe.

Primarily because of the Greek defeat and being weary of war, Great Britain withdrew its support for the division of Anatolia as contemplated in the Treaty of Sevres. With the Greek defeat, Ataturk also took control over the remnants of the Empire, established the Republic of Turkey and rejected the Treaty of Sevres. The Allies acquiesced and entered into negotiations with the Republic of Turkey for a new agreement which became the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923.

The Treaty of Lausanne of 1923

The Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 accomplished the objective of the Treaty of Sevres, which settled World War I in the East. It was the companion Treaty to the better-known Treaty of Versailles. The comprehensive Treaty of Lausanne involved more than just issues between Greece and the newly constituted Republic of Turkey under Ataturk. It set the lines of the borders between and among Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait and the Emirates. Although diplomacy and warfare have moved these lines over the decades since 1923, the basic framework of the national boundaries was set by the Treaty of Lausanne and that framework exists today.

The most significant effect on Greek nationalism did not involve the Aegean Islands. Rather it involved the Greek people who lived within the Ottoman Empire, particularly in Smyrna, Thrace and Pontus. Stemming from the Greek defeat in Anatolia, the treaty forced a so-called "exchange of populations." Two million Greeks were forced out of their homes and businesses in Turkey and sent to Greece while about 500,000 Turks were forced out of their homes and businesses in Greece and sent to Turkey. For the Greeks this was the Great Idea in reverse. It marked the effective end of the Great Idea as the fundamental basis of Greek national policy.

The importance of the treaty for the Aegean Islands is that it confirmed the facts on the ground. Greek sovereignty over the northern Aegean Islands, which Greece had administered since the end of the First Balkan War, was confirmed and the islands were integrated into the Greek state. The treaty also drew a water boundary. Any island or islet that was located inside of three nautical miles west from the Turkish coast was Turkish territory. Any island or islet that was located outside of three nautical miles west from the Turkish coast was Greek territory. Because of their strategic location at the entrance to the Dardanelles, the islands of Imvros and Tenedos remained under Turkish sovereignty even though the majority of the population was Greek. The northern Aegean Islands were to be and remain de-militarized, a term not adequately defined in the treaty.

The Treaty of Lausanne also confirmed Italian sovereignty over the Dodecanese. The Greek people who were the majority became Italian citizens. Unlike the northern Aegean Islands, the Treaty did not delineate a water boundary between the territorial waters of the Dodecanese and the Turkish territorial waters. This issue was and remains difficult because of geography. Formally, the Dodecanese consists of twelve islands. However, interspersed among them are about forty small islands some of which are habitable. The geography apparently made it impractical to delineate a distance water border like the one in the Northern Aegean Islands.

The Convention of January 1932 and the December 1932 Agreement

Italy and Turkey negotiated sporadically over the water boundary during the 1920s. In 1929, they asked the Permanent Court of International Justice (the PCIJ) to decide which of an enumerated list of islets belonged to Italy and Turkey respectively under the Treaty of Lausanne. Italy and Turkey continued to negotiate while the PCIJ considered a jurisdictional issue. In 1932, Italy and Turkey reached an agreement and jointly withdrew the case from the PCIJ. That agreement was memorialized in the Convention of January 1932 and a Protocol annexed to the Convention.

The Convention, dated January 4, 1932 sets forth an agreement as to the respective sovereignty of the islets enumerated in the list submitted to the PCIJ and a geometric maritime boundary between the area around the island of Kastellorizo and the coast of Turkey. The Convention was duly registered with the Secretariat of the League of Nations. Italy and Turkey further agreed to resolve the sovereignty of the islets that had not been listed in the Convention by convening a technical committee that would designate a maritime boundary between the remaining islets of the Dodecanese and Turkey. The activities of that committee culminated in the December 1932 Agreement that delineates a geometric maritime boundary between the remaining islets of the Dodecanese and Turkey. It sets forth a detailed list of each islet and whether it is Greek or Turkish.

Treaty of Peace with Italy of 1947

The Treaty of Peace with Italy of 1947 was one of five treaties signed between the Allies and each of the allies of Germany in World War II, but not Germany itself. These treaties are collectively referred to as the Paris Peace Treaties of 1947. The Treaties have a common structure. Each of them set forth agreements on territorial adjustments, politico-military matters, reparations and restitutions. Like most agreements, the Treaties are compromises and compromises that often lead to ambiguities or leave unresolved issues for future agreements.

The Allies set up a commission to decide issues of sovereignty. Greece argued that the Dodecanese must be ceded to Greece. The primary argument was that the population of these islands was overwhelmingly Greek. The argument was a vestige of the Great Idea. Over the objections of Italy, the commission ceded the twelve islands of the Dodecanese to Greece. The issue then became delineating sovereignty over the islets of the Dodecanese between Greece and Turkey. The Greek delegation advocated incorporating into the Treaty the Convention of January 1932 and the December 1932 Agreement (the Instruments). The theory was that these Instruments delineated sovereignty over the islets between Italy and Turkey so that Greece succeeded to the sovereignty of Italy under these instruments. The Soviet delegate objected. The commission asked Greece to submit a draft map that would describe the maritime boundaries which Greece asserted. Ultimately, Greece did not submit the draft map. The most likely reason is that submitting the map might compromise the legal position that Greece succeeds to the sovereignty of Italy as set forth in the Instruments.

Conclusion

Greece emerged from a seven-year military dictatorship in 1974. It became a member state of the European Union in 1980. Since that time, Greek nationalism has gradually transformed from the Great Idea into the Hellenic Idea. The Hellenic Idea is to propagate the ideals of classical Hellenism through cultural diplomacy, literature and education.

Although the philosophical basis of nationalism can change, geography does not. Turkey confronts Greece with a resurgent form of Islamic-Turkish nationalism. President Erdogan of Turkey has stated that the Treaty Regime should be eliminated and longs for the glories of the Ottoman Empire. This form of nationalism is aggressive and aggrandizing.

By contrast, Greek nationalism no longer seeks to “redeem” territory outside of Greece where Greeks live. Rather, Greek nationalism is defined by the need to defend its borders as well as the Republic of Cyprus from the existential threat posed by Turkey

since 1974. The Imia Crisis of 1996 and the daily violations of Greek airspace over the Northern Aegean Islands and the Dodecanese by Turkish jets demonstrate that the Treaty Regime that has been in force since 1911 is vital only if the parties respect it.

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