

ENVER PASHA IN TURKISTAN, 1918-1922

by Nermin Menemencioğlu

'The actual events which took place in Central Asia between the February (Kerensky) Revolution and the death of Enver Pasha in August 1922 are so confused that a close disentanglement is hard to make,' writes Sir Olaf Caroe in his book on the Soviets in Central Asia.<sup>(1)</sup> Yet such is the fascination it exerts that the story has been told and retold in the intervening years, most recently by Peter Hopkirk in *Setting the East Ablaze* (1984). In all these accounts the figure of Enver Pasha himself remains enigmatic, full of contradictions, the dates imprecise, the facts veiled in mystery, either by Enver for reasons of his own, or by the various secret agents on his trail who were reluctant to reveal their sources and methods.

We know that on the night of November 2nd to 3d, after the signature of the Armistice of Moudros, Enver, Talât and Jemal and three or four other prominent members of the CUP fled from Istanbul on board the German submarine U-67, to Eupatoria in the Crimea.

When the news broke out, there was pandemonium in the city, to which many dissidents had returned after the political amnesty declared by the Ahmet Izzet cabinet on 20 October. An editorial in the newspaper *Vakit* of November 4, stating that 'Enver Pasha should have thought of fleeing not from the country but from the world,' gave expression to the general indignation.<sup>(2)</sup>

Meanwhile the fugitives, having reached Eupatoria, continued to Berlin, except for Enver, who disappeared as the German train was pulling out. His original plan was to join the Turkish armies under his uncle Halil Pasha and his brother Nuri Pasha in the Caucasus, and assume command. But the Caucasian front disintegrated while he made desperate efforts to reach it. He arrived in Berlin early in 1919. In July of that year a court-martial in Istanbul condemned the three pashas and Dr. Nazım to death.

Though there were still friends in high places, a defeated Germany offered no scope for action. Establishing ties with the growing Soviet Union became the chief preoccupation of several UP leaders, chief among them Enver. Not only was the fate of Russian Turkistan still undecided, but also was it relatively easy to slip across the frontier in one of the craft that plied between Batum and Turkish ports.

In August or September 1919 Enver visited Karl Radek, imprisoned for his involvement in the Spartacist revolt but still an important Bolshevik leader, and was invited by him to go to Moscow. So determined was he that he made three attempts, the first two ending in plane crashes and imprisonment in Kovno and Riga.

These attempts were made possible by General Hans von Seeckt, a friend since 1916, who had served in Turkey as chief of the German military staff from 2 December, 1917, to the end of the war, and who was appointed commander of the Wehrmacht in July 1919. After Versailles von Seeckt, 'a broader mind than is expected in so tight a uniform',<sup>(3)</sup> pursued a policy of rapprochement with Soviet Russia and to this effect placed Captain, later General, Ernst Köstring on his staff in charge of Enver's journeys to Moscow. On Enver's third attempt Köstring accompanied him personally from Stettin to Königsberg by ship, then by train to Johannesburg on the Russian frontier, where Soviet troops were waiting.<sup>(4)</sup> Enver arrived by car in Moscow, just in time to be whisked by Zinoviev to the Congress of the People of the East which met in Baku September 1-8, 1920. Tumult and exclamations preceded the reading of his speech, and a critical resolution was passed afterwards.<sup>(5)</sup>

Next, after visits to Berlin, Italy and Switzerland, he organized the 'Congress of the Union of Revolutionary Islamic Societies' in Moscow in February 1921. Most of the 'delegates' were ex-members of Enver's Special Organization (Teşkilat-ı Mahsus) <sup>(6)</sup> among them the Syrian Emir Shekip Arslan, A Unionist Deputy. Even this small group disagreed as to the aims of the organization and some of them resigned soon after, leaving Enver alone. According to his biographer, Aydemir, they were not far wrong, for his real aim was 'Ana-

tolia, that Anatolia which Mustafa Kemal was trying to organize.' (7)

To this end he moved to Batum in July 1921, where he held a Congress of the Party of People's Soviets (Halk Şuralar Partisi) composed of old Unionists like Halil Pasha, Küçük Talât, Dr. Nazım and Haji Sami. (8) There was contact with Kayıkji Yahya's organization in Trabzon, and even with Ankara, where his partisans had formed the Popular Group (Halk Zümresi) and other opposition groups. (9) Enver even speculated on joining 'a group of about 3000 volunteers' from Rize as an anonymous private, then assuming command at the appropriate time. (10)

But meanwhile the Soviets have become convinced that the Ankara government is there to stay. They have signed the Russo-Turkish Treaty of March 16, 1921. While Enver is holding futile gatherings in Batum, Mustafa Kemal has won the battle of Sakarya. The Soviets foil Enver's attempts to cross the frontier. They may well have 'despatched him to Central Asia to get him out of the way.' (11)

He now travelled secretly via Baku and Ashkabad to Bukhara, in October 1921. Over a year before, the Emir of Bukhara, Alim Han, had been deposed by the Young Bukhara party, with the help of Soviet troops, and Osman Hoja declared President. After he fled to Afghanistan, in March 1921, the Emir's partisans, the reactionary and feudal landlords of Eastern Bukhara, formed Bas-machi bands of their own, composed of untrained peasants, to fight against both the Soviets and the young reformists, or Jedid. Prominent among them were the Uzbek Ibrahim Bek of the Lakay tribe, Ishan Sultan of the Tajiks of Dervaz and Devletmend Bek of the Tajiks of Beljuvan.

Enver, who only a few months before had talked of the necessity of a united Islam fighting beside the Soviets against the imperialists of the West, now declared that the real oppressor of Islam was 'Red Imperialism'. (12) He would unify the different Basmachi groups (some reformist, some Emirist, some merely brigands) operating in Eastern Bukhara and form an army out of them to drive the Soviets out of Turkistan.

Once again, as in Sarikamish in December 1914, he was going to fight a war in mountain defiles, in the dead of winter. The Basmachis he thought he could unify were men of different tribes who spoke different dialects (the Tajiks in the Pamirs spoke a kind of Persian) of different political aims, their religious beliefs ranging from an 'excessive formalism' (Shiite) to 'an easy nonchalance' (Sunni).<sup>(13)</sup> Further, they were armed for the most part only with flint guns and cudgels.

The number of his adherents fluctuates constantly.<sup>(14)</sup> He starts out with 160 horsemen. At first he is well received by the partisans of the Emir, but imprudent words at a banquet given by the chieftain Togay Sari at Korgantepe cause a revulsion against him.<sup>(15)</sup> He is arrested by the Uzbek Lakay Ibrahim, his horsemen disarmed, dispersed into a number of villages and robbed of all their belongings. He writes to the exiled Emir of Bukhara for help, and Ibrahim's guards melt away. There follow a number of successful skirmishes against the Soviets. His first major victory is when he attacks Dushanbe on January 22, 1922, with 1500 soldiers against some 7 or 8000. After two weeks of fighting the occupying troops evacuate the town. On March 28 he receives a letter from the exiled Emir of Bukhara naming him Superintendent of all armies.<sup>(16)</sup> In April he holds yet another Congress, this time of Basmachi leaders, at his temporary headquarters at Kiafirûn, where he has himself officially declared commander-in-chief. The Emir of Afghanistan, Amanullah Han, sends a detachment of 300 armed volunteers. He receives gifts of munitions. On May 19, he sends an ultimatum to the Soviet government, via the President of the Azerbaijan Soviets, Neriman Nerimanoff, demanding the evacuation by Soviet troops of all Turkistan.

The day before, the Politburo in Moscow had taken the decision to liquidate the Basmachis and Enver Pasha, whose activities they were well aware of. By February 1920 the Soviets had recovered control of Central Asia, and the white armies of Denikin and Wrangel had collapsed.<sup>(17)</sup>

Beginning May 15, 1922, efforts to dislodge the Soviets from Baysun in Southeastern Bukhara met with failure. On the night of June 24, Enver attacked General Kakurin in the region of Derbent (with 3000 men against a well-armed Soviet division of 8000) and was defeated. In July the Soviet forces reoccupied Dushanbe, and Enver's partisans abandoned him in droves. Ishan Sultan requested permission to withdraw his men to Dervaz in the West, their homeland, and Efdaladdin Bek, commander of the Afghan volunteers, announced that he had received orders from his Emir to return to Afghanistan.<sup>18)</sup> Only the brave Devletmend Bek and his men met Enver as he retreated, pressed deeper and deeper into the mountains, after these farewell scenes. He was celebrating the fest of Bayram when a Red Army patrol appeared in a mountain gorge on the morning of August 4th, 1922. By all accounts he died a gallant death, charging the Red cavalry with a handful of men, swords drawn against machine guns. Devletmend Bek was killed minutes later.

The news of Enver's death travelled rapidly, and it is said that 15 to 20,000 gathered for his funeral - more than ever fought for him. He was buried under a tree in Chegen, in the district of Beljuvan. In Togan's words, 'elegies were written on all sides!' (19)

What were Enver's aims in Turkistan? Was he going to establish 'a Moslem state...ostensibly hostile to Soviet Russia,' to be used as 'a base of operations for the liberation of Asia'? (20) Did he truly intend to collaborate with the Bolsheviks, (21) or was his occasional use of the Bolshevik vocabulary merely a subterfuge? Did he see himself as 'a Napoleon of Asia', the 'ruler of a realm embracing Chinese Turkestan, Russian Turkestan, Kazakistan and Afghanistan'? (22) Or having failed in his attempt to cross into Anatolia and take over the National movement from Mustafa Kemal, was he merely seeking a glorious death?

The titles he gave himself may hold a clue to his intentions. At the Baku Conference of September 1920, where he gave an impassioned if ill-received, address against Western imperialism, he was 'the representative of the revolutionary organizations of Morocco,

Algeria, Tunisia, Tripoli, Egypt, Atabia and India'.<sup>(23)</sup> In Bukhara, in 1921, he had a golden seal made and signed himself 'Commander-in chief of all the armies of Islam, Son-in-law of the Caliph and Representative of the Prophet'.<sup>(24)</sup> On a number of proclamations he was 'the Emir of Turkestan'.<sup>(25)</sup> On others he was 'the representative of the Emir of Bukhara, Son-in-law of the Caliph of Moslems, Seyyid Enver'.<sup>(26)</sup> To his wife, Najiye Sultan, he wrote on November 7, 1921 of having signed proclamations to Bukhara and Khiva as 'the Commander of the great Turanian Revolutionary Armies, Supreme Head of the Central Organization.'<sup>(27)</sup> On May 19, 1922, he signed an ultimatum to the Soviet government, sent to the President of the Council of Azerbaijan Soviets, 'the Supreme Commander of the Armies of Bukhara, Khiva and Turkistan.'<sup>(28)</sup> Some weeks before, on March 22, 1922, the Emir of Bukhara appointed him 'Superintendent of all Armies' (nazır-ı küllü-yi asakir).<sup>(29)</sup> But the Emir was then in exile in Kabul, and his 'armies', at best a mixture of regulars, militia and Turkish ex-prisoners of war, had been decimated by the Bolsheviks in 1920.

Enver's prestigious reputation, his personal charm caused the flow of visitors eager to meet him, the embassy dinners in his honour, at the same time that they aroused suspicion and apprehension in many political quarters. That he was ill-equipped for any action in Turkistan was noted by two objective observers in the autumn of 1921. The first, <sup>Muht</sup> ~~Narrett~~ Birgen, was a member of the UPC and one-time associate editor of the newspaper Tanin under Hüseyin Jahit Yalchin. He saw Enver in Baku, at the newly-opened Ankara Embassy, when Enver was waiting for a ship to take him across the Caspian, and later published an account of the conversation. By then Enver had given up all hope of returning to Anatolia. But when asked what his aims were in going to Turkistan, he replied only with a <sup>u/n</sup> number of vague generalities. 'As for his political and social opinions, it was as though nothing had happened on earth, an embattled world had not been steeped in blood, and the Bolshevik Revolution had had no spiritual effect in Europe. He seemed completely indifferent to all movements of ideas.'<sup>(30)</sup>

A few days later, Zeki Velidi Togan, a Bahkirt historian who was active in Turkistan politics and who ended his days as a professor of Turcology at the University of Istanbul, met him by special appointment in Bukhara. He too was struck by the lack of knowledge which Enver displayed: 'That day, I realized that this person (bu zat) was a great idealist, unable to reckon with life and with the realities, and that he was completely ignorant of any European or Russian publications concerning the geography or statistics of Turkistan. There is no doubt that it was only during the 23 days he spent in Bukhara that this person decided on his subsequent activities in Turkistan.'<sup>(31)</sup>

Except for the sycophantic Haji Sami, ex-secret agent for the Special Organization founded by Enver in August 1914, posted to Shanghai during the War and suddenly turning up in Moscow, no one gave any support to these subsequent activities. Togan in Bukhara drew up a list of fourteen points against Enver's prospective attempt to join the Basmachis, the raiders and guerilla bands of Eastern Bukhara, and become their leader.<sup>(32)</sup> Talât Pasha on his way to <sup>er</sup>Berlin had already expressed his opinion: 'Our political life is at an end.'<sup>(33)</sup> Jemal Pasha called him a madman in a letter to the Emir of Afghanistan dated July 1, 1921.<sup>(34)</sup> To Enver himself he wrote a few months later, on November 15, 1921: 'For God's sake, stop this obstinacy, this insistence... and return to Moscow at once.'<sup>(35)</sup> And to a letter from Enver which mentioned his plans for a 'Union of Revolutionary Islamic Societies', Mustafa Kemal replied in October 1920, stressing the importance of not causing the Soviets any anxiety by the manipulation of Pan-Islamic ideas.<sup>(36)</sup>

Even his aide-de-camp, Bartınlı Muhittin Bey, who detested Haji Sami cordially, took part in the Bukharan campaign with the greatest reluctance.

As for the Soviet leaders in Moscow, they merely kept him in reserve, until the outcome of the War of Independence in Anatolia was clear. They put him up in their famous guest-house opposite the Kremlin, sent him to Batum in a special coach and

kept him provided with funds. But they refused him the two divisions of Moslem troops with which he hoped to cross into Anatolia and kept his movements watched by the Cheka.

To the twenty-seven year old Bengali communist M.N.Roy, who also talked of stirring up anti-British rebellion in India, they gave two heavily armed trains carrying ammunition and gold and protected by Red Army troops, and made him a member of the Central Asiatic Bureau of the Comintern, with the task of setting up a secret military school in Tashkent to train the soldiers and staff for an all-Indian 'Army of God'. (37)

Finally, was Enver's death on the battlefield really a kind of suicide, following on the realization of the impossibility of resuming a career in Turkey and of the harsh realities of warfare in Turkistan?

Many sources tell of the bitter disappointment he felt in the last days. General Karabekir quotes him as having said to those still around him, 'Haji Sami is the cause of this calamity, he has besmirched the last page of my record, there is nothing left but to die.' (38) Tekin Erer writes: 'He threw himself into the arms of death, willingly, deliberately.' (39) Zeki Velidi Togan points out that he was close to the Afghan frontier when he died, and could easily have crossed it with his retinue had he so wanted. 'He would have been welcomed there with honour and respect.' This was the course which Efdalettin Bek entreated him to follow when he took leave of him in the end of July. But Enver firmly refused, 'having decided to die on Turkistan soil'. (40)

While there is something of the Moslem precept of 'either Victor or Martyr' in his attitude to death on the battlefield, Enver's many letters to his wife reveal the importance which he attached to his connection by marriage with the Ottoman dynasty. On his way to Bukhara in October 1921, he sent her a brochure in which he was described as 'Victor' (Gazi) and wrote: 'May the hopes expressed here be realized, so that I can show the world that I



am worthy of my darling.'<sup>(41)</sup> Two months later, when he was the virtual prisoner of Lakay Ibrahim, he wrote her again: 'If it goes on like this, I shall withdraw to Afghanistan and there I shall give up all activity, then come to join you. But if I am unsuccessful, how will you receive me? I did so want to be successful, Najiyeh!'<sup>(42)</sup>

The desire to be worthy of his 'darling' may have led to his brave but hopeless charge against the machine guns of the Red Army. 'Here,' writes his biographer Aydemir, 'it was no longer a question of soldiership, but rather of the end of the road, the final effort and the quest for the expected ending.'<sup>(43)</sup>

## NOTES

1. Caroe, Soviet Empire, The Turks in Central Asia and Stalinism, p.99.
2. For variations in dates, see Aydemir, Makedonya'dan Orta Asya'ya Enver Paşa, Vol.III, p.505 n.1. The date given here is favoured by many sources. See A.E.Yalman, Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim, Vol.I (1988-1918) for effect on Istanbul as reflected in the press.
3. Wheeler-Bennett, John W., The Nemesis of Power, The German Army in Politics 1918-1945, p.86.
4. For details of Enver's journeys see Rölich, A.A., Fellow Travellers: Enver Pasha and the Bolshevik Government 1918-1920, in Asian Affairs for October 1982.
5. Le Premier Congrès des Peuples de l'Orient, Bakou 1920, Compte-Rendu Sténographique, pp. 106-109, 111-114.
6. Aydemir, op. cit. p.586. For early mention by Enver of the organization, see Samih Nafiz Tansu, İki Devrin Perde Arkası, Colonel Hüsamettin Ertürk's memories of the Armistice years, p. 172.
7. Aydemir, op. cit. p. 585.
8. See Zürcher, E.J., The Unionist Factor, pp. 129-30. Also Kâzım Karabekir, İstiklâl Harbimizde Enver Paşa ve İttihat Terakki Erkânı, p. 89.
9. See list of opposition groups in Turkey in Mesaf, 1920, p.19.
10. See Enver's letter quoted in Aydemir, op. cit.p. 609.
11. See E. H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, Vol.3, p. 469, n.2. Also M.N.Roy's Memoirs, p. 408: 'Why not let him go to Eastern Turkestan, which was in a state of chaos? The Cheka would keep an eye on him. By this stratagem, he could be kept away from Afghanistan,' etc.
12. See Zeki Velidi Togan, Bugünkü Türkili (Türkistan) ve Yakın Tarihi, p. 435.
13. Caroeğ op. cit., p. 35.
14. Aydemir, op. cit. p. 639.
15. Tekin Erer, Enver Paşa'nın Türkistan Kurtuluş Savaşı, p. 72.
16. Aydemir, op. cit. p. 668.
17. Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1920-1923, p. 365.

18. Erer, op. cit. p. 135.
19. Togan, op. cit. p. 453.
20. M.N.Roy's Memoirs, p. 407.
21. See Paul Dumont, La Fascination du Bolshévisme: Enver Pacha et le Parti des Soviets Populaires, 1919-1922, in Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique, XVI, 2, April-June 1979, pp. 140-166. Also Azade Ayse Rölich in Fellow Travellers: Enver Pasha and the Bolshevik Government 1919-1920.
22. Louis Fischer, The Soviets in World Affairs, Vol. I, p. 386.
23. Le Premier Congrès des Peuples de l'Orient, Compte-Rendu, p. L09.
24. Fitzroy Maclean, A Person from England and Other Travellers in Turkestan, p. 343.
25. Ibid.
26. Togan, op. cit. p. 449.
27. Aydemir, op. cit. p. 641.
28. Joseph Castagné, Les Basmachis, p. 51.
29. Aydemir, op. cit. p. 669.
30. See Aydemir, op. cit. pp. 616 ff; Erer, op. cit. pp 57 ff; Feridun Kandemir, Enver Paşa'nın "on Günleri, p. 15.
31. Togan, op. cit. p. 437.
32. Ibid, p. 435.
33. Aydemir, op. cit. p. 497, quoted from Emir Şekip Arslan's memoirs.
34. See Cemal Paşa'nın Son Mektubu, ed. by Mithat Perin, in Hürriyet for 22-27 July 1985.
35. Quoted in Ali Fuat Cebesoy, Moskova Hatıraları, p. 262.
36. Quoted in Aydemir, op. cit. pp. 348-9.
37. M.N.Roy's Memoirs, Ch. 57-58, pp. 419 ff; see also Peter Hopkirk, Setting the East Ablaze, p. 115.
38. Karabekir, op. cit. p. 356.
39. Erer, op, cit. p. 12.
40. Togan, op. cit. p. 460.
41. General Sami Sabit Karaman, İstiklâl Mücadelesi ve Enver Paşa, letter intercepted by Turkish military intelligence, quoted on p. 99.
42. Letter of December 12, 1921, quoted in Aydemir, op. cit. p. 655.
43. Aydemir, op. cit. p. 684.

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