

1 The high politics of anarchy and competition

The event that triggered the Young Turk Revolution had nothing to do with questions of equality or freedom, the principles in the name of which the revolution was made. Rather, it was a meeting in the Baltic port of Reval (today's Tallinn) between the king of England and the tsar of Russia in June 1908 that spurred the Committee of Progress and Union to act (it would later change its name to the "Committee of Union and Progress"). Fearing the meeting was a prelude to the partition of Macedonia, Unionist officers in the Balkans mutinied against Sultan Abdülhamid II and forced him to restore the constitution he had abrogated three decades earlier. A desire to preserve the state, not destroy it, motivated the revolutionaries. They believed the empire was weak for two reasons: its constituent peoples lacked solidarity, and the institutions of its state were undeveloped and decentralized. The Unionists' public formula for generating that solidarity was to restore the constitution and parliament and thereby give the empire's varied elements a stake in the empire's continued existence.

The Unionists' private views, however, were somewhat different. They placed little confidence in the ability of the people to pursue their best interests on their own and distrusted democratic politics. Instead, taking their cue from cutting-edge sociological theories from Europe that emphasized the utility of elitist administration, the leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) trusted in the efficacy of marrying the power of scientific reason to the power of the state to guide, control, and transform society. Modern Europe's example also fed skepticism about the possibility of generating between ethnically disparate elements the sort of powerful solidarity that a modern state needed. Since Turks composed a plurality of the empire's population and their fate was bound more tightly to the state than that of any other element, the Unionists identified them as the properly "dominant nation" around which the empire should be organized, not unlike the position of Germans

in Austria-Hungary.¹ Only a small minority occupied themselves with Turkism. Saving the empire and state, not asserting Turkism, remained the prime goal of the Unionists, and they embraced the latter in so far as it supported the former.

Whereas the CUP's origins lay in a student secret society founded in 1889, by 1908 military officers, not writers or intellectuals, accounted for the organization's largest constituency. They saw themselves as heirs to a once glorious military tradition, and the defense of their shrinking state had become for them a matter of intense corporate and professional pride. Most of these officers, like the party's membership as a whole, hailed from the empire's Balkan and Aegean borderlands in the west, where the empire's borders were shrinking quickly. They cut their teeth fighting Balkan guerrillas, and they nurtured no illusions that the consequences of the end of the empire for its Muslims could be anything less than dire, and this, too, stiffened their resolve. Service in the borderlands of a declining empire had habituated them to violence, and it convinced them of the need for deep, radical reform of the state they served and of the society that supported it. For them, the application of violence in the name of the state was familiar in practice and permissible, even mandated, in theory. The discipline and cohesion they developed while underground would enable them to operate almost as an institution parallel to the state.

In their endeavor to preserve the empire and reform it from top to bottom, however, the Unionists faced an interlocking dilemma. The first part lay in the nature of the interstate order in the early twentieth century. That order was anarchic, competitive, and dominated by a small, select group of actors. In an environment where no higher sovereign existed to regulate interstate relations, a state's only guaranty of survival was its own power. Gains in power were zero sum. A gain by one meant a loss by another. This state of affairs was, arguably, as old as the state system itself, but now a handful of European states, whose preponderant military, technological, and economic capabilities earned them the sobriquet of "great powers," stood astride the world. Anarchy, competition, and the global reach of the great powers combined to create extraordinary turbulence around the globe in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the Ottoman lands were among those most buffeted.

The second part of the dilemma stemmed from domestic politics. The Ottoman empire owed its historical expansion and growth to the center's ability to accommodate its multiple varied regions and groups

¹ Hüseyin Cahid, "Millet-i Hakime," *Tanin*, 25 Teşrinievvel 1324 [7.11.1908]; M. A. "Osmanlı İttihadı," *Meşveret*, no. 5, vol. 108 (1896), 1–2.

with flexible relations tailored to the specificities of each. This arrangement demanded relatively little of the periphery. By the same token, when measured against the standard of a modern state, this arrangement yielded comparatively little to the center. As the Unionists were aware, the great powers possessed superior abilities both to extract resources from their populations and to mobilize them via a centralized administration. The problem was that replicating such a system in the Ottoman context required not just the erection of new rationalized institutions but also the elimination of the panoply of existing institutions and arrangements that benefited and sustained local elites. Those elites could be expected to resist reform of the status quo in the center's favor. Moreover, the penetration of the great powers into the Ottoman lands offered local elites the option of enlisting outside support to resist and challenge the center. Any attempt by the center to impose its will upon the periphery was fraught with the possibility that the periphery might choose to ally with an outside power, or that an aggressive outside power might exploit such frictions to detach the periphery.² A fear and loathing of outside intervention lay at the core of Unionist beliefs. A dispute with other underground opposition groups over the propriety of inviting and manipulating outside intervention to bring down the sultan had precipitated the Unionists' decision to split from the opposition coalition in 1903.

Finance posed a further structural constraint on the state's capacity to carry out revitalizing reforms. Although nominally sovereign in the political sense, the Ottoman empire resembled a "semi-colony" in its economic relations. Its economy was agricultural, and its tax base was tiny. To obtain the capital necessary to fund further development, the Ottomans in the middle of the nineteenth century took loans from the great powers, but then proved unable to service them. To recover the loans, the European powers in 1881 established the Ottoman Public Debt Administration and through it began exacting excise and other taxes as well as control over the Ottoman budget. Adding insult to the injury of foreign control over domestic finances was the ability of European citizens, including predominantly Christian Ottoman subjects who through various avenues obtained European citizenship, to take advantage of a number of extra-territorial legal and economic privileges known as the "capitulations." The arrangement granting European subjects exemption from Ottoman law dated back to the sixteenth century. But due to

² For an older view that privileges identity and nationalist awakenings over geopolitics, see Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder: Westview, 1977), 110–14. Cf. Mazower, *Balkans*, 87–95.

the vast shift in power in favor of Europe, by the nineteenth century the capitulations had acquired a distinctly exploitative character. Their existence provoked widespread resentment among Ottoman Muslims and sowed social disruption. The Unionists made annulment of the capitulations a prime aspiration.³

The mass misery of geopolitics

However neatly the process of Ottoman disintegration may have played out on the maps of diplomats, it inflicted death, pain, and misery on the populations who lived on the landscapes those maps represented. Mass emigration, expulsion, and ethnic cleansing of Muslims accompanied the retreat of Ottoman borders in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Crimea. The completion of Russia's subjugation of the North Caucasus in 1864 sent hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees fleeing into Ottoman lands.⁴ During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78 an estimated quarter of a million Muslims in Bulgaria lost their lives and up to one million became refugees. Still greater losses in the Balkans were to follow after 1912.⁵ A son of refugees living in Edirne (Adrianople) wrote of his childhood at the end of the nineteenth century:

These were not tranquil years. They were pregnant with a bloody, perplexing century . . . Ours was a refugee neighborhood. The flotsam of torrents of refugees, coming every so often from Crimea, Dobruja, and the banks of the Danube because of wars and mass killings, had been pushed back to here step by step with the constantly shrinking borders as armies suffered defeat after defeat for 150, 200 years.⁶

Compounding the despair of such Muslims was the fact that the same advances in knowledge that gave Christian powers and peoples technological superiority were reducing mortality rates and contributing to a Christian demographic boom. Christian populations in Europe and the Balkans were not only growing richer and stronger, but they were also outstripping those of Muslims in sheer numbers.⁷ Radical action

³ On the social effects of the capitulations, see Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881–1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York: New York University Press, 1983).

⁴ Kemal Karpat estimates a total of 2.5 million for the period between 1859 and 1914. This is almost certainly excessive. See Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 65–69.

⁵ McCarthy, *Death and Exile*, 90–91, 164; Richard C. Hall, *Balkan Wars, 1912–1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), 135–37.

⁶ Şevket Sürreya Aydemir, *Sıyü Arayan Adam* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1995), 9, 18.

⁷ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2001), 13; Lieven, *Empire*, 155, 208, 216.

and reform would be needed to reverse such a course of events. It was this desperate refugee flotsam from the borderlands that was represented disproportionately in Unionist ranks.⁸

The interstate system at the beginning of the twentieth century was a multipolar one, with no single or two states preeminent. Multipolarity traditionally had afforded the Ottomans the ability to play off one power against the other, which they did at times with consummate skill. Their greatest and most dangerous rival was the Russian empire. Russia bordered directly on the Ottoman empire and had steadily pushed the Ottomans from the Balkans and the Caucasus. And, unlike another neighbor and rival, Austria-Hungary, Russia was growing stronger. Britain and France could project considerable power into the region. They had at times backed the Ottomans against the Russians, and might again in the future. But they, too, had their own economic and geostrategic ambitions in the region and would pursue them to the Ottomans' detriment, as Britain demonstrated in 1878 by absorbing the strategic island of Cyprus in exchange for diplomatic support against Russia. Four years later Britain would occupy Egypt. Italy, too, had its eyes on Ottoman territory in Africa and Albania, and presented a similar, albeit smaller-scale, problem.

That left Germany. Germany was rich and powerful. It shared no direct borders with the Ottoman empire, nor did it have any immediate pretensions to Ottoman territory. Like Istanbul, Berlin had an interest in stymieing the advance of the other powers in the Near East. It alone had opposed the Macedonian reform project without exacting concessions from Istanbul in return. Most important, a deep anxiety about the rise of Russia exercised both capitals. Moreover, a number of influential German foreign policy thinkers by the end of the nineteenth century had become intrigued by the potential of pan-Islam as a revolutionary force to blow up the empires of their Russian, British, and French rivals. Kaiser Wilhelm II was among those fascinated with Islam, going so far as to declare on a trip to Syria that the world's 300 million Muslims had in him an eternal friend.⁹ For all these reasons, Germany, so long as it remained outside the Near East, was a logical and desirable ally.

⁸ Erik Jan Zürcher, "The Young Turks: Children of the Borderlands?", *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9, 1–2 (Summer 2003), 275–85.

⁹ On the kaiser's longstanding fascination with Islam, see Donald McKale, *War by Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998), 9–10; Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam*, 2nd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46–47, 98. See also Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin–Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

This was the environment in which the Unionists found themselves. Outside their empire, predatory states were engaged in an intense, often bloody, contest of expansion that was often at the Ottomans' expense. Austria-Hungary's brazen annexation of the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the wake of the 1908 Revolution underscored the unfor-giving nature of global society. Inside, the empire's constituents chafed under relative deprivation. Yet efforts to overhaul and streamline the empire's traditionally decentralized administration often provoked only resistance from subjects who opposed ceding greater power to the center and who now had options beyond remaining loyal to Istanbul. The restoration of the constitution had sparked not just joyous celebrations but also a chain of rebellions by tribal leaders in Eastern Anatolia who rightfully feared for the loss of the privileges they had held under the old Hamidian regime. Several of these turned to the Russians across the border for help, and their challenge to the Ottoman state would keep the cauldron of Eastern Anatolia simmering. The reform efforts and diplomatic gambits of the nineteenth century had slowed the empire's partition and disintegration, but they had not stopped it. Something greater had to be done. The Unionists' faith in the efficacy of state power pointed to authoritarian rule as the best bet to resolve the dilemma of pressure to modernize from without and resistance to centralization from within. In the course of the next five years, the Unionists would transform the Ottoman government from a constitutional regime with a parliament to a dictatorship of triumvirs.

Russia's security dynamic: the paradox of power

The position of the Russian empire, it would seem, was fundamentally different from that of the Ottoman. Over the previous two centuries that empire had expanded, not contracted, and had come to dominate the vast Eurasian heartland. It was an emerging industrial power that commanded seemingly inexhaustible natural and human resources. Indeed, the perception of inexorably increasing Russian power was almost universal prior to World War I.¹⁰ The Russian empire, however, inhabited the same anarchic and competitive environment as any other state. Paradoxically, its growth and expansion served to generate rather than alleviate security concerns. St. Petersburg felt an acute vulnerability in the south. The conquest of the Caucasus protected Russia's interior, but it put Russia in control of a troublesome borderland exposed to

¹⁰ William C. Wohlforth, "The Perception of Power: Russia in the Pre-1914 Balance," *World Politics*, 39, 3 (April 1987), 380.

competitors. An expanding economy was enriching Russia, but it was also heightening Russia's dependence on the Black Sea Straits for exports. Even Ottoman weakness was a mixed blessing for Russia. Whereas the decline of the Ottomans from the status of true peer competitor was a welcome development, that decline opened the unnerving possibility that another power might manage to exploit it to establish a hostile presence on Russia's southern border and in the Black Sea.

Russia's statesmen, like their Ottoman counterparts, faced the challenge of transforming a polyethnic, multiconfessional, dynastic, imperial state into a modern, efficient, and more centralized state from within, while simultaneously meeting and beating back challenges from without. Russia's territorial expansion and economic growth in the nineteenth century meant the introduction of new constituencies and changing social relations. It subjected the autocracy to severe stress. So long as the tsarist regime proved capable of holding its own against its outside competitors it could keep the internal contradictions in check. But when Japan defeated Russia in 1904–05, the blow to the regime's prestige was so great that a series of revolts, protests, and disturbances erupted across the empire. These events, known as the Revolution of 1905, led Tsar Nicholas II to introduce a constitution and parliament, the Duma. Pressure was alleviated, but only partially, and only for a time.

Southern discomfort

The vectors of Russia's security dilemma came together in January 1908 on the Ottoman–Iranian border. During the previous year Russia had agreed with Great Britain to establish zones of influence in the north and south of Iran respectively in an attempt to regulate both Russia's broader rivalry in Asia with the British empire and to ensure the tranquility of Russian Azerbaijan. But the arrival of the Russians alarmed the Ottomans, in part because they had a border dispute with Iran over Kotur. The Russians' presence also alienated local Kurds, and clashes along the border erupted. Russia's Foreign Minister Aleksandr Izvol'skii sensed an opportunity for a "short, victorious" war to restore the tsarist regime's prestige. With the enthusiastic backing of Army Chief of Staff Fedor Palitsyn, he argued for a war to fulfill "Russia's historical goals in the Turkish East" and floated the possibility of partitioning the Ottoman empire with Britain.¹¹ Izvol'skii failed to get his way, but that summer the possibility of anarchy in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution spurred

¹¹ I. V. Bestuzhev, *Bor'ba v Rossii po voprosam vneshnei politiki, 1906–1910* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1961), 150–51; A. A. Polivanov, *Iz dnevnikov i vospominanii po*

him to push again for action. At a special meeting of ministers, diplomats, and military experts he reviewed the options for intervention and resolved to ready a plan to seize the Straits.¹² The unusually powerful minister of the interior, Petr Stolypin, however, was absolute in his conviction that, in the wake of Russia's catastrophic loss to Japan, St. Petersburg must focus its attention and resources on internal reform, and so he quashed the calls for war.¹³

Concerns about Russia's southern strategic position continued to exercise Izvol'skii, but Stolypin received a chance to consolidate control of Russian policy shortly thereafter when the impetuous Izvol'skii blundered. In exchange for a promise to support a new convention permitting the free passage of Russian warships through the Black Sea Straits, he agreed to Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Before Izvol'skii could obtain consent from the powers for the new convention, however, Vienna announced the annexation, leaving Izvol'skii empty-handed and humiliated, and precipitating his departure as foreign minister.¹⁴

Stolypin's insistence on an inward focus was not a renunciation of expansion. To the contrary, he explained that three or four years of domestic reform would prepare Russia again to assert itself abroad.¹⁵ Until that time, however, Russia needed a rapprochement with the Ottoman empire, and Stolypin saw to the appointment of a likeminded diplomat, Nikolai Charykov, as ambassador to Istanbul. As Charykov explained to Izvol'skii's successor as foreign minister, Sergei Sazonov, rapprochement serves "our fundamental goal: to protect Turkey from disintegrating at a time that would be ill-suited for us." Ottoman collapse was foreordained, but had to be delayed until Russia was strong enough to impose its will on the Ottoman lands. In the meantime, Russia

dolzhnosti voennogo ministra i ego pomoshchnika 1907–1916 gg, ed. A. M. Zaionchkovskii (Moscow: Vyshii voennyi redaktsionnyi sovet, 1924), 39.

¹² Protocol of the special meeting called by the minister of foreign affairs, 21.7.1908, [3.8.1908], in A. Popov, "Turetskaia revoliutsiia – 1908–1909," *Krasnyi arkhiv: istoricheskii zhurnal*, 43. (1930), 44–45.

¹³ David MacLaren McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia, 1900–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 129, 145–46; Polivanov, *Iz dnevnikov*, 39–48.

¹⁴ Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans: Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 6. Pavel Miliukov colorfully called Izvol'skii's foul-up a "diplomatic Tsushima": Pavel Miliukov, *Balkanskii krizis i politika A. P. Izvol'skogo* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1909), 133. For more on the crisis, see M. S. Anderson, *Eastern Question*, 279–86; Dominic Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 33–37; Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 69–72.

¹⁵ McDonald, *United Government*, 146–47.

could use the Ottomans to block the Austrians in the Balkans. Even so, aggressively hostile attitudes persisted in Russian military circles.¹⁶

Despite their suspicions of Russia, both the CUP and its opponents reciprocated Charykov's overtures in 1909. CUP-affiliated newspapers such as *Şura-yı Ümmet* and *Tanin* as well as other leading papers such as *İkdam* ran articles calling for closer ties with Russia. The authors of these pieces included notable figures such as Ali Kemâl Bey, a prominent columnist and CUP opponent, and Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir, a member of the CUP's inner circle. To what extent Charykov personally stimulated this favorable commentary is not known, but his formation of a friendship with the editor of *Tanin* and prominent Unionist deputy Hüseyin Cahid surely facilitated matters.¹⁷

Their fierce anti-imperialism notwithstanding, the Unionists could hardly afford to spurn overtures for better relations from Russia, since less than a year after coming to power the government was already embattled at home. That April, anti-Unionist elements from the First Army Corps in Istanbul, joined by members of a party called the "Muhammedan Union," marched on the parliament, calling for the government's resignation and the restoration of the *şeriat*, Islamic law. The government fled Istanbul in panic, and across the empire disturbances broke out. In Adana, Muslims lashed out at Armenians, killing thousands. Only the arrival ten days later from Salonica of another faction of the military, an "Action Army" under General Mahmud Şevket Pasha accompanied by Enver Bey, defeated the uprising. The episode failed to shake the Unionists' will to rule. To the contrary, they seized the opportunity to consolidate their control by deposing Abdülhamid II, trying and executing leading mutineers, banning groups bearing ethnic or national names, ordering the formation of special counterinsurgency units in the Balkans, and heightening penalties against bandits and guerrillas. Nonetheless, the so-called counterrevolution taught the Unionists that they could not ignore Muslim sentiment.¹⁸

When later in 1909 Charykov proposed that Tsar Nicholas II on his way to Rome stop in Istanbul and meet with Sultan Mehmed Reşad V,

¹⁶ Bestuzhev, *Bor'ba v Rossii*, 340; A. M. Zaionchkovskii, *Podgotovka Rossii k mirovoi voine v mezhdunarodnom otnoshenii* (Leningrad: Voennaia tipografiia, 1926), 214; William C. Fuller, "The Russian Empire," in *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars*, ed. Ernest R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 123.

¹⁷ Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya: XVIII Yüzyıl Sonundan Kurtuluş Savaşına Kadar Türk-Rus İlişkileri (1798-1919)* (Ankara: Ankara University Press, 1970), 150, 152, 158.

¹⁸ Feroz Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 40-46; Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, 4 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1940), vol. I, pt. 1, 295-301; Lewis, *Emergence*, 215-18.

the Porte greeted the idea enthusiastically. Within St. Petersburg, however, objections were raised to the idea of the tsar visiting the former Byzantine capital and center of Eastern Orthodoxy – the city the Russians were already calling “Tsargrad,” or “Tsar’s city” – as a mere tourist. The proposal was dropped and Nicholas II traveled to Rome by train. Charykov attempted to salvage some of the goodwill by mounting an exhibition of Russian industry in Istanbul aboard a ship christened “Nicholas II.” Although a commercial success, the exhibition could not rescue the rapprochement. Inside the Russian state bureaucracy too many opposed a closer relationship. Outside, the conservative and liberal press alike criticized the policy, with the former advocating a deal with Austria-Hungary to partition the Ottoman empire. Unsuccessful in their effort to get Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman empire to resolve their differences in Macedonia, Russia’s diplomats ultimately declared the policy barren and dropped it in 1910.¹⁹

At the same time that he had been restraining his fellow ministers from premature aggression and backing Charykov’s efforts to draw Istanbul closer, Stolypin had been pushing for a build-up of Russian military capabilities in the Caucasus and of naval capabilities on the Black Sea. Reports in 1911 that the Ottomans were looking to purchase one or two dreadnoughts raised further alarms. Even if it was true that the Ottomans sought the advanced battleships for use on the Aegean against the Greeks, there would be nothing to prevent them from deploying the vessels on the Black Sea, where Russia’s fleet possessed no comparable warships.²⁰

A different source of anxiety for St. Petersburg was the possibility that another power might grab control of the Black Sea Straits from the faltering Ottomans. Russian military planners saw the creation of a rapid deployment force as a form of insurance against such a scenario. Indeed, during the disorders of July 1908 and April 1909 the Foreign Ministry had considered landing troops in Istanbul. Reviews conducted in March and June 1911 by the navy and army respectively, however, concluded that Russia’s forces remained incapable of executing a surprise assault to seize the Bosphorus. The Council of Ministers concurred with Stolypin that this state of affairs was unacceptable. Overriding objections to the cost, the council backed a Naval Ministry proposal to build eighteen new

¹⁹ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 158–59; Bestuzhev, *Bor’ba v Rossii*, 346–48; K. F. Shatsillo, *Russkii imperializm i razvitie flota nakanune pervoi mirovoi voiny (1906–1914)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), 94.

²⁰ Emissary in Sofia to Neratov, 30.6.1911 [13.7.1911], in *Kommissia po izdaniiu dokumentov epokhi imperializma, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v epokhu imperializma* (hereafter *Movet*), series 2, vol. 18, pt. 1 (Moscow: Gosizdat politicheskoi literatury, 1938), 211.

vessels, including three dreadnoughts, on the Black Sea. The tsar and the Duma approved the proposal in May 1911.²¹ Over the course of the next two years, Russian anxiety about the straits would intensify as events underscored both Russia's economic dependence upon the waterway and the real possibility of an imminent resolution of the centuries-old Eastern Question by the military destruction of the Ottoman empire.

War with Italy

On 28 September Italy gave the Ottoman empire an ultimatum declaring its intent to occupy Tripoli of Barbary (the provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica). The ostensible motive was to protect Italians living there. The real motive was to prevent Italy from falling further behind its great power peers in the scramble to accumulate colonies. Thus, despite receiving a propitiating response, Rome attacked the next day. Described by one historian as "one of the most unjustified [wars] in European history,"²² Italy's aggression provided one more example to the Ottomans of the merciless nature of the great powers and the interstate system they dominated, and belied the Europeans' rhetoric of support for stabilizing reforms. To the contrary, the Ottomans concluded, the great powers preferred to keep the Ottoman empire weak and confused, the easier to carve it up. The assessment was not far off the mark. Apprehension that Istanbul's domestic reforms would strengthen its bonds to the African provinces had been among the factors spurring the Italians to attack.²³

Tripoli represented the last Ottoman possession in Africa. If it went, so would the Ottoman claim to be "an empire on three continents." The Unionists were determined to defend the distant province however they could.²⁴ A number of Ottoman military officers, including Enver and another promising young officer named Mustafa Kemal, made their way overland to Tripoli, traveling discreetly in small groups to avoid detection as they passed through British-controlled Egypt. With the assistance of such advisors, Tripoli's native tribesmen mounted strong resistance. Unable to impose its will, Italy escalated by bombarding targets on the Ottomans' Aegean and Levantine coastlines.

Italy's expansion of the war into the eastern Mediterranean disturbed St. Petersburg. One-quarter of Russia's total exports passed through the

²¹ Shatsillo, *Russkii imperiazizm*, 130–34; Ronald Bobroff, *Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 22–23.

²² M. S. Anderson, *Eastern Question*, 288. ²³ Bobroff, *Roads*, 22.

²⁴ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 168.

Black Sea Straits, and now there was a possibility that Istanbul would block the passage. Since Foreign Minister Sazonov was convalescing, it fell to Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Anatolii Neratov to assume the initiative. When the other powers failed to respond to his proposal to act collectively to prevent any disruption to shipping, Neratov had Charykov propose to Grand Vizier Said Pasha that Istanbul accept free passage for Russian warships in exchange for a guaranty to protect the straits and the Balkan status quo, forego a concession to build a railroad along the Black Sea coast, and even revise the hated capitulations. The offer was tempting, but it would make the empire wholly dependent on Russia for its security. Said Pasha and Foreign Minister Âsim Bey decided acceptance would be tantamount to a betrayal of the empire and so declined.²⁵ All rights and authority over the straits, Said Pasha explained in his response to Charykov that December, belonged to the Ottoman populace and its ruler.²⁶

When Sazonov returned to his post in December and learned of Charykov's proposal, he was aghast. With the Tripolitanian War, friction with Britain regarding Iran, and other problems roiling global diplomacy, Sazonov believed it was an inauspicious time to push for change on such a major issue as the straits. He instructed Charykov to inform the Ottomans that his overture had been a wholly private initiative. Then, in April 1912, Russia's fears were realized. When a frustrated Italy, unable to prevail in Tripoli of Barbary, carried out naval attacks on targets near the straits, the Ottomans shut them to traffic for a month. The impact upon Russia was severe: Russian grain exports for the first half of 1912 fell 45 percent from the same period in 1911, an unacceptable situation given that the export of grain from the Black Sea was absolutely essential to Russia's own drive to industrialize and match its rivals.²⁷ Between 1900 and 1909 the straits accounted for one-third to one-half of Russia's total exports, and shipments of coal, manganese, and oil from the Caucasus and Ukraine were growing in importance.²⁸

²⁵ M. S. Anderson, *Eastern Question*, 289; Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 162, 164; Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. II, pt. 1, 136–43.

²⁶ E. A. Adamov, "Vopros o Prolivakh i o Konstantinopole v mezhdunarodnoi politike v 1908–1977 g.g.," in *Konstantinopol' i prolivy po sekretnyim dokumentam byvshego ministerstva inostrannykh del*, vol. I, ed. E. A. Adamov (Moscow: Litizdat NKID, 1925), 16.

²⁷ D. W. Spring, "Russian Foreign Policy, Economic Interests and the Straits Question, 1905–1914," in *New Perspectives in Modern Russian History*, ed. Robert B. McKean (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 212–13; Ia. Zakher, "Konstantinopl' i prolivi", *Krasnyi arkhiv: istoricheskii zhurnal*, 6 (1924), 49.

²⁸ Alan Bodger, "Russia and the End of the Ottoman Empire," in *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Marian Kent, 2nd edn. (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 79.

If the war underscored to Russia the vital importance of the straits, it revealed to the Balkan states the vulnerability of the Ottoman empire. Italy's audacious unilateral grab of Ottoman territory set an instructive precedent. It was permissible, and useful, to act now and attack the hapless Ottoman empire. Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro all coveted the remaining Balkan territories of the Ottoman empire, and so in 1912 they formed a web of alliances directed against it.²⁹

The Balkan Wars and the acceleration of Russian plans

On 8 October 1912, Montenegro got a jump on its Balkan allies and declared war on the Ottoman empire. With yet another war now on their hands, the Ottomans ceded Tripoli and made peace with Italy. They enjoyed no reprieve, however, as the other Balkan states followed Montenegro and attacked Ottoman positions throughout the peninsula. The Balkan armies enjoyed stunning success, inflicting a series of catastrophic defeats on the Ottomans everywhere from Albania to Thrace.

The reasons for the Ottoman army's defeats extended beyond numerical inferiority and the need to fight simultaneously on several fronts. The Ottomans' foreign and domestic challenges had again combined to disastrous effect. The question of the composition of the Ottoman officer corps had become inextricably intertwined with domestic political struggles. As the Young Turk Revolution and the counterrevolution of 1909 had demonstrated, whoever controlled the army could control the course of domestic politics. A group known as the "Savior Officers" (*Halâskar Zabitân*) underscored this lesson again. Upset with the CUP's authoritarian style, the way it had manipulated elections to stack parliament with Unionists earlier that year, and the participation of active-duty Unionist officers in government, the Savior Officers in July 1912 threatened a coup and successfully forced a cabinet change and new elections, thereby driving the CUP from power.

Somewhat ironically, the Savior Officers also required that henceforth all officers swear not to involve themselves in politics. Yet even a seemingly technical question, such as that of military education and promotion, was politically charged. There were two routes into the officer corps. One was through formal training in a military academy, or *mekteb-i harbiye*. The second was promotion through the ranks. These officers, known as *alaylılar* in reference to their emergence through the regiments, or *alaylar*, were as a rule unsuited for command in a modern military force. The Unionists were emphatic proponents of the academy system,

²⁹ Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, 35; M. S. Anderson, *Eastern Question*, 291.

both because it meshed with their ideological commitment to modernization and because they counted a disproportionate number of academy graduates, or *mektebliler*, among their supporters. The regimental officers as a group overwhelmingly opposed the CUP.³⁰ Infighting and a preoccupation with politics took a toll on military preparedness. Disorder and confusion reigned even at the very top. When with war looming in the Balkans the newly appointed war minister Nâzım Pasha, a talented commander and graduate of the French military academy St. Cyr, was asked what the army would do, he was reduced to the reply, “Some plans were apparently made during the time of [the preceding war minister] Mahmud Şevket Pasha; I am going to obtain and examine them.”³¹

Crushed on every front, the Ottomans in early November found Bulgarian forces on the outskirts of Istanbul. The Bulgarians’ approach alarmed the Russians too. Sazonov, who had earlier encouraged the Balkan alliances, envisioning them as a barrier to Austro-Hungarian expansion, watched in distress as the Bulgarians threatened to take Istanbul and the straits on their own.³² The Ministry of War on 6 November ordered an amphibious landing force formed in Sevastopol for intervening in Istanbul. Less than forty-eight hours later, the naval minister telegraphed Tsar Nicholas II at 1:30 a.m. to ask that the ambassador to Istanbul, Mikhail Girs, be given discretionary authority to order the intervention. It was an extraordinary request, but the tsar granted his approval. Upon Girs’ insistence, the amphibious force was increased to 5,000 men with artillery. A Naval General Staff report advised that Russian forces could deploy to the Bosphorus using the “slightest pretext” and turn their occupation into a permanent one with little difficulty. Although the ostensible mission of the amphibious force would be to protect Istanbul’s Christian population from violence expected to result from the influx of defeated and disorderly Ottoman soldiers, Sazonov’s intent was to use it to give Russia the “deciding voice” in resolving the fate of Istanbul and the straits.³³

By mid November the Bulgarian advance had stalled. With the threat defused momentarily, Sazonov returned to his policy of maintaining the status quo until such time as Russia was be strong enough to impose its

³⁰ M. Naim Turfan, *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the Military, and Ottoman Collapse* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 156–58; Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. I (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), 344–66.

³¹ Hüsamettin Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası*, ed. Samih Nafiz Tansu (Istanbul: Sebül Yayinevi, 1996), 78; Feroz Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 106–12; Ali Fuad Türkgeldi, *Görüp İşittiklerim*, 3rd edn. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1984), 60.

³² M. S. Anderson, *Eastern Question*, 242–44; Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, 45–46.

³³ Zakher, “Konstantinopl’,” 51–52; Bobroff, *Roads*, 52–54.

will. Explaining to his ambassador to Paris that it was in Russia's interest to maintain room for maneuver, he rejected a French suggestion that France, Britain, and Russia issue a joint declaration against any seizure of the straits. He similarly dismissed a British proposal to make the status quo permanent by internationalizing Istanbul and guaranteeing the neutrality of the straits. Although such an arrangement in principle would satisfy Russia's need for free passage for its commercial and naval ships, legal norms, Sazonov stressed, were effective only in peacetime. In wartime they were, virtually by definition, meaningless.³⁴ A state's own might, not the promises of others, was the ultimate guarantor of its security.

A renewed Bulgarian threat to Istanbul jolted St. Petersburg again, and again the Black Sea Fleet was put at Girs' disposal. A strong consensus emerged among the Foreign, War, and Naval Ministries that Russia had to take the straits within the next several years since, as a Naval General Staff report put it, "the decisive resolution of the Eastern Question will probably occur in the next few years." The same report argued that because the idea of seizing the straits "had lain in the Russian consciousness for so long and so deeply" it would be dangerous to forego it. Minister of the Navy Admiral Ivan Grigorovich assured Sazonov not only that a powerful fleet could be built on the Black Sea within five years, but also that "the Turkish Straits, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, inevitably will become, sooner or later, a Russian possession."³⁵

The Naval Ministry drafted a plan to build up the Black Sea Fleet. Calculating that Britain and France would in the event of a *fait accompli* acquiesce to Russian control of the straits, the planners underlined the need for good relations with Greece. Russia between 1915 and 1918 was to concentrate both its Baltic and Black Sea Fleets in the Aegean by making use of Greek ports. Then, at the appropriate time, predicted to be between 1917 and 1919, Russia was to strike and seize the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Russia's ministers gave the plan their unanimous endorsement.³⁶

The message of the Balkan Wars was that the death of Europe's "Sick Man" was at hand. The challenge for Russia was to keep the Ottoman empire around at least until 1917.³⁷ It is worth noting that Sazonov did

³⁴ Zakher, "Konstantinopl'," 59, 72.

³⁵ Zakher, "Konstantinopl'," 64–66; Shatsillo, *Russkii imperializm*, 102–03, 129; M. Petrov, *Podgotovka Rossii k mirovoi voine na more* (Leningrad: Voenizdat, 1926), 158–59; Peter Gatrell, *Government, Industry, and Rearmament in Russia, 1900–1914: The Last Argument of Tsarism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 137.

³⁶ Petrov, *Podgotovka*, 159–61; Zakher, "Konstantinopl'," 66.

³⁷ I. V. Bestuzhev, "Russian Foreign Policy, February–June 1914," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1, 3 (July 1966), 107.

not fear that the Ottoman empire was about to disintegrate on its own. To the contrary, he believed that the empire was robust enough to handle its internal problems and that under the right conditions it could continue in existence for some time to come. The existential threat came from the outside, and that was worrisome enough. “[W]e cannot close our eyes to the dangers of the international situation” created by Ottoman weakness, Sazonov cautioned.³⁸ It was in this context that internal Ottoman conflicts took on heightened significance. As Sazonov remarked, “The Ottoman empire’s defects, its inability to rejuvenate itself on legal and cultural bases, have so far been to our advantage, generating that attraction of peoples under the domination of the Crescent to Orthodox Christian Russia which constitutes one of the foundations of our international position in the East and in Europe.”³⁹ The key was to exploit the internal fissures correctly.

External catastrophe and internal consolidation: the final ascent of the Unionists

Thoroughly routed on all fronts, the Ottoman empire signed an armistice on 3 December 1912 and entered peace talks hosted in London. The fact that former subjects, not the great powers, had stripped the empire of its historic heartland and wealthiest lands made the loss all the more bitter. The Unionists seethed. When the Ottoman government, now in the hands of the Liberal Entente (*Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası*), a loose grouping of disparate elements ranging from liberals to tribal chiefs joined together by myriad ideological and material reasons in opposition to the Unionist platform of centralization, decided to enter peace talks, the Unionists fomented popular distress over the surrender of Ottoman territory and channeled it against the government. Suspecting a plot, Grand Vizier Kâmil Pasha ordered the arrests of a large number of Unionists.⁴⁰ Those who failed to flee were jailed or exiled to Anatolia.

Kâmil Pasha’s preemption was in vain. On 23 January 1912 Enver Bey led an armed group of Unionists in a raid on the Sublime Porte, where they burst in, shot to death War Minister Nâzım Pasha, and forced Kâmil Pasha to resign on the spot. A mistaken fear that the grand vizier had been preparing to surrender Edirne, one of the empire’s earlier capitals

³⁸ Report of Sazonov to Nicholas II on November 23, 1913, as cited in Zaionchkovskii, *Podgotovka Rossii k mirovoi voine*, 393; Zakher, “Konstantinopl’,” 70.

³⁹ Zaionchkovskii, *Podgotovka Rossii k mirovoi voine*, 394; Zakher, “Konstantinopl’,” 71.

⁴⁰ Feroz Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 114–15; Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. II, pt. 4, 268–69.

and one of its largest and most important cities, had been the catalyst for the raid. The sultan had no choice but to accept the resignation and permit the Unionists to form a new government. The Unionists remained resolute in opposing peace talks, but in the interests of forming a cabinet and government that would command broad support and rally the empire in self-defense, they opted to appoint only three of their members to the cabinet and amnestied their opponents.⁴¹

The Unionists' refusal to sue for peace was rewarded in the summer of 1913 when Serbia, Greece, and Romania fell upon Bulgaria on three fronts. The Ottoman army saw its opportunity and opened a fourth front by punching through the Bulgarians' lines at Çatalca to Edirne. The 33-year-old Enver, always with an eye for the theatrical, made sure he was at the head of the Ottoman columns when they entered Edirne on 20 July. The hero of 1908 now claimed the title of the city's "second conqueror," inflating his accomplishment to that of Sultan Murad I's commander, Lala Şahin Pasha, who had captured the city in 1361. The recapture of Edirne boosted the morale of Ottoman Muslims, demonstrating that perhaps defeat was not their only possible fate.⁴²

Although Enver's audaciousness had salvaged something from the Second Balkan War, the fact that the empire had experienced a catastrophe remained. In the two-year period between September 1911 and September 1913 the empire had lost over a third of its territory and more than one-fifth of its population. Its already depleted coffers hemorrhaged further.⁴³ Ethnic cleansing sent hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees, or *muhacirler*, streaming into the empire, adding yet another economic burden and straining the social fabric. The refugees had their blood shed, homes burned, and families expelled from their birthplaces because as Muslims they were judged to be without legitimate claim to their birthlands in an age of nation-states. When, destitute and embittered, they arrived in what was supposed to be their land, Anatolia, they encountered in Istanbul and along the Aegean coast prosperous communities of Christians, especially Greeks, causing their resentment to burn more intensely. Government offices and private relief organizations ameliorated the refugees' plight somewhat,⁴⁴ but the influx of so many desperate and angry people, Russian diplomats

⁴¹ Feroz Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 116–23; cf. Turfan, *Rise*, 204–13.

⁴² Ertürk, *Perde Arkası*, 98; Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Suyu Arayan Adam*, 55; Feroz Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 140.

⁴³ AVPRI, *Asian Turkey and Its Study*, 1.5.1913 [14.5.1913], f. 129, o. 592b, d. 7600, l. 1; Feroz Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 152–53.

⁴⁴ Shaw, *From Empire to Republic*, vol. I, 49–51.

noted, had injected a dangerous anti-Christian element into the empire's politics.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that the defeats and attendant savagery of the Balkan Wars hardened the attitudes of Ottoman Muslims and of the Unionists and their supporters in particular. As noted earlier, a large proportion of Unionists were from the Balkans, and they felt the loss of their homelands most acutely. In his private letters Enver expressed his anger over the "pitiless" slaughter of Muslims, even "children, young girls, the elderly, women." Calling the Balkan Wars the "latest Crusade," he seethed: "But our hatred strengthens: Revenge, revenge, revenge; there is no other word."⁴⁶ Another Unionist, Halil Bey (Menteşe), a future foreign minister, addressed the parliament with an impassioned and militant call not to forget the Balkan lands. That message echoed in speeches, newspapers, and even schoolbooks.⁴⁷

It would be incorrect to explain the savagery of the Balkan Wars as the product of a final reckoning of sorts in the longstanding opposition between Balkan Christians and Muslims. Balkan Christians inflicted upon each other precisely the same savageries that they exchanged with Muslims.⁴⁸ More importantly, the emotional impact of the Balkan Wars upon the Unionists' decisionmaking should not be exaggerated. The loss of the Balkans stung, but it did not cause them to lose their heads. Already by September, representatives of the Unionist government met with their Bulgarian counterparts. In an atmosphere of almost joyous amity, they signed a peace treaty. The cause for reconciliation was simple: The shift in the regional balance of power had given Istanbul and Sofia common enemies. Indeed, the two were already considering a formal alliance.⁴⁹

Despite their rhetoric of a Balkan *reconquista*, one lesson the Unionists drew from the Balkan Wars was that the Balkan lands with their predominantly Christian populations were irretrievably lost. Anatolia and the Arab lands were left. The Arab lands were vulnerable. The great powers had extensive interests there. Geography made the Arab lands' naval and military defense difficult, and their ethnic composition made their

⁴⁵ AVPRI, Dispatch from Ambassador in Constantinople, 12.5.1914 [25.5.1914], f. 151, o. 482, d. 4068, l. 2. On the sociopolitical impact of the war more generally, see Eyal Ginio, "Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation During the Balkan Wars (1912–1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream," *War and History*, 12, 2 (2005), 156–77.

⁴⁶ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Kendi Mektuplarında Enver Paşa* (Istanbul: Der Yayınları, 1989), 240–42.

⁴⁷ Taner Akçam, *Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 114–16; Mustafa Aksakal, "Not 'by those old books of international law, but only by war': Ottoman Intellectuals on the Eve of the Great War," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 15, 3 (2004), 512.

⁴⁸ Hall, *Balkan Wars*, 138. ⁴⁹ Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, 205.

continued inclusion in the Ottoman state difficult to justify under the emerging new global order.⁵⁰ Anatolia might well be the last stronghold. But could they hold even it? Recent history had not been encouraging.

The Liman von Sanders crisis

The Ottomans and outsiders alike recognized that the question of the next onslaught against the empire was when, not if. In order to survive even into the near future, the empire had to obtain outside support. Germany was the most logical choice of ally. It was powerful and a rival of Britain, France, and Russia, and held no immediate pretensions to Ottoman territory. Ties between Berlin and Istanbul were already good, and in May 1913 the Ottoman government requested Berlin to provide a military mission to help train and reorganize its army. The Germans agreed that fall to send a detachment of forty officers under the command of General Otto Viktor Karl Liman von Sanders. There was nothing in principle unusual about the agreement; Britain already had a naval mission in the Ottoman empire⁵¹ and the French were training the Ottoman gendarmerie. But the announcement that Liman von Sanders would take command of the army corps responsible for defending the straits provoked a scandal. The idea of a German in control of the straits was intolerable for St. Petersburg, so much so that Sazonov contemplated invading and occupying the Black Sea port of Trabzon or the Eastern Anatolian town of Bayezid in retaliation.⁵² After London and Paris, at Sazonov's urging, lodged protests, the Ottomans and Germans cleverly resolved the crisis by promoting Liman von Sanders to full general, a rank that disqualified him from command of a mere army corps.⁵³

Yet this did not allay St. Petersburg's fundamental concern, which was rooted in the structure of power in the region more than its fluctuations. In February 1914 Russia's Council of Ministers met to review the options for taking the straits. They concluded that Russia's lack of naval transport and the relative strength of the Ottoman navy rendered such

⁵⁰ On Unionist attitudes and policies toward the Arab lands, see Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁵¹ Chris B. Rooney, "The International Significance of British Naval Missions to the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1914," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34 (1998), 1–29.

⁵² Bobroff, *Roads*, 86; M. S. Anderson, *Eastern Question*, 303; Harry N. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History, 1913–1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1931), 45.

⁵³ For a detailed treatment of the Liman von Sanders mission and the crisis it created, see R. J. Kerner, "The Mission of Liman von Sanders," *Slavonic Review*, 6, 16 (1927), 12–27; 6, 17 (1927), 344–63; 6, 18 (1928), 543–60; 7, 19 (1928), 90–112.

an operation temporarily unfeasible. In response, they resolved that the army, navy, and ministries of finance, trade, and industry would work together to solve the transport problem, achieve naval supremacy, and increase the number of men and artillery assigned to amphibious operations. They decided also to expand Russia's Caucasian rail network so that it could better support Russia's Caucasus Army in a conflict. The optimal time to seize the straits, they concurred, would be during a general European war. Nicholas II approved the council's plan on 5 April 1914, committing Russia to the creation of the forces it needed to seize Istanbul and the straits.⁵⁴ In the meantime, St. Petersburg's task was to avoid a general European war and blunt the Ottomans' efforts to bolster their own fleet. Istanbul had ordered two dreadnoughts from Britain, scheduled for completion in 1914, and was attempting to purchase a third from Chile or Argentina. These two or three warships would give the Ottomans supremacy on the Black Sea until at least 1917 when Russia would launch four planned dreadnoughts. St. Petersburg, in a major departure from its policy of supporting domestic industry, attempted to prevent the Ottomans from acquiring dreadnoughts by preemptively purchasing those ordered by Chile and Argentina and by pressuring London to slow construction of the vessels ordered by the Ottomans.⁵⁵ Sazonov succeeded in the latter, and when World War I broke out right before their scheduled delivery, Britain would claim them as its own in a move that produced large and unforeseen ramifications.⁵⁶

The Turkish–Russian Friendship Committee

The main source of contention between the Ottoman and Russian empires throughout 1913 was Russia's insistence that Istanbul implement a reform program in the six provinces of Eastern Anatolia, namely Van, Erzurum, Bitlis, Diyar-ı Bekir, Mamuret ül-Aziz (Harput), and Sivas. The ostensible purpose of the program was to provide better security for the local Armenian population. The rout of the Ottoman army in the Balkan Wars sparked fears in St. Petersburg that the collapse of the Ottoman empire itself was imminent. This spurred Russia to raise the question of the reform of Eastern Anatolia, both as a way to gain leverage over other powers in the event of partition and to prevent instability spilling over into its Caucasian provinces should the Ottoman

⁵⁴ Shatsillo, *Russkii imperializm*, 106; Zakher, "Konstantinopl'," 74.

⁵⁵ Gattrell, *Government*, 92.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Miller, *Straits: British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire and the Origins of the Dardanelles Campaign* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1997), 200–01.

state implode. The reform plan called for placing the administration and policing of the six provinces under foreign control and amounted to the effective surrender of Ottoman sovereignty. To the Ottomans, it eerily resembled the Mürzteg program implemented in Macedonia before that province was lost for good. Istanbul therefore strenuously resisted the Russian proposal, but succeeded only in changing some of the terms before signing a joint agreement on 8 February 1914.

Ironically, the completion of that agreement cleared the way to warmer relations. Sazonov was open to cooperation as a way to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman empire until such time as Russia could violate that integrity on its own terms. The Ottoman government was acutely aware of the dangers of seeking confrontation with a great power and recognized that, given its weakness, it had no chance of abrogating the agreement. Russia, moreover, was bidding to become a member of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, and there was the possibility that it might back the Ottoman desire to raise customs duties.⁵⁷

In fact, Russians in Istanbul had detected a “Russophilic” tendency among social circles and the press already in the fall of 1913. When a correspondent from the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency named V. Ianchevetskii proposed taking a group of leading Ottoman professionals to Russia on a tour and sending Ottoman youth there to study so as to improve ties, the leading Unionist and minister of the interior Mehmed Talât Pasha promised his support.⁵⁸ The idea of sending students to Russia was not Ianchevetskii’s alone. The well-known expatriate from Russian Azerbaijan Ahmed Ağaoğlu (Agaev)⁵⁹ was serving in the Ministry of Education and had published articles in the newspapers *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* and *Jeune Turc* calling for Ottoman students to be sent to Europe, including Russia, for education. After meeting with the correspondent, the minister of education assigned Ağaoğlu to draft a plan for sending youth to Russia. Aside from being an expatriate from Russia and an expert in education, Ağaoğlu also taught Russian in Istanbul’s university, the Dar ül-Fünun, and was thus an obvious choice to oversee such a program. Ağaoğlu wished to send some of his own students to Russia, lamenting to Ianchevetskii that despite Russia’s proximity most Ottomans knew the Russians only as *Moskoflar*, Muscovite barbarian oppressors.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 213.

⁵⁸ AVPRI, Imperial Embassy in Constantinople to Neratov, 31.10.1913 [13.11.1913], Report of Ianchevetskii, 28.10.1913 [10.11.1913], f. 151, o. 482, d. 4347, ll. 2, 3.

⁵⁹ For more on Ağaoğlu, see Holly Shissler, *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).

⁶⁰ AVPRI, Report of Ianchevetskii, 28.10.1913 [10.11.1913], f. 151, o. 482, d. 4347, ll. 4–5.

That March, a “Turkish–Russian Committee” was established in Istanbul for the development of closer cultural, economic, and political ties. It planned to accomplish these objectives by influencing the press in the two countries, publishing a monthly newspaper, organizing travel excursions, and holding conferences. It had an executive board of twelve and a total membership of forty, half Ottoman, half Russian. The Ottoman members included Aġaoġlu and were all Unionists.⁶¹

That Aġaoġlu and the Unionists would have been enthusiastic about such a committee may sound surprising, even suspicious. As a sometime exponent of Turkism and member of the Turkish Hearths (Türk Ocakları), he had penned many articles critical of the Russian government and its treatment of Turks and Muslims. Although it is possible that such Ottomans were merely humoring the Russians with the committee, they supported it financially and were more eager than the Russians to open a branch office in St. Petersburg.⁶² The Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Istanbul did not see the committee as mere window dressing, and excoriated its formation.⁶³

A pitch for an alliance

The reassignment in the spring of the Russian embassy’s chief translator, Andrei Mandel’shtam, known for his hostility to Ottoman Muslims, to the University of St. Petersburg to teach Turkish was interpreted in diplomatic and other circles as a sign of Russia’s wish to improve relations.⁶⁴ The Porte indicated its desire for closer ties when Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha proposed to send a delegation to Livadia in Crimea to greet the tsar. The practice of the Ottoman sultan dispatching a delegation to formerly Ottoman Crimea to welcome the vacationing tsar was a ritual established during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz to symbolize the sultan-caliph’s spiritual ties to Crimea’s Muslims. Sazonov welcomed the proposal, seeing a visit as an opportunity to push for Russia’s inclusion in the Ottoman Public Debt Administration.⁶⁵ When Said Halim announced that he would send Minister of the Interior Talât, Hüseyin Cahid Bey in the pages of *Tanin* expressed his support for

⁶¹ AVPRI, Charter of the Turco-Russian Committee, 1914, f. 151, o. 482, d. 4347, l. 8. For a list of the leading members, both Ottoman and Russian, see Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 216.

⁶² AVPRI, Secret Telegram from the Ambassador in Constantinople, 7.7.1914 [20.7.1914], f. 151, o. 482, d. 4347, l. 6; AVPRI, Dispatch from the Ambassador in Constantinople, 7.4.1914 [20.4.1914], f. 151, o. 482, d. 4347, l. 7.

⁶³ Frank G. Weber, *Eagles on the Crescent: Germany, Austria, and the Diplomacy of the Turkish Alliance, 1914–1918* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 47.

⁶⁴ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 217.

⁶⁵ Minister of Foreign Affairs to Girs, 15.4.1914 [28.4.1914], *Movei*, ser. 3, vol. 2, 404–05.

the mission while Ağaoğlu similarly boosted the trip in hopes that it would dispel the Russian public's hostile impressions of the Unionist government.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Said Halim warned the Austro-Hungarian ambassador Johann von Pallavicini that the CUP had all but decided to realign with the Entente after Germany lent its support to Greece in a dispute over some Aegean islands. If Said Halim's warning was a bluff, it was a dangerous one, as it led Pallavicini to counsel his German counterpart to undercut the Ottoman effort by offering Istanbul to the Russians. The Habsburg diplomat explained that Russia would soon partition Anatolia and that Germany would be wise to act now and cede the straits on good terms before Russia seized them later.⁶⁷

Talât, accompanied by Minister of War İzzet Pasha, arrived in Livadia on 10 May. The tsar explained that Russia desired a strong and independent Ottoman state so that Istanbul, a vital national interest of Russia, would remain free. He warned that St. Petersburg had not forgotten about the Liman von Sanders crisis and would not tolerate Ottoman dependence on Germany. Talât replied that the Ottomans had little choice but to ask the Germans for technical assistance. When the tsar pointed with pride to the lavish banquet spread and the ornate tableware and boasted that all of it was Russian, Talât coolly remarked, "Because of the capitulations, our situation unfortunately is not the same."⁶⁸ An acute sense of their state's disadvantaged position and lack of maneuvering room pervaded the outlook of Ottoman statesmen.

On the day that the Ottoman delegation was to depart, they hosted the Russians with a meal on the sultan's yacht. According to Sazonov's memoirs, after the meal Talât leaned over to Sazonov and proposed an alliance. The suggestion so shocked him, Sazonov later wrote, that he nearly fell over.⁶⁹ Talât's account of the meeting, although like Sazonov's given years later, is more convincing. Rather than springing the idea of an alliance in a whisper after lunch, he broached it during a general discussion of the straits. When Talât assured Sazonov that the solution to the straits question was for them to remain in Ottoman hands as they would never be closed to Russian shipping, Sazonov pointed out that, whereas this was true for peacetime, it would not be in the event the Ottoman empire and Greece went to war (a real possibility at the time). Talât then said that an alliance would be a possible solution to the problem. Sazonov just smiled in response.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 218. ⁶⁷ Weber, *Eagles*, 54.

⁶⁸ As cited in Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 221.

⁶⁹ S. D. Sazonov, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, [1927] 1991), 160, 164.

⁷⁰ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 223.

In the event, nothing emerged from the Livadia overture. The Ottoman press had accorded the run-up much attention, but its silence following Talât's return highlighted the meeting's barren nature.⁷¹ Back in Istanbul, Talât met with Girs. When asked how the meeting had gone, Talât diplomatically explained that he had been anxious about meeting with the "powerful potentate of the mightiest empire" but that the tsar displayed so much goodwill toward the Ottoman empire that he left the Russian sovereign's chambers "touched to the soul and grateful." Talât several times expressed his belief that an alliance with Russia would be beneficial. He also, however, acknowledged that no great power, be it in the Triple Entente or the Triple Alliance, had any use for an alliance with such a weak state. Therefore, he was committed to putting all his efforts toward making the Ottoman empire "a state strong and fully independent of foreign influences." Talât's suggestion of an alliance with Russia surprised but did not stun Girs, who advised Sazonov not to write off the idea since there was a significant faction of Unionists who advocated closer relations with Russia.⁷²

Andrei Kalmykov, another Russian diplomat, found Talât to be genuinely concerned about Ottoman dependence on Germany for security and his desire for an alliance with Russia serious. He judged Sazonov's failure to respond seriously at Livadia to be a "great mistake."⁷³ The course of events in the next several months would show that Talât was right. The great powers put relatively little value on an alliance with the Ottoman empire, preferring instead to look at it as a problem of partition rather than a state with a future. The next several years would prove Kalmykov right, as the Russian empire succumbed to war fatigue and revolution.

⁷¹ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, 224.

⁷² Girs to Sazonov, 5.5.1914 [18.5.1914], *Movei*, series 3, vol. 1, 212.

⁷³ Andrew D. Kalmykov, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat: Outposts of the Empire, 1893–1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 259.