

During my third and (for the foreseeable future) final year at the British Institute at Ankara, the thrills and chills of Turkish politics continued apace. In the run up to 16 April, the country was swamped with campaigning for the referendum to change Turkey's parliamentary system to a presidential one. Posters the size of basketball courts proclaiming 'Our decision is yes' were draped from buildings along major roads in Ankara and Istanbul, where they even hung from the Theodosian city walls. Comparatively dwarfed 'No for my future' banners fluttered in opposition-dominated urban districts, while bridges, lamp posts and roadside barriers were fought over with graffiti and stickers proclaiming 'yes' and 'no', words that became so politicised that 'No to cigarettes' pamphlets were withdrawn from health centres in some parts of the country. On the night of the election, I watched together with colleagues as a substantial initial lead for the Yes camp on the basis of votes from eastern Anatolia was whittled down to 2% as votes from the western cities came in. Although the aims of the governing party and its leader were fulfilled, No's victory in Istanbul and Ankara, and the closeness of the result have left the outcome of the next election, due in 2019, less certain than it may have appeared otherwise.

Turkey's diplomatic relations suffered during the campaign, as government ministers' attempts at rallies among the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands and Germany led to scenes of confrontation, while harsh criticism of the fairness of the vote from the Council of Europe produced anger in Ankara. The arrest and detention of foreign journalists and civil-society activists, joining many Turkish colleagues behind bars, deepened Turkey's diplomatic crisis, which engulfed US relations after the arrest of local members of its embassy staff following long-running tensions over the US' choice of partners in Syria and continued failure to extradite Fethullah Gülen. Britain somehow avoided any major public dispute with Turkey, a distinct possibility during an intense period of negotiations over Cyprus, instead signing deals to sell fighter jets to the country, even while Turkey took the momentous step to procure its anti-aircraft weapons system from Russia.

Such contemporary shifts in the diplomatic landscape are a pertinent reminder of the importance of the 'Turkey and Britain 1914–1952: from enemies to allies' research project that I have been responsible for implementing. Begun in October 2015, the project aimed to promote new research on the history of UK-Turkish relations in the period 1914–1952, while bringing journalists, diplomats and other stakeholders into a multidisciplinary debate on their historical legacy. Our first workshop, focusing on British-Ottoman imperial rivalry and conflict in the run up to and during the First World War,

was successfully held in Ankara in April 2016. Junior and senior colleagues produced new insights into the conflict that made modern Turkey and the Middle East, working across Turkish, British and international sources in a refreshing departure from the mono-national focused research that has characterised past publications on the topic.

Our second workshop, which took place from 31 March to 1 April 2017, was focused on the interwar period, which witnessed the division of the defeated Ottoman Empire by Britain and its allies, the emergence of the Turkish National Movement under Mustafa Kemal and the instigation of a new relationship between the Turkish Republic and Britain that shifted from suspicion to friendship in the later 1930s. The workshop took place in Cambridge in Churchill College's Jock Colville Hall, named after Winston Churchill's principal private secretary during his time as prime minister. Churchill himself loomed large throughout the workshop; he was both architect of Britain's major clash with the Ottoman Empire during the First World War (with a Gallipoli Campaign memorial plaque mounted in the hall serving as an ever-present reminder of this) and a key advocate of a revised Turkish policy during his time as Secretary of State for War and, later, the Colonies. Researchers had the chance to visit the Churchill Archive Centre in the same building, containing important personal records from the period kept by Churchill and his contemporaries.

As intended, the historically focused workshop was nevertheless highly interdisciplinary, with 18 presenters from the fields of history, comparative literature, international relations, anthropology, archaeology and political science engaging a broader audience of doctoral students, academics and diplomatic staff. Complementary to this, a further objective of the project was to analyse UK-Turkey relations in their broadest possible sense. Papers on intelligence gathering and high diplomacy over such contentious issues as the rightful ownership of the former Ottoman province of Mosul and the international regime governing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits complemented work on the interactions of British and Turkish literary figures, archaeologists and historians. Listening to these diverse papers, I was again convinced that the history of the early Republic, for all its specificity and uniqueness, deserves to be read as part of an entangled story in which developments in Turkey were linked with contemporary events in Britain, Europe, the Middle East and the wider world.

The British-led occupation of Istanbul and its machinations for the rest of the remnant Ottoman Empire during the period 1918–1923 brought Turkey and Britain face to face and set the tone of UK-Turkey relations in the coming decades. Largely forgotten in Britain as other imperial crises stole the attention of the public and policy makers, the occupation is well known in Turkey, where school and university courses give particular attention to the War of Independence period, and continues to shape Turkish suspicions of British and Western intentions in



Scottish soldiers march past the Dolmabahçe mosque, Istanbul.

the region. The topic was well represented at the workshop, with Hakan Özoğlu assessing British plans for the autonomous future of the Ottoman capital, Michael Llewelyn-Smith examining Britain’s wavering support for the Greek occupation of Izmir and its surroundings, Alp Yenen looking at British intelligence gathering on Nationalist-controlled Anatolia, Alaadin Paksoy analysing Turkish press reporting on the Treaty of Sevres of 1920, which set out the division of the Ottoman Empire, and Richard Toye detailing Britain’s imperial response to the confrontation with Turkish National Forces at Çanakkale in 1922.

My own paper also focused on this period, looking at Britain’s role in maintaining and creating multiple legal systems within the Ottoman Empire and its failed attempt at their preservation during the negotiation of the Treaty of Lausanne which conferred recognition on the new Turkish Republic in 1923. Legal privileges, known as the

capitulations, had been requested by European ambassadors for their subjects during the 15th and 16th centuries, and were, for the most part, willingly granted by Ottoman sultans. By the late 19th century, the legal exemptions from taxation and trial by local courts that benefitted British and other foreign subjects had become a clear obstacle to the centralisation and expansion of the Ottoman state, provoking major discontent on the part of the Ottoman public. Britain was reluctant to relinquish such privileges, which could be extended to local merchants in exchange for influence and eased their economic penetration of the region. The crisis of the summer of 1914 presented a moment of opportunity for the Ottoman government, which unilaterally declared the end of the capitulations from 1 October onwards, breaking obligations entered into in the 19th century that had transformed privileges granted by the sultan into bilateral treaty clauses that could not, in the British view, be abandoned without mutual agreement. The diplomatic dispute between the two countries was subsumed by the declaration of war on 5 November 1914. At the termination of the conflict, Britain used its dominant position in the Ottoman capital to restore its subjects’ legal privileges, while working with its allies to create new legal institutions for the governance of the multi-ethnic and multinational city. Promises of reform, however, were belied by the establishment of an arbitrary and contested system of martial law for the governance of the city, which saw British officers fine and imprison Ottoman subjects with little legal process. The Turkish National Movement’s victory in Anatolia dealt a final blow to the pluralist legal system that had governed the Ottoman Empire, including the legal privileges of selected foreigners. The failures of the Turkish justice system, long used by British ambassadors as an excuse for the prolongation of the capitulations, remain at the centre of disputes between Turkey and its western partners, as the cases of imprisoned German journalist Deniz Yücel and American pastor Andrew Brunson highlight.

My paper and others selected from the first and second ‘Enemies to allies’ workshops have now been submitted to the journal *Middle Eastern Studies*, which we hope will publish a special issue on the history of UK-Turkey relations based on the work of the project to date. Two future workshops, on the Second World War and early Cold War, are also planned, but have been postponed while the project’s committee continues its search for funding. The crucial years of the 1940s and 1950s are particularly deserving of further study, witnessing Turkey’s decisive if not irrevocable entry into the orbit of the Western bloc with its admission to the NATO and CENTO alliances and the move to multi-party democracy.

Events of the last few years, which have weighed heavily on the minds of everyone at the Institute, show just how crucial it is to understand the foundations and challenges of Turkey’s partnership with Britain and the wider Western world.

Special page of the newspaper *Tasfir-i evkar* proclaiming the news that the capitulations would be abolished.

