

# PERCEPTIONS

## JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Guest Editors: Ayşegül SEVER  
Nuray BOZBORA

- 1 The Great War and the Ottoman Empire:  
Origins  
Ayşegül SEVER and Nuray BOZBORA
- 7 Redefining the First World War within the  
Context of Clausewitz's "Absolute War"  
Dystopia  
Burak GÜLBOY
- 23 Unionist Failure to Stay out of the War in  
October-November 1914  
Feroz AHMAD
- 39 Austro-Ottoman Relations and the Origins of  
World War One, 1912-14: A Reinterpretation  
Gül TOKAY
- 59 Ottoman Military Reforms on the eve of  
World War I  
Odile MOREAU
- 77 The First World War in Contemporary Russian  
Histography - New Areas of Research  
Iskander GILYAZOV



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# The Great War and the Ottoman Empire: Origins

Ayşegül SEVER\* and Nuray BOZBORA\*\*

## Introduction

As a turning point in modern world history, the Great War at its centennial anniversary has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention all over the world including Turkey. This special issue of *Perceptions* on the First World War is just one of those reflections. The articles in this issue are based on the papers presented by First World War scholars and Ottoman historians at the International symposium, *The Great War and the Ottoman Empire: Origins*, held at Marmara University on 16 October 2014, in İstanbul.<sup>1</sup>

When the Great War broke out with Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia following Austrian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo, on 28 June 1914, the Ottomans were far from being ready

to be a party of another war just less than a year after the Second Balkan War. As the war was declared, the Ottoman State had already suffered from a prolonged period of economic downturn and military decline and faced serious internal unrest and territorial losses after the Libyan and the Balkan wars. The Balkan wars meant "the loss of 80 % of the empire's European territory, home to a population of over 4 million, or 16 % of the empire's total population".<sup>2</sup> This was also a period when the Ottomans found themselves politically isolated and increasingly under European financial and economic tutelage. Against this background, involvement in another war after the Balkan wars would be a disastrous development. On the other hand, as the war turned into an unavoidable confrontation among the Great Powers, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP - İttihat ve Terakki Partisi) regarded the war as a crucial development that would shape the future of international order. Consequently, it was considered that the Ottoman Empire could be better off aligning itself with the prospective

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victor of the war in order to guarantee its independence and territorial integrity.<sup>3</sup> In view of this, the belief that Germany would win the war led pro-German figures of the CUP, such as War Minister Enver Pasha, to an alliance with Berlin.

Prior to the First World War, the Ottomans had already initiated an intense search for a great power to align with. This search was accelerated by the outbreak of the war, but there were unmatched preferences among the Unionists over the choice of a “great power” with which to sign an alliance treaty. The leading figures of the CUP seriously differed from one another over the best possible great power to side with. The CUP government, since it had no means to defend itself on its own, had in fact contacted all the great powers before reaching an understanding with Germany.

After the diplomatic marches failed to secure France or Britain’s agreement to ally with İstanbul, Germany remained the only major power left to sign an alliance treaty as «equal partners».<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the alliance with the Ottoman state was not an easy decision for the German side, either. Some influential German figures were not convinced of the Ottomans’ capability of contributing to German war efforts. Despite the reservations, expectations to make use of the Ottomans against the Russians in the Caucasus and the

Straits, and to benefit from the Sultan Caliph’s potential for calling a jihad against Britain, brought about the alliance treaty between Germany and the Ottoman Empire soon after the war had begun. The secret military alliance with Germany was concluded on 2 August 1914. At the time the alliance agreement was signed, Germany was not unanimously favored in the CUP cabinet. Not even all the members of the cabinet were informed.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after the signing of Turco-German Alliance in August 1914, the CUP government came under pressure from both the Entente and the Central Powers. While Germany and Austria were willing to see the Ottomans enter the war soon, the Entente Powers were asking the Ottomans not to get involved and to remain neutral, despite the alliance with Germany. In parallel with the pressures coming from both sides, the issue of neutrality became a major point of disagreement in both the CUP and the Cabinet.<sup>6</sup> While Enver Pasha was the most enthusiastic about becoming a party to the war, the rest of the Young Turk cabinet was willing to remain neutral as long as possible, since there was no absolute commitment to enter the war in the agreement. In return for staying on the sidelines, the Ottoman government asked the British and French to guarantee its territorial integrity and to demolish capitulations, but no agreement was reached. Meanwhile, German pressure over

the Ottoman Empire remained and a critical decision was taken by Enver Pasha as two German battle cruisers, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*, were allowed to pass through the Dardanelles and reach İstanbul. It was declared that the ships had actually been purchased by the Ottomans, but this was far from convincing the Entente Powers about the continuity of Ottoman neutrality. Eventually, the Ottomans' being drawn into the war became complete after a squadron of Turkish warships passed into the Black Sea under the command of German Admiral Wilhelm Souchon. As the warships raided the Russian ports of Odessa and Sevastopol on 27-28 October 1914, the Entente powers declared war against the Ottoman Empire. It was on 11 November 1914 that the Ottomans countered with a war declaration and became one of the belligerents, despite all the efforts of the non-interventionist wing of the Ottoman administration. This would be the last war of the Empire, bringing its centuries-long political existence to a dramatic end with the losses of many lives as well as an irreversible dissolution.

The Great War brought about far-reaching and long-lasting repercussions for the then-existing world order and beyond, with the downfall of empires, the rise of nation states, the conduct of a new kind of warfare, the introduction of novel universal norms, the demarcations of unprecedented

political maps, and dramatic changes in the cultural, intellectual, and economic fabric of societies all over the world. Moreover, the legacy of the war left a remarkable mark on the successor of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey. The Ottoman Empire lost the war, but achievements prevailed in certain battles, e.g. Gallipoli, and the politics pursued during the war largely influenced the foundations of the state narrative, its ideology as well as its relations with the outside world. This effect has remained consistent in the years since. In this respect, this special issue aims at drawing attention to at least one critical phase of the war – the Ottomans' involvement in the war and its general implications on the world stage in view of existing comparative historical narratives and findings.

The first article of this special issue, by Burak Gülboy, looks at a Clausewitzian definition of the Great War. His article provides us with a basis of theoretical debate on the First World War, thereby setting the stage for the subsequent focusing on various historical accounts of the initial phases of the war in the following articles. In his article, Gülboy aims at analyzing the First World War within the context of Clausewitz's dystopia of "absolute war". In elaborating how the conditions of the Great War, the real war, were transformed into a state of absolute war, the article also makes comparisons among the definitions of war i.e. total

war, absolute war, and limited war. With these comparisons, the piece refreshes our considerations of the First World War within a theoretical framework and therefore revisits how the Great War has become a consistent source of conceptualizations or categorizations regarding the broader war literature.

In the second article, entitled “The Unionist Failure to Stay out of the War in October – November 1914”, Feroz Ahmad addresses quite extensively how the Ottoman Empire under the CUP became a party to the war after a negotiation marathon conducted by the leading figures of the CUP with all the then great powers. Even though the Empire had no means to get involved in another war after the previous successive defeats in the Balkans, its involvement came along almost as a perceived obligation to guarantee the financial and political support of a great power. According to Ahmad’s account, Britain was the first choice for the Ottomans to align with, but no understanding was reached with that country or any of the Entente Powers. Meanwhile, the process of securing the support of a great power caused serious opinion divides among the cabinet members. In the final analysis, his work shows us that the pro-German wing of the CUP prevailed over the others, which led to the signing of a German-Ottoman alliance.

Gül Tokay’s article is a well documented account of how the pre-First World War regional crises such as the Albanian question or disputes over the Aegean islands could be regarded as early signs of the great power competition, and thus of Ottoman insecurity even before the outbreak of the Great War. The earlier Balkan disagreements, rivalries, alliances or contacts among the interested parties were largely revived again during the Great War. It is also argued in Tokay’s article that evolving Ottoman relations with Austria over the Balkans in 1912-1913 paved the way for a closer understanding between Austria and the Ottoman state. As cited in her work, the growing cordiality in Austro-Ottoman relations largely benefited from the personal initiatives of respective officials who were assigned to İstanbul and Vienna. The growing understanding with Austria over various regional issues also served well to the consolidation of an Ottoman-German rapprochement through an alliance treaty in the early times of the war. The Austrian side played a crucial role in convincing Germany to conclude an alliance treaty with the Ottomans in early August 1914.

After pointing out that the 1912-1913 Balkan wars had already led to the strong push for immediate reform in the Ottoman military even before the outbreak of another war, Odile



Moreau informs the reader with a detailed account of the situation of the Ottoman military on the eve of the First World War. Initially, she focuses on the influence of the German military missions (i.e. the arrivals of Otto Liman von Sanders and Friedrich Bronsart von Schellendorf) after the signature of an official contract between the Ottoman Empire and Germany in October 1913. At this juncture, the author also examines Enver Pasha's personal influence on military reforms, especially after he became the Chief of the Ottoman Staff as well as War Minister in January 1914. The deficiencies concerning conscription, recruitment, organization, and mobilization in the military just before the Ottoman's entry into the First World War are subjected to a thorough examination in Moreau's work. It is therefore well proven with archival material that the re-mobilization of the Ottoman army in May 1914, not long after the Balkan defeats, was almost a mission impossible given that the military reform had hardly been completed.

The last article on the issue is not directly related to the Ottoman standing on the War, but about the First World War historiography of one of the warring parties, namely, Russia. Iskender Gilyazov reminds us of the wide ranging possibilities of studying the Great War across the world as displayed in recent Russian

war historiography. He likens the current Russian historiography of the First World War to a period of "true renaissance" in view of growing numbers of reinterpretations of the War since the downfall of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet era, the war and its objectives were regarded as imperialistic since it is propagated that the war aimed at defending the monarchy and the bourgeoisie instead of the revolution. Throughout the Soviet era, it was almost impossible to study the Great War without state intervention or ideology driven concerns. This has greatly changed in the last two decades following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The release of new documents as well as the expansion of war related research areas have significantly enriched the war historiography. Various regions of Russia have also become increasingly interested in their own history of the Great War along with regional, religious or ethnic lines following the Soviet period. The article concludes that interest in First World War historiography is a well grounded reality of today's Russia.

Given the aforementioned collection of the articles, this special issue aims to revive further interest in revisiting and reinterpreting First World War historiography and politics on the basis of primary and recent sources while commemorating an historical anniversary of the war.

## Endnotes

- 1 This symposium was kindly sponsored by the Center for Strategic Research (SAM), Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Marmara Municipalities Union.
- 2 Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 22.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 13-17.
- 4 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, London, I.B Tauris, 1998, p.115.
- 5 Ibid., p. 116.
- 6 Feroz Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic*, Vol. 2, İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2008, p.129.

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# Redefining the First World War within the Context of Clausewitz's "Absolute War" Dystopia

Burak GÜLBOY\*

## Abstract

*In general, the First World War is referred to as a "total war" in the history literature. It is possible to introduce a new analysis to define the Great War via the introduction of Clausewitz's theory of war. It could be argued that the First World War, which can be labeled as a novelty in the history of war, both demolished the set of values of the international system which had evolved before and (re)established the structure of the future system of international relations. In that sense, both the pre and post eras of World War I constitute important fields of research for political scientists. This study aims to analyze the First World War within the context of Clausewitz's dystopia of "absolute war" and attempts to construct a new method with which to understand the structure of the Great War in Clausewitzian terms.*

## Key Words

The First World War, total war, absolute war, Carl Von Clausewitz, Eric Von Ludendorff.

## Introduction

The armistice signed in November 1918 between Germany and the Entente States marked the end of the fighting, which had been ongoing without pause since August 1914. The finalization of this "Great War," the popular name given to this major conflict, had to be completed rapidly with the signature of a series of peace treaties at the peace conference that had gathered in Paris in 1919. If the Treaty of Lausanne, which the Entente states signed with Turkey, is also taken into consideration, it could be strongly argued that the end of the Great War was actually in 1923 as opposed to the more conventional date of 1918.

Even though it was named the Great War, the reference to the Second World War necessitated a change in the name and the conflict that had been known as the "Great War" was later reclassified as the "First World War". Despite the massive loss of life and limb and the introduction of nuclear weapons by the end of the Second World War, the impact of the preceding conflict, which

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had divided the great powers into rival blocs and placed them in a situation of endless struggle, was physically and physiologically even more devastating for humanity. This effect can be evidenced by its unique nature, one which the so called “modern” states had never before witnessed. The level of the devastation can be measured with statistics that would have been nothing less than fictional before 1914. During the course of the Great War, some 65 million people were recruited for the fighting and 8 million people, both military and civilians, died, with more than 25 million people wounded in the course of the fighting.<sup>1</sup> The conflict not only damaged the resources of the participant states but also jeopardized civilian (material and human) resources on the so-called home front. Under pressure of such tension, the integrity and sovereignty of the combatant states were put to the test, one in which neither Russia nor Austro-Hungary managed to survive and see to the end. The Ottoman Empire’s days also seemed to be numbered. The European political system was in peril, as the norms and values of the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s European Concert began to be eroded. As the new status quo began to take shape with the peace making process of 1919, the major causes of the Great War seemed to be rooted in these European norms and values.

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Despite the massive loss of life and limb and the introduction of nuclear weapons by the end of the Second World War, the impact of the preceding conflict, which had divided the great powers into rival blocs and placed them in a situation of endless struggle, was physically and physiologically even more devastating for humanity.

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Before 1914, within the context of the evolution of the European state system, war had been perceived as an instrument of sovereign states. The characterization of this perception was first made by Carl Von Clausewitz’s work, *On War*, a reflection and examination of the Napoleonic Wars. However, the negative impact of the Great War on the concept of war, which had previously been defined in Clausewitzian terms and institutionalized in the same manner within the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European system values, initiated a great deal of criticism towards the concept itself. In this sense, the victors labeled their war effort in terms of liberal idealist definitions, such as “the struggle of democracy against tyranny”, or even christened their fight in terms of a “Just War”. On the other side, the defeated adversaries defined their

struggle in terms of the preservation of their national beings and as self-defense against a forcibly imposed fate. Such attempts to legitimize the catastrophe, in which each state involved needed some kind of explanation and justification of its effort, caused some obscurity regarding not only the phenomenon of the Great War but also on the history of the origins and causes of the conflict. However, with a huge potential for analysis, Clausewitz's theory of war stands ever ready as a tool for examining and evaluating the Great War. This article bases its argument on Clausewitz's dystopic concept of "absolute war", which he used to define the concept of "real war" and analyzes the origins and the causes of the Great War in relation to Clausewitzian dystopia by classifying it (the First World War) as an absolute war.

## Clausewitz's Dystopia: Absolute War

Arguably, the first academic text on the concept of war was written by Carl Von Clausewitz. In his famous book *On War*, Clausewitz made a revolutionary distinction between war and warfare.<sup>2</sup> He referred to "warfare" as an act of violence, in which one side tries to impose its will on the other. His delineation of warfare as an act of violence implies that the definition of war should be different and more

inclusive than that of warfare, which is merely the act of violence. In that sense, Clausewitz describes "war" as merely a continuation of politics by other means. The logic of the definition posits war as an instrument for states as continue their relations by means of warfare. War is thus an act of politics and a form of communication that includes an element of conflict; a struggle, as it were, of persuasion. Under such conditions, war is politics combined with the means of force, a collection of practices reinforced by strategy and tactics to reach defined goals and objectives.

Clausewitz argues that if war were merely an act of violence to impose one's will on another, such an action would have been a radicalization of a mutual struggle in which neither side would hesitate to go to extremes in order to defeat the other and thus ensure its own survival. He labels this extreme situation as "absolute war", in which war represents not a means but becomes an end for the belligerents.<sup>3</sup> As Raymond Aron points out, absolute war is an abstraction of the phenomena of war and has no resemblance with earthbound and historical facts; it represents a purely ideal state, and due to its negative nature it should be referred to as a dystopia.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that though Clausewitz uses the term "absolute war" in many places of *On War*, he never explains or defines

the term directly in his text. The cause of Clausewitz's approach is perhaps his intention to use the term absolute war to determine the materialization of the circumstances of real war by questioning and negating the dystopia of absolute war, which seems to be the reason behind Clausewitz's negligence in producing a description of absolute war; even though the dystopia accompanies his efforts on analyzing the real war.

In Clausewitz's own words:

“As the most extensive use of physical force by no means excludes the co-operation of intelligence, he who uses this force ruthlessly, shrinking from no amount of bloodshed, must gain an advantage, if his adversary does not do the same. Thereby he forces his adversary's hand and thus each pushes the other to extremities to which the only limitation is the strength of resistance on the other side.”<sup>5</sup>

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Influenced by the idealization and equipped with nationalist assumptions, Ludendorff's definition of total war led to a totalitarian rhetoric.

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In Clausewitz's philosophy of absolute war in the book *On War*, a war which is severed from historical and public influences and whose destructive character can only be defined at a theoretical level, cannot belong to the

living world. In other words, real war is evidently different from absolute war.

Despite increasing density in his quest to explain war by moving from pure theory to actuality, Clausewitz takes the reader to his explanation of what constitutes war in the real world. First, he examines the state of absolute war by examining it as a solitary condition immune to preceding events; he supposes that real wars do not break out suddenly and without any cause, as was supposed in the case of absolute war. Following his emphasis, he presents a second enquiry, which is clearly related to the first one. He supposes that the sudden break out of absolute war is related to a sudden decision or to simultaneous decisions of war, whereas in the case of real war such decisions go through a rather lengthier process. Finally, and related to the above statements, Clausewitz questions the non-existence of political aims and goals in the process of decision making in the case of real war. His final verdict (or his aim) is striking but meaningful. In regard to real war's uncertain outcomes, he writes: “Thus the political object as the original motive of the war will be the Standard alike for the aim to be attained by the military action and for the efforts required for this purpose.”<sup>6</sup>

As can be understood, Clausewitz argues that real war is a political action. In his words: “war is a serious mean for

serious ends", and not simply a political act but "a continuation of politics by other means".<sup>7</sup>

The term "real war" is a notion denoted by Clausewitz via his examination of historical wars,<sup>8</sup> whereas the dystopia of "absolute war" is a theoretical projection in which war exceeds politics. Despite his faint attempts to impart relevance to the Napoleonic wars, he does not seek any examples to substantiate his dystopia.<sup>9</sup>

Raymond Aron calls attention to the delicate relationship between real war and absolute war in the passage below:

"The subordination of war to policy as a means to an end, implicit in Clausewitz's formula, establishes and justifies the distinction of absolute war and real wars. Escalation is the more to be feared, and real wars risk coming closer to absolute war, the more violence escapes the control of the chief of state. Policy seems to vanish when it takes the destruction of the enemy army as its single goal. Even in this case, war assumes a form that results from political intentions."<sup>10</sup>

Here one may once again ask: could it be that war, which is a political instrument, may change as a phenomenon in the minds of its users? Or to reform the question in Clausewitzian terms: could there be a situation in which in a war which seems to be a perfect real war in its political sense, a state of absolute war, replaces the state of real war in the course and execution of the process?

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In fact it is not only Germany being accused but the extreme nationalist, historical and operant approaches of German philosophy that are seen as culpable.

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Colin Gray argues that the Clausewitzian theory of war may be applied to any period of time.<sup>11</sup> In Gray's sense, and in the logic given in the previous paragraphs in which each question relates itself to the former, it is possible to introduce a hypothesis that may be put forward as follows:

"Within the context of its outbreak and its practice, the First World War became an absolute war. The instinct of destroying the opponent caused the disappearance of the vague political aims and goals and with the allocation of all existing resources, each side sank into a fight in which violence became the only end within itself. With the loss of diplomacy, the belligerents were polarized and their political activities gave way to pure violence. Such conditions transformed a struggle which should have been a real war to a state of absolute war dystopia. Under these conditions, the First World War is an absolute war."<sup>12</sup>

## Ludendorff and Total War

Eric Von Ludendorff, who had shared the position of Chief of the German High Command with Paul Von Hindenburg from August 1916 to the end of the First World War, labeled

the First World War as “total war”.<sup>13</sup> For Ludendorff, the First World War was a conflict whose roots could be traced back to the Napoleonic Wars but its first appearance could be seen in the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, in which the belligerents amassed all their ideological and physical energies and resources to serve an environment in which the military characteristic of the conflict superseded the political one. Ludendorff’s effort was to purify Germany from Clause 231 (also referred to as the Guilt Clause) of the Versailles Treaty, which placed the entirety of guilt for starting the First World War on Germany, by proposing that Germany fought a defensive war from 1914 to 1918 for her survival, which was threatened. Ludendorff argued that total war is a state of war that emerges when a nation’s being is in danger and when a nation under such circumstances is intent on destroying the threat. Ludendorff argues that wars in which no such threat appears are to be called limited wars. In this manner, total war is a just and merited struggle for survival, whereas limited wars are low and vicious activities which are born of greed.<sup>14</sup>

Influenced by the idealization and equipped with nationalist assumptions, Ludendorff’s definition of total war led to a totalitarian rhetoric. As total war is a struggle for the survival of an entity (known as the nation), the elements

that form the nation should mobilize their physical and spiritual resources to sustain the fight. Under such extraordinary circumstances, the distinction between civilian and military becomes nonexistent, as all the people of the nation are supposed to demonstrate their will for the survival of the whole, and thus each person becomes a warrior. In such times, the need for civil authority diminishes and the need to lead such a society of warriors gives rise to a military authority. In the case of Ludendorff’s total war, the authority of the military elite should surpass the authority of the civilian elite to supervise and oversee the struggle for survival, and the resources of the nation in their entirety should be administrated to fulfill the needs of the military. In Ludendorff’s view, the scope of this struggle for survival would not only include the main threat, which is defined as the external enemy, but would also include internal enemies who do not contribute enough to the cause.<sup>15</sup>

As Ludendorff’s attributions shift the definition of the concept of the total war to extremes, there is a need to leave his views behind, but it should also be remembered that the First World War is also classified as a total war within the international historical literature and that Clausewitz’s notion of absolute war is nonexistent. The motive behind such a delineation is that Germany is



accused of being responsible for the beginning of the Great War. In fact it is not only Germany being accused but the extreme nationalist, historical and operant approaches of German philosophy that are seen as culpable. Therefore under such circumstances, Ludendorff's definition paves the way for a counter-definition, which was to later be explicated by the other side that fought the Great War.

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Though absolute war is an isolated act which appears suddenly, in the case of real war, the conflict is the sum of certain origins and causes, which are apparently persistent in regards to historical context and the preceding historical era.

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Referring to the topic of H.G. Wells' book, *The War That Will End War*,<sup>16</sup> which posited the idea that world peace may only be achieved through the defeat of German militarism by force, the phrase "the war to end all wars" was often used by the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George.<sup>17</sup> However, it should be noted that this phrase was usually attributed to the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson nominated the Great War as a fight by democracies against tyrannies in order to make the

world a safer place. If the fight was won, the world was to be a better place, in which problems would not be solved by wars but via democratic institutions that would make dialogue and negotiation possible. In order to erect the reign of good, evil had to be beaten by force and violence, and under such conditions, the war which was being fought was the most important struggle in history. Clearly originating in one of Christianity's most important apostles, St Augustine, and his concept of the "just war", the phrase "the war to end all wars" was a definition that countered the concept of total war.<sup>18</sup>

Even though it should be accepted that total war and the war to end all wars are contradictory definitions presented by the belligerents of the Great War, it should also be noted that these concepts fall short of explaining the hypothesis put forward in the previous pages. At this point, the need for the Clausewitzian dystopia arises. However, there is still a further need to follow Clausewitz's line of thinking and follow his lead over his enquiries.

## A Clausewitzian Analysis over the Characteristics of the First World War

Clausewitz defines his concept of absolute war over a state of conflict in which the use of violence becomes

the sole purpose. Upon this point, Clausewitz sets up his famous trinity. The first practice of his trinity is the use of force to impose one's will on the other. However, this action is said to trigger a counter action of a similar character from the other side. This reciprocal action necessitates a second practice aimed at disarming the opponent to break his will and thus fulfill the first practice, which in turn again forces reciprocal action from the other side, necessitating a third practice. This third action necessitates the allocation of all possible resources in one's arsenal in order to manage the first two practices. This final practice would also be countered by the opponent. Within such a context of theoretical triple reciprocal actions, war – logically - would go to extremes and would not end until one side is utterly destroyed. Though in Clausewitzian terms, the concept of real war is indeed based on the reciprocal trinity, because of the relationship between war and politics, real war is usually resistant to such extremes. Thus the starting point for the test of the hypothesis of this study appears. Within the context of these reciprocal practices, was the First World War limited by the resistance of politics as in case of real war, or was it carried to the extremes of the dystopia of absolute war?

If Clausewitz's path is followed, a second argument arises. Though

absolute war is an isolated act which appears suddenly, in the case of real war, the conflict is the sum of certain origins and causes, which are apparently persistent in regards to historical context and the preceding historical era. Was the beginning of the First World War related to the origins and the causes of the period before 1914 or did the war begin unexpectedly and "independent" of time?

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The final argument should be based on Clausewitz's descriptions of his opposing concepts of real and absolute war.

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A third argument based on Clausewitz's trinity should be added to Clausewitz's definition of absolute war as an uncontrolled and sudden conflict that is disrupted by a single decision or multiple simultaneous decisions. However, in the case of real war, there is a period of tension and escalation. Did the First World War start at the end of such an escalation, or was it the outcome of the sum of careless decisions (or a series of simultaneous careless decisions)?

Clausewitz points out that in absolute war the political issues and goals are not determinative of the logic of the decisions for war; this, however, is not the case for real war.

Naturally the fourth argument emerges from this statement. In the case of the beginning of the First World War, did the decision-makers in the belligerent states evaluate the existing political environment truly, and how correct were their assumptions regarding the existing situation, which led their countries to war?

The final argument should be based on Clausewitz's descriptions of his opposing concepts of real and absolute war. If the First World War is assumed to be a real war, was it a continuation of politics by other means? Did the states fight for realistic political goals defined by clear war aims on which their strategy would be based? Was the door for diplomacy and negotiation open? Or did the First World War become a simple act of "diplomatic" violence bent on destroying the opponent?

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**With the allocation of all existing resources, each side sank into a fight in which violence became the only end within itself.**

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The analysis of Clausewitz's dystopia of absolute war paves the way for a hypothetical framework that can be used to determine the characteristics of the First World War. The hypothesis that was put forward before should therefore be renewed here:

Within the context of its outbreak and its practice, the First World War became an absolute war. The instinct of destroying the opponent caused the disappearance of vague political aims and goals, and with the allocation of all existing resources, each side sank into a fight in which violence became the only end within itself. With the loss of diplomacy the belligerents were polarized and their mutual political activities gave way to pure violence. Such conditions transformed the struggle, which should have been a real war, to a state of dystopian absolute war. Under these conditions, the First World War is an absolute war.<sup>19</sup>

In order to test the hypothesis, a series of arguments are raised by following the construction of Clausewitz's analysis of the concept of absolute war. It is necessary to repeat these arguments once again but in a sequence differing to that offered in Clausewitz's logic:

- In case of the beginning of the First World War, did the decision makers of the belligerent states evaluate the existing political environment truly and how correct were their assumptions regarding the existing situation, assumptions that led their countries to war?
- Was the beginning of the First World War related to the origins and the causes of the period before 1914 or did the war suddenly begin

in and of a time in which it was unexpected?

- Did the First World War start at the end of such an escalation or was it the outcome of a careless decision or the sum of a series of simultaneous careless decisions?
- Within the context of reciprocal practices, was the First World War delimited by the resistance of politics, as in case of real war, or was it carried to the extremes of dystopian absolute war?
- Did the states fight for realistic political goals defined by clear war aims on which their strategy would be based? Was the door for diplomacy and negotiation kept open? Or did the First World War simply become the banality of acts of diplomacy and violence that were intent on utterly destroying the opponent?

Despite the fact that a new historical approach needs to be presented here to analyze the arguments above, it would be necessary to keep in mind that the data to be put forward may only lead to initial fragments of the main analysis. The need for a further and deeper historical approach would strengthen the outcome of these arguments and therefore would go further in testing the hypothesis.<sup>20</sup>

Considering the first argument, it may be stated that in the case of the declarations of war in the summer of 1914, the polarized motivation of the decision makers of the belligerent states analyzed the political situation in a manner that led towards conflict rather than cooperation, even though the instruments that could have sustained peace were in place.

The outbreak of war in the summer of 1914 is a mystery that is still being examined, with a satisfactory answer or explanation yet to be found. In this article, no claim to finding a solution to the riddle is posited, but it does assume that an environment of low tension (relative to the previous years) existed between the great powers of Europe in 1914. Such an assumption seems to stand in contrast to the general assumption that there had been an escalation of ongoing crises since 1905 between the European powers and that this escalation eventually led to an all-out European war.

Looking at the European system, it is possible to observe that the major crises that had dominated the years before 1914 had indeed brought tension to the system. However, by 1912, all major tensions were in a state of cooling after tensions between the great powers peaked in 1912 with the Agadir Crises, in which England and Germany came near to military conflict. After this shock, both powers

endeavoured to exercise greater caution in order to preserve the peace, although it should be said there was little cooperation between the two. Both powers pursued a rather cautious and responsible path of diplomacy during the Balkan conflicts of 1912 and 1913 in a way to decrease tension amongst the great powers. However, this cooling of tension, the image of the "enemy" that had been constituted by the crises between 1905 and 1912 was ever-present and constituted a major obstacle to cooperation between the European powers. In the case of diplomacy and war, the Sarajevo assassination crisis was not a major issue that would start a European war, as there was always room for diplomacy and the major European powers indeed were cautious to preserve the peace and the status quo between themselves during the previous conflict in the Balkans. But it should be noted that the war prompted a sudden chain reaction, with one European power after another declaring war. No search for mediation was made in the month after the assassination in Sarajevo until the break out of war. After Sarajevo a chance for diplomatic reconciliation existed, but because of the evaluations of the existing political environment,

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none of the European decision-makers opted for a peaceful resolution.

The second argument takes the first to another structural level and introduces the misjudging and misevaluation of the then current environment. As we have seen in previous sections of this article, the situation in 1914 was not the escalation of previous years but rather, initially, a sort of *détente*. But it should be noted that almost all the great powers in Europe somehow envisaged a war earlier than 1914. This understanding can be traced back to

the existing war plans of the great powers, which were drawn up before 1914. These war plans usually formed the definition of security for each power and were

usually in conflict with one another. However it should also be noted that almost all of them were made in the context of a hypothetical-cum-imagined war, falling far short of reality, and the plans never accorded with the existing political situations. Regardless of the "fictional" nature of the plans, nearly all of them aimed at "striking first" at an opponent, thus creating a state and a sense of vulnerability in which a political crisis that should have been solved with the extreme care and vigilance of diplomacy was instead

understood as an opportunity and an imperative to strike first. It should also be remembered that the alliances between the continental powers also encouraged such perceptions. Under such circumstances, it could be argued that what was actually a regional and minor crisis in 1914 appeared to the decision-makers of almost all the major powers as an opportunity to strike first.

The third argument should be considered in such a context. It should also be noted that the thesis which relates the escalation of the naval race between England and Germany to the eventual outbreak of war, is not as strong as first imagined. The mutual perception of hostility amongst opponents/rivals and the ensuing reasoning behind the alliances and coalitions that are formed under the influence of these perceptions do not generate enough motive to opt for war. However, in the case of European politics after 1815, war had always been an option for the state as long as the skirmish was restricted. In such a sense, the escalation that started after the Bosnian Crises of 1908 may well have led to a localized war. Indeed, what transpired in the summer of 1914 represented a localized crisis between Austro-Hungary and Serbia. However, it should also be noted that the motives that emerge from such local crisis are not enough to define the motives of England, France or even Germany, none of which were directly involved in

Balkan issues. It is possible to claim that the outbreak of war was instantaneous. What should have been a crisis or even a local war between Austro-Hungary and Serbia became an all-out conflict and it is interesting to note why none of the major powers looked for any other non-military options. Such rash and short-sighted urgency in decision-making should be considered as reasons behind the sudden outbreak of war.

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It should be noted that the greatest loss of life occurred in the last six months of 1914 and during the first eight months of 1918. The total loss of life exceeded 8 million during the course of the fighting. During the last major conflict to have taken place on European soil, the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, the number of casualties had barely exceeded 300,000. In comparison of numbers alone, it is thus possible to argue that the Great War was a conflict of extremes. However, it should also be noted that,

given the war and mobilization plans of the belligerents in 1914, both the political and military decision-makers should have had some notion as to the immensity of the respective war machines that were about to be set in motion. The major belligerent armies that were mobilized in the summer of 1914 alone constituted over 6.5 million soldiers, numbers that had never before been seen on European battlefields. By clinging on to a will to win the war by military action and by putting more military means forward to serve the war machine, it is possible to say that neither the civilian nor the military decision-makers had any inclination or intention to limit the war. As a rejoinder to the fourth argument, and as the arguments build up, the Great War seems to be a clear representation of Clausewitz's dystopia.

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After 1815, the European powers were successful in building an infrastructure of peace vis-à-vis the European Concert; all the instruments that the Europeans possessed, including diplomacy, congresses and notions of neutrality, served peace.

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The last argument may be discussed within the context of the European

political system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the course of the century, peace between the great powers of Europe was based on a security system that operated with the formation of congresses that oversaw conflicts involving more than two states. As such, the operation of such a system limited the choices for and of war; the states applied military measures that can be seen as a continuation of diplomacy by other means. In such a Clausewitzian manner, it is possible to say that war was an instrument of states that they used responsibly and within controlled limits. However, as industrialization and improvements in military technologies generated new and destructive capacities for armies, the security definitions used by the military elites were modified in light of these new capabilities, which in turn led to new and ever more flamboyant war plans, all of which made an all-out European war, for the first time, increasingly possible.

## Conclusion

After 1815, the European powers were successful in building an infrastructure of peace vis-à-vis the European Concert; all the instruments that the Europeans possessed, including diplomacy, congresses and notions of neutrality, served peace. However, by 1914, an infrastructure

of war had been created and the same instruments were now being used to serve war. In this sense, the Great War represents a superstructure that is the opposite of the European Concert in terms of international politics. Within such a context, the First World War has the capacity to fulfill the terms of Clausewitz's dystopia. Even from its outbreak in the summer of 1914, the Great War had vague political ends, which in time were totally eroded and became a phenomenon that drained the energies of the belligerents. As the instruments of diplomacy between the belligerents collapsed totally, there was only one way to communicate: through violence. Under circumstances in which violence is the only method of communication, war becomes an end in itself as the instruments of peace disappear. It was only in 1917 that the European states managed to finally accept the grim truth that no common ground that could bring peace through negotiation existed between the belligerents. Though it had appeared as a powerful instrument of foreign policy in the previous decades, diplomacy had lost its ability to resolve conflicts, and the European states opted instead for war.

It is important to point out that during the Great War, much more was missing than international diplomacy.

It should also be noted that in order to make peace, the European states needed Woodrow Wilson's 14 points and this clearly shows that the instruments of international politics that the European political system had created in its previous incarnations had become ineffective over the course of the First World War. As a Clausewitzian dystopia emerged during the Great War, the instruments of politics gave way to instruments of violence.

With regard to the arguments and ideas presented in this article, it is possible to construct a Clausewitzian definition of the Great War. However, this definition would clearly be different from his description of a real war. Instead, the definition would be closer to his philosophical understanding of the theory of war, in which he points to the dystopia of absolute war. On the other hand, given the circumstances outlined above, it could be argued that such a new definition forged from Clausewitzian theory may be more objective and academic and may also be freer from the ideological approaches on which Ludendorff's or Wilson's definitions are clearly based. All in all, it is important to point out that, despite its age, Clausewitz's *On War* still maintains a certain utility in terms of examining issues of war and security.



## Endnotes

- 1 Burak Gülboy, *Mutlak Savaş-Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın Kökenleri Üzerine Clausewitzyen bir Çözümleme*, İstanbul, Uluslararası İlişkiler Kütüphanesi, 2014, p. 297.
- 2 Colin Gray, *Strategy and History: Essays on Theory and Practice*, New York, Routledge, 2006, p.185.
- 3 Raymond Aron, indicates that the factor that affects the radicalization of war is the *dialectics of contest*, meaning two sides compete for a single goal by using force against force. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War - A Theory of International Relations*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1962, p. 21.
- 4 Ibid., p. 21-22; also see: Ali Karaosmanoğlu, "21. Yüzyılda Savaşı Tartışmak: Clausewitz Yeniden", *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, Vol. 8, No. 29 (Spring 2011), pp. 5-25.
- 5 Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated by O. J. Matthijs Jolles, New York, the Modern Library, 1943, p. 4.
- 6 Ibid., p. 9.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 15-16. For such an approach, Clausewitz was criticized for affirming war. For such arguments see Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle the Political Theory of War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 70-71.
- 8 Aron, *Peace and War*, p. 23.
- 9 For Clausewitz other writings see: Clausewitz, *Historical and Political Writings*, in Peter Paret ve Daniel Moran (eds.), New Jersey, Princeton University, 1992.
- 10 Aron, *Peace and War*, p. 23.
- 11 Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 1.
- 12 This hypothesis is widely discussed in the author's previously published work, see Gülboy, *Mutlak Savaş, Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın Kökenleri Üzerine Clausewitzyen bir Deneme*.
- 13 Eric Ludendorff, *Der Totale Krieg*, Münih, Ludendorffs Verlag, 1935.
- 14 Eric Von Ludendorff, "Apostle of the Total War", *The Living Age*, March 1940, pp. 22-25.
- 15 Ibid., Under such an understanding, the term total war has a tendency to become utopic. For this argument see Talbot Imlay, "Total War", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (June 2007), pp. 547-570.
- 16 Herbert G. Wells, *The War That Will End War*, London, Frank and Cecil Palmer Red Lion Court E.C., 1914.
- 17 For David Lloyd George War time speeches see David Lloyd George, *The Great Crusade*, New York, George H. Doran Company, 1918.
- 18 For St Augustine's concept of "Just War", see Henry Paolucci, *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*, 3. ed, Chicago, Gateway Edition, 1967, pp. 162-183; also for an approach from International Relations, see: Haldun Yalçınkaya, *Savaş Uluslararası İlişkilerde Güç Kullanımı*, Ankara, İmge Kitabevi, 2007, pp. 63-83.

- 19 See endnote 12.
- 20 For such an approach also see Hew Strachan, “Clausewitz and the First World War”, *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 367-391.

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# Unionist Failure to Stay out of the War in October-November 1914

Feroz AHMAD\*

## Abstract

*The Committee of Union and Progress hoped for a short war and had no intention of becoming a belligerent. But Britain's decision to confiscate two battle ships being built for Istanbul and the arrival of two German war ships in the Marmara on 10 August, weakened their position. Still, the Unionists were determined to stay out of the war even though they had handed over the army and the navy to Berlin. The crucial problem was that the Ottomans were bankrupt. The Unionists were divided between the war faction and peaceniks. The war faction, led by Enver and Cemal Pashas, agreed to permit the Ottoman navy, commanded by Admiral Souchon, to sail into the Black Sea and attack only Russian ships. Souchon, however, who took his orders from Berlin, attacked Russian ports. The Entente Powers then declared war on Istanbul and she could no longer stay out of the World War.*

## Key Words

First World War, Committee of Union and Progress, Enver Pasha, German diplomacy, Cavid Bey.

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## Introduction

After the catastrophe of the Balkan Wars, the Unionists were determined to avoid a regional conflict. The only threat came from Greece. She had made great territorial gains from the Balkan Wars and was on the way to becoming “a second-class military power”. The question of friction between Istanbul and Athens remained, the islands being the main stumbling block in their relationship. The Istanbul press was up in arms against the cession of the Islands of Chios and Midilli to Greece, arguing that western Anatolia would now be insecure. There was even talk of a third Balkan war and growing tension between the two communities in the Empire. There was no such war, only a naval race, as both powers began buying Dreadnoughts in order to strengthen their fleets. War was averted with the diplomatic intervention of the Powers, and on 28 June 1914, Prime Minister Elefthérios Venizelos accepted the idea of the exchange of population. This, however, was also prevented by the July crisis that followed the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28

June and the subsequent outbreak of war in Europe.

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The Powers, especially Britain, had declared that there would be no territorial changes as a result of the war.

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The CUP had felt betrayed by the Great Powers during and after the Balkan Wars. The Powers, especially Britain, had declared that there would be no territorial changes as a result of the war. But after İstanbul's defeat that declaration was forgotten and the Balkan states were allowed to gain the Ottoman Empire's Balkan territories. Despite the sense of betrayal, the Porte was convinced that the only way to guarantee what remained of the Empire was to end its isolation and conclude an alliance with a Great Power. The Unionists' Great Power of choice was Great Britain and they offered an alliance to her on three occasions, in 1909, 1911, and finally in 1913. They had been turned down on each occasion so in 1914 they turned first to France and then Russia but were rejected by both. Finally they approached the Germans.<sup>1</sup>

On 23 July 1914, during the July crisis following the assassination in Sarajevo of Franz Ferdinand on 28 June, Grand Vezir Said Halim Pasha saw Ambassador Hans Freiherr von Wangenheim and proposed an

alliance with Germany. Said Halim Pasha stipulated that the Alliance would be only against Russia and not against France and England. İstanbul and Berlin opened negotiations and the German-Ottoman alliance was concluded surprisingly quickly on 2 August, one day after Germany's ultimatums to Russia and France.<sup>2</sup>

The Sublime Porte had found its Great Power ally but only after a European war had broken out. The opinion in the İstanbul press at the time suggested that the Empire would stay out of any war though its action would depend on the decisions of the Balkan states, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. The two sides had different expectations from the alliance. İstanbul hoped to watch the war from the sidelines, while Berlin expected Turkey "... not only to defend the straits and protect her frontiers at immense distances, but conquer Egypt, make Persia independent, prepare the creation of independent states in Trans-Caucasia, threaten India from Afghanistan if possible, and in addition furnish active assistance in European theatres."<sup>3</sup>

The Ottomans, like most people in Europe, were convinced that it would be a short war that would end by the end of the year and that it would be won by Germany. Said Halim Pasha, though he had signed the agreement, did not believe that the agreement bound Turkey to enter the war on

the German side. He repeatedly told the Entente ambassadors that Turkey would never participate in the war.<sup>4</sup>

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Events out of the CUP'S control had a profound effect on the mood in the country. The first such event was Britain's decisions to confiscate the two ships - the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* and the *Midilli* - being built in British yards for the Ottoman fleet. When Winston Churchill's decision was read in the cabinet, it led to the Ottoman announcement of mobilization as a security measure.<sup>5</sup>

But the cabinet was divided. Finance Minister Mehmed Cavid and the peace camp proposed partial mobilization, while Defence Minister Enver Pasha, leading the war party, demanded armed mobilization. Talat Bey explained to Cavid:

"This war began with the explosion of the pan-Slavic bomb in Sarajevo. Now that the Russian, Austrian and German armies are on the move we have to take care of our security and we can't wait for the Slavs to march to Istanbul. Thus the war has begun and we have not entered it. The ambassadors of

the Entente states are in Istanbul. If the English and French give separate guarantees to protect our territorial integrity and independence and accept the abolition of the capitulations, we are ready to contract to remain neutral until the end of the war. We are appointing you our delegate, go and make our anxieties known. Make our proposals to the English and French ambassadors.; don't neglect the Russian ambassador."<sup>6</sup>

On Tuesday, 4 August Cavid and the "war cabinet" met at Said Halim's villa to discuss the conditions for intervention they would propose to the Germans, and Ottoman war aims.

The terms they would propose included the following:

- i) In eastern Anatolia an extensive border with the Muslims of the Caucasus that would be binding and guaranteed; in Rumelia a border extending to territory inhabited by Turks;
- ii) The abolition of legal and economic capitulations and an undertaking [by Germany] to have them accepted by other states;
- iii) In case the enemy attacks [and occupies] our territory, not to make peace until this invasion has been repulsed;
- iv) A share of reparations after the war.

All these points had to be discussed and accepted by Berlin before the

military convention was signed. When Said Halim met Ambassador Wangenheim and put these proposals to him, he accepted them all.<sup>7</sup>

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*The arrival of the **Goeben** and **Breslau** on 10 August in İstanbul altered the Porte's decision regarding the alliance with Germany.*

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On 5 August, Russian ambassador, N.K. Giers reported that his military attaché, General Leontiev, talked with Enver Pasha, who had explained that Ottoman mobilization was not directed against Russia. But on the same day, Andrey Toshev, the Bulgarian ambassador in İstanbul, visited Giers and proposed a Balkan League under Russian auspices. On 9 August 1914, Enver went further to appease Russia and proposed withdrawing troops from the Caucasus as a sign of his sincerity. The troops would be placed in Thrace against Bulgaria and Greece. When an agreement was reached between the Powers, the German military mission would be dismissed. In return İstanbul expected the return of western Thrace and the Aegean islands and a defensive alliance with Russia for an unspecified period.<sup>8</sup>

Ambassador Giers proposed accepting the offer immediately;

Foreign Minister Sazonov was cautious and saw acceptance as a sign of weakness. The question remained though of how to square going against Bulgaria and Greece by accepting Enver's terms, as refusal meant a German victory in Turkey. Sazonov continued to temporize, preferring to threaten İstanbul with what the Allies would do to Asia Minor if İstanbul abandoned its neutrality.<sup>9</sup>

The arrival of the *Goeben* and *Breslau* on 10 August in İstanbul altered the Porte's position regarding the alliance with Germany. Berlin already controlled the Ottoman army thanks to the military mission; She would control the navy as soon as Admiral Wilhelm Souchon was appointed its commander. Before allowing the two ships to enter the Straits, on 6 August the cabinet put forward certain demands to Ambassador Wangenheim. These were:

- i) Support the abolition of the capitulations.
- ii) Aid the Porte to restore the 1878 borders in the Caucasus.
- iii) Reconsider the Balkan frontier.
- iv) Promote understanding with Romania and Bulgaria
- v) Help regain the Aegean islands if Greece joined the Entente.
- vi) Germany was not to make peace while Ottoman territory was in

enemy hands and to ensure that Istanbul received a war indemnity.

Wangenheim replied that such terms would depend on the Porte's belligerence and Germany's ability to dictate the peace.<sup>10</sup>

On 9 August the war cabinet then decided to take the following decisions before entering the war:

- i) To examine the treaty from a legal point of view;
- ii) Seek alliances with Bulgaria and Rumania;
- iii) Convince the Entente that Turkey intended to remain neutral;
- iv) Form a commission responsible for the food supply of the army and the people;
- v) Play for time until the outcome of the war was clear;
- vi) Do not allow the German embassy to interfere in military matters and Liman von Sanders to meddle in politics;
- vii) Under no circumstance to enter the war before reaching an understanding with Rumania, Bulgaria and Greece;
- viii) To open negotiations with the French and Russian Ambassadors.

Cavid wrote in his diary that Ottoman neutrality had been thoroughly violated, softened by the

fiction that the Porte had purchased the ships. The press made much of this, seeing the purchase of the Goeben and the Breslau as strengthening the Ottoman navy.<sup>11</sup>

On 13-14 August 1914, the Porte renewed its declaration of armed neutrality through its ambassadors in London, Paris and St. Petersburg. They promised to return the crew of the ships to Germany and not to use the vessels in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean; they even asked the British to leave their Limpus naval mission in place. The cabinet meanwhile had resolved "not to allow the German ships to enter the Bosphorus under any circumstances...." But by mid-August the German admiral was acting independently of the Porte, his men strengthening the defences of the Dardanelles. He told Berlin: "I intend to move forward against the Black Sea as soon as possible". His problem was that the ship's boilers continued to leak.<sup>12</sup> Cavid noted that:

"...the Germans are encouraging and inciting us to enter the war at the earliest instant. Enver is prepared to jump into the fire; he is the most straight-forward about this among us: he wants to go the whole way or get out. He is a bit too much under German influence. He has total faith in a German victory. He wants to march with them and to tie our destiny with theirs. He does not think of anything else. But here is no sign of the old ardour and fire [to resist] in either Talat or Halil..."<sup>13</sup>

However Talat, Halil, and Enver saw Ambassador Wangenheim and restated the conditions before Turkey would become a belligerent. It was also decided on Talat's suggestion that he and Halil would go to Bulgaria because Andrey Tochef was totally opposed to the war and was pursuing the best policy.

“Galip Kemali Bey, our ambassador in Athens, informed us that if we appoint a delegate, Nikolaos Politis would come to Bucharest and if our delegate was Talat then Strahi would come. It was agreed that Halil would also go to Bucharest. We would try to sign a treaty against the Triple Entente by promising Besarabia to Rumania, an important part of Serbian territory to Bulgaria and Thrace to us. If the Bulgars do not enter it was decided that we would definitely not enter.”<sup>14</sup>

On Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavid saw Ambassador Tochef. He said that for the moment the most suitable policy for Sofia and İstanbul was to be patient. He was sure his country would not move, “and if we are hasty and rash and in case Russia comes out victorious, she will destroy and demolish us. He fears Enver and says Talat has changed his mind. I reassured him. I said we would not move unless the Bulgarians did so and unless the Germans won a very great victory. I explained that it was not possible for Enver to do anything on his own”.<sup>15</sup>

Talat and Halil left İstanbul by car on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> and arrived in

Sofia. They then went on to Bucharest on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Talat returned to İstanbul on 2 September while Halil stayed on in Bucharest. The purpose of their visit to these two capitals was to discuss the attitude of these two neutral states towards the war. Halil returned on Sunday 13 September. The negotiations between Greece and Turkey had been postponed, but not broken off. Talat's aim was to bring Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece into an alliance with Germany. However, Bucharest refused to enter into any engagement while Bulgaria promised neutrality and guaranteed İstanbul against an attack from Sofia.<sup>16</sup>

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After seeing his colleagues, Talat saw Said Halim Pasha, the pro-peace Grand Vezir, who spoke positively of the proposals of the Triple Entente states and of not wanting to fight Russia because he saw no benefit in doing so.

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On Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> France's ambassador, Maurice Bompard visited Cavid and complained about all the activity and prophesied that Turkey would soon enter the war.

“I [Cavid] said that just as there are different currents in the country, in the cabinet too there are pro-war people. But we will stop them and while we are in the cabinet we will prevent going to war. Next day Cavid saw



Goulkevitch of the Russian embassy who had just returned from Russia and said Russia had no bad intentions towards Turkey...

I explained to him our purpose in preparing for war and what informed circles in the country thought about Russia: if she is defeated she will seek revenge from us and if she is victorious she will be a nuisance to us.

I told him that we would not join the war very easily. I added... that if we have to fight, we will fight the Greeks. That would not be an anti-Russian move.

I said if the French could win a major victory against the Germans, we would win over the pro-war faction; until that time it was necessary for us to remain in this uncertain situation.”<sup>17</sup>

Cavid complained to Goulkevitch about Entente diplomacy towards Turkey, the requisitioning of the ship and the bad effect that had had on the Muslim world: “I also mentioned that the French and Russian ambassadors had not made a single proposal to us since the beginning of the war whereas the German ambassador had not spent an idle moment”<sup>18</sup>

When Said Halim saw Cavid the next day – 17 August – he said that:

“Today the French, English, and Russian ambassadors declared that if we followed neutrality our territorial integrity would be guaranteed after the war. This being an oral declaration, I don’t find it sufficient. But they had an effect on the grand vezir who now doesn’t favour war at all. Even Halil is saying that our agreement doesn’t oblige us to declare war on Russia.

The grand vezir is saying that this treaty was signed for the future, that Wangenheim deceived us, that he concealed the declaration of war [in Europe], and he kept repeating that the clauses of the treaty did not oblige us to intervene.”<sup>19</sup>

Informal talk between Unionist ministers and the Entente ambassadors continued but were inconclusive. On the 19<sup>th</sup> Ambassador Giers met Cavid, following the Entente’s negative reply on 18 August to Enver’s proposal of 5 August:

“... a conversation with Djavid Bey, Minister of Finance and partisan of the Entente. In his opinion the Allies would have to offer a written proposition to Turkey, with a guarantee for fifteen or twenty years. Likewise the regime of the capitulations would have to go. In return the German military mission would be dismissed...”<sup>20</sup>

Cavid also saw the British and French ambassadors and offered similar proposals. The question of the capitulations caused difficulties for both men, though Ambassador Giers found the issue acceptable. Cavid saw the Grand Vezir who asked him to see the Entente ambassadors about the capitulations and other outstanding problems. Cavid also saw Cemal Pasha, who wanted to undertake discussions with the English ambassador. The two discussed the proposals he wanted to make:

- The restoration of the two ships.
- The abrogation of the capitulations.

- Cessation of interference in internal affairs
- The defence on the Empire by the Entente if that became necessary.

Cavid then saw Ambassador Mallet that evening and talked about the situation, especially the question of the two ships. The ambassador confirmed that they had been forced to confiscate the ships because England only had a slight preponderance over German in Dreadnoughts.<sup>21</sup>

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Knowing that the Great Powers would not intervene in the affairs of the Empire, The Unionists abrogated the capitulations by imperial edict on 8 September and announced that to the world the next day.

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Cemal Pasha saw Sir Louis Mallet on 20 August and broached the subject of the immediate abolition of capitulations. He also asked if the battleships seized by Britain could be returned and the renunciation of any interference in the internal affairs of Turkey. He also wanted a guarantee of western Thrace if Bulgaria sided with Germany, as well as the restoration of the Aegean islands.

Mallet rejected these proposals. He pointed out the difficulty of abolition of the capitulations and told Cemal

that the return of the warships was “impossible”. He considered renunciation of interference in Turkey “absurd”, and return of the Greek islands “impossible”. As Howard notes, “Both France and England seem to have been too certain of an easy victory over Turkey to consider it worthwhile to make serious advances toward conciliation”. This was in contrast to the concessions the Russians had considered making.<sup>22</sup>

İsmail Canbulat returned from Bucharest on August 24<sup>th</sup> and said that the Romanians were not willing to give anything in writing while the Bulgarians promised nothing, only to safeguard their freedom of action by this treaty. After seeing his colleagues, Talat saw Said Halim Pasha, the pro-peace Grand Vezir, who spoke positively of the proposals of the Triple Entente states and of not wanting to fight Russia because he saw no benefit in doing so. On hearing these views, Talat said there were differences in the cabinet and as he and Enver were in a minority (i.e. those who wanted to join Germany) he would resign and withdraw from the cabinet. They decided to meet and resolve their differences at Said Halim’s villa in Yeniköy.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, Berlin had been calling for Ottoman intervention virtually since they signed the alliance. The Russian victory at Lemberg on 3 September made the Ottoman leaders even more

reluctant to intervene, especially as Germany urged “quick Ottoman action against Russia”, and possibly a naval demonstration in the Black Sea. While the Grand Vezir assured the British and French ambassadors that İstanbul did not dream of war, more German troops arrived in İstanbul along with big 30.5 cm. Krupp guns for coastal defence. All together there were now about 2,000 German soldiers in İstanbul.<sup>24</sup>

During dinner on 5 September, Ambassador Tochev advised Cavid that Turkey should remain neutral. Cavid agreed, but Tochev said he feared Enver: “I told him that it was not possible for Enver to do anything on his own. I explained that the Grand Vezir was of the same opinion. Enver knew that...” Tochev said he would resign if the Bulgarian government followed a different policy against Talat and was confident that the Rumanians would give a written guarantee (*teminati tabiririye*).<sup>25</sup>

The German defeat at the Battle of the Marne (5-9 September) ended the myth of German invincibility. It was the turning point in the war that changed the situation in the Balkans, and Turkey became even more reluctant to become a belligerent. But for Berlin, now that her advance in the west had been checked, the army had to face the Russian steamroller. Therefore Ottoman participation became critical. On 7 September 1914

Berlin sent a telegram to Wangenheim in İstanbul: “We are forced to exploit every suitable opportunity to break England’s resistance. For the time being your Excellency will do everything to demand the attack of Turkey on Russia”.<sup>26</sup>

The Unionists were also busy exploiting the war in Europe to their advantage. Knowing that the Great Powers would not intervene in the affairs of the Empire, they abrogated the capitulations by imperial edict on 8 September and announced that to the world the next day. The ambassador protested and even threatened the Porte. But to no avail. On 10 September, Germany’s War Minister Falkenhayn declared that there would be no further military aid to İstanbul – officers, artillery, and ammunitions – “until the Ottoman Empire was at war with Germany’s enemies... from the moment hostilities begin, [Ottoman] wishes will be followed to the greatest extent possible”.<sup>27</sup>

The Porte continued to maintain its armed neutrality though Germany’s position was becoming stronger. London recalled the British naval mission under Admiral Arthur Limpus, leaving Germany with total control over the Ottoman military. Churchill wanted Limpus to command the eastern Mediterranean forces so as to “cow and embarrass the Turks”,<sup>28</sup> but Ambassador Mallet asked that

the admiral be sent to Malta so as to convince the Unionists that Britain's intentions were still peaceful.<sup>29</sup>

Churchill was correct in observing that:

“Factions [in İstanbul] are struggling for ascendancy, and are only actuated by considerations of force & fear, & only restrained by their great doubt as to who is going to win in Europe.... Nothing appeals to the Turks but force; & they will continue to kick those people who they think are unable or unwilling to use it against them....”<sup>30</sup>

Enver, the leader of the war faction, was ready to intervene on Germany's side. He was convinced, he told the Austrian military attaché, that victory over Russia's empire could alone assure a prosperous future for the Turkish people. But when another council was convoked to review this decision, [Said Halim and Talat] “moved its rejection in the hope of winning Russia's peaceful agreement to the abolition of the capitulations”.<sup>31</sup>

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**The war party was now in control; given the financial crisis the peace party had no choice but to surrender.**

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By 15 September, Hindenburg's victory over the Russians in East Prussia raised German self-confidence tremendously and also increased

pressure on the non-interventionists, as the war party grew more confident. On 20 September, the cabinet discussed the position of Admiral Souchon, and Cavid noted that the Admiral took his orders from his General HQ and his own Emperor and not from the Ottoman minister. Under these conditions the war cabinet rejected Enver's proposal to send the fleet into the Black Sea:

“We did not accept Souchon's word as a soldier that he would not attack the Russians. We said we would not accept any responsibility for his actions if Admiral Souchon went out with the fleet and bombarded any commercial shipping or ports. The Germans were with every act trying to force us to enter the war and we were not going to victims to their schemes.

On hearing this, Enver wondered what would happen if he [Souchon] took the ships and went into action. I proposed that if we wanted to be consistent with our decision, we should instruct the Black Sea forts to bombard the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*. The Straits should be closed and they not be allowed to return. I said that once the *Goeben* left we would not have the courage to break with Germany. Even if Enver as Commander-in-Chief says that the Admiral cannot leave, he cannot guarantee it.”<sup>32</sup>

By the end of September the Empire was feeling the economic and financial cost of weeks of armed mobilization and as well as the impact of war in Europe on the economy. Ministers like Cavid were certain that Berlin would not give any money until İstanbul entered the

war. Falkenhayn had said as much on 10 September. On 30 September Enver asked Berlin for a loan of five million in gold. Chancellor “Bethman Hollweg and Deputy Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman wanted to make the loan conditional on Turkey’s entry into the war....”. The reply to the request for a loan arrived from Berlin on 7 October. After long discussions, Zimmerman promised to give half a million Turkish liras and said he would see the bankers about this matter. He saw the bankers and they decided that it would be better to have this transaction executed by the two governments. Cavid concluded: “As I thought, this initiative has produced no result”.<sup>33</sup>

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### The Ottoman apology to the Tsar was dismissed out of hand and was of no avail in keeping İstanbul out of the war.

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The economic and financial crisis was such that the Porte was badly in need of money. At a meeting at the German Embassy on 11 October, Talat and Enver promised to open hostilities “on receipt of financial aid from Germany”.<sup>34</sup>

After the first installment had been received, the second installment arrived on 21 October. On 22 October, Mallet understood that the Porte had received 1,000,000 pounds and that 4,000,000

would be received when the Ottomans entered the war. Giers, the Russian ambassador, learned that if Said Halim refused to go to war, Enver and Talat would remove him.<sup>35</sup>

Ambassador Mahmud Muhtar Pasha sent another telegram from Berlin on 12 October, regarding the German loan. Berlin proposed that beginning in 1915, every year on 31 December, an advance of five million Turkish pounds at six per cent interest would be made. 250,000 pounds would be given after the signing of the agreement, 750,000 ten days after Turkey entered the war with either Russia or England, the rest in installments of 400,000 pounds each month, thirty days after the declaration of war. When the war ended so would the payments. The Deutsche Bank in İstanbul would make the first payment; the method of making the other payments would be decided later. The repayment of the capital and interest would be decided within 12 months after peace. “What a beautiful bargain! [noted Cavid] However, I had not anticipated a better deal from the Germans. Perhaps they see what dire straits we are in”. After this telegram there were no further negotiations.<sup>36</sup>

The war party was now in control; given the financial crisis the peace party had no choice but to surrender. Enver Pasha made the decisive and fateful move. On 22 October he drew up a set of proposals for Turkish

intervention in the war and had them sent to the German General Staff for comment. These included fleet action to seize naval supremacy in the Black Sea without prior declaration of war on Russia. The General Staff in Berlin signaled its approval the next day. America's Ambassador, Henry Morgenthau, reported that the British and the Russians feared a rupture with the Porte and were sending documents and valuables for safe keeping to the American Embassy. But Enver "... while dining with me on Thursday [22 Oct], said that Turkey does not contemplate attacking any country but intends to keep strong its army so as to be prepared for any emergency..."<sup>37</sup>

By 24 October, Enver gave Admiral Souchon the order for the Ottoman captains to follow the admiral's orders. Souchon was to attack the Russian fleet in the Black Sea and establish maritime supremacy. On the 26<sup>th</sup> Souchon entered the Black Sea. The peace camp, still hoping to avoid conflict with the Entente, sent Halil to Berlin to seek a postponement. The initiative was too late, for on 29 October the so-called "Black Sea Incident" took place. Souchon attacked the Russian ports of Odessa and Sevastopol on 27-28 October though the incident is dated 29 October. In order to deceive the non-interventionists as well as public opinion Souchon then sent a message

to İstanbul: "Russian fleet observed all movements. Turkish fleet October 27 and 28 and disturbed all exercises in a planned way. Russian fleet opened hostilities today. Fleet Commander"<sup>38</sup>

The Unionists knew that they had now become belligerents against their will. The peaceniks sent Halil Bey to Berlin to seek a postponement. But the Black Sea incident was based on Berlin's calculation that Russia was weak in the region and, in 1914, was only capable of a defensive war. Russia would not be ready with her new ships until 1917 at the earliest.<sup>39</sup>

The reports in the press on the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> and the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> – Friday, the first day of Şeker Bayramı - gave the official version, that a very small portion of the Ottoman fleet was carrying out maneuvers in the Black Sea on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> when the Russian fleet, which had been following the maneuvers, opened hostilities on the 16/29 October by attacking the Ottoman fleet. The Imperial government would protest with the utmost vigour against this act of hostility committed by the Russian fleet.<sup>40</sup>

The Ottoman apology to the Tsar was dismissed out of hand and was of no avail in keeping İstanbul out of the war. The Russians saw these actions as the Ottoman entry into war. Tsar

Nicholas announced on the same day: "The ill-advised intervention of Turkey will only hasten the nation's downfall... We shall be obliged to make Turkey pay dearly for her error... Before all else... we must defeat Germany".<sup>41</sup>

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Despite all their efforts to remain neutral until they thought the time was appropriate, the Unionists were forced to enter the war.

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Before any diplomatic resolution could be found to the crisis, Russian forces went on the offensive against Ottoman positions in the Caucasus. On 31 October Russian forces launched an attack on the Ottoman position north of Doğu Beyazıt. The next day the Russians crossed the border and advanced towards Pasin and Eleşkirt. Said Halim, still hoping to save the situation, ordered his ambassador at St Petersburg to approach Foreign Minister Sazonov, only to be told that that was too late. On 2 November, Russia declared war officially on İstanbul. On the same day, the French and British ambassadors – Bompard and Mallet – asked for their passports and left İstanbul. The Ottomans had become belligerents despite all the efforts of the non-interventionists.

Cavid was in Berlin on 12 July 1916, negotiating another loan with Count Reveren, the new Finance Minister. They talked about Turkey's entry into the war and Cavid argued that Turkey would have been better off if she had remained neutral. Count Reveren disagreed and said if Turkey had remained neutral she would have been in the same position as Greece. Cavid, perhaps reflecting the thinking of Unionist non-interventionists, disagreed. He said the Entente would have still had to break through the Straits and Turkey would have been better prepared than she was in 1914/15. So Turkey had taken a very great risk by entering the war so early. The Straits were not properly fortified and if the Entente had broken through Germany would not have been unable to help. Therefore Turkey should have entered eight to ten months later. "I told him politely that they themselves had thrown us into such great danger and consequently were obliged to undertake broader commitments".<sup>42</sup>

Despite all their efforts to remain neutral until they thought the time was appropriate, the Unionists were forced to enter the war. They had no choice but to go along with Berlin's policy, having handed over some of the most important levers of the state power – the army, the navy, and finances – to Germany.

## Endnotes

- 1 On The Unionists' attempts to form an alliance with Britain see Feroz Ahmad, "Great Britain's relations with the Young Turks, 1908-1914", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (July 1966), pp. 302-29; for the French, see Bruce Fulton, "France and the End of the Ottoman Empire" in Marian Kent (ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1984, p. 161.
- 2 Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, New York, Norton, 1967, p. 84.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 121-124.
- 4 Ahmed Emin [Yalman], *Turkey in the World War*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1930, p. 72.
- 5 Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918*, 193. Four Square Book, London, 1962 ed. 314; Field Marshal Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum Book of the Turkish Front 1914-18*, London, Pan Books, 2004, p. 5. According to Cavid the decision was not discussed until 2 August. See Mehmet Cavid, "Meşrutiyet devrine ait Cavid Beyin Hatıraları", *Tanin*, 16 October 1944; see also the press of 28 July 1914. An imperial decree (*irade*) announced mobilization and declared martial law throughout the empire following mobilization. Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, Vol. 3/i, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1953, p. 63.
- 6 Halil Mentese, Eski Meclisi Mebusan Reisi Halil Mentese'nin Haritaları' *Cumhuriyet*, 10 November 1946, published in İstanbul in 1986 as *Halil Mentese'nin Anıları*, Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları.
- 7 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 16 July 1944.
- 8 Harry N. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History 1913-1923*, New York, Howard Fertig, 1966, p. 97 quoting Giers's dispatch to Sazanov. Captain B.H. Liddle Hart, *The Real War 1914-1918*, Boston and Toronto, Little, Brown: n.d. (originally published by London, Faber&Faber, 1930), 144. Russia "preferred isolation to the sacrifice of her dream of annexation, and did not even report the offer to her allies". Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, Vol. 1: 'To Arms', Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 672. The Entente's reply came on the 18<sup>th</sup>.
- 9 Giers to Sazonov, Howard, *Partition*, pp. 97-98, n. 84 & 86.
- 10 Strachan, *World War*, p. 671.
- 11 Ahmed Emin, *Turkey*, p. 72.
- 12 Dan van der Vat, *The Ship that Changed the World: the escape of the Goeben to the Dardanelles in 1914*, Bethesda, Maryland 1986, Adler & Adler, pp. 114 and 116.
- 13 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 18 October 1944.
- 14 Ibid. Leon, George B. Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers 1914-1917*, Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1974, pp. 34-35.



- 15 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 19 October 1944.
- 16 Tanin, 17 August 1914; 19 August 1914. Talat and Halil arrived in Bucharest in order to discuss the question of the Aegean island with Greek delegates. "Notes from Roumania", Bucharest, August 20, *The Near East*, September 11, 1914, p. 624. *Tanin*, 2 September 1914. Howard, *Partition*, p. 91, n. 44. Talat and Halil were visiting the two capitals (*Tasvir-i Efkar*, 18 August, 1914 published pictures of the two men; see also Yunus Nadi interview with Talat, "Rumanya'nin Vaziyeti Hakkında Mulakat", *Tasvir-i Efkar*, 20 August 1914.
- 17 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 20 October 1944.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., 21 October 1944.
- 20 Howard, *Partition*, 101, n. 101. See Strachan, *World War*, p. 672
- 21 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 23 October 1944; Howard, *Partition*, p. 103 citing diplomatic documents of Britain and Russia; Joseph Heller, 'Sir Louis Mallet and the Ottoman Empire: the Road to war'. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (January 1976), p. 138.
- 22 Howard, *Partition*, p. 103.
- 23 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 27 October, 1944.
- 24 Constantinople Letter, *The Near East*, 2 October 1914, p. 703.
- 25 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 31 October 1944.
- 26 Strachan, *World War*, p. 700.
- 27 On the question of the capitulations see Feroz Ahmad, "Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations 1800-1914", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 11, No.1 (January 2000), pp. 1-20; and Howard, *Partition*, pp. 103 and 102ff. On Falkenhayn see Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 149.
- 28 Churchill, *World Crisis*, p. 320; Charles V Reed. "The British naval mission in Constantinople: 1908-1914". Unpublished MPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1990, p. 62; Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı*, iii/1, p. 87; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Vol. 3. 1914-1916, The Challenge of War*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1971, pp. 207-208.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Gilbert, Churchill, p. 208.
- 31 Pallavicini to Berchtold, 15 and 17 September, 1914, Frank G. Weber, *Eagles on the Crescent – Germany, Austria, and the Diplomacy of the Turkish Alliance, 1914-1918*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1970, p. 74.
- 32 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 8 November, 1944; Weber, *Eagles*, 78-9; in fact on 14 September the Kaiser ordered Souchon to attack the Russians in the Black Sea.
- 33 Aksakal, *Ottoman Road to War*, p. 151 n. 108 and 156.
- 34 Strachan, *World War*, 676; Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 12 November 1944.

- 35 Strachan, *Ibid.*, p. 676, citing Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914-1918*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 48-49 and 51.
- 36 Howard, *Partition*, pp. 109-110. Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 15-16 November 1944.
- 37 Morgenthau to Secretary of State, tel, Constantinople, 24 October 1914, *FRUS 1914*, Supplement, 120-21.
- 38 Dan van der Vat, *Ship*, pp. 188-189; Strachan, *World War*, pp. 677-678; Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History*, New York, Henry Holt, 1994, pp. 104ff.
- 39 Howard, *Partition*, p. 110; See Bodger, "Russia and the End of the Ottoman Empire", in Marian Kent (ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1984, pp. 88ff where he discusses the weakness of Russia's naval position.
- 40 *Tanin* and *Tasviri Efkar*, 29 and 30 November 1914 and *The Orient*, Vol. 5, No. 44-49, 14 December 1914, p. 431.
- 41 W. Bruce Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon: the Russians in War and Revolution 1914-1918*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1986. pp. 167-168.
- 42 Cavid, "Hatıralar", *Tanin*, 1-3 March 1945.

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# Austro-Ottoman Relations and the Origins of World War One, 1912-14: A Reinterpretation

Gül TOKAY\*

## Abstract

*This article investigates the origins of World War I through the correspondence of Ottoman diplomats between 1912 and 1914, namely from the formation of the Balkan League in early 1912 until the Ottoman-German alliance in August 1914. However, the emphasis is on how Ottoman officialdom interpreted 'the Albanian issue' in conjunction with the Austro-Ottoman rapprochement on the eve of the Great War. This close relationship between the Austrians and Ottomans influenced Ottoman decision-making on declaring war on the Balkan allies in October 1912. More significantly, however, on the eve of the Great War, despite the reluctance of German officials, it was again the influence exercised on Germany via the Austrian Embassy in Istanbul that finalised the Ottoman-German alliance on 2 August 1914. With new sources and reasoning, this article hopes to contribute to current debates on the origins of the Great War.*

## Key Words

Balkan Wars, Committee of Union and Progress, Entente, Triplice, Central Powers, Triple Alliance, German Military Mission.

## Introduction

This article investigates the origins of World War I via the correspondence of Ottoman diplomats between 1912 and 1914, and in particular in the period following the emergence of the Balkan Crisis until the Ottoman-German alliance of 2 August 1914.<sup>1</sup> However, the emphasis of this paper is on how Ottoman officialdom interpreted 'the Albanian issue' in conjunction with the Balkan wars, leading to the Treaty of Alliance in August 1914. Within this framework, the study has two aims. Firstly, it briefly discusses the Albanian question within the context of regional developments following the Young Turk revolution of 1908. When the Young Turk regime began implementing stricter policies through the control mechanisms introduced on Macedonian lands by 1909, Muslim Albanians lost most of the privileges they had previously enjoyed. Furthermore, many local Albanian leaders found that their interests competed and clashed with those of the Young Turk regime and as a consequence, they

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stepped up their armed struggle. These circumstances also coincided with the internationalisation of the Albanian issue. For a long time, both Italians and Austrians insisted that the equilibrium in the Adriatic was not to be challenged by a third party and therefore they supported the creation of a buffer Albanian state. Secondly, the article discusses the *rapprochement* between the Austrians and the Ottomans, especially after the appointment of Leopold von Berchtold as the Monarchy's Foreign Minister in February 1912.

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On the eve of the Great War, it was the influence exercised on Germany via the Austrian Embassy under Pallavicini in İstanbul that finalised the Ottoman-German alliance.

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Berchtold developed close working relations with the Ottoman ambassador in Vienna, Mavreyoni Bey and, later, Huseyin Hilmi Pasha, while the long-serving Austrian ambassador in İstanbul, Johann von Pallavicini, exercised some influence in the Ottoman capital. This close relationship between the Austrians and Ottomans influenced Ottoman decision-making, especially in terms of support for the Albanian concessions of August 1912, but at the same time it also contributed

to the escalation of Serbo-Austrian tensions preceding the Balkan wars and after. More significantly, on the eve of the Great War, it was the influence exercised on Germany via the Austrian Embassy under Pallavicini in İstanbul that finalised the Ottoman-German alliance. Despite the reluctance of German Ambassador Freiherr von Wangenheim and Foreign Minister Gottlieb von Jagow, the pressure placed on the Germans by the Austrian Foreign Ministry and the embassy in İstanbul was such that the Germans eventually agreed to the signing of an alliance with the Turks.

The present article does not intend to tackle all the questions either on the Albanian issue or on the origins of Ottoman-German alliance, but with the assistance of primary Ottoman documents and some European sources, it hopes to partially fill an existing gap not only in the historiography of the late Ottoman period, but also contribute to current debates on the Great War.

## The (Re-)Emergence of the Albanian Issue and War in the Balkans, 1912-13

After the Young Turk revolution of 1908, when the new regime began implementing stricter policies through their centralisation efforts and the control mechanisms introduced on

Macedonian lands by 1909, Christian communities, as well as Muslim Albanians, lost many privileges they had previously enjoyed. As a result, there was an increase in insurgent activities, as well as attempts at forming alliances against the existing Ottoman administration.<sup>2</sup> However, recent research indicates that it was Austrian support of the Albanians under Austrian Foreign Minister Leopold Berchtold, at the expense of Serbian and Montenegrin ambitions that finally compelled the formation of the Balkan alliances.<sup>3</sup>

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Austrian ambitions in the Peninsula, especially in Kosovo and the Sanjak after the Austrian annexation crises of October 1908, and the escalation of Albanian insurgent activities and a series of Albanian uprisings, forced the

Serbs to ultimately sign an agreement in March 1912 with the Bulgarians, despite the existing differences between the two states.

The Albanians were already dissatisfied with the fact that the Treaty of Berlin excluded them from the Macedonian reforms, while promising, through Article 23, to improve the conditions of Christian subjects. With the implementation of the Macedonian reforms at the turn of the century, there was constant tension between the Muslim Albanians and the reformers, including the *Esbraf* and the *Ulema*, notably in Monastir and Kosovo.<sup>4</sup> After the 1908 revolution, despite the European reformers being given unlimited leave and being sent home, it was now the Young Turks' stricter policies that deprived many local Albanians of their privileged status even further. Many local Albanian notables and leaders found that their interests competed and clashed with those of the Young Turk regime, further contributing to the existing unrest in the region.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, there was an increase in their demands for independence, or, at the least, autonomy.

However, it was only once the Italians and Austrians began to cooperate in regional affairs that the creation of an Albanian state acquired greater importance, as it would act as a buffer zone against Serbian and Montenegrin designs in the Adriatic.<sup>6</sup> Since the

late 19<sup>th</sup> century, both the Italians and the Austrians had insisted on the equilibrium in the Adriatic remaining unchallenged by a third party, which consequently elevated the Albanian question into an international issue. But local factors and a power shift among local Albanian leaders produced by the Young Turk regime's new control mechanisms were probably the main reasons for their demand of autonomy (or even independence), but such demands required support from the Great Powers.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding the Balkan states, they had already been engaged in attempts to establish alliances among themselves, but it was the events of spring 1912 that finalised the alliances. This *rapprochement* coincided with the appointment of Berchtold as Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister following the death of Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal (1906–1912) and the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean in May 1912. Although traditional Austro-Hungarian policy supported the *status quo* in the Balkans, Berchtold made no secret of his support of an Albanian state, at the expense of Serbian and Montenegrin ambitions.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, uncertainties about the future of the Aegean islands after the Italian occupation accelerated the finalisation of the Greco-Bulgarian alliance, as well as provoking Greek irredentism in the Ottoman held

islands.<sup>9</sup> In late spring of 1912, when the Italians occupied the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean during the Turco-Italian War of 1911-12, Serbo-Austrian tensions were escalating, a circumstance that not only accelerated the finalisation of the Balkan alliances in May 1912 but also the path to war.<sup>10</sup>

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**With the escalation of Albanian and Macedonian turmoil on the one hand and the Ottoman inability to solve the crises on the other, increasingly warlike dispositions began to reach the Ottoman Foreign Ministry.**

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The Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty had already been signed in March 1912, and with the signing of the Bulgarian-Greek Treaty, the Balkan alliance was more or less finalised by May 1912. Montenegro only joined in October, in order not to be excluded from the changes that would occur in the status quo were the Ottomans to lose the war.

In July 1912, the cabinet of Said Pasha, backed by the Committee of Union and Progress, resigned and a new ministry was formed under Gazi Ahmed Mukhtar Pasha, whose priority was to end the Albanian uprisings and the war with the Italians.<sup>11</sup> In the meantime, Berchtold developed close working relations with the Ottoman

ambassador in Vienna, Mavreyoni Bey, while the long serving Austrian ambassador in İstanbul, Johann von Pallavicini, was very popular among the Ottoman and foreign officials in İstanbul, where he could easily exercise some influence.<sup>12</sup> This close relationship between the Austrians and Ottomans had a major impact on Ottoman decision-making, especially in terms of support for the Albanian concessions of August 1912. But, on the other hand, it escalated existing tensions in the Macedonian provinces and intensified preparations for a possible war in the Balkans, especially among the Serbs.<sup>13</sup>

For Italy, the creation of an Albanian state was important. As di San Giuliano stated on more than one occasion, the equilibrium in the Adriatic was essential. Despite denying the rumours that were circulating of an official Italian policy of inciting unrest among the largely Catholic Malisore tribes of northern Albania, the available material suggests that he allowed agitators to act within Albanian borders, permitting the presence of certain revolutionary Albanians and thus gaining support among Italo-Albanians. But, under the prevailing circumstances, his priority was to end the Turco-Italian War.<sup>14</sup>

In the meantime, by September, with the escalation of Albanian and Macedonian turmoil on the one hand and the Ottoman inability to solve

the crises on the other, increasingly warlike dispositions began to reach the Ottoman Foreign Ministry. It was not only regional developments but also the differences between the great powers over the affairs of the peninsula that seemed to prove that a resolution to the crises in the Balkans via diplomatic means alone was nigh on impossible. Although there was a hope that any conflict that did erupt would remain localised, war seemed to be the only option.

Peace was signed with Italy on 15 October, and the following day Turkey broke off diplomatic relations with the Balkan states. On 17 October, the Ottomans declared war against the Balkan allies and soon after, Ahmed Mukhtar resigned and the pro-British Kamil became grand vizier.

By early November, Gabriel Effendi had already informed Ottoman envoys abroad of the Ottoman defeat and on 3 December, an armistice was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan allies.<sup>15</sup>

Soon after, two conferences opened in London; the St. James Conference, convened for the Balkan allies and the Ottoman Empire, and the Ambassadors Conference, under the presidency of Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, and hosted for the signatories of the Berlin Treaty. Grey had earlier suggested that the

great powers' ambassadors in London should meet to consult the Balkan allies and discuss issues of mutual interest, including the question of Albania, the Aegean islands' issue, and a Serbian outlet to the Adriatic.<sup>16</sup>

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The non-interventionist German policy became even more noticeable after the death of the German Foreign Minister Kiderlen Wächter in December 1912 and his replacement by Gottlieb von Jagow.

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At this juncture, however, it must be stressed that the Albanian issue was one of the key issues of the ambassadorial conference. Throughout the conference, balancing the Balkan allies' territorial aspirations with the creation of an Albanian state had represented the chief issue for the Austrians and Italians.<sup>17</sup> The Austrians and Italians were particularly worried that the new state's borders would be drawn in such a manner as to provide an advantage to its pan-Slavist and pan-Hellenist elements.<sup>18</sup> It was the efforts of the Austrian Ambassador in London, Alfred Mensdorff, who enjoyed close working relations with the British Foreign Office, who played the key role in the discussions on the establishment of an Albanian state.

Both states also had the support of the Germans, who followed a passive policy throughout the Balkan crisis and acted in concordance with their Austrian allies. This non-interventionist German policy became even more noticeable after the death of the German Foreign Minister Kiderlen Wächter in December 1912 and his replacement by Gottlieb von Jagow. It continued until the Edirne crisis, when the Ottomans recaptured the town during the second Balkan war, which resulted in international upheaval and even with Russian threats to invade Ottoman Armenia. The Russian threat no doubt provoked German involvement, and relations were even further strained with the arrival of the German Military Mission under Liman von Sanders soon after.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime, the primary concern of the British, and especially of Foreign Secretary Edward Grey, was to prevent any of the great powers acquiring a naval base in the Aegean, which would threaten the *status quo* in the Eastern Mediterranean. Under the circumstances, the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese (as well as the Greek-occupied Aegean islands) became a bargaining tool over the course of the Balkan Wars and during the debates on the establishment of the new Albanian state's borders – an issue that persisted well after the Balkan War.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, at a very early stage, with



the transfer of the Albanian question to the ambassadorial conference, the Ottomans' role in the issue became merely symbolic.

However, hostilities resumed at the end of January, soon after a new Ottoman government was formed under Mahmud Shevket Pasha, following the coup of January 1913 led by the CUP (the Committee of Union and Progress).<sup>21</sup>

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As for regional developments in the period subsequent to the Balkan conflicts, many local states were not satisfied with the Treaty of Bucharest, but they were also careful not to reignite hostilities.

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In late March, the Ottomans had to request a ceasefire and the London Peace Treaty was finally signed on 30 May, ending the First Balkan War. The question of the financial arrangements, the Aegean islands and the status of Albania were to be settled by the Ambassadorial Conference, but the area west of the Enos-Midia line, including Edirne, was left to the Allies.

When the second Balkan War broke out between Bulgaria on the one side and Greece and Serbia on the other, the powers informed Turkey that it

would be wise to remain neutral.<sup>22</sup> But in early July, with the success of the Serbian and Greek armies against the Bulgarians, and, more importantly, the mobilization of the Romanian forces, the Ottomans began to consider the advantages of joining the war against the Bulgarians in order to recapture Edirne.

The Ottomans issued an imperial *irade* on 13 July and declared war on Bulgaria. The same day, the Bulgarian government under Stoyen Danev resigned and was replaced by the Russophobe government of Vasil Radoslavov, presenting an opportune moment for Berchtold and initiating a period of closer Austria-Bulgarian relations.<sup>23</sup> Radoslavov swiftly initiated a call for a cease-fire to end the war and asked the powers to intervene. However, with the Bulgarian army exhausted, it was an easy victory for the Ottomans, and on 23 July, Edirne was recaptured. The recapture of Edirne created an outcry not only in Bulgaria but in most European capitals. Many of the major powers wanted an immediate Ottoman retreat from Edirne, worried as they were about the circumstances in which the region had been (re-) captured.<sup>24</sup>

Soon after, with the intervention of the European powers and a Romanian invitation, peace talks between the Balkan allies commenced in Bucharest in early August and were finalised on 10 August in the Treaty of Bucharest,

leaving Bulgarians only one alternative, namely bilateral negotiations with the Ottomans.<sup>25</sup>

As a consequence, in early September, direct negotiations with Bulgaria formally started in İstanbul, where Pallavicini, the Austrian ambassador in İstanbul, informally used his influence to mediate. Concerning the recovery of Edirne, there were rumours that the Bulgarians had sacrificed Edirne in order to gain Ottoman support against the Greeks over Macedonia, and that they were ready to discuss an alliance with Austrian mediation.<sup>26</sup> Since the summer of 1913, closer relations had emerged between the Austrians and Bulgarians under the Russophobe government of Vasil Radoslavov, and Pallavicini was willing to use his efforts in the mediation to gain both Ottoman and Bulgarian support for the Triple.<sup>27</sup>

## From the Balkan Wars to the Ottoman – German Alliance of 2 August 1914

The existing sources state that throughout the Balkan crisis, Austrian politics was not necessarily based on the principle of territorial acquisition in the Balkans but rather on the maintenance of the balance of power in the Adriatic.<sup>28</sup> It was under these prevailing circumstances that, despite mutual distrust, the interests of San

Giuliano and Berchtold coincided with regards to developments in south-eastern Europe. Both ministers were willing to cooperate on the question of Albania, on the Adriatic railway concessions, on maintaining the status quo in the Mediterranean, and even on the consolidation of the Triple Alliance. On the Albanian question, the only major difference was that the Italians were in favour of an international commission to oversee the affairs of the new state as per the wishes and aims of the rest of the Great Powers, whereas the Austrians preferred a mechanism akin to dual control.<sup>29</sup>

In the early months of 1914, when the future of the Albanian throne became an issue in European and Ottoman circles, the Ottomans insisted on a Muslim prince. The Ottoman officials were convinced that in a population with a majority Muslim population, a Christian prince would not be easily acceptable and İzzet Pasha, the ex-Minister of war, was the choice of the CUP. On the other hand, members of the Ambassadors' Conference, with the Germans and Austrians in particular, were willing to appoint Prince Wied, a German prince, to the Albanian throne, to which the Ottomans had to acquiesce.

As for regional developments in the period subsequent to the Balkan conflicts, many local states were not satisfied with the Treaty of Bucharest,

but they were also careful not to reignite hostilities. A strong Serbia, no doubt, threatened the very existence of the newly created state of Albania, but on the other hand, Serbia's new borders were incompatible with the Monarchy.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, there was an escalation in tensions between the Greeks and the Turks, as the Greeks were delaying in their evacuation of Northern Epirus, which was ceded to the new Albanian state in return for Greek acquisition of the occupied Aegean islands. The issues of the Albanian frontier and the islands had been clearly considered together since the beginning of ambassadors' conference, and the powers had warned Athens and İstanbul that their decisions were to be respected. The question of the islands had been an on-going issue between the two neighbouring states and escalated further once the Great War had commenced.<sup>31</sup> With the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese and the Greek occupation of the rest of the Aegean islands during the Balkan wars, British support for the Greek position had already raised the issue of the islands to an international platform.

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**The German Military Mission under Liman von Sanders worked closely with the Ottoman War Ministry and despite the problems within the mission itself, relations between the war ministry, the upper echelons of the CUP and the German military mission remained close.**

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In the early months of 1914, different insurrectionary activities in and around Albania continued. The rumours were that the CUP – namely the Ottoman Imperial government – supported the insurrection in Central Albania. However, some experienced diplomats such as Hilmi Pasha denied Ottoman involvement and stated that the Ottomans did not have any interest in the prolonging the conflict, as the fundamental problem was the Albanians themselves, in that they had no political culture, government, army or administration.<sup>32</sup> Hilmi Pasha's observations might have contained some truths but local Albanian leaders were operating in different parts of the new state trying to establish further influence, which they would have been unable to do without outside support.

During the period under review (namely, the years following the 1908 revolution), the most significant shift regarding the Ottomans' relations with the Great Powers was that the Ottomans had further detached themselves from the Entente, especially the British.<sup>33</sup> Although Grey

had expressed indifference on issues related to the Eastern borders, such as the crisis over Ottoman Armenia and other regional developments, he always concurred with his Russian partner. Thus, the fundamental problem was Grey's support for the Greeks on the question of the Aegean islands, a position, which irreversibly harmed relations between the Ottomans and British.<sup>34</sup>

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As with Britain, up until the outbreak of the Great War, there was a steady deterioration in Anglo-Ottoman relations following both Grey's insistence on placing the Aegean islands under Greek authority, and the delay in the delivery of two dreadnoughts that had been ordered by the Ottoman government in 1911.

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Furthermore, since the beginning of the century, the British Embassy in İstanbul lost much of its influence compared to that of the German Embassy under Freiherr Marschall von Bieberstein and Hans von Wangenheim, and even more so compared to the long serving Austrian ambassador Johann von Pallavicini.<sup>35</sup> No doubt, in the Ottoman capital,

there had been a significant increase of German influence. The German Military Mission under Liman von Sanders worked closely with the Ottoman War Ministry and despite the problems within the mission itself, relations between the war ministry, the upper echelons of the CUP and the German military mission remained close.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in the public sphere, there was a notable increase in German activities, such as the opening of German schools, hospitals and various associations (trade, commercial, social and cultural), mainly measures to bring the two countries closer to each other.<sup>37</sup> But, these issues should not be exaggerated in terms of the developments leading to the Ottoman-German alliance of August 1914.

Until the last minute, a formal alliance had not been on the agenda of the German Foreign Minister Gottlieb von Jagow. Jagow, who replaced Kiderlen Wächter after his death in December 1912, and Wangenheim (who replaced Marschall von Bieberstein) adopted a more cautious approach and were often critical of the Ottomans, especially on the issues of the Aegean Islands and Edirne. More importantly, German officials believed that the Ottomans would be a liability to the Triple, rather than an advantage.

In the meantime, for the Russians, despite the tension of Liman von Sanders' mission in late 1913, there was

an improvement in relations between the two states following the settlement of the Balkan crisis.<sup>38</sup> However, despite the rumours of a possible Turco-Russian alliance, a formal alliance with the Ottomans was not on the Russians' agenda.<sup>39</sup>

According to the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazanov, the Russians wanted to see Turkey for the Turks and they would not tolerate any other foreign power acquiring any privileged position in the Empire, especially in the Straits. When, during his visit to Livadia in May 1914, Talat Pasha, Minister of the Interior, gave assurances to Sazanov that the German military mission had a purely technical character, despite the friendly atmosphere of the visit, the Russian Foreign Minister was not satisfied.<sup>40</sup> For Sazanov, with the German military mission under Liman von Sanders, not only was there an increase of German influence in the Ottoman Empire but Turkey was increasingly becoming a vassal of Germany.<sup>41</sup>

As with Britain, up until the outbreak of the Great War, there was a steady deterioration in Anglo-Ottoman relations following both Grey's insistence on placing the Aegean islands under Greek authority, and the delay in the delivery of two dreadnoughts that had been ordered by the Ottoman government in 1911. There were rumours that the delay

was deliberate and had been enforced, as it was believed the dreadnoughts could upset the naval balance between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean and thus increase the likelihood of war between the two.<sup>42</sup>

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With the recent experience of the Balkan wars, the local states were trying to avoid a new conflict as long as circumstances permitted it but they were also well aware of the difficulty of remaining neutral in a war.

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It was under these circumstances that the Sarajevo assassinations took place on 28 June. At first, Ottoman diplomats underestimated the danger created by the assassinations, thinking it would be eased by Serbian concessions. Furthermore, it was believed that if a war were to break out between the belligerents, it would remain localised.<sup>43</sup>

However, events proceeded rather rapidly and on 23 July, Berchtold sent the Serbian government an ultimatum, expecting a reply from them within 48 hours. With the Serbian reply being negative, war became inevitable and on 28 July, Austria declared war on Serbia.<sup>44</sup> When it became obvious that the Serbo-Austrian conflict would involve all the great powers; diplomats such as Tevfik in London, Rifaat in

Paris and Assim in Teheran, all pro-Entente, opted for strict neutrality. On several occasions, Assim Bey, who also served as the Ottoman Foreign Minister between the years 1911 and 1912, stated that due to the material conditions of the Ottoman forces and her armaments and finances, it would be extremely difficult for the Porte to declare war on Russia. Therefore, for Assim, the best option for the Ottoman Empire was to maintain strict neutrality.<sup>45</sup> However, Mukhtar Pasha from Berlin, a German-educated military officer, and Hilmi Pasha from Vienna, were convinced that the Ottomans should not waste time in joining the Central Powers.<sup>46</sup> Hilmi Pasha had been the Inspector General of the Macedonian Provinces during the Macedonian reform era of 1902-8 and had developed close working relations with Austrians since then. On the day the Austrians declared war on Serbia, Hilmi Pasha went to see Berchtold and even told him that their sympathies lay with the Austrians.<sup>47</sup>

It was, however, the pro-German wing's dominance in Turkish politics, especially of Enver, that led to a proposal being sent to Wangenheim by Said Halim on 27 July. A treaty of alliance was signed between them on 2 August and was later joined by Austria.

Jagow and Wangeheim, who knew the Turks well, did not want to sign the agreement, and did so only at the

last minute as a result of the pressure exerted by Pallavicini, and with the proviso that the Turks would finalise an agreement with the Bulgarians as well. The Austrian Ambassador not only wanted to gain Bulgaria as an ally but also wanted to prevent Turkey from forming an alliance with the Entente.<sup>48</sup> Soon after the treaty of alliance had been ratified, Enver and Liman von Sanders were ready to go to war but Said Halim, the Grand Vizier, stated that not only were the mobilizations incomplete but that the Bulgarian alliance – which they needed as a bulwark against Russia – had not yet been completed either.<sup>49</sup> When an imperial *irade* was issued on the mobilisation of the navy and land forces, Said Halim stated that they had only been announced as a measure to safeguard the security of the provinces.<sup>50</sup> He further stated that in the actual conflict, the government had opted to follow strict neutrality.<sup>51</sup>

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Like the British, the Russians favoured strict neutrality on the part of the Ottomans and insisted on maintaining free passage through the Straits during the conflict, with Ottoman mobilization to take place purely for defensive purposes.

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When Berchtold informed Hilmi of the mobilizations in Thrace, Hilmi stated that these were no cause for Austrian alarm as they were mainly defensive and, additionally, that their views and their outlook were similar to those of the Triple Alliance.<sup>52</sup> This was important for Berchtold because the Austrians were working for a local alliance among the Balkan powers to prevent any of them forming alliances with Serbia. Their main worry was that in a likely Serbo-Bulgarian conflict, the Ottomans would join Serbia.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Berchtold stated that they wanted to count on the military cooperation of the Turks and the Bulgarians against Serbia.<sup>54</sup> This was the key factor behind the pressure placed by Austria on Germany to form an alliance with the Ottomans and also the role adopted in the previous mediations by the Austrians in trying to ease and even eradicate any of the existing tensions between the Ottomans and Bulgarians.

It was partly for the reasons discussed above that the Ottomans also rushed to form alliances with the local Balkan states. Talat was sent off to Sofia to conclude an agreement with the Bulgarians and to assuage them of any reluctance or reservations they may have had.<sup>55</sup>

The Ottomans were also trying to improve relations with the Greeks. Even after the war had commenced, both states were trying to resolve their

differences bilaterally rather than via the mediation of the great powers.

The problem, however, was that none of the Balkan states took the Treaty of Bucharest very seriously and the situation between them remained rather fragile.<sup>56</sup> With the recent experience of the Balkan wars, the local states were trying to avoid a new conflict as long as circumstances permitted it but they were also well aware of the difficulty of remaining neutral in a war.<sup>57</sup>

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Despite the Ottoman-German alliance in August, it took the Ottomans another three months to join the war, as the CUP leaders wished to keep their options open.

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Among the great powers, despite the developments in early August and especially after Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 5 August, British public opinion seemed to desire amicable relations with Turkey, so long as the latter remained neutral.<sup>58</sup> Grey's main concern and expectation was for the Ottomans to remain strictly neutral and to allow the free passage of merchant ships through the Straits and Dardanelles.<sup>59</sup>

However, relations between the two states were strained in the Ottoman capital when the Admiralty decided not to deliver the two dreadnoughts to the Ottoman navy until the war was over.

Grey's offer of financial compensation, moreover, was rejected.<sup>60</sup> Another incident in the early weeks of August that contributed to the escalation of the tension occurred on the 10<sup>th</sup>, when the Ottomans took possession of the German ships *Goeben* and *Breslau*. The British asked for the immediate return of the officers and crew to Germany but instead the continued presence of the German officers, especially in the Dardanelles and Bosphorus, increased the already existing tension between the British and the Ottomans.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, when the Ottomans bought the German commercial ship the *Lili Rickmers*, tension rose still further in the Entente capitals. Said Halim stated, however, that the purchase was not a violation of neutrality as the vessel was a commercial ship and neutral governments could buy ships of commerce from the belligerents. Thus, it was another circumstance that contributed to the already existing tension between Ottomans and British and was interpreted as Turkey – fatally – throwing herself into the arms of Germany.<sup>62</sup>

Like the British, the Russians favoured strict neutrality on the part of the Ottomans and insisted on maintaining free passage through the Straits during the conflict, with Ottoman mobilization to take place purely for defensive purposes.<sup>63</sup> However, despite Ottoman neutrality, mobilizations without any disturbances

and the presence of German officers in the upper echelons of the Ottoman military caused anxiety in Russian circles.<sup>64</sup> Already, in the month of August, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Ottoman envoys abroad to convince their host states about their neutrality, and some experienced Russian diplomats in the Ottoman capital, such as Nikolai Giers, were increasingly worried at the growing German and Austrian influence.<sup>65</sup>

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During the early stages of the war, the Ottomans were still very much occupied with regional issues, such as the question of the islands, and were still endeavouring to reach an understanding with the Greeks.

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Meanwhile, reports from the Ottoman envoys of the Central Powers, especially from Berlin and Vienna, stated that the Ottomans should waste no time in joining the war on the side of the Central Powers. In particular, by the second week of August, Berchtold had stated that the time had come for Turkey to decide.<sup>66</sup>

In the German capital, it was Muhtar Pasha who was pushing to join the war with the Triple Alliance without delay.<sup>67</sup> The crucial point for Muhtar was



that Turkey was neither militarily nor financially strong enough to remain neutral during the war, and would face even more harrowing circumstances and consequences once the war had been concluded.<sup>68</sup> However, even after the Ottoman-German alliance, uncertainties remained among the ruling circles in İstanbul. Since the outbreak of the great war, there had been two major factions; that of Enver Pasha, which demanded immediate entry into the war as an ally of Germany, and that of the neutrals, headed by men such as Djavid Bey, who were personally in favour of the Entente, but who, upon seeing the strength of the pro-German faction, contented themselves with declaring that Turkey needed to preserve its neutrality. For some time, however, Germany had been assisting Turkey in financial and other matters. According to many, Turkey was still in need of further support and therefore it would grasp – without hesitation – whichever opportunity was offered.<sup>69</sup> Even among the pro-German upper echelons of the CUP, this was also more or less the opinion in the Ottoman capital when the Ottoman-German alliance was signed in early August.

## Conclusion

Under the prevailing circumstances, it would not be wrong to argue that, despite the Ottoman-German alliance in August, it took the Ottomans

another three months to join the war, as the CUP leaders wished to keep their options open. However, there are still many gaps in the available Ottoman foreign ministerial documents for the full reasoning of the CUP leaders to be understood. In the meantime, during the early stages of the war, the Ottomans were still very much occupied with regional issues, such as the question of the islands, and were still endeavouring to reach an understanding with the Greeks. On the other hand, the Great Powers thought that the question of the islands should be left aside for the time being, at least until the war was over. In Albania, with many uncertainties about status and new borders abounding, insurrectionary activities continued. There were rumours that the Ottoman government was behind the insurrectionary movement in Central Albania and was trying to establish a presence and an influence there in order to be able to appoint a Muslim prince. The Greeks were delaying in their evacuation of the territories assigned to the new state and were taking advantage of the war situation, inciting strife in the Northern Epirus regions. Nevertheless, although the Great Powers did not want any direct involvement in the regional tensions, they continued to unofficially support one or more of the existing movements. This was more or less the picture during the early stages of the war, from the point of view of the *Hariciye*, the Ottoman Foreign Ministry.

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# Ottoman Military Reforms on the eve of World War I

Odile MOREAU\*

## Abstract

*This article examines the Ottoman Military reforms on the eve of World War I. The heavy defeats experienced by the Ottomans during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) provoked an urgent call for military reforms and a "Military Renaissance". Within a year of these calls being made, the First World War would begin, in early August 1914. First, light will be shed on the military reforms taken in 1913 immediately after the Balkan Wars and the official request for a German military mission. Second, the organization of the Ottoman military in 1914 and the last reforms undertaken before the war began will be examined. The Ottoman recruitment system would be updated by means of a new law for military service in May 1914. After the declaration of Ottoman general mobilization on 2 August 1914, additional changes were introduced to counter the recurrent lack of manpower.*

## Key Words:

First World War, Ottoman Army, Military Reforms, Enver Pasha, German Military Mission.

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## Military Reforms After the Balkan Defeats: A Primary Agenda

In the fall of 1911, Italy invaded Ottoman Libya and then, in October 1912, the Balkan Wars broke out. The Balkan States of Montenegro, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Very quickly, in November 1912, the Bulgarians occupied Edirne (Adrianople) and were threatening İstanbul, the Ottoman capital. Since July 1912 and during the First Balkan War, the Ottoman government was comprised of liberals, with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) not in command. Refusing to abandon Edirne (Adrianople), on January 23, 1913, Enver Bey (1881-1922) attacked the Sublime Porte [the *Bab-ı Ali Baskını*] with a group of armed Unionists to force the Grand Vizier, Mehmed Kâmil Pasha (1833-1913), to resign, thus provoking a military coup. Nazım Pasha (1848-1913), the War Minister, was assassinated and Mahmud Şevket Pasha (1856-1913) became Grand

Vizier and Minister of War until he too was assassinated in June 1913. The Unionists would go on to establish single-party CUP rule until the end of World War One.

The Treaty of London, signed on May 30, 1913, brought the First Balkan War to an end. However, with the dissolution of the Alliance the Balkan Allies continued to clash during the summer of 1913, after the treaty had been signed, thereby initiating a Second Balkan War. Bulgaria attacked Serbia and Greece and the Ottoman government took advantage of this complex situation to recapture Edirne (Adrianople). The Treaty of Bucharest ended the Second Balkan War on August 10, 1913. The Ottoman Empire held Edirne (Andrianople) and the Eastern territories to Maritza and Greece Selânik (Thessaloniki) and Epirius and Serbia held Macedonia. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire lost most of its European territories (83%), with only Eastern Thrace remaining under Ottoman rule. The Ottoman Empire had lost a significant part of its territory, about 32% of its total, and four million subjects, representing about 20% of its total population.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these territorial losses, the Ottoman Army was devastated, with the loss of the entire Second Army, consisting of twelve regular infantry divisions, and a significant portion of its First Army. Thus, the chief

priority was to reshape and rebuild the Ottoman Army before entertaining the possibility of mobilisation for war.

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The disastrous defeats of the Balkan Wars, the humiliating peace treaties and the independence of Albania in 1912 created a trauma among the officer corps. According to the leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress, the ideal solution for the travails of the Ottoman Empire would be an enlightened military dictatorship, as it was the officer corps that was blamed for the humiliating defeats experienced during the Balkan wars. Partisan politics was also subject to criticism and was seen as a cause for the abject performance of the military forces. Separatist nationalists were also agitating the officer corps after the desertion of several Albanian officers during a counterinsurgency operation in 1910. Such incidents raised suspicions concerning the loyalty of non-Turkish officers. Some of the military officers were involved in semi-secret societies<sup>2</sup> that were demanding reorganization of the Ottoman Empire, with a smaller



minority pushing for some form of independence. Turkish intellectuals and officials also founded societies and clubs to promote the ideologies of Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism. Partisan politics were rife among the Ottoman Military elite, causing fragmentation within the officer corps.

In order to neutralize the disadvantages experienced by the Ottoman army, Grand Vizier and Minister of War Mahmud Şevket Pasha welcomed the appointment of German military advisors to command positions. The Ottoman government officially requested a German military mission in May 1913 and the agreement between the Ottoman Empire and Germany was officially signed in the autumn of the same year, on October 27, 1913. The German military mission led by Major General Otto Liman von Sanders arrived in İstanbul in December 1913.

However, in the interim period between the official request and the formal signing of the agreement, Mahmud Şevket Pasha was assassinated, on 11 June 1913. After his assassination, a state of emergency was proclaimed, members of the opposition were arrested and a dictatorial regime was established under the leadership of the triumvirate of pashas, Enver, Talat (1874-1921) and Cemal (1872-1922), who would remain in power until the end of the First World War.<sup>3</sup> Moreover,

the arrival of the German military mission generated a diplomatic furore among the European nations and led to an uneasy tension.

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Yet, the German Military Mission did not initiate great changes in the institutions or the structures of the Ottoman Army. The general architecture was the concept of the triangular division, which had been introduced into the Ottoman army before the Balkan Wars. In fact, the Ottoman army had already gone through a massive military reorganization program, implemented by Ahmet Izzet Pasha, the War Minister, on 11 December 1913. Under this program, called the New Organization of Active Forces, the forces were organised into the Army, Independent Corps and Division Areas corps. This plan was the direct consequence of the loss of an entire army in the European territories and its recruiting districts and the subsequent need to recreate these lost formations in Anatolia.<sup>4</sup>

In the reorganized First Army corps, only the previous Third Corps still

existed. The First and Second Corps were reorganised as a new division.<sup>5</sup> In August 1914, there were twenty-two new infantry divisions, and in the spring of 1915 it was the Third Corps that would be assigned to protect the Gallipoli Peninsula. As for the Second Army, it was reconstituted and assigned to Syria and Palestine. The military reform process can therefore be considered the true rebirth of the Ottoman army in the aftermath of the Balkan wars.

**Table 1: Ottoman New Army Corps<sup>6</sup>**

Army Corps	Centre	Number of divisions
I	İstanbul	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> in İstanbul, 3 <sup>rd</sup> in Catalca
II	Edirne	2 in Edirne and I in Kirkkilise (Kırklareli)
III	Gallipoli	3
IV	Izmir	3
V	Ankara	4, among 1 in Rodosto
VI	Alep	2
VII	Yemen	3
VIII	Damascus	2
IX	Erzurum	3
X	Erzincan	3
XI	Van	3
XII	Moussoul	2
XIII	Baghdad	2

## New Recruitment Law

After the Second Balkan Wars, the recruitment system was also reformed before the arrival of the German Military Mission. One of the main changes was the abolition of the *Redif* system (Reserve of the Active Army)<sup>7</sup>. In the meantime, recruitment became regional and Anatolia was divided into regions corresponding to an Army corps. The deficit of officers and deputy officers coupled with financial problems paved the way for a drastic reduction in the number of Army corps (thirteen Army corps and three independent divisions).<sup>8</sup>

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Under the new recruitment law, the active army (the *Nizam*) was unchanged with military service lasting either three, six or nine years. No longer the *Redif*, but a longer term known as the *Mustahfiz*, the territorial guard of seven years of service rather than two. The Reserve of the Active Army (the *Redif*) would no longer be organized into independent divisions.<sup>9</sup>

## The German Military Mission: Diplomatic Crises with the Arrival of Liman von Sanders

On his arrival, Major General Otto Liman von Sanders received the grade of *Birinci Ferik* and was appointed commander of the First Army corps in İstanbul. He was also involved in the decision-making processes in the Ottoman Army. In addition, he oversaw the instruction of generals in the Ottoman Army and was vice president of the *Sûrâ-i Askeriye* (the High Military Council).<sup>10</sup> It should be noted here that Great Britain already had a Naval Military Mission, overseen by Admiral Limpus, who was commander-in-chief of the Ottoman Navy.<sup>11</sup> However, the situation with regards to the German Military Mission was unprecedented in the Ottoman Army. A foreign officer granted superior rank and being made commander of the First Army provoked an outcry in the foreign embassies. The first country to express its dismay was Russia, which was against a German officer commanding an Ottoman Army responsible for the defense of the Straits (the Bosphorus and Gallipoli). Saint-Petersburg, London and Paris issued serious protests and the diplomatic crisis was resolved by the Ottomans and the Germans with

the nomination of Otto Liman von Sanders as Marshal, a rank too high for him to be in charge of the First Army, the command of which was given instead to the Kurmay Albay Nuri Bey. Otto Liman von Sanders was then in charge of the German Military mission and was appointed Chief Inspector General of the military schools, including the Military Academy [the *Harbiye*].<sup>12</sup> In addition, some incidents arose concerning Otto Liman von Sanders's daughters, which were locally commented upon disparagingly. At the end of 1913, the situation was so tense that some rumours began to circulate that von Sanders could even be recalled to Germany.<sup>13</sup>

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In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, Enver Pasha purged from the Ottoman army a number of officers from the old guard as well as a number of commanders deemed to have performed incompetently during the Balkan conflicts and who were now seen as unqualified for posts in high command posts.

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At the very beginning, the German Military Mission was small. In December 1913, Otto Liman von Sanders arrived with about twenty

trained Prussian and Bavarian General Staff officers. Their aims were to create model regiments and to serve as instructors at the Harbiye [the Ottoman War Academy] and on corps and army level staffs.<sup>14</sup> The number then rose to thirty officers and forty men during the summer of 1914<sup>15</sup> and up to eight hundred by the end of the First World War. The most important posting was that of Colonel Friedrich Bronsart von Schellendorf as First Assistant Chief of General Staff [*Erkan-ı Harbiye-i Umumiye Dairesi Erkan-ı Harbiye Reis-i Saniligi*]. Von Schellendorf, who became the most influential German Military advisor in the Ottoman Empire until his recall in 1917, reorganized the Ottoman General Staff in line with the German Staff, with young and mostly German-trained Ottoman officers appointed as branch chiefs. Von Schellendorf supervised the strategic military mobilization and concentrations plans and also rewrote most of the campaign plans. In addition, Enver Pasha expressed great appreciation for von Schellendorf. After defeat in the Sarikamis campaign in Eastern Anatolia in January 1915, von Schellendorf became the *de facto* Chief of the General Staff, despite opposition by most of the high-ranking Ottoman officers.<sup>16</sup> In fact, he had more importance in the Ottoman Army than Otto Liman von Sanders.

## Ottoman Military Organization in 1914 and the Last Reforms before the Great War

### *1914 Military Reforms Organized by Enver Pasha as War Minister*

On 3 January 1914, in order to reframe the Ottoman army, the Committee of Union and Progress replaced Ahmed Izzet Pasha as War Minister with one of their own, Enver Bey. The new *Genelkurmay Başkanı* (Chief of the Ottoman Staff) and *Serasker* (War Minister) relied heavily on Colonel Friedrich Bronsart von Schellendorf, who was appointed Second Assistant of the Ottoman General Staff, and revised the mobilization and the defensive war plans that had been approved in April 1914.<sup>17</sup>

### *Purge*

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, Enver Pasha purged from the Ottoman army a number of officers from the old guard as well as a number of commanders deemed to have performed incompetently during the Balkan conflicts and who were now seen as unqualified for posts in high command posts. It was not exactly a *tabula rasa*, but there were a lot of

changes. Eight hundred high-ranking officers were dismissed,<sup>18</sup> among them two Field Marshals, three Lieutenants-Generals, thirty Major-Generals and thirty-five Brigadier-Generals. Despite the appointment of new young officers, mentoring in the Ottoman army remained insufficient and so Enver Pasha appointed young and highly trained general staff officers to key positions, where their task was to carry out and complete the military reforms that had been drawn up before the Balkan Wars. For example, the Third Army corps, which was in charge of the defence of the Gallipoli Peninsula, was very effective. In addition, the modern German military system was well established within the General Staff Officer corps. Since 1885, hundreds of Ottoman officers that had been trained in Germany worked as intermediaries between Ottoman soldiers and German officers by acting as interpreters and translators.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Supervisory Staff Problem*

Enver Pasha initiated strong reforms to restore discipline and order among the Ottoman army and to make it more efficient. Eminent anti-unionist officers

were appointed to the periphery of the empire, to the provinces (*taşralar*). For example, Mahmud Muhtar Pasha, who refused his appointment, was appointed to a position in Erzincan in Eastern Anatolia.<sup>20</sup> Aziz Ali Bey al-Misri was arrested in January 1914, deferred to a Martial Court, and sentenced to death but his sentence was later revoked. The trial of al-Misri, who had a glowing reputation in the army, provoked a shock among his fellow officers. The consequence of this purge of the Ottoman army was the banishment of young and experienced officers who were not held in the high regard that Mahmud Muhtar Pasha and Aziz Ali Bey al-Misri had been. A number of officers believed Enver Pasha was settling a score with Aziz Ali Bey al-Misri.

### *Discipline in the Army*

Enver Pasha issued a proclamation regarding discipline and order in the Ottoman army and went on to take three kinds of measures to put the army on order. There were bad habits concerning the badly welcomed appointments. Some officers took time to take up their posts. Enver Pasha threatened all

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those who received a new appointment to take up their new post by January 23 1914 at the latest, under penalty of immediate compulsory retirement. Enver Pasha forbade the retired officers from wearing the uniform, except during military celebrations, following military law. Concurrently, in order to prevent any opposition, retired officers were not allowed to reside in İstanbul and had to return and settle in their region of birth.<sup>21</sup>

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A new generation of young officers who knew the theoretical basis of modern warfare arrived at command positions and would, for the first time, encounter the threat of dismissal.

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Enver Pasha had between 280 and 300 Ottoman Staff officers at his disposal, in addition to fifty German officers, a relatively small number, if one is to take the immensity of the Ottoman Empire into account.<sup>22</sup> A new generation of young officers who knew the theoretical basis of modern warfare arrived at command positions and would, for the first time, encounter the threat of dismissal. Enver Pasha wished to impose discipline and order in the army and in one declaration, he stated that he was expecting only

two main traits in his soldiers, namely absolute obedience and hard work, warning the officers that their future careers were in the hands of their commanders. Consequently, they had to obey their supervisors, consider their own subalterns as their own children and the barracks their home. This was a paternalistic and authoritarian vision of military duty that Enver Pasha wished to implement and control with an iron fist.<sup>23</sup>

Officers' conduct in the public sphere was also restricted. They were no longer allowed to frequent cafés or cabarets [*kabvehâne*] in İstanbul. According to Enver Pasha, frequenting these establishments and drinking alcohol could damage the military's prestige and impair religious sensibilities. Breaking these official rules would immediately incur removal from one's post and/or compulsory retirement. For Enver Pasha, faith was to be the moral force guiding the army and he went on to suggest that commandants preserve the religious ethical codes and sensitivities of both Muslim and non-Muslim soldiers.<sup>24</sup> Enver Pasha tried to leave a long-lasting imprint on the reformed Ottoman army, attempting reform even in the orthography of the Ottoman language that was used in Ottoman military correspondence. His proposal to palliate the absence of vowels in the Ottoman spelling/writing system by creating vowels and

separating the letters was rejected, however, by all the members of the cabinet.<sup>25</sup>

Financial restrictions continued to effect soldiers, nevertheless, officers' salaries did receive a slight augmentation.<sup>26</sup> The pensions of retired officers were reduced by at least 50% and sometimes more. Soldiers in their first years received only a quarter of their salaries. Men in the third year of their military service were the only ones to receive the same salary of 20 *piastres*. In addition, food rations were suppressed for officers and became non-mandatory for soldiers and non-commissioned officers. These measures were aimed at saving the army's money but were very trying for those soldiers that were most affected.<sup>27</sup>

The recruitment of the active army's officers was changed. Since the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the length of study at the Military School (the *Harbiye*) had been reduced to two years and regular practice of military training had been established. Officer candidates spent the first six or seven months in a model regiment, after which they received 11 months of general instruction, followed by six months of exercises. The immediate aim was to develop a corps of officers without compromising the exigency of quality.<sup>28</sup>

## The Ottoman Recruitment System in 1914

The reorganization of the Ottoman army during the spring of 1914 brought in major modifications. At the very beginning, the new laws were guided by the principle of economy and aimed at simplification and rejuvenation of the army. In fact, the number of posts had decreased due to enforced retirements. In addition, according to the enormous territorial losses in the European part of the Empire, recruitment had to be modified. Conscription was re-established at a local regional level and the army was organized into thirty-six regular divisions of the Active Army's (*Nizâm*) thirteen corps' zones, with two additional independent divisions. In the aftermath of the Balkan wars, the Ottoman army was devastated by huge human losses and only recovered its territorial basis in April 1914.<sup>29</sup>

The new conscription law was adopted on 12 May 1914 (*Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanûn-ı Muvakkatı*). Enver Pasha, the War Minister, altered several points of the law proposed by his predecessors. Since 1909, conscription had been the norm for Muslims as well as for non-Muslims. This reorganization addressed the problem of exemptions in order to minimize absences and to be more inclusive, to include non-Muslims in the military in particular and "to oblige everybody

equally to defend the fatherland”, by addressing the problem of equality under and before the law. Although the Ottoman state could not dispense with this extra source of revenue, non-Muslims were not to comprise more than 10 % of their military units. Those who would not serve in the Ottoman armed forces would pay a tax, assessed according to their wealth.<sup>30</sup> At least one exemption was abolished, the so-called *muinsiz*, who were exempt from active military service because they were the sole breadwinners in their families. In exchange, the law provided for an allowance of 30 piasters [*kuruş*] to the families in need of support. It became a serious financial problem for the Ottoman State, which received a considerable number of claims during the First World War. In addition, the new law emphasized the importance of training draftees in modern warfare. On the other hand, there was also a need for a larger volume of officers, and of middle- and low-ranking officers in particular. Consequently, reserve officers were recruited from amongst the graduates of high schools.

The law project was submitted to the *Sura-i Devlet*, which amended the law in several points. Military service was reduced to two years for the infantry, in line with the French system of 1911.<sup>31</sup> However this measure appeared demagogic and unrealistic during a time of preparation for war. In wartime,

soldiers would remain on duty and in uniform for much longer. Indeed, three months after the law had been passed, a declaration of mobilisation was issued.

**Table 2: Military Compulsory service’s length in 1914<sup>32</sup>**

	Land Army Infantry	Land Army Other classes	Navy
Active Army <i>Nizâm</i>	2 years	3 years	5 years
Reserve of the Active Army <i>ibtiyât</i>	18 years	17 years	7 years
Territorial Guard <i>mustabfaz</i>	5 years	5 years	5 years
Total	25 years	25 years	17 years

The law suppressed the reserve class [*redif*] and posited the length of the conscription at 25 years, 20 years in active army service and five years in the territorial guard (*mustabfaz*). In the Navy, the duty was 17 years, of which 12 would be in active service and seven in the reserve. Manpower was slightly diminished, with the active army reduced to 200.000 men of 36 divisions instead of 43. Henceforth, regiments would be composed of only two active battalions. Furthermore, the War Minister had promised long summer vacations for harvesting and threshing to be performed.<sup>33</sup> The geographical



areas from which the people were recruited became regions for the sake of savings and to diminish travel costs. Savings would also be made on feeding and clothing. For example, rice (*pirinç*) would be replaced by cracked wheat (*bulgur*) and reservists would wear simplified uniforms during their training. Additionally, the pace of military constructions would be slowed down. All these reforms were expected to save as much as 69 million francs.<sup>34</sup>

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The War Minister was in such a hurry to implement these reforms that the new recruitment law was applied before being voted on. With district conscription becoming regional, the men were sent back to their original army corps. In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, all these mass movements provoked disorganisation as well as a diffusion of epidemics – especially typhus and smallpox – around the empire. The division commanders protested, especially those of the first three army corps, as they had seen their manpower reduced.<sup>35</sup>

The sanitary situation was also quite worrying and the mortality rate exceedingly high. A quarter of the men suffered from diseases, and among the officers, the death rate was half of the sick.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the manpower of the battalions could be very different due to the casualties encountered during the Balkan wars. In some regiments, three battalions had to merge to become only two. Moreover, the regional affectations provoked additional changes. The composition of battalions varied between 200 and 500 men.<sup>37</sup> Between 1910 and 1914 (1326 and 1329), the breadwinners [*muinsiz*] that had been enrolled in the military classes in order to supplement the units caused an increase of desertion in the regions where the rate was already high.<sup>38</sup>

The poor management that was rife during the Balkan wars was not solved in the spring of 1914. It was estimated that during the Balkan wars about 6000 more officers would be needed, aside from those that had already been killed in battle or forced to accept compulsory retirement. Middle- and low-ranking officers were thin on the ground. In 1909, all those who had participated in the counter-revolution (*31 Mart Vakası*) were banished from the army. On the eve of the Great War, the discharge of the class of 1908 (1324) deprived the units of the most skilled officers. Only a quarter of the troupe had received

training; the most experienced soldiers were those that had fought during the Balkan wars.

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The interlude between the Balkan wars and the Great War was dramatically short, from August 1913 until August 1914, giving the Ottoman Empire less than one year to recoup and stand on its own feet again.

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In 1914, it was difficult to evaluate the fighting spirit and offensive combat in the Ottoman army. In fact, the reorganization process was disengaged within less than a year and could not be fulfilled because of the outbreak of the new conflict. The Balkan wars had been a traumatic experience and one of the most humiliating defeats in Ottoman history.<sup>39</sup> The interlude between the Balkan wars and the Great War was dramatically short, from August 1913 until August 1914, giving the Ottoman Empire less than one year to recoup and stand on its own feet again. However, these military reforms had clearly had a positive impact; otherwise how can one account for an army defeated by four small Balkan states being able to fight throughout the First World War?

The Ottoman army was facing two major problems: a lack of manpower and defects in its communication

channels. The lack of manpower had been a recurrent problem since the abolition of the Janissaries' corps in 1826. In comparison with Europe, the Ottoman population was not so dense. The population of the centre of the Empire, which was the main source for conscription, was estimated at around 19 million. Although the total population of the Ottoman Empire had risen from 23 to 26 million, conscription was not possible in the distant regions without census information and infrastructure to implement the military service. In addition, the non-Muslim population represented about 20 per cent of the entire population. Since 1909, the universal conscription had been applied, but non-Muslims (as well as some Muslims) often paid exemption fees (*bedel*).<sup>40</sup> Most of the exempted were urban men. While very lucrative for the state, this system did not resolve the problem of the lack of fresh recruits for the army. Consequently, the non-Muslims that did serve in the army were from poor or modest backgrounds and were not allowed to occupy posts higher than that of Lieutenant, except for military doctors, who were allowed to rise to the rank of captain.<sup>41</sup> It seems that the problem of the lack of manpower had perhaps not been taken into account when the Ottoman and German commanders had been drawing up their strategic plans.

To remedy the lack of officers, the administration used various methods. Officers (*alaylı*) that had been forced to retire were recalled, cadets from the Military Academy (the *Harbiye*) were sent to units with the rank of brevet-lieutenant (*Zabit Vekili*) and senior cadets from the military secondary schools and the students from civilian high schools were appointed as officer candidates (*Zabit Namzeti*) after brief military training. Several training courses for officers (*Zabit Talimgâbları*) were opened to orient and train the new incoming officers into the army. Cadets saw basic training for six to eight months, and after an examination by the unit commanders, were sent to the front with the rank of corporal. However, the students of the civilian high schools filled the gaps in supervision for one year. After 1915, the high command decided to enrol students and graduates of religious schools (*medrese*), before looking for other opportunities.<sup>42</sup>

The lack of manpower was recurrent, except at the beginning of the war. However, the recruitment law of May 12, 1914 had already enlarged the manpower base. As for the refugees (*muhâcir*), it was announced that any present or future refugee was eligible for compulsory military service after six years residence in Ottoman territories. However, this period was reduced to three months in case of war. In order

to apply for Ottoman citizenship, refugees had to complete their military obligations. A decree promulgated in August 1914 stipulated that all men who took Ottoman citizenship, including those from enemy countries, were required to accept conscription in exchange for acknowledgment of their refugee status, which included settlement in the Ottoman Empire, in order to avoid deportation.<sup>43</sup> However, refugees who did not receive Ottoman citizenship were considered enrolled into the Ottoman regular army or into the irregular forces as volunteers. Without doubt, to be enrolled as a volunteer represented a great opportunity for quick integration and recognition, granting social status as well as confirming their right to housing.<sup>44</sup>

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**In the aftermath of the Balkan wars, Ottoman society as a whole was overwhelmed by drastic radicalization that took place at all levels.**

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The men who were enrolled had to follow the general procedure in the active army, and then in the reserve army, serving 20 years in active service and five years in the reserve army. Men who served in the artillery, gendarmerie and band service had 12 years of active

service. As for naval recruits, they underwent 12 years of active service and five years in the reserve army.<sup>45</sup> Active military service was supposed to last for two years for men serving in the infantry and transportation service, three years for those serving in the other land services, the gendarmerie and music bands, and five for the navy. However, the service length was regularly reviewed and modified by decrees issued by the Minister for War. The first one year extension was proclaimed as early as August 1914, just after the secret alliance with Germany had been signed on 2 August 1914 and the call for the general mobilisation had been issued.<sup>46</sup> At the beginning of the summer of 1914, the Ottoman army was composed of about 150,000 men. Throughout the course of the war, about 2,873,000 men would be mobilized.<sup>47</sup>

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After the Balkan Wars, the reorganization of the Ottoman army was accomplished before the arrival of the German military mission in December 1913.

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The mobilization proceeded slowly because of the drastic changes within the recruitment system and the problems related to recruitment districts. The number of mobilized men was more

than one million, with a combat force of around 820,000 soldiers. However, the number of regular officers was quite small, around 12,469, giving an average of about 1.5 officers per hundred men. Several methods were tried to fill empty officer posts:

The mobilization proceeded far more effectively than it had during the Balkan wars. Nevertheless, it was not geographically uniform. Mobilization was much easier in Western and Central Anatolia, whilst more problematic in Eastern Anatolia and the Eastern provinces.

## Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Balkan wars, Ottoman society as a whole was overwhelmed by drastic radicalization that took place at all levels. A dictatorship was established and power was concentrated in the hands of military officers.

After the Balkan Wars, the reorganization of the Ottoman army was accomplished before the arrival of the German Military mission in December 1913. From the very beginning, the decision had been made to appoint German Military advisers in command positions. Conversely, the German military Mission played a huge role in the workings of the Ottoman General Staff. However, it

was still a work in progress and the awaited 'Military Renaissance' was not completely achieved and remained incomplete.

The Ottoman recruitment system had been updated by means of a new recruitment law for compulsory military service (*Mükellefiyet Askeriye Kanunu Muvafakati*) on 12 May 1914, which aimed at introducing radical changes. Its main goal was financial savings, the encouragement of a younger army with an efficient recruitment process, and a renewed zeal for training in modern warfare.

Recruitment had to be modified due to the changes in the geographical areas from which soldiers were recruited after the territorial losses. The reestablishment of conscription at the local regional level through district recruiting offices was an important reform and provoked huge changes. In addition, the attempt to extend military service to all segments of society remained incomplete. Nevertheless, not all exemptions were abolished.

For example, because of financial shortfalls, the practice of the exemption fee practice (*bedel*) was maintained. Furthermore, the use of volunteers provided additional manpower for special services. However, due to financial difficulties, soldiers' salaries were reduced.

In the beginning of the summer of 1914, much had been accomplished. However, the dominant feeling was

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Recruitment had to be modified due to the changes in the geographical areas from which soldiers were recruited after the territorial losses.

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to not plunge immediately into World War One. Despite the secret agreement with Germany signed on 2 August 1914, the commitment of the

government and the military hierarchy to remain out of the war for as long as possible was real. As in Europe, many believed the forthcoming war would be very short. At this point, there was little awareness of the notion of "absolute warfare"<sup>48</sup> as described by Clausewitz, that had begun forming on the Western front and which was soon to spread and erupt in the Middle East.

## Endnotes

- 1 Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: a History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*, Westport, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 19.
- 2 Among the semi-secret societies founded was “al-‘Ahd”, founded by Arab officers. “al-‘Ahd”’s political demands aimed at that time, before World War One, at forms of autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. After the Great War, “al-‘Ahd” disintegrated into two separate factions in Syria and Iraq.
- 3 The repression was very hard. Sixteen personalities were sentenced to death, among which were a sultan’s nephew through marriage and Prince Sabaheddin in absentia.
- 4 Edward J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War First: A Comparative Study*, London, Routledge, 2007, p. 9.
- 5 Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: a History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*, Westport, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 10.
- 6 S. H. A. T. (Service Historique de l’Armée de Terre), 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 650, 1 December 1913.
- 7 Mesut Uyar and Edward J. Erickson, *A Military History of Ottomans*, Santa Barbara, Praeger Security International, 2009, pp. 240-241.
- 8 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 598, 26 March 1913.
- 9 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 624, 3 August 1913.
- 10 Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of Ottomans*, pp. 237-238.
- 11 Amiral Limpus directed a large British military mission composed by 72 British officers. It was not a coincidence that the number of the German officers was exactly the same. Therefore, the British Embassy was not in a position to react against the German military mission. Cf. Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: the Ottoman Empire and the First World War*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 80-81.
- 12 S.H.A.T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 678, 24 January 1914.
- 13 S.H.A.T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 710, 7 April 1914.
- 14 Edward J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War First: A Comparative Study*, London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 9-10.
- 15 Erickson, *Ordered to Die: a History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*, p.11.
- 16 Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans. From Osman to Atatürk*, pp. 239-240.
- 17 Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War First* pp. 10-11.
- 18 Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, p. 241.

- 19 Odile Moreau, *Reformlar çağında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Askeri « Yeni düzen » in İnsanları ve Fikirleri 1826-1914*, İstanbul, Bilgi University Press, 2010.
- 20 Mahmud Muhtar Pasha was a victim of the fight led by his father, Gâzi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha against the Unionists, during the time he was Grand Vezir in the Big Cabinet [*Büyük Kabinesi*] in 1912.
- 21 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 682, 28 January 1914.
- 22 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 711, 7 April 1914.
- 23 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, annexe to report No 682, 28 January 1914.
- 24 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, annexe to the report No 682, 28 January 1914.
- 25 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 711, 7 April 1914.
- 26 The monthly salaries of the Brigadier-Generals in the independent divisions were increased by a thousand piastres, and those of the Lieutenant-colonels by 750 piastres.
- 27 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, Report No 711, 7 April 1914. Cf. Odile Moreau, *L'Empire ottoman à l'âge des réformes. Les hommes et les idées du "Nouvel Ordre militaire" 1826-1914*, Maisonneuve et Larose, collection Passé ottoman, présent turc, 2007, pp. 304-306.
- 28 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 723, 10 May 1914.
- 29 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 713, 8 April 1914.
- 30 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 671, 12 January 1914.
- 31 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 717, 11 May 1914.
- 32 *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, Vol. 3, 6<sup>ième</sup> partie (1908-1920), livre I, Ankara, Genelkurmay Basımevi, pp. 236-237.
- 33 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 671, 12 January 1914.
- 34 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 671, 12 January 1914.
- 35 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 723. 10 May 1914.
- 36 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 723, 10 May 1914.
- 37 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 723, 10 May 1914.
- 38 S. H. A. T., 7N1638, Constantinople, report No 723. 10 May 1914.
- 39 Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *Atatürk. An Intellectual Biography*, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 72.
- 40 In the recruitment law of 1909.
- 41 Erik-Jan Zürcher, "The Ottoman Soldier in World War I" in Erik-Jan Zürcher (ed.), *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building. From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey*, London-New-York, I. B. Tauris, 2010, p. 171.

- 42 Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of Ottomans*, pp. 243-244.
- 43 Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, *Prelude to War*, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2006, p. 157. Cf. août 1914/1332 (Hicri). BBA-DH.UMVM, Dosya Nr 128, Gömlek No 85.
- 44 However, there were various statuses among the refugees. Refugees from the Italian occupation of Trablusgarb and Benghazi enjoyed exemption from conscription for a time.
- 45 Draftees who began their service before the age of 20 could enjoy a reduction. However this situation changed with the regulation issued on 29 April 1915. Cf. Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, Vol. 1, *Prelude to War*, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2006, pp. 157-158.
- 46 BBA-BEO 322709, Harbiye Tezkere 501/367; BBA-İrade 14373, July, 20 1330/ August 20, 1914. Cf. Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, *Prelude to War*, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2006, p.158.
- 47 Mehmet Beşikçi, *The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War: Between Voluntarism and Resistance*, Leiden, Brill, 2012, pp. 113-115.
- 48 Carl von Clausewitz, developed in *Vom Kriege* the concept of “Absoluter Krieg” [Absolute Warfare] in the first half of the 19th century.



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# The First World War in Contemporary Russian Historiography - New Areas of Research

Iskander GILYAZOV\*

## Abstract

*For a long time in Soviet (Russian) historiography, the First World War (WWI) was known as the “forgotten war”. Therefore it can be said that during Soviet times, the history of WWI was in many respects only studied informally. Over the last 15 to 20 years, however, this topic has experienced something of a renaissance in Russia. This can be seen in the publication of a considerable number of sources and in the expansion of the perspectives of modern historiography – historians have begun to study topics that had, until recently, almost never been examined. The centenary of WWI no doubt has had an influence on the growth of interest in research regarding the war – at the state level, we notice an attempt to revive the historical memory of events that happened a century ago. In this article, the major trends of contemporary Russian historiography of the First World War will be examined and analysed.*

## Key Words

First World War, Russia, Soviet historiography, contemporary historiography, war literature.

This article is titled “The First World War in Contemporary Russian Historiography –New Areas of

Research”. I deliberately made this specification, because currently, there is in Russian historiography, increasing interest in the history of the First World War. Not only is the number of publications growing daily, but the number of research issues brought up by experts is also expanding. Many of these issues are novel in the context of Russian historiography, which is also why it is almost impossible to cover the entire gamut of problems in modern Russian historiography in one article. This article therefore restricts itself to examining the most notable achievements that historians have registered over the last few years.

In order to understand how historiographic approaches and interpretations have changed during the last decades, it is necessary to remember how this tragedy was studied after the end of the First World War by Soviet historians.

Even Mikhail Pokrovskiy, the famous Russian historian of the 1920s, called the First World War the “forgotten war”,<sup>1</sup> and in many respects he was right. During the Soviet era, this area of study

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was not popular amongst historians, to say the least. Immediately after the end of the war, Russia underwent huge political changes. Both the revolution of 1917 and the civil war shook society to its core and fundamentally altered its character, arguably overshadowing politically the events that had taken place between 1914 and 1918.

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Many of the heroes and eminent commanders of the WWI later were the ones that fought against the Bolsheviks during the civil war.

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To interpret the past, including the First World War, Soviet historical sciences used in the main the class approach; there were therefore “popular”, “attractive”, “irrelevant” and even “closed” or redundant issues. The events of the past were examined in the light of their importance in the formation of socialism and communism. According to the historian Vladimir Mal’kov, the study of the First World War “didn’t carry a systematic character and was even considered as having lost its significance”.<sup>2</sup> Which begs the question of why this happened.

The attitude towards the First World War in Soviet society and therefore in Soviet historical studies was very tendentious. The war and its aims were considered imperialistic, and Lenin’s comment “about changing the imperialistic war into a civil war” took

predominance when characterising the conflict. The war was understood as a defence of the monarchy and the bourgeoisie. It therefore did not have real heroes – they had all protected tsarism, after all, and in the Soviet way of thinking, heroes were only those that defended the revolution. Many of the heroes and eminent commanders of the First World War later were the ones that fought against the Bolsheviks during the civil war, which also left its mark on the attitude of Soviet sciences towards the events of 1914-1918.

Moreover, Russia actually did not gain any striking victory that could be used for political and ideological purposes. Of crucial importance is the fact that Russia dropped out of the war by concluding the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk before Germany was defeated, which meant that Russia had lost to the defeated country. This to my mind also had an impact on the attitude of historians towards the First World War.

However, this does not mean that during the Soviet era the historiography did not appeal to the First World War. The subject, of course, could not be avoided – after all the two revolutions (in February and October 1917) had taken place during the war. Thus, some of the topics, such as the actual events of the war, foreign policy, the history of the labour and socialist movements, and the history of the European countries received a certain amount of coverage during the war. The history of Russia at the same time was analysed in the light

of preconditions for carrying out the October Revolution. That is, numerous studies had been carried out, but they were solely of a tendentious nature and were devoted mostly to social, economic and political problems. Furthermore, when the Second World War broke out in 1939, this particular subject matter became even less of a priority.

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The centenary of WWI no doubt has had an influence on the growth of interest in research regarding the war – at the state level, we notice an attempt to revive the historical memory of events that happened a century ago.

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Recently, even outwardly, attitudes towards the First World War have changed noticeably, and it should be noted this is not only connected to the centenary of the outbreak of the war. Since the collapse of the USSR, interest in this field has continued to grow. In different regions of the country, various events are held, including, conferences, seminars and “roundtables”. The number of academic publications has increased exponentially, memorials to the participants of the war have been opened (there is an impressive monument in the city of Kaliningrad for example), and films about the war and historical personalities have been produced (the recent premiere

in Moscow of the film “Unnoticed Heroes of an Unknown War” about the participation of the Volga Tatars in the war, garnered great interest not only in Tatarstan but beyond). Many academic events are held by the Russian Association of the First World War Historians. The centenary of the outbreak of the war was also a reason behind the creation in the State Duma of the Russian Federation of a special commission that oversaw preparations for the centenary of the outbreak of war. Thus, it can be seen that the study of the history of the First World War is now supported at the national/federal level. The basis of this change is the awareness of the need for more in-depth studies of the past, and the desire to understand the meaning and the place of the First World War as one of the greatest events of the twentieth century, which changed the face of the world and Russia in particular. This was also demonstrated by a recent representative conference in Moscow, dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the war, in which I had the opportunity to participate –the list of the section names alone confirmed the increased interest in Russia in the First World War.

It is clear that over the past two decades historians have had the opportunity to analyse these events without any government regulation or interference; in other words, more objectively and more comprehensively than ever before. This has resulted in numerous studies on a wide variety

of aspects of the history of the war. Unfortunately it is nigh on impossible to describe them all in one article of limited length.

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### The attitude towards the First World War in Soviet society and therefore in Soviet historical studies was very tendentious.

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It should be noted here that the desire to be rid of the ideological dogmas of the Bolshevik past sometimes plays a cruel joke in the estimations of history: some historians and journalists now stand for the diametrically opposite position - the opponents of the war for them are now traitors, and the generals, officers and soldiers are the only true patriots and defenders of the monarchy. In fact, we can see the continuation of this one-sided approach when considering the question of who is to be blamed for the outbreak of the war. The Romanov dynasty in this interpretation is idealized, and Germany and Austria-Hungary are considered the guilty parties. Subjectivity in historical works clearly continues to exist.

At this juncture, it is worth highlighting the major themes and issues that are of particular interest to modern Russian historians, and to highlight the most important trends in the development of Russian historiography of the First World War.

In recent years, there have been two notable global trends. First of all, much

attention has been given to the source base, primarily to the publication of documents and memoirs; secondly, the subject area has expanded significantly. Many different kinds of documents,<sup>3</sup> memoirs and diaries of contemporary witnesses of the war - the memoirs of Nikolay Astrov, Pjotr Badmaev, Aleksei Brusilov, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Ivan Grygorovich, Alexander Rediger and Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich<sup>4</sup> for instance - have been published. Works by emigrant historians (Nikolai Golovin, Victor Kobylin, Melgunov) have also been published,<sup>5</sup> and books (including some of the new studies by foreign authors such as William Fuller, Eric Lor, Giles Macdono and Norman Stone) have been translated.<sup>6</sup>

There are a large variety of themes in the works on the history of the First World War. General works<sup>7</sup> and works about battles at different fronts, including the Caucasian and Persian fronts,<sup>8</sup> have been issued.

Another fact worth noting is that fundamental studies on the generals and officers of the Russian army have also been published, the most striking example being the two-volume work by S.V. Volkov entitled *The Generals and Staff Officers of the Russian Army: A Martyrology's Experience*,<sup>9</sup> which provides an account and description of some of the generals and officers that participated in the First World War, some of whom then died during the Civil War or in exile, or were subject to repression in the 1920s and 1930s. This

reference work also gives the estimate of the number of Russian casualties during the war at 9,347,300.

The problem of captivity – one of the more recent and more significant important topics of the last decade - has also generated much attention from the modern historian.<sup>10</sup> Here it is important to mention a work by Oksana Nagornaya titled *Another Military Experience: Russian Prisoners of the First World War in Germany*, published in 2010. This study, in my opinion, is an example of a qualitative analysis of almost all of the aspects of the history of Russian prisoners of war (POW) in Germany, in which Nagornaya explores the history of Russian prisoners of the First World War in terms of everyday history, in that she considers and conceptualises captivity as an experience of the “small person”, or the “common person”. Of particular note is the fact that in her monograph, Nagornaya brings to light topics that had previously been little studied in Russian historiography, such as the feelings experienced by prisoners of war when coming into contact with a foreign culture, their everyday lives, the relationships within the POW community, and their reactions to the political turmoil in Europe. The camp is seen as a symbol of the twentieth century, as by the beginning of the First World War it had become “an integral means of warfare”.<sup>11</sup> Nagornaya considers Russian prisoners of war in German camps not as objects/victims of violence, as was previously the case in

historiography, but mostly as “involved subjects that influenced the character of the camp system and the experience of detention.”<sup>12</sup>

It should also be noted that historians have not only undertaken studies of Russian prisoners of war but also the fate of German prisoners of war and those of its allies - including the Ottoman Empire- held captive on Russian territory. A research project currently being undertaken by the author of this article and a group of researchers at Kazan University seeks to describe and analyse the fate of Turkish prisoners held in the province of Kazan and other provinces of the Middle Volga.

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**The history of Russia at the same time was analysed in the light of preconditions for carrying out the October Revolution.**

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Historical research quite often appeals to the history of the home front; here, such problems as the military potential of Russia, its economic development and the state of its finances are raised.<sup>13</sup> Historians pay much attention to studying the influence of war on Russian society, with a number of new works devoted to the study of the various problems that arose as a result of war in the regions.<sup>14</sup>

The research into the history of the First World War in recent times has acquired an increasing diversity in

Russian historiography. As an example of this, we can consider some of the research trends in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the regions of the Russian Federation. We should first of all note that the Middle Volga region is a multinational territory with a multi-confessional/multi-religious population. As the Muslim factor played a considerable role during the war but was also somewhat difficult to study during the Soviet period, historians are now particularly active in addressing this imbalance. Thus, Dilyara Usmanova in her publications has investigated the experience of the Duma and the factional and non-parliamentary activities of the Muslim deputies, as well as the influence of the national-religious movement of the Muslim peoples of the Empire over these activities. In many ways she has succeeded in analysing the position, characteristics and significance of the Muslim representatives in the process of forming the parliamentary system of the country, including the period of the First World War.<sup>15</sup>

Rustem Ciunchuk uses a new methodological approach to study the history of national relations in the early twentieth century, a period that includes the First World War. He deals with a complex of ethno-confessional and regional issues through the prism of the first Russian Parliament, the election campaign and parliamentary activities of non-Russian deputies of the State Duma and the newly formed national political elite.<sup>16</sup> This perspective makes

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it possible also to demonstrate the reflection in parliamentary discussions of certain specific national and religious issues, including those pertaining to Muslims.<sup>17</sup> In a summarizing article entitled “The national question in the State Duma on the eve and during the First World War,” R. Ciunchuk shows that the Duma was the only legal site during the First World War to discuss national issues and was where a parliamentary struggle against xenophobia and intolerance took place, a forum in which Polish, Russian, Muslim, German, Jewish, Ukrainian, Armenian, Baltic and other issues were keenly discussed. However, despite the political loyalty of the national elites of Duma, the authorities, even during the extreme conditions of war, refused to admit the equal rights of peoples, which served only to deepen already existing divisions and thus hasten the disintegration of the Empire.<sup>18</sup>

An international conference titled ‘Tatar People and the Peoples of the Volga Region during the First World War’ was held in October 2014 at The Institute of History of the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences. The participants

presented regional historians' newest and most interesting research trends, which included topics as diverse as but not limited to ethnicity and religion, regional economy; public moods and everyday life in the rear; the state of prisoners of war, refugees and internees; the socio-cultural development of the Volga region during the war; the First World War in the lives of the famous in the Volga region; the memory of war: source studies and the culturological aspects; the consequences of war from a "human perspective" and the problems of demography, family and childhood.<sup>19</sup>

Historians have also drawn attention to topics connected with the role of Islam and Muslims in the First World War. The Muslim subjects of the Russian Empire were at that time in an extremely difficult situation – the state authorities openly expressed their suspicions and their distrust, believing that the Muslims at any moment were ready to support the Ottoman Empire and the Sultan's call for jihad against the Entente.<sup>20</sup> A monograph by Iskander Gilyazov and Leila Gataullina, published in Kazan in 2014,<sup>21</sup> for the first time in Russian historiography deals with the topic of Muslim prisoners of war held in German captivity during the war and examines German attempts to use the Islamic factor as leverage. The monograph refers to the history of the two so-called "special" camps built to house and detain Muslim prisoners of war: Halbmondlager and Weinberglager. It also shows the various elements of

German propaganda that sought to convince the Muslim POWs to join the 'holy war' on the side of Germany and the Ottoman Empire. The history of the First World War had not yet attracted the attention of Russian historians from this perspective, in that they used to examine the events of the war primarily from the Russian side, with little reference to sources from foreign archives. In referring substantially to a considerable bulk of material from the German archives, this monograph can be considered one of the new trends in Russian historiography.

Interestingly, in the historical literature we may find new interpretations of the causes of the revolutionary crisis in Russia in 1917, which was often presented as the result of a conspiracy, and of the activities of certain external forces and Russian revolutionaries. Such interpretations had been studied specifically until recently,<sup>22</sup> but now a number of researchers believe that the collapse of Tsarist Russia was the result, amongst various reasons, of corruption, a weakened Russian economy, and lack of talent amongst many military commanders. This assessment, for example, was supported by many of the participants at various international conferences held on the anniversary of the First World War in September 2004, November 2013 and September 2014.<sup>23</sup> During these conferences, participants paid much attention to the political outcomes and consequences of the Great War. They also affirmed that

a great number of Russian historians consider the period between 1914 and 1945 as an integral historical period of the world wars, local conflicts and revolutionary upheavals, that paved the way for human progress towards industrial modernization.

## Conclusion

It should be noted that the literature that has been published in the last 10-15

years on the history of the First World War is very extensive. In this article, the most important accomplishments of Russian historiography have been underscored. It is possible that some aspects may have been overlooked. Nevertheless, this clearly shows the diversity of interests amongst modern Russian historians with regards to some of the newest and more novel issues pertaining to the history of what is arguably the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century.

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