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Greek Decision-Making and the Battle of the Sakarya River, 1921: Towards a New Assessment?

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The article seeks to reassess certain key decisions by the leadership of the Greek Field Army of Asia Minor (FAAM) in connection with the battle of the Sakarya River (23 August to 14 September 1921), at which the FAAM reached the high water mark of its campaign against the Turkish Nationalist forces during the Greco-Turkish War of 1919 – 1922. The article focuses on the Greek decisions (i) to exploit their victory at Eskişehir in July 1921 by crossing the Sakarya river and attempting to capture the Nationalist capital of Ankara, (ii) to attack the Nationalist forces arrayed behind the Sakarya river by way of an envelopment of their southern flank rather than a direct assault and (iii) to abandon the offensive and withdraw on 11-13 September 1921. The article argues that the historiography of the campaign, particularly in English, has tended to be overly critical of the first of the above decisions and insufficiently critical of the latter two. It concludes that (i) there were compelling reasons for the FAAM to make a determined attempt to capture Ankara despite the challenges and risks of doing so, (ii) the plan of battle was overly complex and risky from a tactical and a logistical standpoint whilst a direct assault across the river might have been more effective and involved less risk, and (iii) the withdrawal may have been premature. While it has been argued that the Sakarya river campaign is a classic illustration of Clausewitz's concept of a 'culminating point', at which an offensive pushed too far yields the advantage to the defender, the article argues that it has just as much to teach about Clausewitz's countervailing principle of 'continuity', which holds that an insufficiently aggressive follow up of an initial victory can lead to unnecessary defeat.

The Greek Field Army of Asia Minor (the FAAM) reached the high-water mark in its 1919-22 war against the Turkish Nationalists on 2 September 1921, when it captured the dominating height of Mt. Çal, east of the Sakariya River in central Anatolia and 65 kilometres from Ankara, the capital of the Turkish Nationalist Movement. This achievement capped an 11-day offensive aimed at seizing the city and, if possible, decisively defeating the Turkish Nationalist Western Front (the WF) commanded by Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk). Within two days, however, General Anastasios Papoulas, the commander of the FAAM, had called a halt to offensive operations and asked his government in Athens for a decision as to whether the political value of occupying

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Ankara justified a continuation of the offensive and the consequent risks and casualties. A week later the FAAM commenced a withdrawal under pressure from a Turkish counterattack. Within a year it had been decisively defeated by the Nationalist forces and expelled from Anatolia.

This paper seeks to re-assess, based on recent scholarship and primary sources, the Greek decisions to (i) advance on Ankara and engage the nationalist forces east of Sakarya River following their victory at Eskişehir, (ii) conduct the battle in the way they did, and (iii) call off the offensive and withdraw. It will consider whether the decision to advance on Ankara was reasonable in view of the potential advantages to be gained and the associated risks; whether the Greek battle plan, which involved an envelopment of the nationalist position from the South, was the best available option and whether the decision to withdraw may have been premature. While the paper does not purport to resolve these issues definitively it argues that the historiography to date, at least in English, has tended to be overly critical of the first of the above decisions and insufficiently critical the other two.

Background

The moment was undoubtedly a critical one for the Greeks.[1] Following the Ottoman defeat in 1918 the victorious allies had granted Greece, in recognition of its decision to join the Entente Powers, the right to occupy the former Ottoman territories of Eastern Thrace and Smyrna, both of which contained large ethnic Greek populations, with a view towards holding a plebiscite that would eventually allow Greece to annex those territories. The Greeks had deployed troops to Smyrna in 1919, supported by Britain and France (but opposed by Italy, which had its own claims on Smyrna), each of which also occupied portions of former Ottoman territory in Anatolia. These arrangements were ultimately codified in the Treaty of Sèvres, signed with the Ottoman Empire in August of 1920. Before and after the signing of the treaty, however, all of the occupying powers incurred increasing costs and came under increasing threat from a burgeoning Turkish nationalist movement based in Ankara and led by Mustafa Kemal.

In the fall of 1920, Greek relations with the Entente powers suffered a serious blow with the untimely death of the Greek King Alexander II as a result of an infected monkey bite, followed by an election in which the party of Greek premier Eleutherios Venizelos was unexpectedly defeated by a royalist faction whose dominant figure was Demetrios Gounaris, which brought back from exile Alexander's father, King Constantine. Venizelos, with the encouragement and active support of France and England, had opened the way to Greek entry into the war in 1917 by forcing the abdication of Constantine, who had followed a policy of neutrality and was viewed as pro-German. Constantine's return poisoned public opinion in France and Britain against Greece. France and Italy took the opportunity to seek to negotiate separate accommodations with Kemal that would allow them to withdraw from Anatolia.

The royalist government was faced with a decision whether to continue the effort to achieve the Venizelist ambition of an expanded Greek state on both sides of the Aegean, the so-

[1] The account that follows relies mainly on Michael Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian vision: Greece in Asia Minor 1919-1922* (Ann Arbor, 1973, revised edition 1998) chapters 4-10; Stanford L. Shaw, *From Empire to Republic: the Turkish War of National Liberation 1918-1923: a documentary study (Ankara, 2000)*, Vol. III part 1, and Andrew Mango, *Ataturk: the biography of the founder of modern Turkey* (New York, 1999) pp. 305-315.

called 'Megali' (Great) idea, or abandon it. It chose to continue the effort and to seek a military victory over the Turkish nationalists. Those efforts began with two military setbacks in late 1920 and early 1921, known as the first and second battles of İnönü, followed by a significant victory in July which left the FAAM poised at Eskişehir, located strategically on the railway line which ended at the nationalist capital of Ankara.

Historiography

The Greek decisions to advance from Eskişehir to Ankara and engage the Nationalist forces east of the Sakariya River have been criticised, both by contemporaries and historians, on the basis that the effort was not worthwhile and that failure was or more or less preordained.

Such critiques date back to the earliest writers on the war, who in turn are quoted in later works. Toynbee, who had toured the region during the war and reported on atrocities by both sides, wrote in 1922 that the Greek attempt to capture Ankara was 'a crazy enterprise, for every rational objective had disappeared. The annihilation of the enemy? Three times already that stroke had missed its aim. The occupation of his temporary capital? As if the loss of [Ankara] would break a Turkish morale which had survived the loss of Constantinople, or would prevent the Grand National Assembly from resuming its activities at Sivas or Kaisaria.'[2] Pallis in his 1937 book on the diplomatic history of the war quotes Ioannis Metaxas, a German-trained former chief of staff, who had by the time Pallis wrote his book become Prime Minister (and dictator) of Greece, warning Venizelos of the dangers of an advance into the hinterlands of Anatolia and comparing them to those encountered by Napoleon in Russia.[3] Metaxas later gave similar warnings to Gounaris when he sought to recruit Metaxas to join Papoulas' staff or even replace him as the FAAM commander in early 1921.[4] An assessment by the British War Office in June 1921 predicted that the coming offensive on Eskişehir, which was later continued towards Ankara, would ultimately fail.[5] Two of the three FAAM corps commanders opposed the decision to advance on Ankara from Eskişehir at the time it was made and the Army commander himself was apparently unenthusiastic about it.[6]

After the war such criticism came even from the most determined international supporter of the Greeks, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who referred in his memoirs to the 'careless and reckless advance' on Ankara, even though he had ridiculed the War Office assessment mentioned above, and recent scholarship shows that he secretly 'permitted and promoted' the Greek offensive.[7]

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[2] Arnold Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey* (London 1922) pp. 237-8.

[3] A.A. Pallis, *Greece's Anatolian venture – and after: a survey of the diplomatic and political aspects of the Greek expedition to Asia Minor 1915-1922* (London, 1937), pp. 20-26, quotes objections advanced by Metaxas to Venizelos in 1915 very similar to the Clausewitzian "culminating point" analysis of Nioutsikos, *op. cit.*

[4] Quoted in Smith, *Ionian vision* pp 204-207.

[5] The War Office assessment of June 1921 can be found in B.N. Şimşir (ed.), *British documents on Ataturk*, (Istanbul 1974) Vol. III, Item 200.

[6] See Hellenic Army General Staff, *A concise history of the campaign in Asia Minor 1919-1922* (Athens, 2003) pp. 216-217; Prince Andrew of Greece, *Towards disaster* (London, 1930) pp. 91-97, and Smith, *Ionian Vision* pp. 229-30.

[7] Daniel-Joseph MacArthur-Seal, 'Intelligence and Lloyd-George's Secret Diplomacy in the Near East, 1920-1922', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 56, 4 (2013) p. 718, quoting David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the peace conference*

Much modern historiography has continued along the same lines. Shaw in his five volume documentary history of the Turkish independence struggle credits the Turkish commanders with 'luring the Greeks into a trap' by withdrawing beyond the Sakarya and inducing the FAAM to attack them there.[8] Giles Milton's history of Smyrna in the period before during and after the Great War quotes Toynbee with approval.[9] A recent book length treatment of the Greek Turkish War dismisses assertions that King Constantine, the Greek sovereign and titular commander in chief of the FAAM, championed the Ankara offensive and states 'that he was such an excellent soldier as had been proved during the Balkan wars that he would never have committed the mistakes made by the Greek military leadership. Constantine would never have marched on Ankara.'[10]

A collection of scholarly articles on the war published in October 2020 to mark its centennial contains three articles which characterize the offensive that ended at the Battle of the Sakarya River, respectively, as an example of 'the operational and tactical weakness of the Greek military strategy to overcome the fundamental factors of friction and fog of war', as an illustration of Clausewitz's theory of 'culmination' where an offensive becomes exhausted and gives way to counterattack, and as an attempt to achieve a decisive victory in circumstances where such a victory could not have realistically been achieved.[11]

Methodology

This article does not seek to reassess (or in any way to justify) the royalist government's political decision to reject proposals by the Entente powers aimed at a negotiated solution to the conflict at and after the London meetings of February-March 2021 and instead to seek a military solution of the conflict with the Turkish Nationalists, nor does it seek to address the broader ethical issues involved in this bitter and brutal conflict. Rather, it focuses on the narrower decisions taken at and after Gounaris' visit to the FAAM headquarters at Kütayha on 28 July 1921 following the victory at Eskişehir to continue the FAAM offensive towards Ankara and engage the Nationalist forces east of the Sakarya River, as well as those subsequently taken regarding the conduct of the engagement and ultimately whether to call off offensive operations and withdraw. These decisions were primarily military in nature even if, as will be argued, they required a proper appreciation of political imperatives. The latter two decisions have received surprisingly little attention in the English language historiography, perhaps because of the apparent consensus as to the inadvisability of launching the Ankara offensive in the first place and the widespread view that Greek defeat was inevitable. As the British military attaché in Athens noted in December of

(New Haven, CT, 1939) p. 870. Lloyd George's sarcastic comment, following the battle of Eskişehir, on the War Office assessment is quoted in Smith, *Ionian vision*, p. 226. A subsequent claim of vindication by the primary author of that assessment, General Timothy Harrington, is quoted in Shaw, *Empire to republic* Vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 1353.

[8] Shaw, *Empire to republic* Vol. 3, pt. 1, pp. 537-538.

[9] Giles Milton, *Paradise Lost: Smyrna 1922: the destruction of a Christian city in the Islamic world* (2008) p. 210.

[10] Heinz Richter, *The Greek-Turkish War 1919-1922* (Wiesbaden, 2016) p. 121.

[11] Dionysios Tsirigotis, 'The Asia-Minor catastrophe: the causes of Greece's defeat', Konstantinos Travlos (ed.), *Salvation and catastrophe: the Greek-Turkish War, 1919-1922* (London 2020) pp.111 – 142, at p. 123; Ioannis Nioutsikos, 'The Greek military strategy in the Asia Minor campaign, 1919-1922: an application of Clausewitz's theory on culmination' Travlos *op. cit.* pp. 143 – 171; Edward J. Erickson, 'Decisive battles of the Asia Minor campaign 1921-1922', Travlos *op. cit.* p.173 – 195, at p. 182.

1921, '[t]he true wonder is not that the Greek Army failed to gain decisive success but that it went so near to gaining it.'[12]

This article will reassess these decisions in light not only of Clausewitz' theory of 'culmination', as Nitsioukis has effectively done, but also his theory of 'continuity', which holds that an initially successful assault must be pursued relentlessly and as long as it has any realistic prospects of further success.[13] Both concepts would have been well known to the many German-trained commanders on both sides of the conflict.

Travlos in the introduction to his 2020 collection of essays on the conflict summarizes the current state of the historiography in English, Greek and Turkish.[14] He notes that English language works tend to focus primarily on either Greek or Turkish sources, and also more on the diplomatic and/or political rather than purely military aspects of the conflict, and that Greek and Turkish scholarship has tended to be affected by domestic political influences, in particular the 'National Schism' between republican and royalist factions on the Greek side, and the narrative expounded by Atatürk in his 'Great Speech' on the Turkish side.

Only a few months after Travlos' collection was published the first military history of the war in English was published by one of Travlos' contributors, Edward Erickson. This book contains a wealth of information, which like Erickson's other work draws extensively from Turkish sources, as well as the concise Greek General Staff history, but does not address directly the issues on which this article focuses.[15]

This article has sought to draw on a mix of Greek and Turkish sources in as balanced a way as possible. The main primary sources utilized are the Greek and Turkish General Staff histories of the campaign. A concise version of the former is available in English. The latter is available online in Turkish and was consulted with the assistance of a translator. In addition, contemporaneous British military and intelligence assessments were consulted to provide insight into the views of the combatants and other interested parties, including the 'Great Powers' of the day and in particular Great Britain, as the campaign developed. Memoirs are available in English by two of the participants, Prince Andrew of Greece, commander of FAAM Army Corps B, and Halide Edip Adivar, a journalist and academic who observed the battle at the side of Mustafa Kemal. Neither of these memoirs is unbiased. However, both offer a wealth of eyewitness detail, and in the Prince's case, documentary evidence. The article has also sought to draw on a balance of secondary sources, including English language works that rely predominantly on Greek (Smith, Richter) and Turkish (Shaw, Mango, Erickson) sources, as well as the invaluable essays, mostly by Greek and Turkish scholars, collected by Travlos. Finally, certain Greek and Turkish language secondary sources referenced in the English language materials have been consulted with translation assistance.

[12] Şimşir (ed.), *British documents on Ataturk*, Vol. IV, Doc. No. 63, encl. 3, p. 165.
[13] Carl v. Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret (ed. and tr.), (Princeton 1976; rev. ed. 1984), pp. 528; 625.
[14] Travlos, *Salvation and catastrophe*, pp. 7-9.
[15] Edward J. Erickson, *The Turkish War of Independence: a military history 1919-1923*, (Santa Barbara, CA, 2021).

The article will conclude that the Greek military leadership seemingly never had a proper understanding of the high risks involved in failing to achieve a clear, if not necessarily a decisive, victory, and thus adopted a conservative approach to the campaign that made such a victory less likely. It will argue that the campaign is therefore a good illustration not only of the factors that may lead to a culminating point being reached but also of how concerns over culmination may undermine opportunities to apply effectively Clausewitz's countervailing principle of continuity.

PART ONE: The Advance on Ankara

Culmination or continuity?

As briefly described above, both recent and older historiography of the battle of the Sakarya tends to treat it, in substance if not expressly, as a classic example of Clausewitz' theory of culmination, with the capture of Mount Çal constituting the 'culminating point of victory' where momentum swings to the defender. Nioutsikos, who makes this argument expressly and in detail, cites the following as his text:

> If the superior strength of an attack – which diminishes day by day – leads to peace, the object will have been obtained. There are strategic attacks that have led directly to peace, but these are the minority. Most of them only lead up to the point where the remaining strength is just enough to maintain a defence and wait for peace. Beyond that point the scale turns and the reaction follows with a force that is usually much stronger than that of the original attack.
>
> The natural goal of all campaign plans, therefore, is the turning point at which attack becomes defence. If one were to go beyond that point it would not just be a *useless* effort which could not add to success. It would in fact be a *damaging* one… [Emphasis in original][16]

Clausewitz's concept of culmination is, however, in tension with another concept, the principle of continuity, which holds that a defeated enemy must be pursued relentlessly, boldly and even in the face of imperfect intelligence, logistics challenges and other less than ideal conditions:

> Once a major victory is achieved there must be no talk of rest, of a breathing space, or reviewing the position or consolidating and so forth, but only of the pursuit, going for the enemy again if necessary, seizing his capital, attacking his reserves and anything else that might give his country aid and comfort…we demand that the main force should go on advancing rapidly and keep up the pressure.[17]

As noted by Handel, '[b]oth the principle of continuity and the concept of the culminating point of victory (or attack) are very perceptive – but at the same time contradictory. On the one

[16] Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 528 and 570, quoted in relation to the battle of the Sakarya and the capture of Mt. Çal by Nioutsikos, 'Greek military strategy', p. 143.
[17] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 625.

hand Clausewitz advocates the full exploitation of a successful attack, but he also advises caution since the culminating point of victory is "often.. entirely a matter of the imagination [i.e., it cannot be identified objectively]"'.[18] In other words, one might say it is not simply a matter of ticking off the circumstances listed by Clausewitz that can contribute to an attack reaching its culminating point, important as they are to consider. Rather, the ability to judge whether a culminating point has actually been reached or the principle of continuity calls for a further effort, is a hallmark of military genius and art, rather than science.

Although the FAAM's organization, training and doctrine had come largely from French military missions before and during the Great War, a number of figures influential in 1921, including King Constantine himself (Kaiser Wilhelm II's brother-in-law), and Generals Stratigos and Metaxas, had received German military educations, or would have otherwise been familiar with Clausewitz's concepts, as would their counterparts among the Turkish nationalist commanders.[19] In late July, 1921, following the FAAM's clear but not decisive victory at Eskişehir, its commanders were called upon to advise their Government in substance (although they do not seem to have phrased it this way), as to whether a culminating point had been reached, or whether a further advance was warranted. We will begin by summarizing the circumstances they faced, the advice they gave and the decisions that were ultimately made, and then turn to the arguments for and against continuing the advance toward Ankara.

The meeting of 28 July 1921: situation report

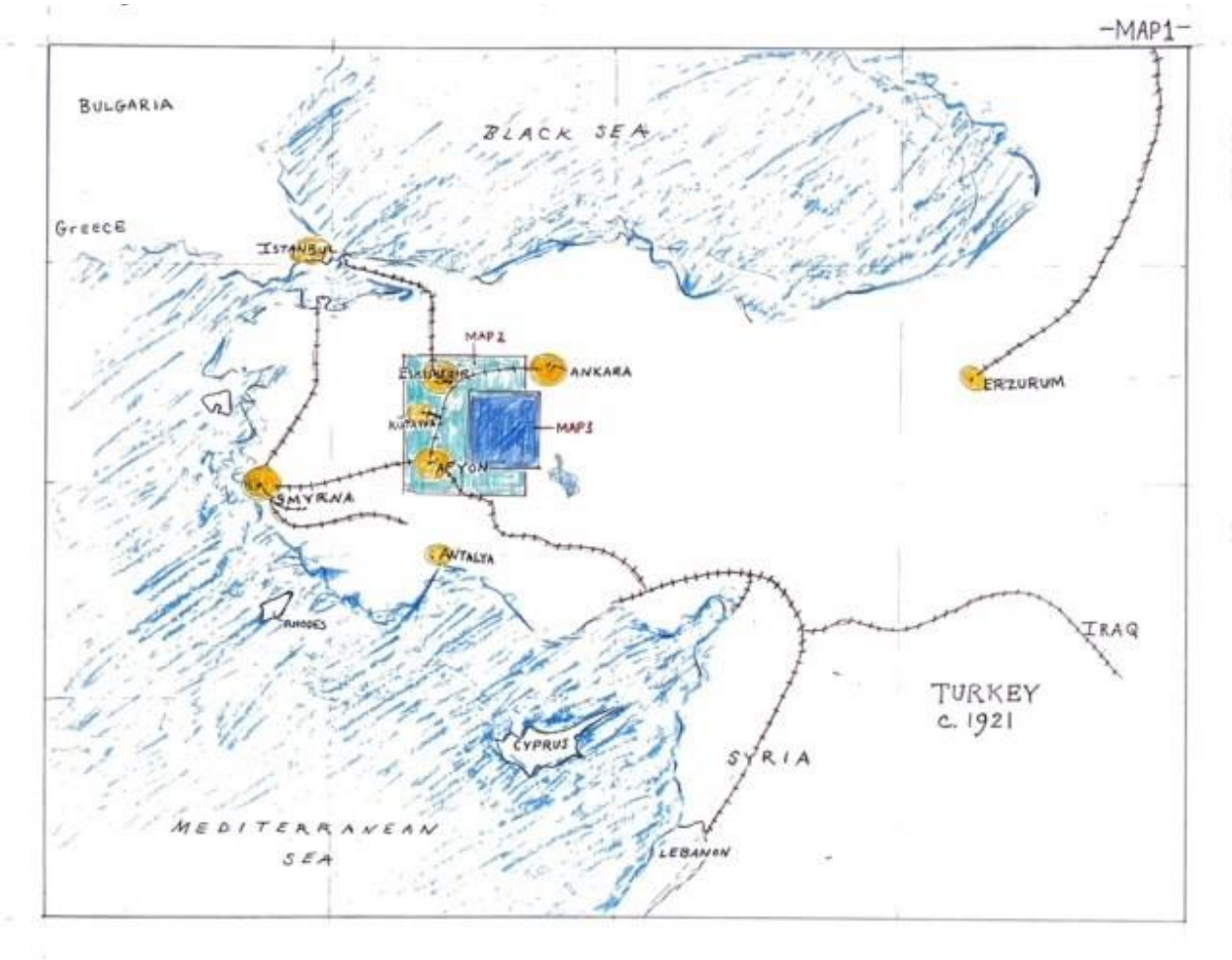
Prior to the battle of Eskişehir, the WF's position was anchored on the aforementioned two key junctions that controlled Anatolia's only north-south railway line that had remained under Nationalist control as well as the advanced fortified position at Kütayha at the end of a Western spur of the railroad midway between them. During the battle itself, launched on 10 July, the FAAM overwhelmed the WF's southern grouping at Afyonkarahisar with seven divisions and sought to outflank and trap the northern grouping at Kütayha and Eskişehir, which was pinned by the remaining four Greek divisions, with the aim of not only capturing the two rail junctions but also destroying the WF.[20] The manoeuvre was successful in the former goal but not the latter. The WF commander İsmet was forced to withdraw rapidly, first from Kütayha on 17 July and then from Eskişehir on 19 July, in order to avoid encirclement, but then launched a counter-attack on 21 July which, although unsuccessful, held back the FAAM long enough to enable the

[18] Michael I. Handel, *Masters of war: classical strategic thought*, (London and Portland, OR, 1992, 3rd Rev ed. 2001, electronic version 2005 - unpaginated), position 3353.

[19] Xenophon Stratigos studied at the Berlin Military Academy as did Constantine and Metaxas. Smith, *Ionian Vision*, p. 340 and 342. Prince Andrew quotes 'Klausewitz' in his memoir *Towards disaster*, at pp. 272-3. For an account of the French military mission to reorganize and train the Greek Army in 1917 (which followed an earlier one in 1911) see Hellenic Army General Staff Army History Directorate, *A concise history of the participation of Hellenic Army in the First World War 1914-1918* (Athens, 1999), p. 154. A concise history of the German military mission and the German role in training and doctrine of the Ottoman Army over the period 1882-1918, including the centrality of Clausewitz's writings, can be found in Edward J. Erickson, 'From Kirkilisse to the Great Offensive: Turkish operational encirclement planning 1912-1922', *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 40, No. 1 (2004), pp. 45-64, at pp. 45-47.

[20] Army History Directorate, *Concise history*, pp. 152-3; Erickson, 'Decisive battles', p. 177-178.

WF to withdraw eastwards towards the Sakarya river, significantly damaged in numbers, material and morale (although not so much as claimed by the victorious Greeks), but intact.[21]



Map 1: theatre of operations including the main cities and rail lines.

On 28 July, Greek Prime Minister Demetrios Gounaris met at Kütayha with FAAM commander Lt. Gen. Papoulas and his staff, in the presence of the King and the Minister of the Army, to discuss next steps. Gounaris opened the meeting of 28 July by inquiring whether the

[21] See Erickson, 'Decisive battles', p. 179; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian vision*, p. 225. Battle casualties seem to have been relatively low – less than 7,000 killed and wounded, but Turkish sources indicate that significant numbers of Turkish troops (30,000 to 48,000 depending on the source) deserted or, according to the Turkish staff history, 'dispersed'. Mango, *Ataturk*, pp. 315-316, Turkish Armed Forces Department of Archives and Military History, *Kütayha Eskişehir Muharebeleri (15 Mayis-25 Temmuz 1921), Türk İstiklâl Harbi IInci Cilt Batı Cephesi 4ncü Kısım [Battles of Kütayha and Eskişehir (15 May – 25 July 1921), Turkish War of Independence 2nd Volume Western Front Part 4]*(Ankara, 1974), p. 583. The Greek staff history reports Greek casualties as 8,072 and notes that FAAM announcements following the battle were exaggerated and led to an overly optimistic impression. Army History Directorate, *Concise history*, p. 214-215.

FAAM's command group believed the Nationalist forces had been so damaged as to enable the Greek government to declare the war ended, such that even in the event the Nationalists did not accept a negotiated peace, Greece could proceed with a unilateral settlement of the situation and gradual demobilization of the army. If not, he asked what the FAAM recommended the next step should be.[22] Following an internal debate, in which the chief of the FAAM Operations Bureau, Lt. Col. Ptolomeos Sariyannis, expressed strongly the view that the FAAM should advance as quickly as possible to take advantage of the enemy's disorganization, while the chief of the Supply Bureau, Lt. Col. Giorgios Spyridonos, expressed doubt about its ability to supply the army on a campaign beyond the Sakarya river, the FAAM staff had produced a memorandum, signed by the commander in chief, which his chief of staff presented at the meeting. Practically every historian who has commented on it has denounced this document as confused and contradictory, being apparently designed to acknowledge the concerns of all sides without addressing any difficult decisions, and thus leaving the army command with room to argue in future that the course of action followed, if it miscarried, was not what they had recommended, laying the blame on the political authorities.[23]

The memorandum proposed that the FAAM pursue the retreating WF with a view to bringing it to battle on the west side of the Sakarya river, something the Turks would have been most unlikely to accept, since they had a strong geographical defensive position on the east bank and no such strong position on, or viable retreat route from, the west bank. If the FAAM were successful in defeating the WF there, the memorandum calls for it to launch a 'raid' on Ankara with a section of the army, destroy the nationalist supplies there, and 'if the enemy after this does not yield, because it is disadvantageous to remain in Ankara, return to Eskişehir, totally destroying the railway line.' If on the other hand, the Nationalist army withdrew to the east bank of the Sakarya, 'the Field Army will advance or stop, according to the conditions that will arise until this time. If, that is, these conditions are favourable, for example, the seizure of the railway line intact, roads and tracks in good condition, etc., the march on Ankara is possible to continue, otherwise the Field Army will return to Eskişehir...'[24]

The Nationalists (unsurprisingly) did not offer battle west of the river, and the FAAM soon committed itself to a full assault on the Nationalist position on the east bank of the river, a decision that the commanding general of the FAAM appears to have gone along with only reluctantly.[25]

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[22] Army History Directorate, *Concise history*, p.216; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian vision*, p. 228; Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, pp. 100-101.

[23] See, for example, Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, pp. 229-30 and Richter, *Greek-Turkish War*, p. 121. For even more pointed critiques see Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, pp. 101-106 and Vasilios Lumiotis, Brig. Gen. (ret), 'Η Απόφαση για Επιχειρήσεις προς Άγκυρα [The decision on the operation to Ankara]' *Μικρασιατική Εκστρατεία 1919-1922 (mikrasiatikhekstrateia.gr)* (posted 28 August 2016).

[24] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p.217.

[25] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, at pp. 131-132, notes that the operation had changed from a simple raid to an all-out assault no later than 7 August, and quotes the relevant order. He goes on to note at pp 132-133 that '[a]fter the campaign was over, great efforts were made to make it appear, both at home and abroad, that no definite decision to capture [Ankara] had ever been come to, whereas at the beginning of August it was understood by everyone that operations were aimed at the capture of the enemy's capital.' He also quotes Lt. Gen. Papoulas as having 'later' (presumably after the campaign had ended) 'confessed to me' that he 'absolutely refused to give his

The case for culmination

As has already been noted the weight of historical opinion of the campaign, beginning with Toynbee and continuing through to the present, is that the FAAM should have been satisfied with its victory at Eskişehir. This position is advocated forcefully by Prince Andrew, the King's brother and major general commanding Army Corps B, who according to his own memoir and the Greek General Staff history, opposed the operation in July along with the commander of Army Corps A, Maj. Gen. Alexandros Kontoules, on the basis that they 'believed that in order to succeed in an operation of such scale, there had to precede a significant reinforcement of the army in men and munitions, as well as thorough organization and training. Without this preparation they considered the operation doomed to failure.'[26]

In his memoir, Prince Andrew proposes instead that the army should have halted, if necessary for some months, while it was reinforced and re-equipped, before considering whether to continue the offensive. He cites the case of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in support of his position, arguing that 'the Russia of 1812-1813 had many points of similarity to Asia Minor' and that if Napoleon had stopped at Smolensk for the winter rather than proceeding to Moscow in 1812 he might have taken the city the following year and held it.'[27] If, however, the army could not be sufficiently reinforced he admits that the Eskişehir-Afyonkarahisar position would have been untenable (as was in fact proved to be the case in 1922) and argues that the FAAM should have withdrawn to a shorter line closer to Smyrna, which it could have held with a reduced force and demobilized a portion of the army.[28] Metaxas in his memoirs stated he made a similar recommendation to Gounaris when he refused his offer of command of the FAAM in 1921.[29] Prince Andrew also argues that the value of occupying Ankara would not have justified the cost of capturing it.[30]

As noted in the introduction, Pallis, quoting Metaxas at length, endorses the Napoleon-in-Russia analogy, as do, among others, Richter and Erickson.[31] Nioutsikos describes in detail how the circumstances of the advance on Ankara conform to many of the factors cited by Clausewitz that cause an attacker to lose strength and eventually become weaker than the defender. These include (i) an increasingly unfavourable diplomatic situation, and a correspondingly more favourable one for Kemal's nationalists, (ii) internal legitimacy and morale challenges due to the strains of a long war and maintaining a large army on a small and relatively poor country such as Greece, (iii) overextension of supply and communications lines as the FAAM advanced deeper into enemy territory, which the Turks exploited with superior cavalry forces; (iv) guerrilla warfare and the detachment of units to garrison occupied and hostile territory

consent to th[e Ankara] operation and even threatened to resign in the event of his staff and the Government insisting on their views...but, in spite of that, he agreed to act against his personal convictions.' *Id*., pp. 96-97.

[26] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 218.

[27] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 117.

[28] *Id*., p. 114.

[29] Smith, *Ionian vision*, pp. 204-205.

[30] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 114.

[31] Pallis includes in his book a geographic comparison of Russia and Asia Minor. Pallis, *Anatolian venture*, pp 20-26. See also Richter, *Greek-Turkish war*, p. 120 and Erickson, 'Decisive battles', p. 189.

(beyond the Greek ethnic majority areas near Smyrna) and (v) increasing attrition from assaults on defensive lines and fortifications.[32]

Erickson argues that the Sakarya offensive was unlikely to result in a decisive victory for the Greeks (which he defines as one that would have destroyed the WF) because (i) while the destruction of the WF was a hoped for result the Greek plan was actually based on the geographic objective of Ankara and (ii) single envelopments are seldom decisive and such a manoeuvre would be particularly unlikely to be decisive against a command team as experienced at that of the WF, all of whom had fought in both the Balkan Wars and the Great War against superior opponents.[33]

These mostly retrospective arguments are supported by a contemporary British War Office assessment of the FAAM conducted in June 1921 (prior to the Eskişehir battle) which is discussed in the introduction and predicted in essence that the FAAM would reach a 'culminating point' prior to the achievement of Greek political goals in Asia Minor. This assessment was prepared in order to advise the British Government whether to provide military aid to Greece. It recommends against providing such aid, arguing that it would not enable the Greeks to achieve decisive results unless aid could be cut off to the Turkish nationalists, and that the main challenge for the Greeks was not in obtaining additional equipment but in maintaining and supplying sufficient manpower at the front to provide an adequate margin of numerical superiority over the defending Turks.[34]

The case for continuity

The various arguments outlined in the preceding section are by no means unpersuasive, particularly in view of how the campaign actually developed. Nevertheless, they fail to take account of certain key considerations that the Greek government and military commanders either did take or should have taken into account at the time.

a. Assessment of alternatives

Any course of action can only fairly be assessed in light of and in comparison with the available alternatives, and thus the advance on Ankara can only be considered ill-advised if there were another, better course of action. The alternative to continuing the advance was, to use Clausewitz's formulation quoted at the beginning of this chapter, to conclude that the offensive had come so close to its 'culminating point', that a further advance would be a 'useless effort' that could be 'damaging'. Such a conclusion would have led to a decision either to halt on the Eskişehir – Afyonkarahisar line or to withdraw closer to Smyrna as advocated by Prince Andrew and Metaxas. How viable were these alternatives militarily and politically?

From a military standpoint, the defence of the Eskişehir – Afyonkarahisar line was untenable in the medium to long term, as was disastrously demonstrated in August of 1922 when the rebuilt and retrained WF routed the FAAM from that position and won the war. The Eskişehir

[32] Nioutsikos, 'Greek Military Strategy', pp. 145-160.
[33] Erickson, 'Decisive battles', p. 182.
[34] Şimşir (ed.), *British Documents*, Vol 3, Doc. 200, pp. 492-493.

– Afyonkarahisar line was simply too long for the FAAM to hold in sufficient strength, and no one seems to argue otherwise in light of the history.

Withdrawal to a shorter line closer to Smyrna, enclosing an area inhabited by large numbers of ethnic Greeks and thus more friendly to the army, which could be defended effectively by a substantially smaller force, was advocated by Prince Andrew and Metaxas because it would have potentially allowed the FAAM to be partially demobilized, a key political goal, since much of the army had been serving for three years already and the continued mobilization was a significant strain on the Greek economy and morale.[35] However, it is difficult to imagine a reduced FAAM holding off indefinitely the ever increasing strength of the Nationalist Army and supporting resources that could, over time, have been brought to bear by a unified and energetic Nationalist government under Mustafa Kemal. A relatively poor nation such as Greece could not maintain forever an expeditionary force capable of holding off the potential military power of a unified nation of three times its population.

Prince Andrew's analogy of a halt at Eskişehir to a halt by Napoleon at Smolensk is unconvincing for the same reason. Napoleon entered Russia as the master of Europe and at the head of well over half a million men.[36] Had his army halted in a position where it could have been effectively supplied and reinforced from Western Europe perhaps it might have been built up as fast as or faster than its Russian opponents could have been. The opposite is the case for the FAAM in Asia Minor, as the much larger resources in terms of territory and population of the Turkish majority, so long as they remained unified under a strong leader, must have eventually swamped the Greek forces.

Prince Andrew's and Metaxas' proposals might have bought time to reach some sort of negotiated settlement, but no more. Nothing in Kemal's consistent positions throughout the Turkish Independence War suggests that the Nationalists would ever have ceded sovereignty of Smyrna or acquiesced in the FAAM remaining in Anatolia.[37] Possibly a determined defence by the FAAM of a more defensible line closer to Smyrna might have led to agreement on internationally guaranteed arrangements for the protection of the ethnic Greek population subject to confirmation of Turkish sovereignty. However, a chance for just such a settlement had already been provided to both the Greeks and Turks by the Entente powers of Britain, France and Italy at the London Conference of February-March of 1921.[38] The Greek government rejected that opportunity, with encouragement from British Prime Minister David Lloyd-George, who was secretly undermining his own Foreign Minister by encouraging the Greeks to pursue a military solution of the conflict.[39] For this decision they have been much criticized by historians.[40] Having made it, however, it is difficult to conceive of the Greek government abandoning a successful

[35] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 114; Smith, *Ionian vision*, pp. 204-205.
[36] Alexander Mikaberidze, *The Napoleonic Wars: a global history* (Oxford, 2020), p. 530.
[37] Following the London conference, Mustafa Kamal had mobilized opposition in the Grand National Assembly even to limited concessions by the Nationalist Foreign Ministry Bekir Sami that he felt were contrary to the 'National Pact' asserting sovereignty over all of Anatolia. Shaw, *Empire to republic*, p. 1250.
[38] Smith, *Ionian vision*, pp. 192-3.
[39] MacArthur-Seal, 'Secret Diplomacy ' pp. 714-715.
[40] See, most recently, Tsirigotis,' Causes of Greek defeat', p. 122.

military campaign after so much sacrifice had been made without any assurance of an outcome that was substantially better than the one it had rejected in March.

b. Potential benefits of success

As noted above, a number of commentators, going back to Toynbee and Prince Andrew, have questioned the value of Ankara as the objective of the offensive, arguing that its capture would not have forced the Nationalist government to submit. The earliest account of the Sakarya campaign, written immediately after the battle by the deputy chief of the Greek Army general staff and FAAM liaison, Maj. Gen. Stratigos, downplayed the importance of Ankara, arguing that it was not worth the increased casualties and risks (including from the approaching rainy season) that would have been required in order to capture it, and that it was sufficient for Greek purposes to have significantly attritted the Turkish forces and destroyed the railroad between Polatli and Eskişehir that the WF would need to use to support any future attack on the FAAM.[41] These comments undoubtedly reflect a certain amount of bravado and the need to make the best possible propaganda case out of a failed campaign, but nevertheless highlight the issue of whether the objective of the offensive was sufficiently valued in the first place, even in the estimation of the Greek high command.

The Greek General Staff history attributes a high value to Ankara as an objective, arguing that '[t]he area of Ankara comprised the end of the railway line and was connected with the remaining Asian Turkey only by a poor road network. Consequently, it constituted the last foothold beyond which [the Nationalist army] could not survive and act as an organized army.'[42] Richter criticises this assessment as 'simply wrong', arguing that it is refuted by the fact that Turks were in fact able to bring in supplies to Ankara in August of 1921 by oxcart from various locations in northern and eastern Turkey, and asserts that this 'claim is a kind of justification of the senseless advance towards Ankara.' [43]

The Turkish General Staff's official history of the campaign contains a much lengthier exposition of the reasons for and objectives of the campaign, drawn largely from Greek sources, and while it accuses the Greeks of 'unwariness and overconfidence' it is not nearly so dismissive as Richter.[44] The discussion includes an initial assessment focusing on factors such as (i) the failure to destroy the WF at Eskişehir, (ii) war weariness at home, (iii) the likelihood that the Nationalist army would get stronger, both in the short term by gathering forces from other parts of the country and in the longer term, (iv) the absence of any sign of increased diplomatic pressure on the Nationalists following the Greek victory, (v) the possibility of fomenting uprisings against the Nationalist movement by capturing its capital, including from the Greek minority

[41]Xenophon Stratigos, 'La campagne d'Asie Mineure : Éxposé général de la troisième phase des opérations du 9/22 Juillet au 10/23 Septembre 1921' in Şimşir (ed.) *British Documents*, Vol. IV, Document No. 63, encl. 1, p. 155; see also: 'Reasons for Greek withdrawal', *The Times*, 21 September 21 1921 ('There is reason to believe that the Greek withdrawal across the Sakaria was ordered by the Government after they had received a report from General Papoulas expressing his belief that the Greek Army could reach [Ankara] at the cost of a further 10,000 casualties').

[42] Army History Directorate, *Concise history*, p. 215.

[43] Richter, *Greek-Turkish War*, p. 122

[44] Turkish Armed Forces Department of Archives and Military History, *Sakarya Meydan Muharebesinden Önceki Olaylar ve Mevzi İlerisindeki Harakât (25 Temmuz-22 Ağustos 1921), Türk İstiklâl Harbi IInci Cilt Batı Cephesi 5nci Kısım 1nci Kitap [Battle of Sakarya prior events and initial dispositions (25 July-22 August 1921), Turkish War of Independence 2nd Volume Western Front Part 5 First Book]*(Ankara, 1995), pp 24-32.

population in Pontus, the Armenians and the Kurds; and (vi) since there was no rail line or good roads beyond Ankara, and the Nationalist forces lacked motor transport, they would not be able to withdraw their heavy equipment and ammunition and would need to disperse to areas further east from which it would be difficult to reconcentrate, especially while dealing with the hoped-for uprisings. Since the Nationalist movement had struggled for two years to overcome opposition by various Muslim and non-Muslim factions it was not unrealistic to hope for such uprisings.[45]

A subsequent assessment, to which the British liaison officer with the FAAM reportedly concurred, concluded that Ankara could not be held indefinitely, and assessed the alternatives discussed by Prince Andrew and others (defend the Eskisehir – Afyonkarahisar line, or withdraw to the border around Smyrna designated by the Treaty of Sèvres). It concluded that (i) maintaining an effective perimeter around Smyrna and the ethnic Greek areas surrounding it would likely have required a large force and not have permitted a reduction of the FAAM as Prince Andrew suggests, and (ii) the Eskişehir – Afyonkarahisar line was far too long to hold in sufficient strength. It suggested, however, that the Greeks could have exploited the likely increase in freedom of movement that they would have enjoyed following a successful Ankara operation to shorten that line to a length that would arguably have been defensible. This would be done by occupying the Mediterranean port of Antalya, which had recently (1 June 1921) been evacuated by an Italian occupying force, allowing the Greek army to establish a straight north-south line from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and avoiding the 'corner' at Afyonkarahisar that the Nationalist forces exploited during their 'Great Offensive' of August 1922.[46] Such a line, it was argued, would have been comparable in length to that of the Treaty of Sèvres, but would have denied important recruitment and supply resources to the Nationalists, and secured many ports and an extensive rail and road transportation, as well as the Bosporus.[47]

How long the Greeks could have remained in Ankara, what they might have accomplished there in terms of disrupting the Nationalist movement and its armies and whether they could have successfully maintained their position in Anatolia afterwards absent a political settlement are all matters that merit debate. But even a short stay in Ankara would have placed them in a far stronger position than a retreat without offering battle, and something needed to be done to change the military and/or political dynamic if Greece were to have any hope of remaining in Anatolia, as it was clear that the Nationalists would otherwise only increase in strength, diplomatic recognition and unity under their dynamic leader Mustafa Kemal.

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[45] See Ryan Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate: the Great War and the end of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford 2016) pp. 281-283. See also Erickson, *War of Independence*, chapter 4 of which chronicles a list of some 16 'uprisings' and 8 additional incidents, raids and other acts of rebellion requiring a significant military response from the Nationalists, in addition to their campaigns against the Armenians and French.

[46] The proposed north-south line would have been about 620 kilometres but effectively reduced to 430 due to the presence of natural obstacles such as the two large lakes north of Antalya, compared with the 720 kilometre Eskişehir – Afyonkarahisar line, which turned from north-south to east-west at Afyonkarahisar and ran back to the Mediterranean, creating the corner/salient that Kemal exploited in the 'Great Offensive' a year later. Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* 5-1, pp. 30-31.

[47] The Treaty of Sèvres line is estimated in this analysis at 450 kilometres. *Id.*, p. 30.

Another argument in support of the attempt to capture Ankara, albeit one it does not appear the Greeks seriously weighed, is the potential adverse effect a further defeat of the WF, and the consequent loss of Ankara, would have had on the reputation and position of the president of the Grand National Assembly and driving force behind the Nationalist movement, Mustafa Kemal.

Kemal's biographers, and other historians relying on Turkish sources are unanimous that the Greek victory at Eskişehir and resultant threat to Ankara gave rise to consternation amounting to 'panic' or something close to it within the government and populace.[48] The immediate result was that the Grand National Assembly appointed Kemal as commander-in-chief of the army (a position that under the Ottoman constitution was vested only in the Sultan) with authority to exercise the full powers of the Assembly in military matters for a period of three months (although the Assembly retained authority to revoke the appointment at any time).[49] Most commentators, and Mustafa Kemal himself in his famous six day speech in 1927, assert that many who supported this appointment believed that he would fail to stop the Greeks, would have to shoulder the blame for the defeat, and would either 'perish at the head of the army' or be discharged (as both commander in chief and head of the Assembly).[50] In accepting the appointment, therefore, Kemal was consciously accepting that defeat would likely result in his replacement.

Historians have offered different speculations as to who that replacement might have been. Kemal's leading rival, at least for command of the army, was Kazim Karabekir, the general who had defeated Armenia in late 1920 and secured Turkey's eastern border, allowing the Nationalist army to concentrate on the Greek threat.[51] Another, less likely, possibility was Enver, one of the 'young Turk' leaders of the Ottoman Empire prior to and during the Great War (and Mustafa Kemal's commanding officer at Gallipoli), who was not himself a member of the Assembly but remained politically active from exile as a leader of the 'Unionist' faction. Even if Enver was not a significant factor within the Assembly, he had developed relations with Soviet Russia that might have led to his entry into eastern Turkey at the head of a rival army that could have led to an intra-Nationalist civil war, a threat that only dissipated after Kemal's victory at Sakarya.[52]

Karabekir and Enver both had associations with Soviet Russia that would have been troubling to Britain and France. Enver, as one of the triumvirate who brought the Ottoman Empire into the Great War on the side of the Central Powers, would have been particularly

[48] Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey* (Cambridge, 1977), Vol. 2, p. 360; Mango, *Ataturk* p. 315; Patrick Kinross, *Ataturk: the rebirth of a Nation* (London, 1964), p. 349; Edward J. Erickson, *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk* (Oxford, 2013) p. 39.
[49] Mango, *Ataturk* p. 316.
[50] Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, *The Great Speech (Nutuk)* (English Edition) (Istanbul, 2020) p. 764; Mango, *Ataturk* p. 316; Shaw, *History* Vol. II, p. 360; Kinross, *Ataturk* p. 349.
[51] Shaw and Shaw, *History* Vol. 2 p. 360 identifies Karabekir as 'leader of the opposition. See also Mango, *Ataturk* p. 322.
[52] Enver's efforts are discussed in Celâl Erikan, *Komutan Atatürk [Atatürk as a military commander]*(Istanbul, 1972, rev. ed. 2001) p. 538 and at greater length in Shaw, *Empire to republic*, Vol III-2, pp. 1538-1542. See also Mango, *Ataturk* p. 322.

unacceptable.[53] In contrast, British intelligence considered Kemal 'strongly opposed to Bolshevik doctrines' although committed to co-operation with Soviet Russia, the nationalists' main arms supplier, out of pragmatism.[54] As such he was someone who could be dealt with if conditions required. Indeed, it seems British intelligence breathed something of a sigh of relief after the Greek defeat at Sakarya, as reflected in a report issued shortly after the battle which assessed the relative strength of the various factions within the Assembly, including those which Kemal, Karabekir and Enver were associated. As summarised by Macfie: '[a]s a result of the Turkish nationalist victory, the prestige of Mustafa Kemal had been greatly enhanced. The British government might, therefore, reasonably assume that henceforth the moderate party in Ankara would exercise power. There was now no chance of a return of Enver Pasha, or of a military alliance being formed between the nationalists and the Bolsheviks.'[55]

A high degree of concern on the part of the British about Nationalist-Soviet relations and possible Soviet intervention in the conflict is evident from diplomatic, military and intelligence documents of the period.[56] The faction within the British government, led by Churchill, that favoured rapprochement with Kemal did so because they 'were haunted by the spectre of Bolshevism and wanted a return to Britain's traditional policy of support for Turkey as a barrier to Russia's ambitions for an outlet to the Mediterranean. In addition, intelligence had confirmed the fears of those who believed that active support of the Greeks would consolidate the Nationalist – Bolshevik alliance.'[57] A defeat that undermined Kemal, brought to power figures more closely tied with Russia and made the Nationalist cause even more dependent on Russian support would have also undermined the position of that faction and correspondingly strengthened that of those more inclined to support Greece as the only credible barrier against Soviet ambitions in Anatolia.

A British War Office assessment of Greek prospects after the battle of Eskişehir is seemingly more optimistic than the one which preceded it, but is noteworthy for the concern it

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[53] Both were considered part of the 'eastern' faction of Nationalist movement, more closely aligned with the Soviet Russia politically than Kemal's 'western' faction (although not necessarily communists ideologically; in fact the faction as a whole was traditionalist and believed in a continuation of the Ottoman Sultanate). Soviet Russia was particularly interested in supporting Enver and willing to see him develop as a force against Mustafa Kemal. See Elaine Diana Smith, *Origins of the Kemalist movement and the government of the Grand National Assembly (1919-1923)*, PhD thesis submitted to the American University, April 7, 1959, pp. 60 -61, 78-79, 81-82.

[54] A.L. Macfie, 'British intelligence and the Turkish National Movement, 1919-1922', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Jan 2001, Vol. 37, No. 1, p.11.

[55] Macfie, 'British intelligence', p. 12, citing a report by the Director British Military Intelligence to the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 22 October 1921, an enclosure to which, dated 5 October 1921, assesses the various factions of the Grand National Assembly, including Enver's faction, which was viewed at 'the most extreme in its aims' which included 'raising the standard of Pan-Islamic revolt throughout Central Asia, and [whose] policy includes a whole-hearted cooperation with Soviet Russia in order to destroy the domination of the Western Powers, Great Britain in particular. The report also mentions an 'extremist' faction which views Great Britain as 'Turkey's inveterate enemy' against which '[t]he aid of Russia…must…be invoked at all costs.' This was the one with which Karabekir was associated. The third 'moderate' faction is Kemal's, clearly the most acceptable to Great Britain. Şimşir (ed.) *British Documents*, Vol. IV, Document No. 12, encl. 1, pp. 38-40.

[56] Eleftheria Daleziou, *Britain and the Greek-Turkish War and Settlement of 1919-1923: the pursuit of security by 'proxy' in Western Asia Minor*, PhD Thesis University of Glasgow (2002), pp 139-41, 145-8, 150, 157 and 186

[57] *Id*., p. 200.

expresses about the risk of Russian intervention.[58] Whilst such an intervention would no doubt have complicated matters for the Greeks, if anything could have brought about a British intervention on behalf of the Greeks it would have been a Soviet intervention on behalf of the Turks.

So, a victory east of the Sakarya that resulted in the capture of Ankara might well have led to the replacement of the leader who had been the main force behind the Turkish nationalist movement from its inception and was its most powerful, competent and unifying figure, or to a leadership struggle or even a civil war. This in itself would have been a major setback for the Nationalists and resulted in corresponding benefits for the Greeks. It is for example unlikely that France or Soviet Russia would have proceeded to sign the treaties that were then under discussion by the Nationalist government - with France for recognition and settlement of the conflict in Syria/Cilicia and the Soviets for additional military support - at least until Nationalist fortunes and their leadership situation was stabilized.[59]

These potential benefits from the seizure of Ankara were not dependent on the FAAM winning a 'decisive' victory that resulted in the destruction of the WF, but only on winning a victory which resulted in the occupation of Ankara. Hence, we can agree with Erickson that the chances of Sakarya river being a 'decisive victory' for the Greeks were not high, yet maintain that even an 'ordinary victory' might have substantially improved Greek prospects in Asia Minor and correspondingly damaged those of the Turkish nationalists generally and Mustafa Kemal in particular.

c. Chances of Success/Risks of failure

The relative strengths of the FAAM and the WF in mid-August were fairly close, and are discussed in greater detail below. Suffice it to say for the present that, while the sources differ somewhat, the FAAM clearly did not have the level of superiority that the British War Office estimated was necessary to prevail in an offensive battle against the Turks.[60] The force that actually crossed the Sakarya was smaller than the one committed to the Eskişehir campaign because of the detachment of significant forces to garrison various points. While the odds were somewhat better at Eskişehir, Greek superiority still did not reach the level recommended by the War Office, and yet the FAAM prevailed, and might have done even better had Papoulas and his staff been able to exercise more effective control over their subordinates.[61] Moreover, as will be discussed below, they may have come quite close to at least an 'ordinary' victory at Sakarya despite mismanaging the battle in various ways. As we have already seen, the Nationalist government and its leader certainly did not discount the threat posed by the FAAM at the time.

While advance undoubtedly exposed the FAAM to a variety of risks, a decisive defeat of the FAAM that would have resulted in the disintegration of the army would have been no more likely than a decisive victory over the WF. As it happened, despite an intense three week contest

[58] 'The Turko-Greek Operations in Anatolia, July and August 1921', a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War dated 17 August 1921, *The National Archives'* ref. CAB 24/127/68, p. 4, and Appendix C.
[59] Erikan, *Atatürk as commander*, p. 538.
[60] That report argues that even a 3:2 advantage in infantry would not be sufficient. Şimşir (ed.), *British Documents*, Vol 3, Doc. 200, p. 492.
[61] Erickson, *War of Independence*, p. 196.

under extremely difficult conditions the FAAM withdrew intact to the Eskişehir-Afyonkarahisar position without significant additional loss and within a short time had fully replaced its losses.[62] While the obstacles to success were undoubtedly considerable, the main risk of failure was the loss of the opportunity to capture Ankara, disrupt the rebuilding of the Nationalist army and possibly overthrow Kemal and/or disrupt the unity of the Nationalist movement. Failure consolidated Kemal's position and meant that the Nationalists would continue to get stronger in comparison with the FAAM, unified under the Nationalist leader who was most acceptable to Great Britain and other Western powers, with the inevitable result that the Greek position in Anatolia would eventually become untenable. But the same result would likely have obtained if no attempt to capture Ankara had been made.

What would Clausewitz have done?

The arguments for a halt at Eskişehir – Afyonkarahisar seem much like the sorts of arguments Clausewitz opposes in his discussions of the principle of continuity:

> Once a pause becomes necessary, there can as a rule be no recurrence of the advance…Every pause between one success and the next gives the enemy new opportunities. One success has little influence on the next, and often none at all. The influence may well be adverse, for the enemy either recovers and rouses himself to greater resistance or obtains help from somewhere else. But when a single impetus obtains from start to finish, yesterday's victory makes certain of today's, and one fire starts another. For every case of a state reduced to ruin by successive blows – which means that time, the defender's patron, has defected to the other side – how many more are there in which time ruined the plans of the attacker![63]

As for the oft repeated analogy with Napoleon's Russia campaign and assertion that Napoleon should have stopped at Smolensk rather than proceeding on to Moscow, Clausewitz observes that '[t]he case of Bonaparte in 1812, far from undermining our argument [in favour of the principle of continuity], merely confirms it':

> His campaign failed, not because he advanced too quickly and too far as usually believed, but because the only way to achieve success failed. Russia is not a country that can be formally conquered – that is to say occupied – certainly not with the present strength of the European States and not even with the half a million men Bonaparte mobilized for the purpose. Only internal weakness, only the workings of disunity can bring a country of that kind to ruin. To strike at these weaknesses in its political life it is necessary to thrust into the heart of the state. Only if he could reach Moscow in strength could Bonaparte hope to shake the government's nerve and the people's loyalty and steadfastness. In Moscow he hoped to find peace; that was the only rational war aim he could set himself.[64]

In the context of the Greco-Turkish war at the end of July 1921 the above sounds much more like an argument for advance on Ankara than for accepting that the culminating point had been reached at Eskişehir. In Napoleon's case it can certainly be argued that he might have

[62] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 315.
[63] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 625, quoted in Handel, *Masters of War*, pos. 3256.
[64] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 626.

avoided an invasion of Russia altogether, just as it can be argued that Greece should have given up the 'Megali Idea' in 1921 and withdrawn from Anatolia. Once the challenge of preserving Greece's position in Anatolia was accepted, however, there were strong reasons to carry the campaign forward as aggressively and relentlessly as possible in an all-out effort to disrupt the cohesion of the Nationalist movement.

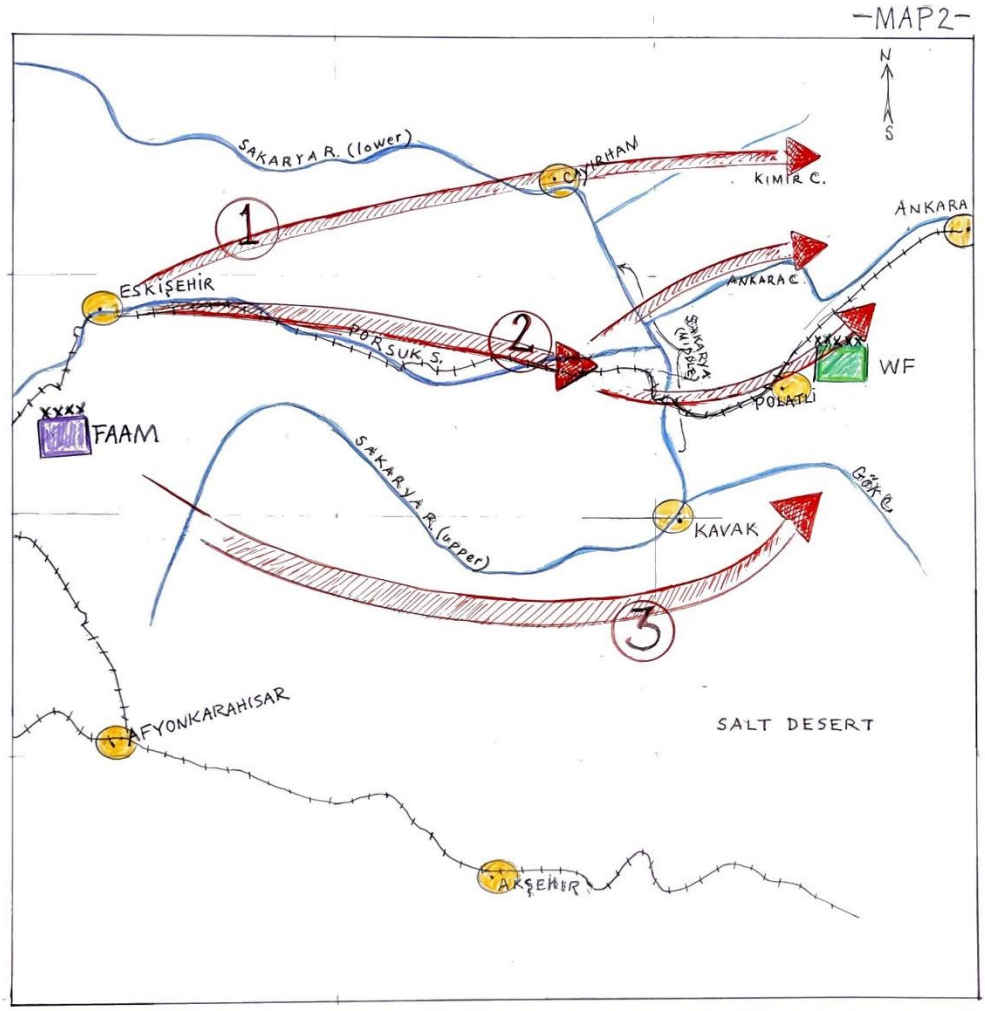
PART TWO: The Battle Plan

The tactical problem

a. Geography

The WF had withdrawn behind a great bend in the Sakarya river, which the railway from Eskişehir to Ankara crosses at a point approximately 130 kilometres east of the former and 90 kilometres west of the latter. As shown on Map 2, the river has its source north of Afyonkarahisar, from which it flows first in a generally easterly direction (the Upper Sakarya) then northward for some 100 kilometres, perpendicular to the axis of advance of the FAAM in the direction of Ankara (the Middle Sakarya), then westward to a point north of Eskişehir before turning north again and finally finding its way to the Black Sea (the Lower Sakarya).

Roughly speaking, therefore, this bend of the Sakarya forms a square open to the west, where the main part of the Greek army was positioned around Eskişehir. The WF, as noted above, was deployed east of the Middle Sakarya, which forms the eastern side of the square, with cavalry and some infantry deployed to the west of the river in order to monitor and delay the Greeks. The Porsuk stream, flowing westwards from Kütayha and Eskişehir, roughly bisects this square and flows into the Sakarya at about the halfway point of the Middle Sakarya. The railroad generally follows the Porsuk and crosses the Sakarya at Beylik Bridge, a few kilometres to the south of where the Porsuk flows into the Sakarya. On the other side of the Middle Sakarya, there are two noteworthy tributaries that flow into the Middle Sakarya from the east. The Ankara Stream meanders in a generally southwestern direction from the city of Ankara and flows into the Sakarya north of the confluence of the Porsuk, about half way from there to the point south of Çeyirhan where the river turns westward and the Lower Sakarya begins. Near the southeastern corner of the square the Gök Creek (also referred to as Göksu and Iliacsu) flows westwards into the Sakarya a few kilometres north of where the Middle Sakarya begins.



Map 2: Battle plans and options.

The terrain to the east of the Sakarya is good defensive ground. It rises in a series of unforested ridges and mountains between the river and Ankara, providing good visibility for artillery fire.[65] An army in this area could be easily supplied from Ankara. North-south and east-west communications were generally good allowing reserves to be shifted easily to threatened points.[66]

[65]The average elevation in this area is 1,000 metres above sea level and the mountain peaks rise as much as several hundred meters above that, in successive lines between the river and Ankara. Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 226. Mt Cal's peak is stated in the same source as having an elevation of 1,340 meters. *Id.* at p. 270, sketchmap 42. Erickson puts Mt. Çal's peak at 1,140 meters and notes that its neighbouring peak to the east, Mt. Ardiç, has a higher elevation of 1,755 meters. Both peaks were captured by the Greeks at about the same time. It may be more appropriate to refer to Greek high water mark as the capture of the Mt. Çal – Mt. Ardiç massif rather than Mt. Çal alone, but most accounts of the battle refer only or mainly to Mt. Çal and so this article has followed the same approach.

[66] Stratigos, 'Éxposé', p. 139; Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 14, p. 45.

The fortification of the WF positions east of the Sakarya was only begun on 25 July, and due to lack of time and supplies only simple field fortifications could be constructed.[67] The WF established three defensive lines, the first starting near the confluence of the Ankara Stream and the Sakarya River, extending south along the river to the confluence of the Gök, then running eastward for a distance about 55 kilometres along the Gök and ending in the mountains to the east. Thus, the first Turkish defensive line formed a right angle with a western leg along the Middle Sakarya and a southern leg along the Gök Creek. The entire length of this line (over 120 kilometres) could not be held in strength by a force the size of the WF and so a defence in depth was adopted with a thinly held front line and ample reserves that could be used to shore up whatever portion of the line was threatened.[68] The second and third lines were located along successive ridge lines behind the first.[69]

The area bounded by the Upper and Middle Sakarya to the south and east, and by the Porsuk to the north, was rough but habitable, and an army in this area could be supplied via the railroad and an adequate road network.[70] There were only two bridges across the Middle Sakarya between the Gök and Ankara streams: at Beylik (where the railroad crossed) and further south at Kavuncu. A third was located just south of the Gök at Beş. The area to the south of the Upper Sakarya is desert (called the Almyra or Salt Desert) which was largely uninhabited, waterless and difficult, but not impossible, for an army to traverse.[71]

The central Anatolian climate in August is generally hot and dry during the day, with a significant temperature drop at night. A rainy season begins in the fall (from late September) which leads to muddy conditions which in 1921 would have presented severe challenges to motor transport, the FAAM's main means of logistical support, as the roads in the region were largely unpaved.[72]

b. The correlation of forces

The FAAM had committed 11 divisions to the Afyonkarahisar-Kütayha-Eskişehir-offensive.[73] The occupation of these two key rail junctions and the railroad between them extended the Greek flanks and an advance to Ankara would extend them further. Afyonkarahisar to the south was particularly vulnerable because the railway running eastwards towards Konya facilitated the supply of Turkish forces threatening this position. The FAAM deployed a reinforced division (the 4th) to garrison Afyonkarahisar and the open flank to its southwest, and another division (the 11th to protect the northern flank on the Lower Sakarya. An additional division (the Independent, or 15th) had recently been transferred to Gemlik on the Sea of Marmara and was potentially available to support the FAAM but was not actually deployed until after the battle.[74] This left

[67] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 5-1, pp 46-47; Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 227.
[68] Billy W. Byrd, *The Turkish War of Independence 1919-1922*, MA thesis submitted to Faculty of the School of International Service of the American University (1959); pp. 100-101.
[69] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 227.
[70] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 5-1, p. 42.
[71] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 224-225.
[72] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 226.
[73] Army General Staff, *Concise history* ; pp. 151-152.
[74] Constantinos Papadimitrios, '"Σαγγάριος 1921 [Sakkarya 1921]', *Στρατιωτική Ιστορία* [*Military History*] 34 (2008), pp. 4-41, at p. 38; Philip S. Jowett, *Armies of the Greek-Turkish War 1919-1922*, (Oxford, 2015), pp.24-25; Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 5-1, pp. 66-67.

nine infantry divisions, organized in three corps of three divisions each, and one small cavalry brigade (attached to Army Corps B), for the offensive on Ankara, representing only 70 percent of the potentially available forces, compared with 85 percent for the Turks.[75]

The WF for its part deployed 16 infantry divisions (which were generally smaller than Greek divisions), four cavalry divisions, one cavalry brigade and three independent infantry regiments east of the Sakarya, and a significant force including an infantry division, although smaller than the Greek garrison, to the south threatening Afyonkarahisar.[76] Most of the formations were organized into seven 'groups' or corps of two-four divisions each, but Turkish doctrine allowed for free cross attachment of formations between 'groups' and their composition varied according to tactical requirements.[77]

Overall the forces available to the FAAM and the WF for the Ankara campaign in August of 1921 were approximately equal in infantry (50,000 rifles for the FAAM vs. 54,572 for the WF), with Turks having a very substantial edge in cavalry (750 sabres for the FAAM's cavalry brigade vs. more than 5,000 for the WF) and the Greeks having advantages in artillery (296 guns for the FAAM vs. 169 for the WF, although the latter had more heavy guns), automatic weapons (2,724 light and heavy machine guns for the FAAM vs. 825 for WF), aircraft (18 for the FAAM and two for the WF), training and morale.[78] The Turkish staff history states outright that '[i]t was a fact beyond doubt that the Greek army was superior to the Turkish army.'[79]

c. Logistics

As discussed in the previous section, Lt. Col. Spyridonos, the FAAM staff officer who headed Bureau IV (Supplies), objected to the Ankara offensive on logistical grounds, arguing that after the battle of Eskişehir shortages of ammunition precluded an immediate pursuit and the army could only be supplied as far as, but not beyond, the Middle Sakarya. Both Prince Andrew and Maj. Gen. Kontoules expressed similar concerns. As a result of Spyridonos' concerns it was decided to delay the offensive by 20 days during which a new logistics hub at Eskişehir was established and stocked, work on repairing the railroad in the direction of Beylik was begun, and supplies of ammunition, clothing and food were collected, as well as means of transport including a fleet of some 840 motor vehicles as well as camels to support the desert march. Greek logistical challenges included the age and poor state of repair of many of the motor vehicles and the variety of types of small arms with which the various units were equipped, each of which required their own ammunition supplies.[80]

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[75] *Id*.; see also Erickson, 'Decisive battles' p. 182.

[76] Army General Staff, *Concise history* pp. 220-221; Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 5-1, pp. 49-55.

[77] Army General Staff, *Concise history* p. 221.

[78] These figures are taken from the Greek Army Staff *Concise history*, pp. 221-222 for the Greek army and Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* Vol. 15, p. 4 for the Turkish, save for the cavalry figures, which are taken from Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* Vol. 5-1, pp 351-2.

[79] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* Vol. 5-1, p. 32.

[80] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 224-225; Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* Vol. 15, p. 4; Theodoros Dimopoulos, 'Η Διοικητική Μέριμνα των Ελληνικών Δυνάμεων κατά τις Επιχειρήσεις του Σαγγαρίου [The logistical support of the Greek forces during the Sakarya offensive operations]', *Stratiotiki Istoria [Military History]* 34 (2008), pp. 58-67; at p. 61.

Despite withdrawing closer to their own sources of supply, the WF was not without its own serious logistical challenges. The railroad ended at Ankara but key supply sources lay further away to the north (where arms were being imported via the Black sea ports) and east. Since the Nationalists lacked motor transport many of these supplies had to be transported to Ankara by animal drawn carts and even on the backs of Turkish peasant women.[81] Mustafa Kamal utilized his emergency powers aggressively to mobilize all resources in support of the army during the short period granted him by the Greek delay.[82]

The operational solution chosen by the FAAM

The Turkish position along the Sakarya could be approached in three main directions, as shown on Map 2. A flanking attack north of the Ankara Stream (option 1 shown on Map 2) would encounter mountainous terrain with few roads, and a particularly difficult river crossing as the hills on both sides of the Sakarya River are located close to its banks and rise steeply.[83] Starting a short distance south of where the Ankara Stream flows into the Sakarya, however the land begins to open out and there are relatively flat areas on both sides of the river which expand considerably as one proceeds southwards, although as noted earlier the heights east of the river provided good observation and artillery positions.[84]

Moreover, the river itself would have to be crossed. (Option 2 shown on Map 2.) On average it is about 40 metres wide and three deep, both banks in the area south of the Porsuk being partially swampy and covered with reeds, and while slow flowing, it was considered a significant military obstacle.[85] Indeed, Lt. Gen. Stratigos maintained it was a 'tactically impassable obstacle'. [86] This assessment is echoed in the Greek staff history.[87] Accordingly, the Greek plan called for an envelopment of the southern flank of the Turkish position by crossing the Upper Sakarya, marching eastward through the Almyra desert, turning left and attacking north across the Gök Creek, which was shallow and did not present a significant military obstacle. (Option 3 shown on Map 2. See also Map 3) However, the bare, mountainous ground to the north provided good defensive positions running roughly perpendicular to the axis of advance toward Ankara, as it did along the Middle Sakarya.

The Greek plan called for the advance to be led by Army Corps B under Prince Andrew, comprising three infantry divisions and the one small cavalry brigade assigned to the operation, which would march through the desert, emerging to the south of the Gök position as the right flank of the army poised to advance northwards towards the heights of Kale Grotto, thus enveloping the Turkish position from the south.[88] Army Corps A and C were to advance first directly on the Middle Sakarya, clearing the Turkish forces on the west side of the river, as the

[81] Kinross, *Atatürk* p. 352-3; Mango, *Atatürk* p. 317. The Turkish staff history devotes an entire appendix to the monumental logistical efforts made in July and August of 2021. Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 15, pp. 467-485.
[82] Kinross, *Atatürk* p. 351; Mango, *Atatürk* p. 318; Erickson, 'Decisive battles', p. 180; Byrd, *Turkish War*, pp. 95-96.
[83] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 5-1, p. 44.
[84] *Id*. pp. 44, 46.
[85] Papadimitrios, 'Sakkarya 1921', p.8; Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 14, p. 46.
[86] Stratigos, 'Éxposé', p. 139.
[87] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 228.
[88] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 227-9; see also p. 221 for the strength of the cavalry brigade

FAAM were unsure whether the WF would defend this area in strength or not. Then five of the six divisions involved (all of Army Corps A and two divisions of Army Group C) would pivot southwards, cross the Upper Sakarya and join up with Army Corps B for the northward offensive across the Gök. One division of Army Corps C, the 7th, would remain on the western bank of the Sakarya to demonstrate against the WF across the river, screen the flanking movement by the rest of the army, protect the railroad and the army's supply line, and be prepared to cross the river and join the offensive with the rest of Army Corps C (which would form the left flank of the army) if the opportunity arose.

The plan sought to achieve surprise (due to the swift marching of the Greek mountain infantry) as well as concentration of force (8 of 9 available infantry divisions plus the cavalry brigade) at the point of attack along the Gök line. Its weaknesses were in the areas of logistics and security. The troops of Army Corps B marching through the desert would be moving far from the rail line through a desert area with few water sources at the height of the summer heat. Moreover, the WF enjoyed both (i) interior lines which would allow it easily to shift forces to its left (southern) flank as well as (ii) a cavalry force that was greatly superior to the Greek's in numbers and the quality of mounts and thus in a position both to monitor FAAM movements and threaten its lengthening supply line.[89] Finally, the FAAM would be vulnerable to an attack across the river on its left, which would threaten to cut off the bulk of the army east of the river from its main supply line, the railroad.[90]

Assessments of the plan and other options

The question as to whether there was a superior plan available to the FAAM is one that has not received sufficient attention in the English language historiography. In Greek language publications, the question was addressed as recently as 2016 by Vasilios Lumiotis, a retired Greek brigadier, in an article published on a website dedicated to the 'Asia Minor Campaign', citing works by various Greek participants in the campaign.[91] He advocates an attack along the central axis illustrated on Map 2 (Option 2), with attacks being made both north and south of the confluence of the Porsuk with the Sakarya, followed by an advance both along the Ankara Stream and the railroad via Polatli, the last large town on the way to Ankara. Such an advance would have had the principal advantages of a short and relatively secure supply line, as well as a more concentrated force attacking along a narrower front.

This view goes against the Greek staff history's assessment, which as noted earlier concurs with Stratigos' view of the Sakarya as 'tactically impassable.'[92] Prince Andrew is slightly less emphatic in opining that an attempt to attack across the river 'though not impossible, would have meant disproportionately heavy sacrifices on our part.[93]

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[89] For details on the Turkish cavalry superiority see Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 221; Jowett, *Armies*, pp 24-25; and Nioutsikos, 'Greek military strategy', pp. 153-154.

[90] See, e.g., Lumiotis, 'Operation to Ankara'.

[91] *Id*., citing Giorgios Spyridonos, *War and Freedom, The Asia Minor campaign as I saw it* (Athens, 1957, 2011) and K. Bulalas, *The Asia Minor Campaign 1919-1922* (Athens, 1959). As noted, Spyridonos was the FAAM deputy chief of staff in charge of the Supply Bureau during the 1921 campaign and opposed the advanced on Ankara for logistical reasons. Bulalas was deputy chief of staff for the Ist Division.

[92] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 227.

[93] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 126.

The solution chosen of an enveloping march through the desert was not universally supported among the FAAM corps commanders, although the available sources do not suggest that a direct attack across the river near the confluence of the Porsuk (such as is suggested by Lumiotis, citing Spyridonos' post campaign memoir) was the next preferred alternative.[94] Prince Andrew reports that Maj. Gen. Kontoules, commander of Army Corps A, supported an enveloping movement to the north, apparently not in the area recommended by Lumiotis but further north, despite the mountainous terrain.[95] Prince Andrew, on the other hand, considered the southern route the only viable option despite its logistical challenges, which he maintained would be easier to overcome than those presented by the northern route.[96]

The Turkish staff history is much less confident than the Greek staff history would suggest it should be about the strength of the position behind the eastern bank of the Middle Sakarya. In fact it goes so far as to state that of the three potential directions of attack illustrated in Map 2, the direct approach across the Middle Sakarya in the area of the Porsuk was 'the most favourable in all respects' to an attacker due to the roughness of the terrain to the north and the desert terrain and lack of water to the south.[97] It goes on to quote a contemporary reconnaissance evaluation, which identified 'the weakest part of the position' as being the region just to the north of Beylik Bridge, where the railroad crosses the river, as the Greeks could put this area under artillery fire more effectively than others.[98] It also mentions an attack slightly further north along the Ankara Stream valley as an option but comments that there would be only room to deploy a maximum of two divisions along this axis.[99]

It is difficult to avoid suspecting that the Greek planners (it is not clear who was the principal author of the plan although Lumiotis, citing Bulalas, believes it was Stratigos) were trying to repeat the envelopment from the south that had surprised the Turks at Afyonkarahisar.[100] If so, it did not work as planned. Unlike the advance on Afyonkarahisar, the advance on the Gök position was not supported by a railroad and entailed a long desert march which left the troops thirsty and exhausted at the end.[101] The FAAM's right flank was open to constant raiding by the superior Turkish cavalry, which plagued Greek supply lines, nearly capturing General Papoulas himself in a raid on 24 August that came dangerously close to FAAM headquarters at Uzunbey.[102] Despite strenuous efforts by the FAAM Supply Bureau, Turkish raids and other logistical challenges left the FAAM so short of ammunition that attacks had to be ordered to go forward without artillery support on 29 August and continuing shortages of ammunition and food were experienced thereafter.[103] Because of the length of the Greek front

[94] Lumiotis, 'Operation to Ankara'.
[95] *Id*., p. 148.
[96] *Id*.
[97] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, Vol. 5-1, pp. 42-43. See also related sketch map 3.
[98] *Id*., p. 46.
[99] *Id*., p. 44. Lumiotis suggests either a feint at Beylik and a main attack along the Ankara stream valley, or *vice versa*.
[100] Lumiotis, 'Operation to Ankara'.
[101] Papadimitiriou, 'Sakarya 1921', p. 11; Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 157.
[102] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 249-250; Nioutsikos, 'Greek military strategy' pp. 153-154.
[103] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 179, 201; Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 254; see also Dimopoulos, 'Logistical support', at pp. 64-65.

– variously estimated as between 120 – 190 kilometres depending on the beginning and end points chosen – no adequate reserve could be maintained to guard against these incursions or to support success at the front.[104] Nor could a continuous line even be maintained in some cases.[105] During the time needed to effect the flanking manoeuvre and allow the tired troops to recover sufficiently to conduct offensive operations, the WF, alerted in good time by the dust raised by the Greek troops marching through the desert, was able to deploy 12 of its 16 infantry divisions along or in support of its threatened flank.[106]

Can it be that all of these disadvantages were outweighed by the strength of the 'impassable' Middle Sakarya position, or was the plan chosen the worst possible option, as Lumiotis maintains? It is difficult to criticise a general in 1921 for hesitating to launch a frontal assault across a river against a mountainous position, even if imperfectly prepared, with the recent experiences of the Great War in mind. Nevertheless, the Greek army had enjoyed considerable success in offensive operations in mountainous terrain during the Salonika campaign and at Eskişehir (notwithstanding setbacks in two preceding battles) and would go on to overrun two of the three main Turkish defensive lines at Sakarya. Moreover, the 7th Division was able to force a crossing of the river at Beylik on 24 August with little difficulty, using a feint to decoy the Turkish defenders before throwing a pontoon bridge and an assault force across the river 1500 metres south of the demolished railway bridge, and follow up with a rapid advance along the rail line.[107] By this time the main focus of the battle had shifted to the south, and there were fewer Turkish forces available to contest a crossing than would have been available had this been the main axis of the Greek attack. Nevertheless, a glance at any detailed map suggests it would have been challenging for the Turks to prevent a crossing even with much larger forces, given that the river meanders as it flows northwards, creating a number of places where an attacker could concentrate fire from several directions in support of a crossing.

Prince Andrew himself, when describing the Greek withdrawal at the end of the battle and his concerns about a Turkish counterattack, comments on the ease by which the enemy could have crossed the river from the east and notes that the pursuing WF was in fact able to bridge it in one place simply by using a few doors removed from houses in a nearby village held together with ropes.[108] If a crossing were so easy, why was the river considered a 'tactically impassable obstacle' by the FAAM in the first place? Undoubtedly, once they had crossed the river the FAAM would have faced hard fighting in the mountainous terrain to the east, but they faced the same sort of terrain to the south. The only difference between the two approaches was that one involved crossing the Sakarya river and the other its smaller tributary.

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[104] Erickson, 'Decisive battles', p. 182.
[105] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p.182; Erickson notes that the FAAM required three days to prepare for their attack during which the WF substantially strengthened its position on the Gök. Erickson, *War of Independence*, pp. 209-210.
[106] Turkish Armed Forces Department of Archives and Military History, *Sakarya Meydan Muharebesi (23 Ağustos – 13 Eylül 1921) ve sonraki harikât (14 Eylül – 10 Ekim 1921), Türk İstiklâl Harbi IInci Cilt Batı Cephesi 5nci Kısım 2nci Kitap [Battle of Sakarya (23 August - 13 September 1921) and subsequent movements (14 September to 10 October 1921), Turkish War of Independence 2nd Volume Western Front Part 5 Second Book]* (Ankara, 1973), p. 455.
[107] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 264-5.
[108] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 259, 261.

Papoulas' report to the Ministry of War on 4 September demonstrates some apparent sensitivity to what had by then become evident regarding the difficulties encountered in the flank march and goes out of its way to repeat that a frontal attack across the Middle Sakarya would not have been viable.[109] The report attributes the ease with which the 7th Division crossed the river to the effect of the southern flanking manoeuvre and cites the difficulties encountered by the other Army Corps C divisions in assaulting Mount Yildiz, which is located to the east of Kavuncu Bridge, not far from the river, at the point where the WF's first line turned eastward, as evidence of the difficulties that would have been encountered. The latter argument does not, on its face, seem terribly compelling. Mt. Yildiz is the most dominant terrain close to the Middle Sakarya to the east, and there is no comparable terrain so near to the east bank of the river for quite some distance northwards, certainly not where the 7th Division actually crossed and where both Lumiotis and the Turkish Staff History suggest would have been the optimal point of attack. Moreover, Mt. Yildiz was not actually assaulted across the Sakarya, but across the Gök, which by all accounts was not a significant military obstacle.[110]

Other criticisms of the plan, that it was delayed too long for logistical reasons, and that insufficient troops were committed, deserve further study.[111] Lumiotis delves into contemporary FAAM records at some length to challenge Lt. Col. Spyridonos' objection to the advance on Ankara on the basis of insufficient ammunition being available.[112] This was not the only logistical challenge, however, as the FAAM also lacked clothing and boots.[113] Also, as the Turkish Staff study observes, sufficient potable water was not readily accessible even on the direct route along the Porsuk Stream, as the WF had numerous reported cases of sickness during its withdrawal from Eskişehir on the part of soldiers who had drunk from the stream.[114] A 2008 article on the logistical efforts of the FAAM to support the offensive suggests not that the advance was too much delayed but rather that it might have been delayed a bit further, or at least interrupted for a few days after the west bank of the Sakarya was cleared of Turkish forces, in order to allow railway repairs to be pushed forward before beginning the assault on the main Turkish position east of the river.[115] Still, Lumiotis is undoubtedly correct that time was of the essence given the Turkish need to reorganize, resupply and reinforce the WF, and their own logistical difficulties, not to mention the approaching rainy season. His essay suggests at least that further study as to the feasibility of an earlier advance is warranted. Also it is difficult to avoid comparing the conservatism of Spyridonos unfavourably with the audacity of İsmet one year later, following the WF's initial success at Afyonkarahisar during the 'Great Offensive', in which he urged an immediate pursuit by the entire available force in an effort to keep pressure on the retreating FAAM despite the fact (and indeed precisely because) the WF did not have sufficient ammunition to fight another battle.[116]

[109] Papoulas' report is quoted in full in Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* 5-2, pp. 489-493.
[110] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, map 39.
[111] Erickson, 'Decisive battles', p. 182; Papadimitrios, 'Sakarya 1921', p. 38.
[112] Lumiotis, 'Operation to Ankara'.
[113] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 92.
[114] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, 5-1, p. 43.
[115] Dimopoulos, 'Logistical support', pp.66-67.
[116] Erickson, 'Decisive battles', p. 187; Mango, *Ataturk*, p. 341.

As for committing additional troops, it is not surprising that the FAAM, having advanced so far into central Anatolia, would feel obliged to take care to protect its northern and southern flanks. Nevertheless, Papadimitrios argues convincingly that at least four regiments, amounting to a reinforced division in strength, might have been made available later in the battle without unduly weakening the army's flanks and rear areas and could potentially have made a significant difference to the battle's outcome.[117]

It is difficult to avoid the impression that the Greek plan was the product of hesitant, conservative leadership that lacked either confidence in its ability to achieve the task assigned it or a belief that that task was worth the significant sacrifice success would require. It was concerned over logistics and over its flanks and attempted by manoeuvre to avoid the risks of a frontal assault, which it was forced to resort to anyway in arguably less favourable conditions than a direct approach would have provided. As will be seen in the next chapter, its commander displayed a lack of confidence as soon as it was apparent that the flanking movement had failed and it would be necessary to assault a mountainous, partially fortified position directly. His troops, however, came close to succeeding despite the challenging position that the overcomplicated plan had put them in.

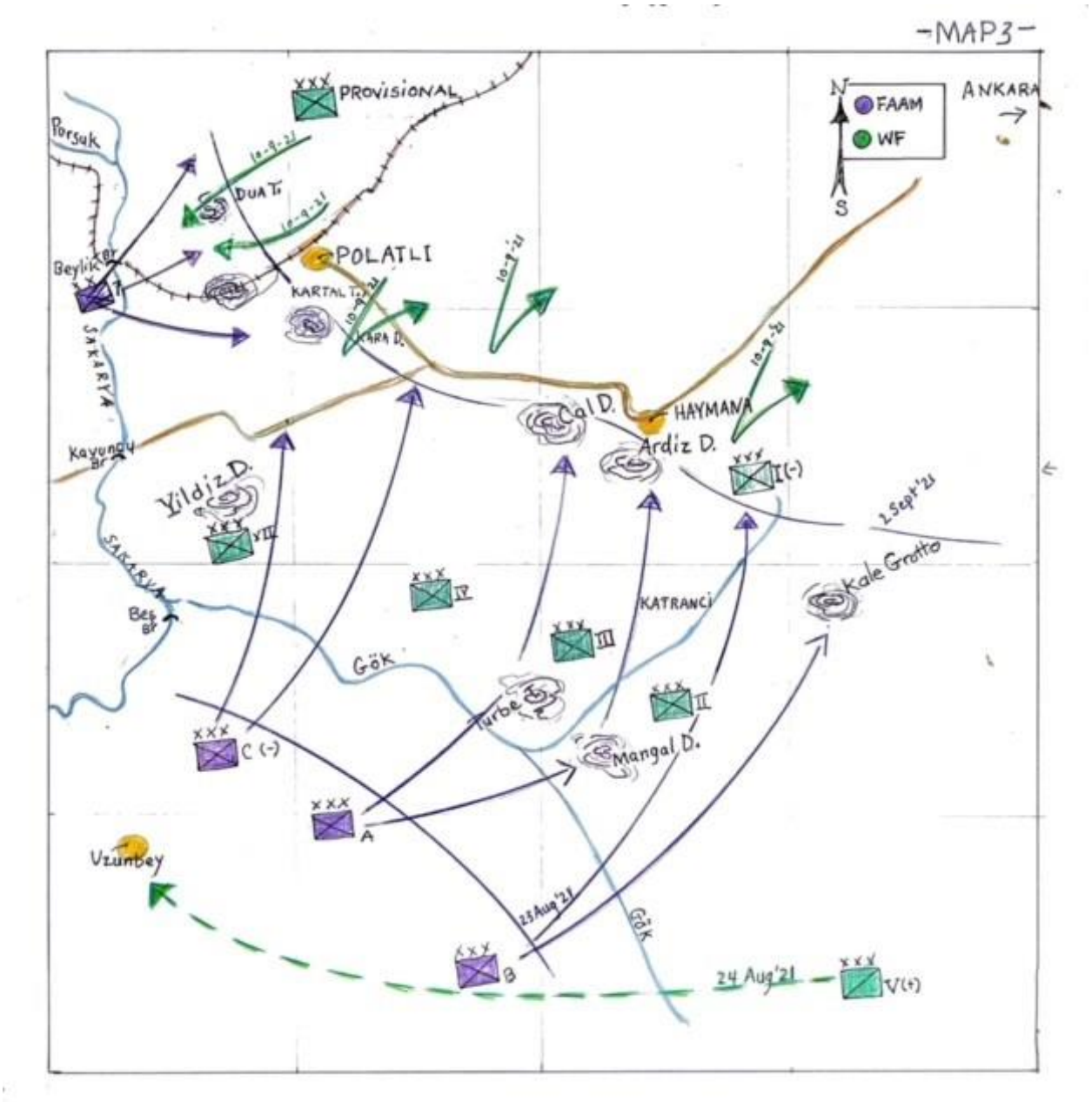
A direct assault, ideally but not necessarily implemented sooner and with additional troops, would have significantly mitigated several of the factors cited by Nitsioukis as being contributory to the FAAM reaching a 'culminating point' on 2 September, in particular by improving security against cavalry raids and shortening supply lines, as well as by shortening the front and permitting the formation of reserves to exploit success, without necessarily exacerbating the tactical difficulties the FAAM actually faced in assaulting the mountainous defensive lines held by the WF. The contemporaneous assessment of the Turkish staff, subsequent assessments on the Greek side, and actual experience during the battle all suggest that the tactical significance of the Middle Sakarya as a military obstacle may have been overestimated by the FAAM leadership, with the result that the Greek army was unnecessarily exhausted before the battle was begun, deprived of essential supplies after the battle had been joined that could have been delivered more securely, and left without any operational reserve at army level, something the WF was very careful to maintain throughout the battle.

PART THREE: The Decision to Withdraw

The course of the battle

On 22 August the FAAM's three corps, with eight of its nine divisions, were lined up south of the Gök facing northwards, with Army Corp B on the far right, Army Corps A in the centre and Army Corps C on the left with two of its three infantry divisions, its third division, the 7th, being deployed to the west of the Middle Sakarya as previously described.[118] See Map 3.

[117] Papadimitrios, 'Sakarya 1921' p. 38.
[118] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 236-239.



Map 3: the course of the battle.

Over the next 11 days, it achieved some notable successes, but at considerable cost. The advance was characterized by shifts of emphasis between the originally envisaged envelopment of the WF's left flank and attempts to pierce its centre.[119] Various accounts of the battle criticise the FAAM for poor communication and coordination between the various corps and between each of them and army staff, resulting in some units sitting idle while others attacked unsupported, and praise the WF for its skilful shifting of reserves to address crises. Prince Andrew

[119] *Id*., pp. 239-269.

is scathing throughout his memoir regarding FAAM staff work, citing swings from undue optimism to undue pessimism, even panic, reluctance to accept observations of commanders on the ground over aerial reconnaissance, condescension, poor communication, etc.[120] Since one of the main accusers at the Prince's subsequent trial was the deputy chief of staff for operations, Sariyannis (as was Papoulas), he cannot be counted as a disinterested witness. However, the Greek staff history also laments the lack of coordination and instances where one or more corps was idle while other advanced.[121] In contrast, the Turkish staff study praises the deft shifting of forces by the WF to meet various threats, first to confront the attempted envelopment to the south, then to stop the offensive on Kale Grotto, then back to the centre to stop the assault beyond Mt. Çal and finally to the right for the counteroffensive.[122] This also, in light of its effusive praise of Mustafa Kemal and İsmet, cannot be considered wholly objective, but secondary sources also praise the skillful handling of the WF against a superior enemy.[123] A scan of the maps available in the two staff histories demonstrates how WF constantly shifted resources from place to place while maintaining an army level reserve of up to four divisions. In contrast, while each FAAM corps generally endeavored to keep a division in reserve whenever possible, there was no army level reserve.

Nevertheless, the FAAM pushed the WF back some 20 kilometres and overran the first two Nationalist defensive lines. Army Corps B on the far right occupied the mountainous objective of Kale Grotto before being stopped by threats to its flank. Army Corps A in the centre occupied Mt. Çal (together with Army Corps C) and Mt. Ardiç to its east overlooking the town of Haymana and cut the main east-west road between Haymana and Polatli, threatening to split the WF.[124] The 7th Division in the meantime had captured the heights of Mt. Kara and Dua Hill overlooking Polatli and linked up with the rest of Army Corps C to its south.[125] The right angle of the original defensive line along the Sakarya and the Gök was thus pushed back to a straight, but shorter, line running from Polatli to Haymana and extending east south eastwards into the hills beyond. See Map 3.

At this point the advance stopped. Losses on both sides were high in percentage terms (20-30 percent attrition in front line troops) if not in absolute terms, at least by First World War standards (approximately 15,000 killed, wounded and captured on each side).[126] And as noted, the FAAM suffered from shortages of ammunition, food and medical supplies which were never fully solved.

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[120] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, pp. 162 -167, 170-173, 176, 179 and 182.
[121] See Army General Staff, *Concise history* pp. 242, 262, 283.
[122] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence*, 5-2, pp. 457 – 458.
[123] See, for example, Erickson, 'Decisive battles' p. 181 and *War of Independence*, p 236 (where he states that İsmet 'performed exceptionally well during the pitched defensive Battle of Sakarya' while criticizing his performance during the Nationalist pursuit/counteroffensive which followed the Greek withdrawal); Byrd, *Turkish War*, pp. 108-109, and Sean McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, (New York and London, 2015), p. 457.
[124] *Id*., pp. 269- 278; see also Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, pp. 169-181.
[125] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 274.
[126] Adding up the official casualty figures for the various battles mentioned above in the Army General Staff, *Concise history* (pp. 249, 255, 264 and 278) the total comes to 15,560. Comparable Turkish casualty figures were not available, but judging by the final casualty figures it seems unlikely that Turkish losses were significantly less.

Greek decision making

As discussed above, General Papoulas had been reluctant to endorse the offensive on Ankara to begin with and the failure of his envelopment manoeuvre to surprise or outflank the WF seems to have increased his reluctance. As early as 22 August, the day before the attack on Gök line was launched, when it was clear that the WF had redeployed and the FAAM was faced with a frontal assault against a prepared position, and again on 26 August, he wrote to the Greek Government requesting permission to suspend the offensive on Ankara.[127] As mentioned in the last chapter, on 4 September, two days after Mt. Çal had fallen, he wrote a lengthier report asking the Government to advise whether the political importance of occupying Ankara would justify the continuing sacrifices that would be necessary to achieve it.[128] His report is summarized in the concise Greek General Staff history and quoted in full in the Turkish Staff history.[129] In it he noted the following:

- The relative strength of the FAAM and WF was reckoned to be about equal – average division strength in the former having fallen from 8,500 to 5,200 since the beginning of the July (Eskişehir) campaign.
- While the FAAM retained the offensive initiative and morale advantage that goes with it, continued losses would eventually make further offensive operations impossible and would erode morale within the ranks.
- While the occupation of a bridgehead over the Sakarya had eased supply problems, these had not been fully solved and in particular maintenance and repair issues were keeping half of the army's trucks out of service.
- The rainy season was approaching, which would cause severe problems for the operation of motor vehicles on the unpaved roads east of the river.
- While it was possible that a new effort would result in the fall of Ankara a disastrous failure was also possible.

The report referred back to the equivocal recommendation provided to the government following the council of Kütayha in July, according to which the army was to continue its advance to Ankara or stop, according to circumstances. Prime Minister Gounaris was invited to come to Asia Minor to assess the situation in person. In short, Papoulas sought to place on the government the decision whether to risk a continuation of the offensive.[130]

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[127] Nioutsikos, 'Greek military strategy', p. 143 citing to the unabridged history by the Army History Directorate. See also Lumiotis, 'Operation to Ankara'.

[128] *Id*.

[129] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 281-2; Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* 5-2 pp. 489-492.

[130] 'The Commander-in-Chief was already trying to exonerate himself from the responsibility of the advance on [Ankara], and accordingly gave out that he had been constrained by the Government to undertake this expedition against his will. It is also clear that his aim was to leave the responsibility of ordering the continuation or not of the campaign to the Government.' Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, p. 210.

In the meantime, the FAAM moved into a primarily defensive mode, with limited attacks focusing (with limited success) on expanding the area occupied by Army Corps C on the east bank of the Middle Sakarya so as to secure the withdrawal of the army and recrossing the river.[131]

On 3 September Prince Andrew, through his chief of staff, who was a personal friend of Lt. Gen. Papoulas, proposed to transfer the balance of Army Corps B (comprising two divisions at this point, as one had already been transferred) from the extreme right of the Greek line where it was stalled at Kale Grotto, moving it behind Army Corps A at Mt. Çal and Mr. Ardiç and deploying it in support of Army Corps C. The two corps combined could then renew the assault on Polatli and from there up the railroad to Ankara 'where there were no important fortifications'.[132] This plan was endorsed by General Kontoules, and thus had the support of the two corps commanders who had expressed doubt as to the advisability of the advance on Ankara in the first place.[133]

Such a plan had a number of attractions. It would take advantage of the shortening of the Greek line and cutting of a key east west communication artery that had been used by the WF, which to some extent negated the advantage of 'interior lines' it had previously enjoyed. If effected promptly, it might have allowed the FAAM to amass a significant temporary superiority against the WF left flank on the most direct route to Ankara. It would also have eased the supply situation by moving Army Corps B closer to the railhead and for the first time create an army level reserve. Finally, the move would have secured the FAAM's safest withdrawal route along the railroad. In short, it would seem to be a manoeuvre fully in keeping with the skilful shifting of reserves that had been the hallmark of the WF's tactics throughout the battle. To be effective, however, such a manoeuvre would have had to be undertaken quickly, but it was not. According to Prince Andrew's account, which quotes an informal letter from the commander in chief, Papoulas initially expressed support of the idea but said it could not be undertaken for five days 'because it is necessary for the men to rest first and for the corps to be supplied with abundant ammunition', and then the movement would be undertaken only 'if we find that that we can execute it with few losses'; otherwise 'we will await the decision of the Government [whether to continue the offensive or not].' Furthermore, the FAAM staff opposed the idea, preferring to keep at least one Army Corps B division in place at Kale Grotto, which the Corps considered insufficient to hold such an exposed position safely.[134]

Accordingly, the move was not made. Instead, as will be discussed below, the WF utilized the opportunity to shift its own forces westwards and to prepare an offensive focused on the same front. As an impending counter attack became apparent, Prince Andrew first took initial steps to move the remainder of his corps without orders (for which he was later court martialled). The order was immediately countermanded by the commander in chief, but two days later the

[131] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, p. 282-3.
[132] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, pp. 204-207 and 216.
[133] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 286-7; Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, pp. 216 -218.
[134] *Id*., pp 208-209; Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 287-288.

same move was ordered. By that time, however, the Turkish attack had been launched and Papoulas was in the process of withdrawing the army to the west bank of the Sakarya.[135]

Turkish decision making

The continued Greek advance and the fall of the Mt. Çal may, depending on the account, have led to something of crisis of confidence for the Turkish command. Erickson asserts that while the Mt. Çal-Mt. Ardiç massif was 'key terrain tactically, it [was] not key terrain operationally because a series of equally high peaks and ridges lie directly behind it to the north.'[136] Other accounts, however, refer to the importance of the position not only because of its height, but also because it overlooked the town of Haymana, a key road junction, the capture of which would have had the effect of splitting the WF in two.

Mustafa Kemal later deprecated the importance of Mt. Çal, noting that on the map 'it looks like an extraordinarily dominant position on the whole field' but then commenting that 'our army… did not worry about the Çal Mountain falling into the hands of the enemy at all.'[137]

Halide Edip quotes him as having taken a rather different view earlier:

> Until they occupy [Mt. Çal],' Mustafa Kemal Pasha would say, 'there is nothing serious to worry about; but if they do that we had better watch out - they could easily occupy [Haymana], and after that they have us in a trap.[138]

The Turkish staff history supports this concern, commenting that '[o]n September 2-5, 1921 the situation became very critical for both sides. The central part of the Turkish front was in a critical situation, and the danger of splitting of the front had arisen.' [139]

Edip describes the mood at headquarters following the fall of Mt. Çal as follows:

> Mustafa Kemal Pasha was most affected. He fumed, swore, walked up and down, talked loudly, summed up the situation with the rare lucidity of a delirium, and tormented himself with indecision as to whether he should order the retreat or not.[140]

She then describes a dramatic phone call from Fevzi Çakmak, the Army Chief of Staff, reporting that Greek attempts to occupy Haymana had been repulsed, which revived his spirits.[141]

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[135] Prince Andrew, Towards disaster, pp. 227-243; Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 288 and 291-2. For an account of Prince Andrew's court martial in 1922 see 'Greeks take steps to arraign prince; army chiefs seized', *The New York Times*, 1 December 1922; 'Prince Andrew admits he disobeyed orders', *The New York Times* 2 December 1922; 'Prince Andrew exiled from Greece by military court', *The New York Times* 3 December 1922; 'Incompetence plea saved Greek prince', *The New York Times* 4 December 1922.

[136] Erickson, *War of Independence*, p. 220.

[137] Quoted in Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* 5-2 pp. 456-457.

[138] Edip Adivar, Halide, *The Turkish ordeal*, (London, 1928, internet edition, unpaginated) Chapter X, location 5070.

[139] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* 5-2, p. 457.

[140] Edip, *Turkish ordeal*, Chapter X, location 5097.

[141] *Id*.

Halide Edip was a novelist with a flair for the dramatic and wrote her book after she had split with Mustafa Kemal politically, at which point she had an interest in taking his reputation down a peg. The same can be said of Kazim Karabekir, whose autobiography (written after his own split with Kemal) claims that Fevzi told him that Kemal had ordered a general withdrawal, but that Fevzi delayed carrying it out.[142] Fevzi is credited in other Turkish accounts as helping to maintaining the morale of the higher command, although these accounts do not attempt to compare his character with that of Mustafa Kemal or allege that he dissuaded the latter from withdrawing.[143]

Whoever may deserve the most credit for steadfastness, the WF high command maintained its cohesion after suffering setbacks, shifted forces to defend Haymana successfully and amass a reserve, and eventually planned and executed a counteroffensive, all despite its own severe problems of attrition and supply, in stark contrast with the discouragement, political buck passing, poor communication, disagreement and indecision displayed by the FAAM high command.[144]

The Turkish offensive and the Greek withdrawal: forced or voluntary?

Accounts of the WF counter-offensive which began on 10 September vary significantly between the secondary sources that rely on Greek sources and those that rely on Turkish sources. Stanford Shaw depicts the offensive as 'forcing the Greeks to withdraw by suffering very heavy casualties' and goes on assert that the Greek retreat turned into a rout 'with the Greeks losing as many as 20,000 men dead and captured and hundreds of trucks and cannons in just two days.'[145] Erikan asserts that 14,450 Greek soldiers were taken prisoner during the course of battle, mainly during the retreat.[146] These assertions are not supported by the Greek or Turkish staff histories, however, as further discussed below.

Some Greek historiography suggests that the counterattack achieved only limited success but gave the FAAM commander an excuse to order the withdrawal he had been advocating for some time and had indeed already decided upon, and this is also the view taken by Prince Andrew in his memoir.[147] The Greek staff history reports that on 10 September, when the attack got underway, it was successful in overrunning the Dua Hill west of Polatli and north of the railway, an important position whose capture threatened the bridges at Beylik and the railroad lifeline beyond them, but got no further.[148] Other attacks further south on Mt. Çal and at the junction between Army Corps A and B were repulsed.[149] The Greek staff history then describes an orderly withdrawal across the river on the 11th and 12th.[150]

The Turkish staff history is not greatly dissimilar to the Greek in this regard. Its account of relevant days (10-12 September) does not suggest that the offensive captured and held any

[142] Mango, *Ataturk*, p. 319;
[143] Erikan, p. 529, quoted in Mango, *Ataturk*, p. 319
[144] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* 5-2, p. 458
[145] Shaw, *Empire to Republic*, p. 1351
[146] Erikan, *Atatürk as commander*, p. 534
[147] Dimopoulos, 'Logistical support' p. 67; Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, pp. 253-255.
[148] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 288-93
[149] *Id*., pp. 293-296
[150] *Id*., pp. 296-300

positions other than Dua Hill on 10 September.[151] Other key positions were taken only after the Greeks began their withdrawal on 11 September, and mainly on 12 September after the positions had been evacuated.[152]

There are certainly indications that the Greek withdrawal was not always orderly, and that some quantities of prisoners and equipment were captured.[153] However, the staff histories do not seem to support claims that the Turks inflicted massive casualties and captured 'almost all their heavy equipment and many of their rifles as the Greeks fled in terror of the Turkish advance.'[154] To the contrary the Greek staff history states that the FAAM relocated west of the Sakarya 'with all armament and equipment.'[155] The two staff histories suggest losses on both sides were comparable and neither seems to support claims of large numbers of Greek prisoners.[156] Prince Andrew reports considerable disorder in the crossing of the river but asserts that this was 'ignored by the enemy' who missed an opportunity to turn the crossing 'into a flight if not a panic' and asserts that the morale issues leading to the disorder resulted from the withdrawal and were not a reason for it.[157]

It would certainly not be surprising if equipment were abandoned and prisoners (particularly wounded who could not easily or safely be evacuated) taken during a hasty withdrawal, but it is not clear what would have happened if the FAAM had chosen to stand fast and maintain its position. Was the army beaten or only its commanders?[158] Might a leadership team as unified and determined as that which commanded the WF have not only repelled the offensive but resumed the advance on Ankara? It is impossible to be definitive based on the available sources, but the difference in attitude between the two command teams, one of which was divided, some of its members including the commander in chief reluctant to proceed with the operation, pessimistic about its chances from the beginning, and eager to shift blame for a defeat, and the other unified, accepting of responsibility despite considerable political risk, steadfast in the face of setbacks and opportunistic at the right moments, is pronounced and suggests that the end result owed as much to leadership as to circumstances.

Conclusion

In reconsidering the Greek decisions (i) to advance on Ankara and engage the Nationalist forces east of the Sakarya River, (ii) to conduct their advance by a flanking movement through the desert rather than a direct assault and (iii) to withdraw after the capture of Mt Çal, it is worthwhile recalling the observation of Winston Churchill that 'the Greeks had involved themselves in a politico-strategic situation where anything short of decisive victory was defeat: and the Turks were in a position where anything short of overwhelming defeat was victory.'[159] While a victory

[151] Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* 5-2, pp 221-230 and Map 36
[152] *Id*., pp. 242-45; maps 38 and 39.
[153] *Id*., pp 231, 250 and 256.
[154] Shaw, *Empire to republic*, p. 1351.
[155] Army General Staff, *Concise history*, pp. 299.
[156] *Id*, p. 315. Turkish Armed Forces, *War of Independence* 5-2 p. 484.
[157] Prince Andrew, *Towards disaster*, pp. 257 and 259.
[158] Papadimitrios declines to blame the Papoulas entirely for the decision, noting that none of the corps commanders raised any serious objections at the time. Papadimitrios, 'Sakarya 1921', p. 28.
[159] Winston S. Churchill, *The world crisis: the aftermath 1918-1928* (London 1929), location 6019

that destroyed the WF may not have been achievable at Sakarya, a clear victory that resulted in the fall of Ankara and thus kept pressure on the Nationalist movement and disrupted its cohesion was essential. Yet the Greek military leadership seemingly proceeded as though the position were otherwise.

General Papoulas advanced on a tentative basis with the idea that the movement could be aborted in the event the Nationalists did not give battle to the west of the river, and when they very predictably declined to do so, he had to be talked into engaging them at all. The participants in the Greek debate on whether or not to advance on Ankara tended to underestimate either the resilience of Nationalist Army or the potential importance of capturing Ankara or both. Key factors that were not adequately weighed included (i) the absence of a viable alternative strategy and (ii) the unique opportunity presented to undermine and perhaps cause the replacement of the most effective of the Nationalist leaders, Mustafa Kemal.

The operational plan chosen may have overestimated the challenges of a contested river crossing and led to unnecessary exhaustion, delay and logistical challenges. The conservative FAAM leadership also elected to delay for 20 days the start of campaign giving the WF essential time to prepare, and to commit only 70 percent of their available forces.

Despite vacillation as to where it would make its main effort, the FAAM nevertheless enjoyed significant success over the next ten days, pushing back the Turkish defence and capturing what Mustafa Kemal himself had described as the key geographical feature of the battlefield, Mt. Çal. The attrition to both armies had been severe, however, and each army had to make a decision whether to continue or withdraw. The contrast between how the Turkish commanders, all of them seasoned Great War veterans, and the Greek commanders, the most senior of whom had little or no Great War experience, reacted, could not have been more stark.[160] The latter, particularly the Army commander, tended to question the value of capturing Ankara from the start and thus found reasons not to continue. The former not only did not withdraw, but counterattacked.

The armchair historian writing a hundred years after a battle must approach with proper humility and caution a commanding general's fraught decision whether to commit a bleeding and exhausted army to a last desperate effort at victory. While it is impossible to assess with any certainty whether such an effort could have succeeded it does appear that there were greater rewards to be gained by success and greater risks associated with failure than the Greek military commanders seem to have appreciated at the time. And while the armchair historian may hesitate to judge Papoulas harshly, his opponent İsmet İnönü, undoubtedly earned the right to so. İsmet's own autobiography assessed Papoulas as lacking perseverance and tending to allow his anxieties to cloud his judgment when he failed to achieve quick success. It contains the following pithy assessment: 'Papoulas avoided disaster. But he never won a battle.'[161]

[160] The senior commanders of the FAAM in the summer of 1921 had supported King Constantine, who resisted Greek entry into the Great War, and consequently did not serve in it, although most did have experience in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. This created divisions and suspicions as between them and holdover Venizelist officers. See Smith, *Ionian vision*, pp. 172-179.

[161] Quoted in Mango, *Ataturk*, p. 321. İsmet's statement seemingly overlooks Eskişehir.

Might a more determined leadership group with a better appreciation of the politico-strategic stakes summarized by Churchill have been able to demonstrate that the Clausewitzian 'culminating point' of their campaign had not yet been reached? Had they done so, they might well have thrown the Nationalist movement into disarray and complicated the calculations of the 'Great Powers' on whom both sides were relying for support, one of which was about to enter into a peace treaty with the Nationalists. By withdrawing, however, they cemented the position of their most dangerous enemy, unified Nationalist ranks, gave the Great Powers cover to recognize and reach accommodations with the Nationalist government and set in process a chain of events that led, probably ineluctably, to defeat.