THE SECOND TIME AROUND: BRITISH POLICY TOWARD THE KURDS (1921-22)

BY

ROBERT OLSON
University of Kentucky

This article focuses on documents from the Public Record Office of Great Britain written by Lieutenant Colonel A. Rawlinson on 4 March 1922 and minuted by Colonial Office officials through 17 March.¹ The report and its minutes are significant because they give succinct statements regarding the possibilities and potential of British support for Kurdish rebellion in Anatolia, i.e., territories which the British did not occupy militarily. Rawlinson was an intelligence and political agent of the British in the Middle East from 1918 to 1922. He was on duty in Turkey from October 1919 to November 1921 at which time he was released from prison by the nationalist Turkish forces and exchanged for Turkish prisoners interned by the British at Malta.²

Upon his return to Great Britain, Rawlinson wrote several reports for Lord Curzon and Winston Churchill, respectively Foreign Secretary and Colonial Secretary as well as the Director of

¹ Colonial Office (henceforth C.O.) 730/28. Rawlinson’s report and the accompanying minutes of Colonial Office personnel are dated from 4 March to 17 March 1922 and consist of pages 200-209. References will be to these pages unless otherwise indicated in the text.
² Soon after his release from prison in Turkey, Rawlinson wrote Adventures in the Near East (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1929), about his activities in the area. Also see Salah Ramdan Sonyel, Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923 (Beverley Hills: Sage Publications, 1975), p. 24. According to Sonyel, Rawlinson’s reports were of some interest and importance to British officials especially regarding the differences among the nationalists leaders such as Rauf Orbay, Selaheddin Bey and Vehbi Hoca and Kemal Atatürk, see Sonyel, Turkish Diplomacy, p. 163.
Military Intelligence at the War Office.\textsuperscript{3} The report which concerns us here was written at the request of Winston Churchill.

In the first part of his report, Rawlinson posed three questions and then proceeded to answer them: (1) How far the policy of the Allies contributed to the consolidation of the nationalist power; (2) What measure of success attended their defiance of the Allies' proposals; and (3) What prospect the Turkish nationalists considered themselves to have realizing the terms of their “pact”.\textsuperscript{4} In response to question one Rawlinson stressed the uncertainty among the nationalist leaders of being able to “obtain the general support of their countrymen despite their strengthened position after the Erzurum Congress (23 July to 7 August 1919) and the Sivas Congress (4 to 11 September 1919).” Up until spring 1920 the Turkish nationalists still had much opposition. But, contended Rawlinson, this opposition evaporated as a result of the allied occupation of Constantinople (16 March 1920); allied support for the Greek invasion of western Anatolia via Izmir (15 May 1919) and the announcement of the Peace Treaty of Sèvres (10 August 1920) and the Nationalist Peace Treaty with the Soviet Union (16 March 1921).\textsuperscript{5}

In answering question two regarding the success of nationalist defiance of the Allied proposals for peace, Rawlinson stated, that they had been able to mobilize the entire Turkish (Osmanli) population; they captured Kars and the Armenian forces (September 1920) and they began vigorous military operations against the Greeks in western Turkey. In addition, the nationalist leadership sent German trained intelligence officers to establish regular connections via Kabul with revolutionary leaders in India, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt.

\textsuperscript{3} Rawlinson, \textit{Adventures}, pp. 351-3.


\textsuperscript{5} C.O. 730/28, p. 207.