

Britain Between Greek and Turk (1919-1922)

Lloyd George: “I insist again that we mustn’t allow Italy to present us with a *fait accompli* in Asia. We must allow the Greeks to land troops at Smyrna.... My opinion is that Mr. Venizélos must be told to send troops to Smyrna. We will give our admirals instruction to allow the Greeks to land everywhere there is a threat of disturbances and massacres.”

Woodrow Wilson: “Why not tell them to land now? Do you have any objection?”

Lloyd George: “None.”

Clemenceau: “I don’t have any either.”

May 6, 1919

What was the “Megali Idea,” and how did it influence Allied policy after World War I?

The “Megali Idea” sought to unite Ottoman lands with large Greek populations into a greater Greece—a “new Byzantium.” After 1918, Eleftherios Venizelos pressed this vision at Paris, persuading David Lloyd George to back Greek expansion into Eastern Thrace and the Smyrna (İzmir) region. Lloyd George viewed Greece as a proxy to secure Western interests, check Italian ambitions, and stabilize approaches to the Straits. This alignment tilted Allied policy toward authorizing Greek occupations despite doubts in London and Paris, embedding Greek aims in postwar diplomacy and setting the stage for the ultimately ill-fated Anatolian campaign.

How did the Treaty of Sèvres attempt to dismantle the Ottoman Empire, and what did it grant Greece?

Signed 10 August 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres sought to dismantle the Ottoman Empire. It detached Arab provinces, internationalized the Straits, and fragmented Anatolia. For Greece, Sèvres embodied the Megali Idea: Greek administration of Smyrna pending a plebiscite on union, plus sovereignty over Eastern Thrace and several Aegean islands. Allied oversight, minority protections, and military limits severely constrained the shrunken Ottoman state. In effect, the treaty licensed deep Greek occupation in western Anatolia while promising a later plebiscitary vote. It left a resentful Anatolian core that soon mobilized under nationalist leadership to overturn the settlement.

What were the main internal British debates about Sèvres and backing Greece?

Inside Whitehall, Lloyd George led Hellenophile advocates portraying Greece as civilizational ally and strategic sentinel. They cited Ionia’s historic ties, atrocities against Christians, and public sympathy to justify expansive claims. Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon and military

advisers doubted Greek capacity to subdue Anatolia and urged limits. The strongest dissent came from Edwin Montagu, India Secretary, who feared alienating Britain's Muslim subjects by humiliating the Caliphate and destabilizing imperial rule. He argued for fairer treatment of Turkey. Montagu's stance cost him office, underscoring cabinet division; the clash between romantic Hellenism and imperial prudence eroded policy coherence.

How did French and Italian positions evolve, and why did they switch toward Ankara?

France and Italy initially acquiesced to a Greek landing at Smyrna to manage armistice chaos and restrain rivals. Interests soon diverged. Italy, denied preferred concessions, landed troops in southwestern Anatolia, then withdrew by mid-1921 while quietly facilitating Ankara's forces. France, bloodied in Cilicia and prioritizing Syria, made the Franklin-Bouillon Agreement (October 1921), recognizing Ankara's authority and evacuating. Both powers judged Greece overstretched and preferred a strong, stable Turkey buffering Bolshevik Russia. By late 1921, Paris and Rome had effectively aligned with Mustafa Kemal, leaving Britain isolated as Greece's chief patron and undermining Allied unity behind Sèvres.

What role did Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish National Movement play in reversing Allied policy?

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk organized a nationalist government in Ankara, repudiated Sèvres, and mobilized disciplined forces. Though Greeks advanced toward Ankara, Kemal's army—benefiting from interior lines, conscription, and limited Soviet aid—halted them at the Battle of Sakarya (August–September 1921). The victory shattered confidence in a Greek solution. In 1922 the “Great Offensive” broke the front, drove the Greeks to the coast, and culminated with Smyrna's recapture and evacuation. Military success, coupled with diplomatic outreach and administrative consolidation, compelled the Allies to abandon the Sèvres framework and negotiate directly with Ankara as the effective Turkish authority.

What was the Chanak Crisis, and how did it contribute to Lloyd George's fall?

The Chanak Crisis (September–October 1922) erupted when Kemalist troops approached the neutral Straits zone near Çanakkale, confronting British garrisons. Lloyd George threatened war, appealed to the Dominions, and sought Allied backing; none committed. France and Italy refused to fight; the Army balked; the public was weary. At home, Conservatives sustaining his coalition revolted rather than risk war for Greece. In the Carlton Club vote they chose to break with him, collapsing the coalition. Isolated abroad and domestically, Lloyd George resigned on 19 October 1922, his Near Eastern policy discredited by brinkmanship without coalition, imperial, or military support.

How did the Treaty of Lausanne differ from Sèvres, and what did it signify?

Lausanne (November 1922–July 1923) overturned Sèvres. It recognized Turkish sovereignty within National Pact borders, restoring Eastern Thrace, İzmir, and effective control over Anatolia and Constantinople, while abolishing capitulations. The Straits were demilitarized yet remained under Turkish sovereignty with international navigation guarantees. Greece accepted

fixed frontiers and a compulsory population exchange with Turkey, reshaping demographics to reduce friction. For the Allies, Lausanne acknowledged Sèvres' failure and reestablished stability by recognizing Ankara's state rather than fantasy partitions. It marked a negotiated reset of the Near East on more realistic terms reflecting power on the ground.

What lessons emerge from the shift from Sèvres to Lausanne about intervention and great-power diplomacy?

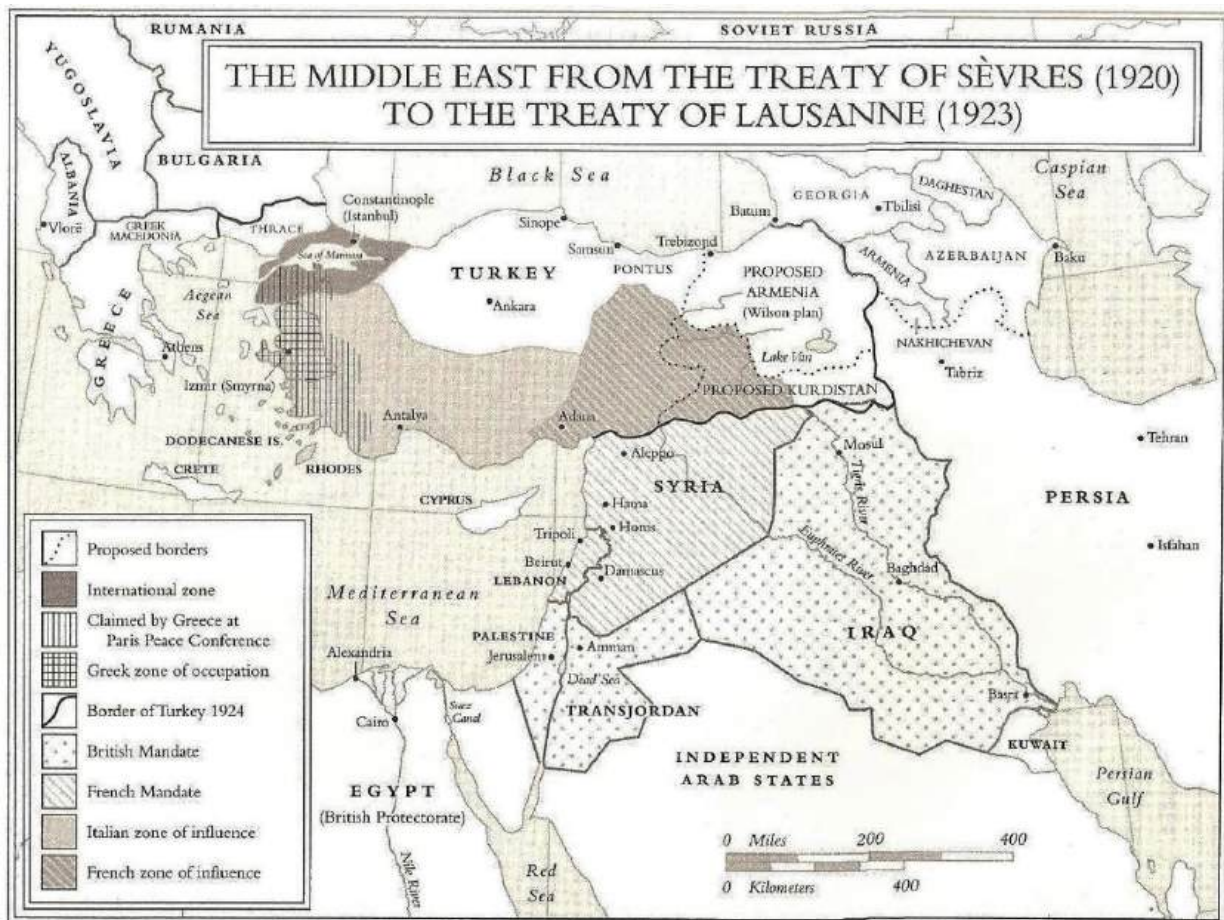
Sèvres to Lausanne shows grand designs fail without unity, logistics, and political will. Reliance on a proxy—Greece—was unsustainable once France and Italy defected. British divisions—Lloyd George's Hellenism versus Curzon's caution and Montagu's Muslim calculus—undermined coherence. Turkish nationalism, organization, and limited Soviet aid shifted facts, while electorates rejected new wars. Effective sovereignty followed those who held and governed territory, forcing pragmatic settlement. The humanitarian catastrophes—especially for Greeks and Armenians—expose how misreading local power and identity turns interventions into tragedies. Durable outcomes required aligning ideals with capabilities, accepting limits, and negotiating with the forces actually controlling the field.

Timeline

- **1918:** Lloyd George pledges not to strip Turkey of **Constantinople** or core Turkish lands (later undercut by Sèvres).
- **May 1919:** With Italy absent, the **Supreme Allied Council** approves a **Greek landing at Smyrna**; **May 15** occupation begins. Lloyd George pushes the Hellenic project; Curzon and officials voice doubts; **Montagu** warns about Muslim opinion.
- **July–August 1920:** Allies authorize a deeper Greek advance and **Eastern Thrace** occupation; **August 10 Treaty of Sèvres** parcels Anatolia, grants Greece Smyrna (admin + future plebiscite).
- **November 1920:** **Venizelos** loses; **King Constantine** returns; **France and Italy** drop support for Greek expansion; Britain grows isolated despite Lloyd George's backing.
- **August 1921: Battle of Sakarya—Kemal** halts the Greeks; Allied cohesion frays; **October 1921 Ankara (Franklin-Bouillon) Agreement:** France exits Cilicia and tacitly accepts Ankara.
- **Early 1922: Montagu ousted; February–March Gounaris** pleads for British aid; **March 6 Curzon** offers no substantive help (letter kept from Cabinet); Allied Paris formula to revise Sèvres stalls as Ankara demands prior Greek withdrawal.
- **August–September 1922: Great Offensive—Greek army collapses; September 9 Smyrna**

retaken; city burns; Christians expelled.

- **September–October 1922: Chanak Crisis**—London threatens war; **Dominions, France, Italy** refuse; British public and military balk; **October 19 Lloyd George falls** (Carlton Club revolt).
- **October 1922: Mudanya Armistice**—Greeks to evacuate **Eastern Thrace**; Turks halt before Allied zones.
- **November 1922–July 1923: Lausanne Conference** (Curzon); **July 1923 Treaty of Lausanne** overturns Sèvres: Turkey regains sovereignty within **National Pact** borders; compulsory **Greco-Turkish population exchange**.



Winston Churchill on Lloyd George¹ and Greece

Churchill was then Secretary of State for War and Air, 1919–1921, and Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1921–1922. From his book *The World Crisis: The Aftermath, 1918–1928* (1929) (excerpt)

... Being in complete disagreement with Mr. Lloyd George on Turco-Greek affairs², but preserving always an intimate and free intercourse with him, I on more than one occasion during these years invited him to state the foundations of his policy. He declared them, with his usual good humour and tolerance of the opinion of a colleague, in these terms, and more or less in these words.

“The Greeks are the people of the future in the Eastern Mediterranean. They are prolific and full of energy. They represent Christian civilization against Turkish barbarism. Their fighting power is grotesquely underrated by our generals. A greater Greece will be an invaluable advantage to the British Empire. The Greeks by tradition, inclination, and interest are friendly to us; they are now a nation of five or six millions, and in fifty years, if they can hold the territories which have been assigned to them, they will be a nation of twenty millions. They are good sailors; they will develop a naval power; they will possess all the most important islands in the Eastern Mediterranean. These islands are the potential submarine bases of the future; they lie on the flank of our communications through the Suez Canal³ with India, the Far East, and Australasia. The Greeks have a strong sense of gratitude, and if we are the staunch friends of Greece at the period of her national expansion she will become one of the guarantees by which the main intercommunications of the British Empire can be preserved. One day the mouse may gnaw the cords that bind the lion.”⁴

Arnold Toynbee on Lloyd George and Greece

Toynbee was a historian and journalist. From his book *The Western Question* (1922).

Why did Mr. Lloyd George back Greece at the Conference⁵, and go on backing her, with unusual constancy, when to all appearance he was losing on her? One must allow something for sentiment—uninformed religious sentiment on behalf of Christians in conflict with non-Christians, and romantic sentiment towards the successors of the Ancient Greeks. He is reported to have read something late in life about the Hellenic or ‘Ancient Greek’ civilisation, and to have been influenced by the identity of name. The words ‘Christian’ and ‘Greek’ possess a magical power of suggestion.... It is no insult to suppose that the Prime Minister’s sentiment

rested on common fallacies, if we assume that it was sincere as far as it went. But it would be wrong to treat it as other than secondary to practical calculations, and there is reason to believe that he calculated as follows: The British Government cannot keep troops mobilised in the East to enforce eventual terms of peace upon Turkey; Greece can provide the troops and enforce the terms with British diplomatic and naval backing, and she will gladly do so if these terms include her own claims. If Greece makes these claims good through British backing, she will have to follow Great Britain's lead. She is a maritime Power⁶, a labyrinth of peninsulas and islands, and the territories that she covets in Anatolia are overseas. In short, if Turkey can be dominated by the land-power of Greece, Greece can be dominated by the sea-power of Great Britain⁷, and so the British Government can still carry out their war-aims in the Near and Middle East without spending British money and lives.

Memorandum by Harold Nicolson⁸

Foreign Office, December 20, 1920

The idea which prompted our support of Greece was no emotional impulse but the natural expression of our historical policy:—the protection of India and the Suez Canal. For a century we had supported Turkey as the first line of defence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey had proved a broken reed and we fell back on the second line, the line from Salamis to Smyrna⁹. Geographically the position of Greece was unique for our purpose: politically she was strong enough to save us expense in peace, and weak enough to be completely subservient in war. The Treaty of Sèvres¹⁰ was thus an immense asset had it succeeded. Is it not too early at present to conclude that it has failed?

Notes

1. **Lloyd George** — David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister (1916–1922), principal Allied patron of Greek expansion after WWI.
2. **“Turco-Greek affairs”** — The post-WWI Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), sparked by the Allied-sanctioned Greek landing at İzmir/Smyrna and opposed by the Turkish National Movement.
3. **Suez Canal link** — Churchill frames Greek-held islands as potential naval/submarine bases flanking Britain's imperial artery through Suez to India and the Pacific.
4. **“Mouse ... lion”** — Aesop's fable (“The Lion and the Mouse”): a small ally (Greece) might, through gratitude and geography, secure larger British interests.
5. **“Conference”** — The Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920), where Allied leaders (Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau) shaped post-Ottoman settlements and entertained Greek claims.

6. **“Maritime Power”** — Toynbee’s point that Greece’s peninsulas/islands and sea-going tradition made her strategically dependent on British sea control.
7. **Land-power vs sea-power** — Toynbee’s logic: Greece could coerce Anatolia on land, while Britain, as sea power, could in turn constrain Greece—achieving aims without large British armies.
8. **Harold Nicolson** — British diplomat and writer (FO Eastern Dept. 1919–1920); later a noted commentator on diplomacy.
9. **“Salamis to Smyrna”** — A metaphorical second defensive line replacing reliance on Ottoman Turkey: from the Greek Straits (near Athens) to İzmir/Smyrna on the Anatolian coast.
10. **Treaty of Sèvres (Aug. 1920)** — The Allied treaty with the Ottoman Empire that envisaged major Greek and Armenian gains and severe Ottoman limitations; never fully implemented and later superseded by Lausanne (1923).



Map of “Greater Greece,” 1920

Winston Churchill on the Greek Landing in Smyrna

From his book *The World Crisis: The Aftermath, 1918–1928* (1929).

On May 15 [1919], in spite of serious warnings and protests from the British Foreign Office and War Office, twenty thousand Greek troops, covered by the fire of their warships, landed at Smyrna¹, killed a large number of Turks, occupied the city, advanced rapidly up the Smyrna–Aidin railway², had a bloody fight with Turkish troops and irregulars and the Turkish population of Aidin, and set up their standards of invasion and conquest in Asia Minor....

That Greeks should conquer Turks was not a decree of Fate which any Turk would recognize. Loaded with follies, stained with crimes, rotted with misgovernment, shattered by battle, worn down by long disastrous wars, his Empire falling to pieces around him, the Turk was still alive. In his breast was beating the heart of a race that had challenged the world, and for centuries had contended victoriously against all comers. In his hands was once again the equipment of a modern army, and at his head a Captain³, who with all that is learned of him, ranks with the four or five outstanding figures of the cataclysm. In the tapestried and gilded chambers of Paris were assembled the law-givers of the world⁴. In Constantinople, under the guns of the Allied Fleets there functioned a puppet Government of Turkey⁵. But among the stern hills and valleys of ‘the Turkish Homelands’ in Anatolia⁶, there dwelt that company of poor men . . . who would not see it settled so; and at their bivouac fires at this moment sat in the rags of a refugee the august Spirit of Fair Play.

I cannot understand to this day how the eminent statesmen in Paris, Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Venizelos⁷, whose wisdom, prudence, and address had raised them under the severest tests so much above their fellows, could have been betrayed into so rash and fatal a step.

Notes

1. **Landing at Smyrna (İzmir), 15 May 1919:** Allied-sanctioned Greek occupation of İzmir under the Armistice framework; the landing sparked immediate clashes and set off the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922).
2. **Smyrna–Aidin railway/Aydın fighting:** The Greek advance inland along the Aydın line led to heavy violence in and around Aydın in June–July 1919, with atrocities and counter-atrocities committed by both sides.
3. **“A Captain”:** Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), organizer of the Turkish National Movement and commander of the Anatolian resistance, soon to become its pre-eminent leader.
4. **“Law-givers ... Paris”:** The Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920)—principally Woodrow Wilson (U.S.), David Lloyd George (U.K.), and Georges Clemenceau

(France)—which considered Greek claims and Ottoman settlements.

5. **“Puppet Government of Turkey” in Constantinople:** The Sultan’s Istanbul cabinet operating under Allied occupation (from Nov. 1918), contrasted with the insurgent Nationalist authority emerging in Ankara.
6. **“Turkish Homelands” in Anatolia:** Alludes to the National Pact (*Misak-ı Milli*, 1920) and the Anatolian core from which the Nationalists fought to overturn the postwar settlement.
7. **“Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Venizelos”:** U.S. President Woodrow Wilson; British PM David Lloyd George; French PM Georges Clemenceau; and Greek PM Eleftherios Venizelos—the principal figures associated with authorizing or encouraging Greek moves in western Anatolia.



Greek troops landing at Smyrna, May 1919.

Lord Curzon to Prime Minister Lloyd George

June 20, 1919

Sir,

On grounds of public policy I have been a good deal disturbed at the continuous and as yet unarrested advance of the Italian and Greek forces in the western parts of the Turkish dominions in Asia Minor¹.... though these movements were in part undertaken in the first instance with the knowledge, and in the case of the Greeks with the sanction of the Allied Powers at Paris², they appear to be continued in their later stages, so far as is known here, with no similar authority, and in open disregard of the principle ... that its ultimate decisions should not be prejudiced by premature and aggressive action³ in respect of the occupation of territory by any of the interested states or Powers. Moreover, in the case of the Greeks in particular ... scenes of discreditable and unprovoked outrage⁴ are alleged to have accompanied them.

I am the more concerned at the occurrence of this twofold penetration⁵ because it is apparently being prosecuted without interference or protest (save from the Turks) at a time when the importance of retaining at least some portion of the Turkish sovereignty and of the former Turkish dominions in Asia⁶ is reported to have received a somewhat tardy recognition at the hands of the Allied Powers, although it must be clear that the realisation of any such policy will be seriously compromised by the presence in the regions affected of the forces of two States whose ulterior intentions⁷ so small an attempt is made to conceal. A further disquieting symptom is the constant recurrence of warnings from our representatives at Constantinople⁸ of the consequences that must ensue from these continued encroachments upon what remains of Turkish sovereignty in Asia, and the likelihood that this part of the Middle East⁹ will thereby be plunged into a state of renewed and, in all probability, protracted violence and disorder¹⁰. The further these advances, whether of Greeks or of Italians, are pushed, the greater becomes the difficulty of withdrawal¹¹, and the more inevitable the prospect of future strife, if not of serious bloodshed.

In the various appreciations that reach the Foreign Office of the policy that is now being pursued with regard to Turkey, I cannot find any voice that welcomes or indeed defends these encroachments. And yet the persistence of the actors¹² appears successfully to effect what the considered judgment of the spectators declines to approve.

I have ventured to submit this representation, not as a protest, which I cannot but feel will be useless, but with a view to ascertaining whether it is in contemplation to place any limit to the extension of these advances, and whether there is any ground for regarding them as provisional in character and duration¹³. I shall be very grateful for any information that you may be able to give me on these points.

Notes

1. **Italian and Greek advances in western Anatolia (spring–summer 1919):** Italy landed forces at Antalya (April 1919) and moved into parts of southwestern Anatolia; Greece, with Allied leave, landed at İzmir/Smyrna (May 15, 1919) and pushed inland—creating overlapping claims and frictions.
2. **“Sanction of the Allied Powers at Paris”:** Refers to decisions/by-consent understandings of the Supreme Council at the Paris Peace Conference (1919), which authorized the initial Greek landing at Smyrna while attempting to balance Italian claims.
3. **Anti-fait accompli principle:** Early conference guidance not to prejudice final Ottoman settlements by unilateral occupations; Curzon argues later stages of Greek/Italian moves exceeded any Allied mandate.
4. **“Scenes ... of outrage”:** Alludes to violence associated with the Smyrna landing and the Aydın campaign (May–July 1919), where Greek troops and local militias, and Turkish forces/irregulars, committed atrocities.
5. **“Twofold penetration”:** Curzon’s term for simultaneous Greek (Aegean/Ionia) and Italian (southwest coast/Antalya zone) military-political pushes into Ottoman Asia Minor.
6. **Retaining “some portion” of Turkish sovereignty:** By mid-1919 some Allied thinking shifted from wholesale Ottoman dismemberment toward preserving a reduced Turkish state in Anatolia and the Straits under conditions—later reflected, though harshly, in the draft terms leading to Sèvres.
7. **“Ulterior intentions”:** Curzon implies that Athens and Rome sought annexation or permanent control—contrary to Allied assurances that occupations would be provisional pending a treaty.
8. **Warnings from Constantinople:** British High Commission reports from occupied Istanbul (from Nov. 1918) repeatedly cautioned that Greek/Italian encroachments would inflame Turkish opinion and strengthen emerging Nationalist resistance centered in Anatolia.
9. **“Middle East.”** Contemporary British usage for the Ottoman lands east of the Mediterranean (Anatolia, Syria/Palestine, Mesopotamia, etc.).
10. **Risk of “violence and disorder”:** Anticipates the Greco-Turkish War’s escalation (1919–1922) and wider instability as the Turkish National Movement organized against foreign occupations.
11. **“Difficulty of withdrawal”:** Curzon notes the political-military problem of reversing occupations once lines are advanced—raising the likelihood of deeper entanglement and later bloodshed.
12. **“Persistence of the actors”:** A pointed way of saying that, despite Allied misgivings, Greek and Italian authorities on the ground continued to advance, creating faits accomplis.
13. **“Provisional ... character and duration”:** Curzon presses the PM to state whether limits/timelines exist for the occupations or whether they risk becoming de facto annexations.

Lloyd George at a meeting in London between Representatives of the British, French and Italian Governments

December 3, 1920

Quite frankly, he himself did not believe in the Turk¹, who had misgoverned subject peoples for generations, and was the curse of every land on which he had laid his hand. The Powers would be degrading themselves and civilisation also if they forced back under Turkish rule any of the lands which had been recently freed from Ottoman maladministration. In those districts where the Turks were in a majority it was, no doubt, necessary to allow Turkish rule to continue. But this was not the case in Smyrna², and he, for one, could not assent to any proposal which involved putting Smyrna again under the Turk, with Allied assistance. If the Greeks themselves liked to allow the Turk to get back into Thrace³ and Smyrna, then the responsibility and the infamy for the consequences must rest with them. Mr. Lloyd George added that he was no believer in international control⁴, which, in fact, was no control at all. He instanced the failure of the international control of the Straits⁵. This was due to many causes, one of which was the fact that the burdens were growing so great that the Allied peoples felt it impossible to incur new responsibilities. International control would mean that Smyrna would be invested by the Kemalists⁶ and other brigands⁷, and that the Allies would send despatches to Mustafa Kemal which he would ignore, but the Allies would be unable to send any troops. He trusted, therefore, that no decision to modify the Treaty of Sèvres⁸ would be taken until the Allies knew what the Greeks⁹ were going to do.... If the Allies began pulling the Treaty of Sèvres to pieces without knowing what they proposed to put in its place they would be initiating a fearful conflagration in the Near East. The treaty had not only been signed, but the Turk had been got out of the provinces of which the treaty deprived him....

For many years Great Britain and France had spent millions sterling in buttressing up the wretched Turkish Empire, and the Turks had then betrayed them shamefully in the last war. They had closed the Straits¹⁰ and they had shot down the French in thousands in Gallipoli¹¹. Nothing that had been done to imperil the success of the Allies was in any way comparable to the effect of closing the Straits, which had shut the Allies off from Russia and Roumania¹², and had eventually caused the collapse of those two countries as we had not been able to get munitions through to them. Were we now to say to the Turk: "In spite of this, you are a fine fellow and a good friend, and a better man than the Greek?" This, Mr. Lloyd George said, seemed to him to be a strange doctrine...

Notes

1. **“The Turk” (rhetorical usage):** Lloyd George’s polemical shorthand for the Ottoman state and its record of rule over non-Turkish subjects; standard in Allied discourse of the time.
2. **Smyrna (İzmir):** Aegean port city occupied by Greek forces on 15 May 1919 with Allied approval; a centerpiece of Greek claims under Sèvres and of later conflict with the Turkish Nationalists.
3. **Thrace:** Refers chiefly to Eastern Thrace (European Turkey west of the Straits), which the Treaty of Sèvres largely awarded to Greece; restoration of Turkish control was a core Nationalist objective.
4. **“International control”:** Proposals to place sensitive zones under joint Allied/League administration (e.g., Straits, Jerusalem, or Smyrna); Lloyd George derides these as ineffective without troops.
5. **“The Straits”:** The Dardanelles and Bosphorus (Turkish Straits) connecting the Mediterranean and Black Sea; control of passage was central to Allied strategy and postwar settlement.
6. **“Kemalists”:** Supporters of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and the Ankara-based Turkish National Movement resisting Sèvres and foreign occupations.
7. **“Brigands”:** Period label used by some Allied and Greek sources for irregular fighters in Anatolia; often Nationalist-aligned militias/chettes operating alongside or ahead of regular forces.
8. **Treaty of Sèvres (10 Aug. 1920):** The Allied peace with the Ottoman Empire that imposed severe territorial losses, granted Greece gains in Thrace and a mandate-like administration in Smyrna, and internationalized the Straits; never fully implemented and later replaced by Lausanne (1923).
9. **“What the Greeks were going to do”:** In late 1920 Greece faced a policy hinge—King Constantine’s restoration alienated key Allies, yet Athens contemplated renewed offensives in Anatolia; Lloyd George wanted Greek intentions clear before altering Sèvres.
10. **“Closed the Straits” (WWI):** Ottoman control and fortification of the Dardanelles barred Allied maritime supply to Russia and Romania from 1914; Allied attempts to force the Straits (1915) failed.
11. **“Shot down the French in thousands in Gallipoli”:** Reference to the 1915 Gallipoli campaign, where British and French forces suffered heavy casualties in failed landings against Ottoman defenses.
12. **“Russia and Roumania” supply lines:** The closed Straits hindered Allied shipment of munitions to Imperial Russia (and later Romania), contributing to their military crises and withdrawal from the war.

Lloyd George to the Allied Conference, Paris

January 25, 1921

Turning to the Greek situation¹, Mr. Lloyd George wished the Allies to emphasise the fact that they were not throwing over the Greek people².... This assuredly would mean that the Allies would incur the hatred of a great and democratic people, and in return the Allies might conceivably obtain an asset of somewhat dubious value, namely, the friendship of Mustapha Kemal³.

Of what use to the Allies was the friendship of the Turks⁴? In the past Great Britain and France had on many occasions stepped in and prevented the dissolution of the Turkish Empire⁵. When the time came the Turks seized what they thought was their opportunity and betrayed the Allies⁶ almost to the verge of ruin. It was true that the responsibility lay with the Turkish Government, but the Turkish people could not escape responsibility altogether. They were not a democratic people⁷, and they must bear to some extent the responsibility for the sins of their Government. To exchange the friendship of Greece for the friendship of Turkey would be a mistaken policy for the Allies. In his view it was quite unnecessary to use any pressure on the Greeks other than the force of argument. The Greeks were well able to hold their own in Smyrna⁸ provided that money was ultimately forthcoming, and they were sensible enough to recognise that an arrangement which saved the face of Turkey and gave them substantial control of Smyrna⁹ would be a favourable solution to the present difficulty. While he was in favour of the conference¹⁰, he felt that the Allies must decide on whether their policy at the meeting would be to give up nothing themselves and make Greece surrender the liberties of her recently-redeemed population¹¹ and make other territorial sacrifices. A transaction of this character was one which he (Mr. Lloyd George) was not in the least anxious to enter into, and he urged that the Allies should try and escape from their difficulties with as clean hands as possible. It was absurd to suppose that Mustapha Kemal would be satisfied with Smyrna. What he really wanted was European Thrace, including Adrianople¹², the removal of financial control¹³ and power to block up the Straits¹⁴. In short, Mustapha Kemal was scheming to revert to the pre-war condition of things¹⁵, and for the Allies to agree to any such proposition would mean that, as regards Turkey, the war had not been an overwhelming victory, but a disgraceful defeat.

The overthrow of Turkey¹⁶ was a matter which particularly concerned the British Empire. From first to last Britain had expended something like £1,000,000,000¹⁷, scores of thousands of lives, hundreds of thousands of casualties, and was the result to be a return to the pre-war state of things in Turkey? The Straits liable to be closed, subject races¹⁸ suffering the most dreadful oppression from their cruel and unreasoning taskmasters? What a wretched conclusion to great

story! If the Allies were to go into the conference they must go having made up their minds not only as to what they were going to do, but also as to what were they not going to do. Nothing approaching the terms which had been mentioned could be considered, nor, he suggested, was it possible for the Allies to contemplate selling the Greeks to the Turks¹⁹....

Notes

1. **“Greek situation” (early 1921):** The Allies were reconsidering policy after Greece’s Nov.–Dec. 1920 elections (restoring King Constantine) and before the renewed Greek offensive into Anatolia (spring–summer 1921).
2. **“Not throwing over the Greek people”:** Lloyd George’s warning that reversing support for Greek claims (e.g., in Smyrna/Thrace) would alienate Athens and Greek public opinion.
3. **“Mustapha Kemal”:** Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), leader of the Ankara-based Turkish National Movement resisting the Treaty of Sèvres and foreign occupations.
4. **“Friendship of the Turks”:** Shorthand for cultivating the Ankara Nationalists at the expense of Greek alliance—an option Lloyd George argued against.
5. **“Prevented the dissolution of the Turkish Empire”:** Refers to 19th–early 20th-century British/French interventions that preserved the Ottoman state (e.g., Crimean War 1853–56; periodic backing against Russia), and to post-1918 Allied forbearance before Sèvres.
6. **“Betrayed the Allies”:** Ottoman entry into WWI on the Central Powers’ side (1914), closure of the Straits, and campaigns (e.g., Gallipoli) that inflicted heavy Allied losses.
7. **“Not a democratic people”:** Period rhetoric contrasting the Sultanate/Nationalist regimes with parliamentary polities; used to assign broader Turkish responsibility for wartime actions.
8. **“Smyrna (İzmir)”:** Greek-occupied (from 15 May 1919) under Sèvres provisions for Greek administration and a future plebiscite; a focal point of dispute with the Nationalists.
9. **“Save the face of Turkey ... control of Smyrna”:** Alludes to mooted compromises—maintaining nominal Ottoman sovereignty while leaving Greek civil/administrative control in the Smyrna zone.
10. **“Conference”:** The Paris/London Allied talks of early 1921 aimed at modifying or enforcing Sèvres; Greece and the Ankara government were to be pressed toward a settlement.
11. **“Recently-redeemed population”:** Greek-administered communities in Smyrna and Eastern Thrace, styled by Athens and its supporters as “liberated” from Ottoman rule.
12. **“European Thrace, including Adrianople”:** Thrace west of the Straits; Adrianople (Edirne) was a prime Nationalist objective that Sèvres had largely awarded to Greece.
13. **“Removal of financial control”:** Nationalist aim to end foreign oversight of Ottoman finances

(e.g., Ottoman Public Debt Administration) and Sèvres-mandated fiscal constraints.

14. **“Block up the Straits”**: Reversing Allied/League control of the Dardanelles–Bosphorus regime envisaged by Sèvres; restoring unrestricted Turkish control and potential closure.
15. **“Revert to the pre-war condition”**: Lloyd George’s claim that Kemal sought to undo Sèvres and restore Ottoman/Turkish freedom of action in Thrace and the Straits.
16. **“Overthrow of Turkey”**: Lloyd George’s broader objective to prevent a restoration of Ottoman/Turkish power that could threaten Allied communications and minorities.
17. **“£1,000,000,000 ... lives and casualties”**: A contemporary political estimate of Britain’s WWI cost in the Ottoman theatre and related imperial commitments; used rhetorically to oppose concessions.
18. **“Subject races”**: Period term for non-Turkish Ottoman communities (Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, etc.) portrayed as vulnerable to renewed Turkish rule.
19. **“Selling the Greeks to the Turks”**: Lloyd George’s phrase for any Allied policy that compelled Greece to relinquish Sèvres-era gains to Turkish Nationalists.



Mustafa Kemal, 1920

Winston Churchill Remonstrates with Lloyd George

Churchill to Lloyd George

Feb. 22, 1921

I did not want to renew the argument about policy this morning. You have the power to decide the British policy, and I can only wait anxiously for the results. The kind of people whose opinions on the questions at issue ought to weigh with you are the following: The Viceroy and Government of India¹; George Lloyd, the Governor of Bombay²; the Viceroy-Designate of India³; Lord Allenby and Sir Percy Cox⁴; the officials of the new Middle-Eastern Department, Mr. Shuckburgh, Col. Lawrence, Major Young⁵; the General Staff⁶, in all its branches and representatives; the High Commissioner at Constantinople and Gen. Harington⁷; Montagu, with his special position and knowledge⁸; true and proved friends of Britain like the Aga Khan⁹. I have yet to meet a British official personage who does not think that our Eastern and Middle-Eastern affairs would be enormously eased and helped by arriving at a peace with Turkey¹⁰.

The alternative of the renewal of war causes me the deepest misgivings. I dare say the Greeks may scatter the Turkish Nationalists¹¹ on their immediate front, and may penetrate some distance into Turkey; but the more country they hold, and the longer they remain in it, the more costly to them. The reactions from this state of affairs fall mainly upon us, and to a lesser extent on the French. They are all unfavourable. The Turks will be thrown into the arms of the Bolsheviks¹²; Mesopotamia will be disturbed at the critical period of the reduction of the Army there¹³; it will probably be quite impossible to hold Mosul and Bagdad¹⁴ without a powerful and expensive army; the general alienation of Mohammedan sentiment from Great Britain will continue to work evil consequences in every direction; the French and Italians will make their own explanations; and we shall be everywhere represented as the chief enemy of Islam. Further misfortunes will fall upon the Armenians¹⁵.

Churchill to Lloyd George

June 11, 1921

As to the terms, I think they must include the evacuation of Smyrna by the Greek Army¹⁶. I do not think anything less than that gives a fair chance of winning French co-operation or of procuring Kemalist agreement¹⁷. The question of the guarantees to be taken either by a local force or by an international force for the protection of the lives of the Christians need not be finally decided at this stage, but I agree with you that effective guarantees must be obtained to prevent massacre¹⁸.

I do not think there is any time to lose. If the Greeks go off on another half-cock offensive¹⁹, the

last card will have been played and lost and we shall neither have a Turkish peace nor a Greek army.

In taking the line I am now doing on the Greco-Turkish problem, I am sure you will understand that my view as to the objective at which we are aiming has never altered. It has always been and it is still, the making of a peace with Turkey which shall be a real peace and one achieved at the earliest possible moment²⁰. I entirely disagree, as you know and as I have repeatedly placed on record, with the whole policy of the Treaty of Sèvres, and the results which have arisen from it have been those which I have again and again ventured to predict²¹. But in the difficult situation in which we now stand I am doing my utmost to find a way out of our embarrassments which will not leave us absolutely defenceless before an exultant and unreasonable antagonist.

**Official minute by Churchill to Lloyd George and Curzon
June 25, 1921**

If it be true, as seems probable from the newspapers, that the Greeks are going to refuse our offer of mediation²², I do earnestly hope we shall not hesitate to make our policy effective. If they go on against the wishes of England and France and without any moral support, and get beaten or at the very best entangled, our affairs will suffer terribly, as we shall have an absolutely unreasonable Kemal²³ to deal with. I am sure the path of courage is the path of safety. The Prime Minister said the other day at Cabinet that he would agree to any even-handed policy as regards the two sides. I think we should ask the French whether they will join with us in letting the Greeks know that unless they put themselves in our hands as we suggested, we shall definitely intervene to stop the war by blockading Smyrna to Greek ships²⁴. This threat is bound to be decisive, as what can they do? Nor will it cost us anything, as the Mediterranean Fleet is overwhelmingly strong and is in the Mediterranean already²⁵. I think everybody here would approve of our stopping the war. As the counterpart to this, we should make it clear to the Greeks that if they do put themselves in our hands and Kemal is unreasonable we will give them effective support, including the full use of the naval blockade weapon against the Turks.

I am deeply alarmed at the idea of the Greeks starting off in a disheartened manner on this new offensive. It may produce irretrievable disaster if it fails. It simply means that all the policy we agreed upon at Chequers comes to nought²⁶. I may add that if the French decline to participate in the naval blockade, either of Greece or Turkey as the case may be, I should still be in favour of our going on alone, as we are fully possessed of the means to do all that is necessary and to do it quite quickly.

Notes

1. **Viceroy and Government of India:** The top British authority in India, whose views on Muslim opinion and imperial communications weighed heavily on Near East policy.

2. **George Lloyd:** Governor of Bombay (1918–23); later Lord Lloyd; a strong voice on imperial/Middle East questions.
3. **Viceroy-Designate:** In early 1921, Lord Reading had been named to succeed Lord Chelmsford as Viceroy of India.
4. **Allenby and Percy Cox:** Lord Allenby (High Commissioner, Egypt/Sudan) and Sir Percy Cox (High Commissioner, Mesopotamia) were Britain's senior regional pro-consuls.
5. **Middle-Eastern Department & officials:** The Colonial Office unit created in 1921 under Churchill; Sir John Shuckburgh (senior official), Col. T. E. Lawrence, and (Maj.) Hubert Young were key advisers.
6. **General Staff:** The Army's planning/operations leadership, cautioning against commitments Britain could not sustain.
7. **High Commissioner & Harington:** Sir Horace Rumbold (High Commissioner at Constantinople) and Gen. Sir Charles Harington (C-in-C Allied forces there).
8. **Montagu:** Edwin Montagu, India Secretary, who urged conciliating Muslim sentiment and making peace with Turkey.
9. **Aga Khan:** Sultan Muhammad Shah, influential Muslim leader and British ally; his counsel mattered for imperial Muslim opinion.
10. **"Peace with Turkey":** Churchill argues for revising Sèvres by agreement with the Ankara Nationalists rather than enforcing it by force.
11. **Turkish Nationalists:** The Ankara-based movement led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) resisting Sèvres and foreign occupations.
12. **Bolsheviks:** Churchill feared pressure on Ankara would push it toward Soviet Russia; in 1921 the Nationalists concluded treaties with Moscow/Kars.
13. **Mesopotamia strain:** After the 1920 revolt, Britain faced costs/political pressure to reduce forces in Iraq; renewed war with Turkey risked fresh unrest.
14. **Mosul and Baghdad:** Oil-rich Mosul and the Iraqi capital were seen as untenable without significant troops if the region destabilized.
15. **Armenians:** Renewed war risked further calamity for Armenians already devastated during WWI and its aftermath.
16. **Evacuation of Smyrna:** Churchill's view that Greece must leave İzmir (occupied since May 1919) to unlock a settlement and French cooperation.
17. **Kemalist agreement:** Concessions (e.g., on Smyrna) were thought necessary to bring Ankara into a negotiated peace.
18. **Guarantees for Christians:** Debates over who would police/protect minorities if Greek forces withdrew—local gendarmerie vs international force.
19. **"Half-cock offensive":** Churchill's warning before Greece's summer 1921 Sakarya campaign—an over-

ambitious push could wreck both peace prospects and the Greek army.

20. **“Real peace ... earliest possible moment”:** Churchill’s constant objective—settle with Ankara swiftly to reduce imperial burdens.
21. **Treaty of Sèvres critique:** Churchill had long argued Sèvres was unenforceable and would provoke Turkish resistance.
22. **Refusal of mediation:** In June 1921 Britain tried to mediate; if Greece refused, Churchill urged coercive diplomacy.
23. **“Unreasonable Kemal”:** If emboldened by Greek failure, Ankara would harden terms; hence the need to check Greek moves or apply pressure.
24. **Blockading Smyrna:** Use of the Royal Navy to compel Greek compliance—naval leverage instead of land deployments.
25. **Mediterranean Fleet leverage:** Britain’s fleet in-theatre gave it a cheap coercive option, with or without French participation.
26. **Chequers policy:** Reference to a Cabinet retreat where a more even-handed policy had been agreed; another Greek offensive would nullify it.



*Big Four at Paris Peace Conference, 1919:
Left to right, Orlando, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Wilson*