

Versailles by securing the Ruhr as a 'productive pledge' or guarantee that Germany would carry out the Treaty.

The Ruhr occupation presented Britain with a difficult dilemma: 'a breach with France would mean chaos in Europe',<sup>8</sup> which could even lead to a Franco-German war; on the other hand, concessions to France could lead to a French economic domination of the Continent or prolonged chaos in the Ruhr. Britain consequently adopted a policy of 'benevolent passivity' towards France, which attempted, as the Cabinet minutes (records) put it, to minimise 'the adverse effects upon Anglo-French relations of French... action and [to reduce] to a minimum the opportunities for friction upon the several inter-Allied bodies'.<sup>9</sup>

For 9 months the French occupation of the Ruhr was met by passive resistance and strikes which were financed by the German government. This increased the cost of the occupation, but it also triggered hyper-inflation in Germany. In September Germany was on the brink of collapse and the new Chancellor, Gustav Stresemann, had to call off passive resistance. The French then launched an all out offensive to detach the Ruhr and the Rhineland from Germany:

- they negotiated individual agreements with the big German firms to make special deliveries to France of coal and steel and to pay tax on any deliveries made to unoccupied Germany;
- parallel with these negotiations, plans were laid for the creation of a special bank for issuing a new Rhineland currency independent of the official German currency, the *Reichsmark*;
- similarly attempts were also made to set up an independent Rhine-Ruhr railway, which would control west German rail communications.
- The French also backed German Separatists in the Rhineland and Palatinate, who wished to break away from the Berlin government.

For a few weeks it looked as if France might, after all, succeed in creating an independent Rhineland. To many Germans, calling off passive resistance was a humiliating surrender to France, and Stresemann himself compared it with the signing of the treaty of Versailles. Yet Germany was too weak to wage war and could only hope that Britain and America would in the end intervene to force a compromise on reparations. By January 1924 this policy was proved right. The French triumph was not as secure as it seemed. France, too, had exhausted itself and seriously weakened its currency, the franc, in the prolonged Ruhr crisis. Its attempts to back Rhineland Separatism and to create an independent Rhineland currency were unsuccessful. In the Palatinate the Separatist leaders were assassinated by German nationalist agents from unoccupied Germany or lynched by angry crowds. The Bank of England refused to back French plans for a Rhenish currency and instead invested £5 million in supporting the German government's ultimately successful efforts to stabilise the mark. Poincaré thus had little option but to cooperate with an Anglo-

American initiative for setting up a financial commission chaired by the American financier Charles G. Dawes, to examine the whole problem of how Germany could pay reparations.

The Ruhr crisis was a 'turning point in the history of post war Europe',<sup>10</sup> and marked the end of French attempts to carry out the Treaty of Versailles by force and the beginning of the gradual revision of the Treaty itself.

## 9 The Revision of the Treaty of Sèvres

**KEY ISSUE** How were the Turks able to achieve a revision of the Treaty of Sèvres? In what ways was the new Treaty of Lausanne more favourable to Turkey?

Although the Ruhr crisis eventually led to the Dawes Plan and some Allied concessions over the payment of reparations, the territorial clauses of the Treaty were untouched. In Turkey, however, the Allies were compelled under threat of war to revise the even harsher Treaty of Sèvres.

Of all the treaties negotiated in 1919-20, Sèvres, signed on 10 August 1920, was the most obvious failure as it was never put into effect by the Turkish government. When the Allies imposed it, they took little account of the profound changes in Turkey brought about by the rise of Mustafa Kemal, the leader of the new nationalist movement. Kemal had set up a rebel government which controlled virtually the whole of the Turkish interior, and was determined not to accept the Treaty. Only if the Treaty had been imposed within the first few months of the Turkish defeat, before Kemal had built up support, might it have been successful; but the long delay until August 1920 ensured that growing Turkish resentment particularly at the Greek occupation of Smyrna, which the Allies had encouraged in May 1919, made its enforcement an impossibility.

To ensure the acceptance of the Treaty, an inter-Allied expedition occupied Constantinople in March 1920 and forced the Sultan to dismiss his Cabinet and declare Kemal a rebel. Inevitably this pushed Kemal into openly challenging the Treaty, thereby running the risk of a clash between the Kemalist and Allied forces. The French and Italians were unwilling to fight to enforce the Treaty but Lloyd George persuaded them to agree to allow Greek forces to advance from Smyrna and head off Kemal's threat to Constantinople. The initial success of the Greek army ensured that the Treaty was at last signed on 10 August, but only at the cost of escalating conflict with the Kemalist forces. Kemal was able to exploit Soviet Russia's suspicions that the western powers were aiming to destroy Soviet Bolshevism, to undermine the Treaty of Sèvres. A joint Russo-Turkish attack destroyed Armenia in

1920 (see the map on page 39), and the subsequent Treaty of March 1921, settling the Russo-Turkish frontier in the Caucasus, enabled Kemal to concentrate his forces against the Greeks without fear of Russian intervention from the north. By August 1922 he was poised to enter Constantinople and the Straits zone, which were still occupied by Allied troops. Both the Italians and French rapidly withdrew leaving the British isolated. Kemal, however, avoided direct confrontation with the British forces and negotiated an armistice, which gave him virtually all he wanted: the Greeks withdrew from eastern Thrace and Adrianople and the British recognised Turkish control over Constantinople and the Straits.

Although this incident, known as the Chanak crisis, contributed to Lloyd George's resignation, to the abdication of the Sultan of Turkey and to a decisive diplomatic defeat for Britain, paradoxically the subsequent international conference of Lausanne, which met to revise the Treaty of Sèvres, resulted in an agreement in July 1923 that has been described by Professor Anderson as 'a victory for the western and above all for the British point of view'.<sup>11</sup> Kemal, anxious not to be dependent on Russia agreed to the creation of small demilitarised zones on both sides of the Straits and the freedom of navigation through them for Britain, France, Italy and Japan. He also insisted on the abolition of foreign control over Turkish finances. This was a serious blow to the French hopes of re-establishing their pre-war influence over Turkish finances, and arguably they, apart from the Greeks, lost more than any other power as a consequence of the new Treaty of Lausanne.

The Chanak crisis in no way affected the fate of Turkey's former Arab provinces. In February 1919, in deference to Wilson and the Fourteen Points, Britain and France agreed that they could only exercise power over these territories in the name of the League of Nations. It took several more months of bitter argument before the British agreed to a French mandate in Syria and also French access to the oil wells in Mosul and Iraq. The frontiers between the British mandates of Palestine and Iraq and the French mandate of Syria were then finalised in December.

## 10 Assessment

**KEY ISSUE** Why was Turkey a more successful revisionist power than Germany in this period?

By early 1924 the immediate postwar period was over. Both Britain and France had been dissatisfied with the Treaty of Versailles and each had attempted to revise it. Britain had managed to ensure that Danzig really remained a free city under the League, while France, despite the fact that 60% of the voters in the Upper Silesian plebiscite opted for Germany, was able to ensure that the vital industrial triangle

went to Poland. Yet overall France's policy towards Germany was a disastrous failure. It failed neither to negotiate an 'economic entente' with Germany that would have slowly created an atmosphere of trust and economic cooperation between the two states, nor did it manage permanently to weaken Germany. France's final gamble in the Ruhr came close to success, but here too Britain's 'benevolent passivity' and its own financial weakness finally cheated it of success. Germany thus survived the dangerous postwar period and by the spring of 1924 was poised to make a come back as one of Europe's great powers.

Nevertheless, Germany remained shackled by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Unlike Turkey, it was unable to renegotiate the peace treaty. How was it that Turkey – and not the potentially much stronger Germany – was able to achieve such a revision? The Germans for a start lacked a dynamic leader like Kemal. Similarly they had no potential allies, once the Poles routed the Russians in August 1920. Kemal on the other hand, was able to rely on Soviet support to regain Turkish Armenia and forcibly revise his country's eastern frontiers. He was confronted with a weak and divided Allied army of occupation. In Germany, on the other hand, there was a large French army, which was ready to fight if Berlin tried to revise the Treaty with force. In the end Germany survived and achieved some concessions over reparations not because of military resistance (although passive resistance in the Ruhr did play a role) but because France overreached itself in the Ruhr, and Britain and the USA were able to impose the Dawes Plan.

## References

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- 2 P. Krüger, *Die Aussenpolitik der Republik von Weimar* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1985), p. 91.
- 3 For this section I have drawn on sections of my article on 'Implementing Versailles in the East, 1920-22' in *New Perspectives*, vol. 5, no. 2, December 1999, pp. 6-10.
- 4 Quoted in D.G. Williamson, *The British in Germany* (Oxford, Berg Press, 1991), p. 184.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 186.
- 6 C. Fink quoted in *ibid.*, p. 151.
- 7 *The Times*, 6 January 1923.
- 8 R. Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister* (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 485.
- 9 Quoted in D.G. Williamson, 'Great Britain and the Ruhr Crisis, 1923-24' in *The British Journal of International Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, April 1977, p. 73.
- 10 L. Kochan, *The Struggle for Germany* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1963), p. 29.
- 11 M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question* (London, Macmillan, 1966), p. 373.