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## **PEACE VS. PACT: MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATÜRK'S CONCEPT OF PEACE**



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The writing of this paper gave me a great opportunity to look, with concentration, on one aspect of Atatürk's doctrine, the politics of peace and peacemaking. By making a discourse analysis of his dictum "Peace at home, Peace in the world" in a historical and philosophical context using the texts of his great rhetoric, I wanted to look with a new awareness into his vision pertaining to the politics of peacemaking. What I have discovered on a closer rereading of the parts of his colossal **Speech** and his "Address to Turkish Youth" at the end of **Speech** was a lot more than mere political leadership in a great revolutionary period of transformation from monarchy to democracy.

Atatürk had wanted to revolutionize the new emerging nation-state, with its foundations to protect the individual's right to life, liberty, and private property, by reconstructing its liberal philosophy as the basis of the representative democratic government. He also innovates a new strategy of peace by putting it at the center of the politics of the liberal state where representative democracy ensures that the wars are fought for liberal purposes. This, however, does not ensure the permanency of the state. On the contrary, it only makes it subject to an adventurous search for wealth to the great satisfaction of the citizens' (attempting to increase the electorates' property) allowing foreign powers to make pacts against its very existence.

Politics of peace is of paramount importance for Mustafa Kemal because in a republican representative democratic government, politics of power may take the form of violating the rights and interests of one group by another at home (and of one country by another in the world). If election for representation generates hatred and hostility among people both in and outside the country, it may serve to disastrous policies of destruction.

How does Atatürk revolutionize the politics and the liberal philosophy of the nation-state in order to safeguard its permanency?

My inferences from Kemalist discourse are based on my rereading of the above mentioned texts that will be referred to in my analysis. The following are the items in my analysis of his discourse on peace and peacemaking:

FIRSTLY, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk sees war as a sublime form of self-sacrifice in the protection of the country and this protection does not cover the protection of borderlines but the protection of the fellow men within these borderlines. In the Battle of Gallipoli, his soldiers heard him saying: "I command you to die, not to fight!". About 250.000 officers and soldiers took his command and the war was won. In other words, it was his firm conviction that the wars which precluded imperialistic invasions and served to the abolishment of slavery and servitude had to be fought to the last drop of one's blood.

SECONDLY, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk transforms the concept of "the country" into, in the most liberal sense, a common "property" whose protection is made into a "gain" by the young folk of the country. In his "Address to Turkish Youth", the "country" epitomizes all our common and collective "wants" and "needs", the assuagement of which would bring us together in the form of a nation, as a genuine ingathering – a "treasure" as he calls it, to be shared by everybody.

THIRDLY, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk knew that the ancestral myths live embedded in the collective unconscious of the peoples as a grand universalizing claim for cultural experiences. So he turned to the old Turkic (the Göktürk and Orkhon) scripts in Mongolia, using the Khagans' method of narration engraved on the four sides of stone monuments. In Atatürk's **Speech** – just as we learn about the lives and achievements of the Turkish Khagans, namely Kul Tigin, Bilge Khagan (The Wise Ruler), and Tang Yuguq, in the earliest documents in the Turkish language – we learn about what Atatürk did at each instant of the War of

Independence; both parties using a cordial and fatherly first-person narration, as a remythologizing act of "good leadership".

FOURTHLY, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is a great humanitarian leader who genuinely believes in the equality of the nations and his doctrine of peacemaking draws on the enlightenment ideals of freedom of man, independence of the state, and equality of nations. Just like the American Revolution puts the Enlightenment principles into practical action, so does the Turkish Revolution, under his leadership. Atatürk believes in the united society of nations; but he knows that Peace cannot be maintained or preserved through pacts, alliances, blocks, unions or any form of treaties, but through creating a mutual confidence and partnership among nations.

In 1934 he wrote a letter to Anzac mothers:

*Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives...  
You are now living in the soil of a friendly country.  
Therefore rest in peace.  
There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us  
where they lie side by side here in this country of ours...  
You the mothers who sent their sons from far away countries wipe  
away your tears. Your sons are now living in our bosom and are in  
peace.  
Having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as  
well.*

The Enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant, in his 1795 essay, entitled "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" proposes a peace program in which he says: "No state shall, during war, permit such acts of hostility which would make mutual confidence in the subsequent peace impossible: such are the employment of assassins, poisoners, breach of capitulation and incitement to treason in the opposing state."<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Kemal enacts this by embracing the victims of the invasion armies in order to eradicate the aggression and criminality of the imperialistic forces.

LASTLY, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk advocates an Emersonian type of activism in the supervision for the integrity of a future world through a) a reformation of dogmatic religion

(Secularism); b) expanded access to education and c) enhancement of women's prestige and rights in the creation of an egalitarian society. His reforms became a battleground against ignorance, exploitation, inequality and domination.

In the rest of my paper I will try to analyze the first three items with regard to the emergence of Atatürk's peace politics in a historical context and in order to do this I will start out by making a comment on the consequences of our divergence from those politics and the reasons for this divergence. I will also

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace", [http://files.libertyfund.org/files/357/0075\\_Bk.pdf](http://files.libertyfund.org/files/357/0075_Bk.pdf). (visited, April 12, 2013).

venture upon making a quick comparison between his "Address to the Turkish Youth" and "American Declaration of Independence" in a context of political philosophy of enlightenment and will finish by making a redefinition of leadership that appears in the messages sent to Turkish Government on the occasion or after the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

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Among hails and hurrahs for the Turkish soldiers' heroic achievements in the Korean War – an expected propaganda to camouflage the battle casualties (717 killed in action; 20.246 wounded; 167 missing in action; 217 captured, with a total of 3.349) Turkey suffered in war, the poet laureate of the Turkish poetry, Nazim Hikmet gave vent to his anger in an impassioned poem he wrote in 1953, entitled Plea.

PLEA (DAVET)

This country shaped like the head of a mare  
Coming full gallop from far of Asia  
To stretch into the Mediterranean  
THIS COUNTRY IS OURS.

Bloody wrists clenched teeth  
bare feet,  
Land like a precious silk carpet  
THIS HELL, THIS PARADISE IS OURS.

Let the doors be shut that belong to others  
Let them never open again  
Do away with the enslaving of man by man  
THIS PLEA IS OURS.

To live! Like a tree alone and free  
Like a forest in brotherhood  
THIS YEARNING IS OURS.

Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963)

The poet protests Turkey's armed intervention, in alliance with other countries under the auspices of the United Nations, in the war between the two Koreas and hints at the Turkish Demokrat Party's divergence from Atatürk's dictum of "Peace at home, peace in the world." The poet resents the fact that Turkey now is fighting other people's wars.

Rather than threatened by the dawning of the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union, emulating "the affluent society" in the West, Turkey could not remain long outside the orbit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) which seemed to promise political security and if allied properly with the United States, economic prosperity. Thus, Turkey sought the NATO membership that she got in February 1952 only after sending the Turkish troops (4500 soldiers and the number increased up to 6000 later) to Korea to die and be buried in a

faraway country. Atatürk would have frowned at this and so did Nazim Hikmet. He disapproved this sharp divergence from the Kemalist principles which seemed to be in more than one directions. The country seemed to be going off the course of an;

- a) Unconditional independence,
- b) Politics of peacemaking,
- c) A modest life of a realistic, practical self-sufficiency.

After the 1950s, under the government of the Demokrat Party, Turks seemed to swap their myths of independence (the highlights of which was Mustafa Kemal) with the myths of what they thought to be the promise of progress and prosperity. Moreover, until a military coup-d'état terminated their government on May 27, 1960, Demokrat Party did not seem to be inclined to face the criticisms of their politics "at home" because they had somehow gradually got contaminated by the Red Scare after the armistice in the Korean War was signed in 1953. Nazim Hikmet, himself, became the victim of this Red Scare; he was disfranchised (1951) and had to leave the country (1950) to live and die (1963) in Russia. Thus, in the long years to come, Turkey presented the very picture of "a house divided against itself" with coup d'états, economic crises, and chaotic rise of fundamentalist religious groups. This was – and still is – the price we have to pay for participating in unjust wars and alliances that have nothing to do with our national self-determination and our own freedom and democracy.

On a quick look over again, the creation of Nazim Hikmet's poem is one of the rare moments in our cultural history where the socialist poet's ideals vigorously and authentically coincides with our founding father's guidance and directions. So Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's principle of "Peace at home, Peace in the world" appears in the form of myth-making in the last three lines of Nazim Hikmet's poem.

To live! Like a tree alone and free  
Like a forest in brotherhood  
THIS YEARNING IS OURS.

This myth is enriched by a metanarration of the Turkish origins in history:

This country shaped like the head of a mare  
Coming full gallop from far of Asia  
To stretch into the Mediterranean  
THIS COUNTRY IS OURS.

This description, with reference to our nomadic origins on horseback, constitutes the mythic logic of the analogy drawn between "a tree in the forest" and the higher quality of a peaceful life in the world. This mythogenic picture of "the lonely and free tree in the forest" is also a universal myth, the description of which appears as early as 1784, in Immanuel Kant's "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View"<sup>2</sup> but the Turkish poet, with good reason, converts it into a demand for peace and independence together. Thus, in the final analysis, Nazim Hikmet's poem invokes the experience of suffering in the

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<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of Wiew", (Third Thesis), [http://yellowpress.edu/yuPbooks/excerpts/kant\\_perpetual.pdf](http://yellowpress.edu/yuPbooks/excerpts/kant_perpetual.pdf). (visited April 12, 2013).

Turkish War of Independence in the recollections of the Turks. Thus, the rest of the poem is read like a tribute to the vision and leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in an egalitarian world.

Bloody wrists clenched teeth  
bare feet,  
Land like a precious silk carpet  
THIS HELL, THIS PARADISE IS OURS.

Let the doors be shut that belong to others  
Let them never open again  
Do away with the enslaving of man by man  
THIS PLEA IS OURS.

To live! Like a tree alone and free  
Like a forest in brotherhood  
THIS YEARNING IS OURS..

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Books of Turkish history quote a very dramatic moment, when Mustafa Kemal, upon seeing the invasion armies in İstanbul, on the day of November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1918, turns to his aide-de-camp, Cevat Abbas (Gürer), softly but with resolution says: "As they know the way to come here, they should learn the way to go back!" The great visionary leader and the winning commander-in-chief-to-be of our War of Independence, the young Mustafa Kemal was, at that time, only an officer in a disintegrated army of a country subjected to an unconditional surrender and without any hopes for future.

What was is that provoked him to utter this conviction? Was it his youthful vigor that would easily turn him into a defiant rebel; or was it a kind of genetic codification that would make him act under the most trying circumstances? Or was it just that the young man was only expressing a hope or a wish inspired by an optimistic impulse in his character? The answer to these questions is carved on the great stone monuments that have outlived the wash of the centuries in Mongolia.

Since we all happen to know the rest of the story and the consequences of what he said to his aide-de-camp as early as 1918, all we need is to ask this practical question:

Was he more of a warrior than a peacemaker? Indeed, he is a daring warrior!

It was because he had a vision to see the depth of the decline of Ottoman Empire. In almost all the fronts, after consecutive defeats in the wars with Austria, Russia, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, there was no hope to reorganize or reform the shaken foundations of the Ottoman Empire. At one point he said:

"There is not a single soldier among us who would not rather die than face the embarrassment in the Balkan War once again."<sup>3</sup>

In order not to face the same embarrassment he won the most remarkable and costly war of the series in the World War I in 1915; the Battle of Gallipoli (The Dardanelles). However, this victory only led to the occupation of İstanbul by the Allied Powers after the armistice of Mudros was signed on October 30, 1918. German-Ottoman Alliance had lost the war and it was only the beginning of the demise of the empire. Then came the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919 and the Treaty of Sévres on August 10, 1920 which partitioned the Ottoman territories among the British, French, Italians and Greek leaving Turks a very small portion of land in Central Anatolia.

The experience of cooperation at war had made it clear that allied wars were not fought to protect your own country and promote your own freedom but to stumble into new wars, and new adventures with powerful states whose main incentives were to conquer and exploit the weak states. Mustafa Kemal saw that in this new world of nation-states, war and peace were occasions for the democratic representation of the sovereignty of people and in order to get the consent of the Turkish people for the War of Independence he went on a long tour of sequential congresses in 1919. He went to Samsun (May 19); Amasya (June 13); Sivas (June 27); Erzurum (July 23); back to Sivas again (September 4); Ankara (December 26) to show and declare that there was a nationwide agreement to cut off ties with the Government in İstanbul (September 12) and wage a war for independence. On April 23, 1920 the Turkish Grand National Assembly convened its first plenary session to elect Mustafa Kemal, the speaker for it.

Mustafa Kemal had also seen that the spirit of democracy for the cause of liberation and national resistance would legitimize new alliances like the one with Bolshevik Russia in the procurement of urgent needs in an armed struggle. He pursued a very sophisticated strategy in the eventual creation of sympathy and partnership he got from the revolutionary leader Lenin without entering the Soviet sphere of influence.

Mustafa Kemal was the great warrior of the Turkish War of Independence; the commander of the Nationalist Forces (Kuvvay-i Milliye) in the decisive victories in the battles with Greeks in Sakarya (September 13, 1921); Kocatepe (August 26, 1922); Dumlupınar (August 30, 1922); İzmir (September 10, 1922) until the Mudanya Treaty on October 11 1922.

At one point of the speech he made in the Turkish Grand National Assembly on March 6, 1922 he said:

"As opposed to the progress made and standard of civilization achieved in Europe, Turkey in the past was faced with a gradual and consistent decline because we were lagging behind the scientific and technological developments that were taking place in Europe. Upon seeing those developments, a new disposition, indeed a stunning and repulsive one, seems to emerge among some of our people, to reorganize and reform our lives under the European

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<sup>3</sup> Kazım Çavdar. *Atatürk*. (İzmir: Bilgehan Basımevi, 1987), p13.

supervision; a readiness and proneness to leave ourselves to European guidance and principles.

Who could ever point at a model for any form of independence rising and persisting on the designs and advises of the mandatories?

In the course of history there is no such precedent." (Translation mine)

Disappointed as he may seem, he concludes his speech in a laconic expression of his faith in the republican democracy:

"Sovereignty without any conditions or reservations belongs to the people of our nation."

For Mustafa Kemal, war is a moral necessity because a war breaks out for explicable reasons and entitles everybody, man and woman, to fight and do away with man's enslavement. In all his messages to the nation he points at a course of action that falls within the parameters of the German Enlightenment philosopher Kant's formulation: "There can be nothing more dreadful than that the actions of a man should be subject to the will of another."<sup>4</sup> Kant gives voice to the Liberal legacy which is laden with wars fought to promote freedom and equality.

Still, what are the meaningful circumstances to promote freedom and equality – if they are not to be made into ossifications for a powerful state to wage war against the relatively less powerful one?

From his early youth Mustafa Kemal saw that powerful states were prone to war and imperialism with weak states. He also saw that imperialism of culture was harder to overcome than the imperialism of power. In his "Address to Youth" he transforms the citizens' right to freedom and equality as tenets on which the liberal state rose, into "missions to be fulfilled" because he has observed that "the protection of freedom and equality as mission" would generate an accountable relation between the citizens of the state by uniting them in the resistance against the potentially aggressive politics and dictatorial tendencies. This indoctrination in the final analysis creates the dialectics of his dictum "Peace at home and Peace in the world." Again, this is also a sharp but very original deviation from the Enlightenment philosophy of the Liberal state because as he assigns the missions and duties, he does not mention the citizens' right to private property. Instead, he turns the whole country into a private property. He says:

"In the future, too, there will be malevolent people at home and abroad who will wish [attempt] to deprive you of this treasure. If one day you have to defend your independence and your republic, you will not tarry [hesitate] to weigh circumstances before taking up your duty. These possibilities [state of affairs] and circumstances may be extremely unfavorable. The enemies nursing [plotting] designs against your independence and your republic may have behind them, a victory

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Bertrand Russell. *History of Western Philosophy*. (London: George Allan and Unwin Ltd., 1971), p. 678.



unprecedented in the annals of the world. It may come to pass that, by violence and ruse, all the fortresses of your beloved fatherland will be occupied, all its shipyards captured, all its armies dispersed, and every part of the country invaded. And what is sadder and graver than all these circumstances [those who hold the power may, in their corruption and negligence and treachery, betray the country audaciously. Moreover, those with power and influence may, combine their interests with the political intentions of the enemies.] The country may be impoverished, ruined and exhausted.

Oh, child of Turkey's future, even in these circumstances it is your duty to save Turkey's independence and the Turkish Republic." (Additions in brackets mine)

The usage of words "home", "treasure" (in the original repeated twice), "fortresses", "beloved fatherland", "shipyards", "armies", "every part of the country", "sad", "grave", "impoverished", "ruined", "exhausted" aim at associating with a picture of "destroyed home - that is the country" by the traitors positioned within home, allying secretly with the enemy. Keeping in mind that "home" is one of the essential archetypes, the picture of "destroyed home" is an everlasting call for action to protect it as a duty. This rhetoric also remythologizes the content of the Göktürk / Orkhon scripts on the monumental stones and reads, for instance, like Bilge Khagan telling his people:

"I brought the dying people back to life; for the naked people I found clothing, the poor people I made rich, the scanty people I made numerous. I have made the other, which has a kingdom and a khagan to stand higher. All the peoples in the four quarters of the world I have brought to keeping the peace and making an end of hostilities; they all have obeyed me and served me."<sup>5</sup> (translation not mine)

Deep down in the Turkish collective unconscious Bilge Khagan, the peacemaker, with his generosity of heart, capacity to accomplish heroic deeds, stands like an anthropomorphic deity in his leadership to give inspiration to the Turkish people in accomplishing all the duties concerning the country, because "a country is a home".

Atatürk's discourse of peace aims at this mythic transformation of the liberal culture by demythologizing its materialistic and commercial mentality by appealing to a narrative logos which counteracts the enlightenment myth of progress. For Mustafa Kemal spiritual values cannot be sacrificed for material progress because those are the elements in the organization of a culture which provide a deeply felt and believed mythology through which we can map, track, or imagine our ontological reality. This mythology and not an admiration for heroism at war will be the true savior of people at the times of crisis.

On the other hand, a nation can cease to be dependent; but this does not necessarily mean that independence can really make freedom possible for a people. In order to make a progress from one level of awareness to another,

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<sup>5</sup> *Orhon Yazıtları: Kül Tiğın, Bilge Kagan, Tunyukuk*. Çev. Talat Tekin. (İstanbul: Yıldız, 2003), p.85.

man has to go “beyond the mechanical ordering of his animal existence”, Kant proposes.<sup>6</sup> Subordination and subjection most of the time can be eliminated by a commitment to the elimination of poverty and weakness, that is to say the elimination of the dependence of the poor on the wealthy. Worship of property, or the conscious pursuit of wealth may lead to the subversion of civilized society.

“American Declaration of Independence” with its philosophy and energy arouses respect because it brings an end to the period of monarchs and empires putting an emphasis on the Civil Compact in the institutionalization of “the government at the service of the people”. However, it does not exemplify a communality with sympathy for the needy, poor or underprivileged. When the list of accusations directed at the English king attempts to put forward “the suffering” as a justification for separation, the opposition to taxation takes priority over consent to opposition to political domination. In other words, “Declaration”, on the whole, does not extend beyond common good, but its implicit disapproval of ignorance and folly, its love of truth and lack of dogmatism make it a mythmaking document of modern democracy.

The reason why Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s leadership became an inspiration for many other countries in their own wars of Independence must be that he was a sincere, artless believer of an egalitarian world, a dedicated defender of humanitarian values and a wholehearted opponent of tyranny. In order to see his influence on the political leaders and intellectuals of the world, one needs to look at the messages sent to the Turkish government on the occasion or after his death. On a quick review of those in my hand, these messages come from all over the world, within a range from the kings, presidents, foreign ministers, diplomats, ambassadors, military attachés, generals... to professors, journalists, writers, historians, spokesmen for various newspapers... I have the Turkish translations of 197 messages in my hands printed on 30 pages. I have picked up some of those because they were sent on either the occasion of his death or after relatively closer occasions (visits, celebrations) to his death. Each one of these messages apart from expressing condolences at his lost, is a praise of his leadership which emphasizes different aspects of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as commander and strategist at war; as statesman with a great diplomacy at the time of peace; and as a revolutionary and reformer of his country. This last category invariably reads like a warning to Turks in future, added to a note on Turkey mixed with emulation and idealization of the change she has gone through under his leadership.

By all means, Mustafa Kemal appears in those messages as a genius whose achievements transcend far beyond the local – reaching the universal standarts. (the translations below are mine)

Pandit Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister says:

“Kemal Atatürk was my hero in my youth. I and my friends were in the middle of our our fight for independence and were put in prison. We were following his laborious tasks to save Turkey from foreign domination with great concern. I will never forget how we celebrated and enjoyed his great victory when the news reached within the walls of our jail.”

Raymond Cartier, the columnist of Le Nouvelliste, writes:

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<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant. “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View”. Third Thesis.

"The diplomatic circles of his time had declared that it was not possible any more for Turkey to change herself so was doomed to die. But she did change herself from top to toe turning over all traditions sects and faiths – the last bits of which they threw away like foreign warships and capitulations. Turkey changed her soul thoroughly beyond imagination... How could she possibly manage it?

It is a just that a man happened to pass by, a man of medium stature who walked like everybody else, but with a different flame in his eyes. This man was Mustafa Kemal."

Sanerwin, the French newspaper writes:

"Atatürk died. The eastern column of the dome of peace collapsed. As of today no one can guarantee the protection of peace in the world. Leaders of Europe failed to see his warnings in the 1930s and dragged their countries into the devastating World War II in 1939."

The German historian Professor Helbert Melzig writes:

"... Mustafa Kemal took a people, hampered by appalling conditions, without an army or weapons, by the hands and started a war and a new epoch in history. At the end of his struggle he proved that sprit of faith in his people rises above all the weapons in the world.

He became a model of excellence among other military commanders because he was bold and daring in the face of risk of death."

Liman Von Sanders remarked that he would always trust Mustafa Kemal's will power because he did not fear to take responsibility and that he was a born leader...

Adolf Hitler praised him by saying that in his person we had lost a great military leader, a statesman of genius, an outstanding figure in history..."

The King of Afghanistan, Emanullah Khan cries over his tomb: ... If I had not come to his funeral and cry in front of this great man who now passed to eternity, I could not have stood this separation...

Ludwig Erhard, the German Prime Minister writes : ... Atatürk came out victorious from a relentless and desperate struggle and took over his shoulders the responsibility of the mainterance of the state...

John F. Kennedy. The President of the USA writes:... Atatürk is the face not only of the success of this reforms in Turkey but also of the self confidence of masses of people...

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, The President of the USA writes: ... I am very sad for two reasons: Firstly, at his loss as a leader and secondly, there are no chances of my meeting him in person any more ...

The New York Times writes :... He is the one who won the first victory of Asia over Europe with the Treaty of Lausanne. No invasion armies in the history of the world met such a devastating defeat as that of the Greeks.

The Chicago Tribune writes: The most remarkable fascinating man in the history of the world passed away...

The Bulgarian Kojuhof says: Everything he did justifies what Gladstone once said: "The world is not as interesting as it used to be after the death of this exceptional personage..."

The Chinese writer Ma Shao-Cheng writes: Mustafa Kemal is the very heart of modern Turkey...

Chang Kai Shek said: His life and his work will continue to be inspiration not only for the people of Turkey but also for all the peoples of the world of independent nations...

Charles De Gaulle, the French President says: ... I should like to be the mouthpiece of the French people expressing the loyalty and the friendship to the Turkish People on the Occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary of Great Atatürk's death...

England's ambassador to Turkey Sir Percy Loraine writes: "Some people wrongly and unjustly think of Atatürk as a dictator. It is true that nobody would hesitate to call both Moussolini and Hitler dictators. However, the label is not to be attached to any leader so easily because the definition yet lacks precision. Atatürk does look so immune to this attribute, though. Among many reasons, there is this fact that, Atatürk encouraged the study of science especially for the times that he would be gone..."

So the praises for Atatürk flow so spontaneously from the mouths of all the leaders of various countries all over the world. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was, it is true, the prodigy of nature for the Turks, as well as the others, a person of unusual and remarkable abilities and on top of everything else, a remarkable model for leadership.

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At this point, in order to look with insight into the nature of his leadership, I would like to make reference to the work of an American film director, the mythmaker of American politics, Steven Spielberg's fascinating analysis of this concept in a historical context based on a real incident in American history which dramatizes a clash between the true leaders and those who are not.

Steven Spielberg's "Amistad" shot in 1997 is a remarkable commentary on leadership as a quality to be a savior of suffering people as opposed to the quality to be a commander or a ruler. The film delineates and dramatizes the character of a leader in very much the same attire as Aristotle's "The magnanimous man"<sup>7</sup> who acts on the principle that "there are conditions on which life is not worth having"; loss of honor, courage and goodness as "the crown of virtues." From this point

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<sup>7</sup> Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy, pp 187-188

of view, one can read the film as a direct criticism of American political leadership which, back at the times of frontier settlement, was based on "proven ability" of the self-made men who were expected to solve the local problems and shook hands with the poor.<sup>8</sup>

Locating his film, first, on a slave cargo ship whose slave passengers enjoy, for a short

period of time, their liberation after a mutiny in 1839 but only to be caught and sent to prison in a New Haven, Connecticut jail. From the very first scene, the film shows the tribal African leader in the process of making: he is the one who with great effort and under painful strain to manage to unlock the shackles and liberate the other Africans, to perceive their deplorable technological limitations to move the ship without white captain's help; he is the one, while the others mindlessly celebrate their release dancing, to organize night watches to follow the stars; he is the one who upon being recaptured to observe and scrutinize, in his profound suffering, this new white society with a researcher's curiosity.

Cinque, the African leader emerges at the time of crises to be the savior of his people and in order to put an emphasis on his ancestral home we are told that he was also the one who, by killing a lion, saved villagers back at home. Cinque in prison works for his people, tries to learn the language and with his poor English convinces the white lawyer, the abolitionist, Roger Sherman Baldwin, who in turn convinces another lawyer, the former president, John Quincy Adams who is, after a long succession of trials, to save the Africans. In other words, in the whites' society, a black-man with the least elocution manages to express himself accurately to galvanize the man with an outstanding oratory into helping him.

Among the three American Presidents; Martin Van Buren (the present); John Quincy Adams (former) and John Calhoun (later to be) only John Quincy Adams seems to represent the American lineage of founding fathers, not because he happens to be the son of John Adams of Declaration of Independence, but because he has the great capacity to understand human condition. Martin Van Buren hesitates and is easily carried away – rather repressed – by the slave holder John Calhoun's rhetoric on the economic importance of slaves for the South. He also lets himself be threatened by the Southern Senator who says that if the government frees the Amistad Africans, the South will go to war with the North.

Thus, the film makes a comment on the leadership of men with great souls as opposed to the human suffering generated by the courts whose justice seem to lie in the hands of the ambitious, weak, greedy and cowardly.

Leadership is important because it has to do with the myths – belief formulations to be transmitted to the future generations – of a country. Our myths create our spirit which creates our leaders and only leaders can solve the pending, crucial problems of the country. Leadership also has to do with the ethics of a country. At this point Spielberg's film proves to be a very original approach to the topic: Leadership in the least and the most developed countries of the world creates

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<sup>8</sup> Ray Allen Billington. "Frontiers" in **A Comparative Approach to American History**. Ed. C. Vann Woodward. (Washington: Forum Series, 1997), pp. 81-90.

the same ethics. By juxtaposing the African tribal leader with the leader of the most progressive country of the world, and both of them dealing with the same catastrophic problem that is the enslavement of man, one party as a victim, the other as the victimizer, the film reaches a code of leadership:

- a) A true leader can solve the problems by breaking the shackles of convention – not by accommodating himself in the convention.
- b) He can take the initiative under very testing circumstances.
- c) The true form of leadership is resistance to tyranny.
- d) Defeats only reinforce the leader's determination to achieve.
- e) The leaders are the embodiments of the same character traits in all cultures, all over the world. They are egalitarian, humanitarian and visionary.<sup>9</sup>

As the film draws to a climactic tension at the Supreme Court, Cinque's simple but

learned advice to John Quincy Adams that "in times of crises they called the spirits of their forefathers to their help" so he should do the same the former president seems to perceive the path to victory: leadership, after all, is creating a mentality to create energy.

Spielberg's film, it is true, leaves a record of American antislavery debate of the past in an attempt to create a mythic leadership in the person of John Quincy Adams. What is amazingly spectacular to me is to see John Quincy Adams talking in the same tone as in Mustafa Kemal in the Speech (*Nutuk*) when he writes in the first person-narration with deep concern about the advancing danger of the civil war in a letter written on February 24, 1820:

"After this meeting, I walked home with Calhoun who said that the principles which I had avowed were just and noble; but that in the Southern country, whenever they were mentioned, they were always understood as applying only to white men. Domestic labor was confined to the blacks, and such was the prejudice, that if he, who was the most popular man in his district, were to keep a white servant in his house, his character and reputation would be irretrievably ruined.

I said that this confounding of the ideas of servitude and labor was one of the bad affects of slavery; but he thought it attended with many excellent consequences. It did not apply to all types of labor – not, for example, to farming. He himself had often held the plough; so had his father. Manufacturing and mechanical labor was not degrading. It was only manual labor – the proper work of slaves. No white person could descend to that. And it was the best guarantee to equality among the whites. It produces an unvarying level among them. It not only did not excite, but did not even admit of inequalities, by which one white man could domineer over another.

I told Calhoun I could not see the things in the same light. It is in truth, all perverted sentiment - mistaking labor for slavery, and dominion for freedom..."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a definition see Emre Kongar. *Devrim Tarihi ve Toplum Bilim Açısından Atatürk*. (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1983), pp. 104-105.

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Thus, leaders of the just wars speak the same language throughout the centuries; and if so is it possible that their legacy can be fully obliterated?<sup>11</sup> Or rather, can the unjust wars be won simply by removing this legacy from the memories of a people? I would say, the Turkish experience shows that this question deserves to meet with an abrupt "NO!".

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<sup>10</sup> John Quincy Adams, Calhoun and the Missouri Compromise, in **Eyewitness to America**. ed. David Calbert. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> Mehmet Devrim Topses in his book *Kurtuluş Savaşı Sosyolojisi* writes about the dialectics between the 18th Century Enlightenment and The Turkish War of Independence, (Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık, 2009), pp. 76-122.

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