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## The Constitutional Revolution, Reform, and War, 1908–1918

### RESTORATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

Figuratively speaking, the Ottoman Empire entered the twentieth century on 23 July 1908, the day Sultan Abdülhamid II (r.1876–1909) restored the constitution he had shelved thirty years earlier. His decision generated great optimism and euphoria throughout the empire, as the new era held the promise of ‘liberty, equality and justice’ for all its citizens. Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as the various ethnic communities – Greeks, Bulgars, Macedonians, Armenians, Arabs, Kurds, Jews and Turks – embraced each other in the streets in anticipation of the constitutional age. Overnight, the press was free to publish without fear of censorship; people congregated in coffee houses, knowing that there were no Palace spies in their midst. In towns and cities, crowds marched with banners and musical bands to the governors’ offices and made speeches in praise of the new order. An amnesty was declared for political prisoners, and exiles began to return to Istanbul from Europe, Egypt, and other parts of the far-flung empire.

In the provinces, the event was celebrated with equal gusto. The heads of various committees who had opposed the sultan’s autocracy promised to cooperate and swore oaths of loyalty to the empire. The sultan’s advisers, though not the sultan himself, were

held responsible for the autocracy; by restoring the constitution without a struggle, Abdülhamid had succeeded in hijacking the movement. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the principal architect of the constitutional movement, halted the insurrection and threatened to renew the struggle should Abdülhamid go back on his word. As the old regime collapsed, there was a breakdown of law and order. The Committee attempted to assume control; for the time being it was the only body that had the prestige and authority to support the government.

But the CUP had always been a secret organization with its roots in Macedonia. There was no hierarchy in which responsibility proceeded up and down the pyramid instead of outwards. There was no recognized leadership, and the CUP has therefore been described as a 'party of leaders' who made decisions by consensus in the central committee elected by the general congress. It had no well-defined ideology; its goal was to 'save the empire', and to reform it so that its multi-religious, multi-ethnic society could survive in the world of the twentieth century. Because Ottoman society was predominantly Muslim, Unionist liberals could not secularize the constitution by removing the Clause XI that declared that Islam was the religion of the state. Islamists among the Unionists argued that the constitution was in accord with the Sharia, the holy law of Islam, because the Sharia sanctioned consultation or *meşveret*. Thus the Unionists maintained the fiction that the Sharia prevailed under the constitution, though conservatives claimed that it did not. For the moment, the Unionists had succeeded in carrying out a coup d'état within the ruling elite rather than a revolution among the social classes. But within a year, they began to introduce reforms that shook society. By calling for elections to elect the assembly, they changed the social composition of parliament and the cabinet, giving representation to local elites – Muslim and non-Muslim, Turk and non-Turk. These elites, in turn, altered the character of the legislation.

The period of celebration came to an end in late August. There followed a spate of strikes by workers who believed that the constitution would also ameliorate their situation. However, they were wrong, for the constitutionalists believed that the economic order required social peace with disciplined and subservient workers. The constitutional regime also alarmed foreign powers, who

feared that a resurgent Ottoman empire would naturally try and curb their imperialist ambitions. The British were concerned about the impact of successful constitutionalism on Egypt and India, and therefore adopted a cautious, and sometimes hostile, attitude towards the constitutionalists. Other powers acted more vigorously. In October, Bulgaria declared its independence and Vienna annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the island of Crete announced its decision to unite with Greece. These events were serious blows which struck at the new regime and undermined its prestige.

In Istanbul, the Liberals who dominated the bureaucracy of the Sublime Porte – the seat of government – pressured the CUP to vacate the political stage now that power had been wrested from the Palace. But the Unionists refused to leave, convinced that they would be able to exert even more influence after the December elections that they intended to win. The Unionists, coming from the lower middle class of Muslim society, realized that they lacked the social status to rule directly by taking over the cabinet. They therefore counted on controlling the government by dominating parliament.

The results of the 1908 elections disappointed Liberal hopes and confirmed Unionist expectations. They seemed to win an overwhelming majority, though Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha was sure that the CUP would not command a majority when parliament convened. For the moment, the sultan acted as a constitutional ruler, while the cabinet set about reforming unconstitutional laws and reorganizing the state so as to create a modern, centralized structure. The aim was to establish a system that would be accepted by the Great Powers, who would then abandon the extra-territorial privileges they enjoyed by virtue of the capitulations. The Palace had been subdued, but the Sublime Porte, that is to say, the bureaucrats supported by the Liberals, hoped to monopolize political power by marginalizing the CUP. Kamil Pasha believed he could do that by gaining control of Ottoman armed forces, a crucial force in the power structure. Consequently, in February 1909, he replaced the ministers of war and marine with his own men, convinced that he had the support of parliament. But members of his own cabinet resigned on the grounds that Kamil had made changes in the cabinet without consulting his colleagues. Parliament met on 13 February in order to question Kamil,

claiming that his actions had been unconstitutional. Kamil threatened to resign; instead parliament passed a vote of no confidence against him and his cabinet fell. Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, an official who had served the old regime but was sympathetic to the Unionist programme of reform, succeeded Kamil.

Kamil's fall was a major setback for the Liberals and for all anti-Unionist elements. They included the non-Muslim elites, particularly the Greek patriarchate, the Palace and the reactionaries, as well as the British embassy. The opposition mounted a bitter press campaign against the CUP and were heartened by the support they received from the embassy. In April, reactionaries came out in opposition to reform and called for a union based on Islam. Through their paper, the *Volkan* ('Volcano'), they appealed to the clerics in parliament, the rank and file in the army, and the urban lower classes.

## COUNTER-REVOLUTION

As a result of the anti-Unionist propaganda, the troops of the Istanbul garrison, led by students from the religious schools, mutinied on 13 April 1909. They demanded the restoration of the Sharia (the holy law of Islam), the dismissal of the cabinet, and the seclusion of Muslim women, liberated by the new regime. Hilmi Pasha resigned while Unionist deputies went into hiding, fearing for their lives. Abdülhamid seized the initiative. He accepted all the demands of the rebels and on the following day appointed his protégé, Tevfik Pasha, as the new grand vizier.

It seemed as though the counter-revolution had triumphed and the CUP had been routed. That was the case in Istanbul where the CUP had no roots. But in Macedonia, the situation was different. The Third Army and its Unionist supporters denounced the mutiny as unconstitutional and bombarded the Palace with telegrams threatening retaliation unless the constitutional regime was restored. They demanded the arrest of certain prominent Liberals who they claimed had fanned the flames of counter-revolution. Meanwhile, officers loyal to the constitution organized a force known as the 'Action Army' (*Hareket Ordusu*) and set out from Salonika to restore order in the capital and punish the mutineers.

The Action Army was led by General Mahmud Şevket Pasha, a strict disciplinarian who stood above politics. He refused to be placated by the deputation sent to assure him that the constitutional order was intact and all would be well once order was restored. He invested the capital and occupied it on 24 April after some light action. Meanwhile, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies formed a 'National Assembly' and convened on 22 April at San Stefano, a Greek village on the Sea of Marmara outside the city. They guaranteed the constitutional regime and went on to depose Sultan Abdülhamid; the Assembly's decision was ratified by the *fetva*, a legal opinion, issued by the *Şeyhulislam*.

In the event of failure in Istanbul, the counter-revolutionaries had intended to provoke foreign intervention by staging the massacre of Armenians in Adana province, a province accessible by sea through the port of Mersin. Hagop Babikian, deputy for Edirne and a member of the commission sent to investigate the massacres, stated the Adana massacres took place because the counter-revolutionaries hated the Armenians for their loyalty to the new regime and the constitution. Therefore they had to destroy the Armenians if they wanted to destroy the constitutional order. But despite the massacres, there was no foreign intervention, though French warships sailed towards Mersin. The balance of power in Europe had changed dramatically after German and Italian unification; unilateral Great Power gunboat diplomacy was no longer possible without threatening the peace of Europe. For its part, the new regime was determined to foster good relations with the non-Muslims. Therefore, on 5 May, the cabinet approved a sum of TL 30,000 for the victims of the Adana massacres; on 12 May the chamber approved a proclamation expressing regret for the events in Adana and enjoining accord and fraternity on all elements of the population in all Anatolian provinces. Colonel Ahmed Cemal Bey (1872–1922) was sent as governor of Adana. Cemal was a leading Unionist officer and often described as one of the Young Turks 'triumvirate', the other two being Enver (1881–1922) and Talat (1874–1921). He took harsh measures against the counter-revolutionaries in order to restore order; for the first time in Ottoman history, a number of prominent Muslim notables were hanged for their role in the massacres.

The restoration of the constitutional regime proved to be a mixed blessing for the CUP. Though the liberal and conservative opponents of the CUP had been crushed as an organized body, they remained alive in spirit. Moreover, the counter-revolution had been suppressed under Mahmud Şevket Pasha's command and he therefore became the dominant force in the government. Unionists became his junior partners, especially after he ordered the army to become independent of all political influences. He was appointed Inspector-General of the First, Second, and Third Army Corps, an appointment that made him independent of the war minister and the cabinet and therefore the virtual dictator of the new regime.

#### THE ACCESSION OF MEHMED V

Mehmed Reşad, known as Sultan Mehmed V (1844–1918), succeeded Abdülhamid in 1909. Son of Abdülmecid (1839–61), he was considered to be the ideal constitutional monarch. He was sixty-five when he came to the throne and bereft of political experience and personal ambition. He was therefore willing to do the bidding of the government while the CUP maintained their influence in the Palace by having their members appointed to his entourage. Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha was again appointed grand vizier, but his cabinet did not include a single Unionist. Society was not ready to accept members of the lower middle classes in government! The Unionists attempted to have a law modified that would permit deputies – their deputies – to be appointed as under-secretaries to various ministries. In that way, they hoped to influence the working of the cabinet. But parliament refused to modify Article 67 of the constitution and the Unionists were forced, against convention, to place their members directly into the cabinet. Mehmed Cavid (1875–1926), an economist and deputy for Salonika, became finance minister in June 1909 and played a significant role in the years that followed. In August, Mehmed Talat, perhaps the most prominent member of the CUP and grand vizier in 1917, was appointed interior minister, replacing Ferid Pasha who was intimately associated with the old regime.

The Unionists were now secure in the cabinet, but their position in parliament was weak. The committee was unable to exercise discipline among members elected on its platform but who voted against

its wishes. It is worth emphasizing that the CUP was not a political party and therefore lacked party discipline. It was a movement that included a variety of interests that competed against each other and often clashed. In March 1909, the CUP had agreed to allow the formation of a parliamentary group or 'party', hoping thereby to instil discipline. But the idea had not worked and deputies belonging to the 'party' had voted against amending Article 67. In February 1910, a splinter group broke away from the CUP and formed the People's Party, destroying the myth of a monolithic committee.

Under Mahmud Şevket's watchful eye, political activity was neutralized. The Liberals were discredited and temporarily eclipsed, while the Unionists were forced to work as the Pasha's junior partners, though he was won over to their programme of reforms and modernization. Meanwhile, the Liberals licked their wounds, reorganized and in November 1911 formed the Party of Freedom and Accord, a coalition of all the anti-Unionist groups in the empire.

After the abortive counter-revolution, the reformers were without opposition and therefore able to pass important laws whose purpose was threefold: first, to write into the constitution the political changes that had taken place since July 1908; second, to modernize and unify the empire and its administrative machinery; and third, to pass legislation that would be acceptable to the Great Powers so that they would agree to the abolition of the capitulations that gave foreigners in the empire a privileged position, placing them outside Ottoman law. The 1909 constitutional amendments took away power from the sultan and vested it in the legislature and the cabinet. But legislation that aimed at unifying and modernizing the empire caused disaffection among the non-Turkish, non-Muslim communities and led to serious revolts in Albania. Nor were the government's attempts to overcome the capitulations any more successful. The Powers temporized, refused to make any concessions and demanded economic concessions from the Porte. Because of these treaties, the empire remained a virtual semi-colony until the Porte abolished the capitulations unilaterally in September 1914, while Europe was at war. Meanwhile, the capitulations obstructed reform, violating Ottoman sovereignty and the very concept of a modern, independent state. Despite all the difficulties, the reforms, especially those of the financial regime under

the stewardship of Cavid Bey, made considerable progress. Revenues increased from 148 million liras in 1909 to 184 million in 1910. Even the Ottoman Public Debt administration, a precursor of today's International Monetary Fund, was full of praise for the regime's administrative achievement. In Anatolia, and even in the lawless east, conditions had improved dramatically. The British vice-consul noted that in the province of Van conditions had improved since the constitution and that the peasants no longer feared attacks by Kurdish tribesmen, and were no longer arrested on political grounds, nor did they have to billet government officials and gendarmes.

Despite the reforms and improved conditions, there was considerable political tension, caused partly by Şevket Pasha's capricious behaviour and partly by dissension within the CUP that led to factionalism. The dissension became so acute in 1910/11 that Talat Bey was forced to resign as minister of the interior on 10 February 1911, to be replaced by the more moderate Halil Bey. Such concessions did not lead to political stability and the Committee soon lost control of the assembly. The political situation was aggravated by Italy's declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire and her attack on Tripoli in Libya on 29 September 1911. Grand Vizier İbrahim Hakkı Pasha, who had been ambassador in Rome and had replaced Hilmi Pasha, was forced to resign, to be replaced by the octogenarian, Said Pasha. Mahmud Şevket and the CUP lost much prestige as a result of the war, especially when the Italians captured some of the Greek islands and blockaded the Dardanelles. The Unionists therefore decided, while they had the means to impose their will throughout the empire, to have the Assembly dissolved and to hold early elections in the spring of 1912. The 1912 elections are known as the 'big-stick elections' because the Unionists resorted to coercion and manipulation during the campaign. The CUP won an overwhelming victory but at the expense of alienating their supporters in Macedonia. But the Unionists were not permitted to enjoy power for long. In July 1912, a military group, known as the 'Group of Saviour Officers' and reminiscent of the one that had carried out the coup in 1908, gave an ultimatum to the government and forced Said Pasha's resignation.



## BALKAN WARS AND OTTOMAN DEFEATS

The Liberal cabinets that the Saviour Officers brought to power (Ahmed Muhtar Pasha, 21 July to 29 October 1912, and Kamil Pasha, 28 October 1912 to 23 January 1913) were both anti-Unionist and determined to destroy the CUP. Had the Liberals had more time, and received sufficient diplomatic support from the Powers, especially Britain, following Ottoman defeats in the Balkan War, they might have succeeded in destroying the CUP and surviving military defeat. The Balkan allies, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece, took advantage of Ottoman political dissension and the ongoing war with Italy and attacked the Ottomans in October 1912. Within weeks, Ottoman armies had been routed and the Balkans lost. Before the outbreak of hostilities on 9 October, Britain's Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, had declared in the House of Commons that 'Whatever the outcome might be of the hostilities, in no case would the Powers permit any alteration in the status quo.' But such declarations were quickly forgotten following the Ottoman rout. The Bulgarian army was halted at Çatalca, on the very outskirts of Istanbul, in mid-November, and an armistice was concluded on 3 December. Negotiations opened in London in January 1913, but failed because the Porte refused to surrender the town of Edirne or the Aegean islands. Edirne had been the empire's capital before the conquest of Constantinople and was considered vital for the defence of the city and Ottoman morale.

Kamil Pasha was unwilling to take responsibility for ceding Edirne and the Aegean islands in the teeth of opposition in the army. The officers, who had not yet engaged in battle, wanted another round, convinced of victory in the final encounter. The press also opposed surrender while the CUP encouraged popular resistance. On 13 January, the Powers again urged the Porte to cede Edirne and leave the question of the islands to be settled by the Powers. The Porte was warned that renewed hostilities would expose the Empire to even graver perils, and that at the conclusion of peace the Ottomans would need the 'moral and material support' of the Great Powers; such support would be forthcoming to the extent that the Porte listened to the advice of Europe. However, Germany and Austria supported Ottoman resistance

because the Unionists argued that Edirne was essential for the defence of the capital and therefore could not be surrendered. Before the cabinet could reach a decision, the Unionists forced Kamil's resignation at gunpoint and seized power on 23 January 1913. Talat declared that 'this movement means that we are going to save the national honour or perish in the attempt. We do not want a continuation of the war, but we are determined to keep Edirne. That is a *sine qua non*'. Şevket Pasha formed the new, moderate cabinet and such prominent Unionists as Talat, Cavid, and Enver were conspicuous by their absence. Mahmud Şevket Pasha remained the dominant political figure.

The situation of the new cabinet was critical. Apart from an empty treasury, the Balkan states were threatening to break off negotiations and resume hostilities. Given the political uncertainty, the Unionists adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the opposition, buying off such prominent leaders as Ali Kemal and Rıza Nur, and sending them to sinecures in Europe. Hostilities were renewed when the armistice expired on 3 February. The Porte appealed for Great Power intervention but was told that Edirne had to be ceded before Europe would intervene. By the end of February, Edirne was ready to fall and the government took measures to foil a Liberal coup whose aim was to make Prince Sabaheddin grand vizier. But the coup d'état had also radicalized the CUP. Contemporaries noted how, since seizing power, the Unionists had begun to emulate the French Commune of 1870, and how Edirne had become the equivalent of Alsace-Lorraine for the Ottomans. Edirne fell on 26 March after a six-month siege, and the fall of the city freed the CUP of the odium of surrendering the Ottoman's second capital without a fight. Nevertheless, the CUP lost some of its prestige. Once again, negotiations were opened and the Porte was offered terms worse than those offered to the Kamil Pasha Cabinet.

After the coup of 23 January, Kamil had gone to Cairo, where he discussed with Lord Kitchener the situation in Istanbul. Kitchener was told that 'he [Kamil] did not expect the present Turkish Government to last very long, and that information had reached him as to the probability of another revolution in the very near future'. Kamil then expressed his willingness to come to power in Istanbul, providing 'he could count on the support of the Entente Powers, and more especially of England'. He asked that Grey

consider 'the question whether some adequate foreign control might not be established in regard to administration in Turkey. Such a course was, in his opinion, the only means of preserving Turkey from extinction, and he would be very glad to undertake the task. He added that it would of course be necessary for England and the Powers of the Entente to impose foreign control, as he could not undertake to introduce it himself. Were they, however, to adopt such a policy he would gladly carry it out.'

The Unionists suspected a conspiracy and when Kamil arrived in Istanbul on 28 May he was placed under virtual house arrest. Ahmed Cemal Bey, military governor of the city, recalled in his memoirs that 'The arrival of the Pasha in Constantinople was the surest sign that the insurrection was immediate', and he assured Şevket Pasha that Kamil had 'been brought to Constantinople in order to be made Grand Vizier over your corpse. The arrival of the Pasha is the secret sign that a revolution is imminent.' Sure enough, on 11 June, the Liberals, convinced that the loss of Edirne had undermined Unionist prestige, assassinated the grand vizier, but failed to seize power. The plot was foiled and the opposition eliminated soon after, marking a new phase in Ottoman political life.

By the Treaty of London on 30 May, the Porte surrendered Edirne to Bulgaria, along with all territory west of the Erez-Midya line. For the moment, Enver Bey, the hero of the 23 January coup, lost prestige and his position in the CUP, and Ali Fethi (Okyar, 1880–1943) became the general secretary. After Şevket Pasha's assassination, the Unionists were finally in power. The cabinet, formed by the Egyptian prince, Said Halim Pasha (1863–1921), who also held the portfolio of foreign affairs, was still moderate. Its aim was to conciliate the Arab provinces and the Armenian community by including an Arab grand vizier, as well as Süleyman al-Bustani, a Lebanese-Christian, and Öskan Efendi, an Armenian member of the Dashnak nationalist movement. That there was no Greek minister in the cabinet simply shows that the impact of the Balkan War had heightened Greek nationalism and the Greek community was no longer considered reliable and part of the Ottoman commonwealth. The cabinet also included such prominent Unionists as Talat (Interior) and Halil (President of the Council of State), İbrahim (Justice), Şükrü (Education). The government took harsh measures against the opposition and over

300 were sent into internal exile to Black Sea ports as a preventive measure. A number of plotters, including Damad Salih Pasha, a relative of the sultan, were hanged.

Differences between the Balkan allies soon led to war. On 28 June 1913, the Bulgarians attacked the Serbs and Greeks, and on 11 July Rumania declared war on Bulgaria; the next day the Ottomans took advantage of the situation and joined the war, acting independently of the Balkan states. Finding Thrace undefended, the Ottomans began to occupy territory they had only recently lost. An imperial *iradé*, decree, authorized the reoccupation of territory belonging to the Empire and the press urged the retaking of Edirne before the Greeks, flushed with victory, did so. But the cabinet was divided, fearful that the violation of the Treaty of London might lead to Great Power intervention. The Unionists called for action arguing that Edirne had been the reason for the coup d'état of 23 January and that the CUP would lose its moral right to rule unless it attempted to regain the city. On 22 July, the day before the fifth anniversary of the revolution, Enver led the army into Edirne and the Unionists fulfilled their promise, regaining some of their lost prestige. Despite foreign pressure and promises, the Porte refused to surrender Edirne again. Talat, whose constituency was Edirne, told the press that 'Ottoman patriotism is not for sale for the price of an increase on customs duties ... Edirne can be bought only at the price of the blood of our devoted and courageous army, ready to sacrifice itself to the last man in order to defend the town.' The Great Powers – Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy – failed to present a united front in Istanbul. Italy assumed a Turcophile attitude, while the German ambassador said he had no instructions from Berlin. Sofia was isolated and forced to negotiate directly with the Porte. Finally, on 29 September, a treaty was signed between the Ottomans and Bulgarians ceding eastern Thrace – including Edirne and Dimotoka – to Istanbul, and included terms for the exchange of populations, an ominous development that had grave implications for the future.

## THE REPERCUSSIONS OF DEFEAT

The crushing defeats of the Balkan War ushered in a period of self-doubt and introspection among the Unionists. While they had been

unwilling to simply surrender to the Balkan alliance, they were more amenable to the dictates of the Great Powers. They became convinced of the need to have foreign expertise to reform Ottoman institutions. Thus in October, the Porte signed a contract with Germany, defining the functions of the military mission that would reform the Ottoman army. The naval agreement with Britain, according to Admiral Limpus who headed the British naval mission, would lead to the renaissance of the navy, but more important still, it would lay the foundations for the creation of heavy industry in the empire. Ahmed Cemal confided to Sir Henry Wilson that while the ‘Turks could not change their military teachers [the Germans], [but] in all else, in finance, administration, navy, they wished to be under British guidance’. But the British were unable to alienate Russia by taking the Ottomans under their wing, and were fearful of the consequences in the European balance of power.

In June 1913, the Russians had proposed to the ambassadors of the Great Powers that the grievances of Ottoman Armenians be met, and the so-called Armenian provinces in eastern Anatolia be placed under a Christian governor on the model of Lebanon. In July, the Porte sent a mission composed of Captain Deedes and three Muslims to study the demands of the Ottoman population. Meanwhile a Colonel Hawker, known for his honesty and fairness, was placed at the head of the gendarmeries of Erzurum, Trabzon, and Van. According to Count Ostrorog, who had served as adviser to the ministry of justice and knew the empire intimately, ‘The Turks, aware that the Armenian question had absolutely to be settled by means straight and effective, were desirous of executing the work of Armenian reform under British control. Diplomatic considerations alone prevented the scheme from being carried out’.

In February 1914, the Porte adopted Great Power proposals to divide the provinces of eastern Anatolia into six zones, with a foreign inspector-general chosen from small, neutral states in each zone. The inspectors-general would be charged with the reforms necessary to establish an efficient administration. But such reforms, under foreign supervision, observed the journalist Ahmed Emin [Yalman], meant ‘in the phraseology of the Eastern Question, a preliminary to amputation. The fiction of the maintenance of

Turkish sovereign rights was, in every case, offered merely as an anaesthetic.' In April 1914, when Kurdish tribes, encouraged by Russian agents, attacked the Armenians of Bitlis, the Porte sent troops and gave arms to the Armenian community so that they might defend themselves. An Armenian paper praised the Porte for the complete confidence it had shown in the Armenian community by distributing arms so that they might defend the city against the reactionaries. In fact, arming the Armenians of Bitlis showed the weakness of the Unionist state; it was a candid confession that the state was unable to defend its citizens in eastern Anatolia, the principal function and claim of any modern state. However, the rebellious Kurds were punished so as to prevent further outbreaks of violence. In May, eleven were found guilty and hanged, and their bodies were displayed in the city for all to see. In July, the Chamber voted 40,000 pounds for the salaries and expenses for the two inspectors-general and their staffs so that the reform programme could progress.

Ever since the diplomatic isolation the Ottomans had experienced during and after the Balkan War, the Unionists decided that they must form an alliance with one of the two European blocs: the Triple Entente composed of Britain, France, and Russia, or the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy. The Unionists preferred the Triple Entente and approached, in turn, England, France, and Russia, only to be rebuffed by each. Germany was equally reluctant to form an alliance with Istanbul after the dismal Ottoman performance in the Balkan War; the Ottomans were likely to be both a diplomatic and military liability. But after the outbreak of the Austro-Serbian war in July 1914, Berlin calculated that there was little to lose and much to gain from an Ottoman alliance. Only when Berlin seemed sure of entering the war did it turn to Istanbul. On 28 July, Berlin offered the Porte definitive terms for an alliance, guaranteeing Ottoman territorial integrity vis-à-vis Russia *if the Porte would place her army under German military command in case of war* and would further bind herself to take Germany's side if Russia entered the war as a belligerent. The kaiser saw the empire and the caliphate as the basis from which to foment *jihad*, or holy war, against England. He wrote to his ambassador: 'England must ... have the mask of Christian peaceableness torn publicly off her face ... Our consuls

in Turkey and India, agents, etc., must inflame the whole Mohammedan world to wild revolt against this hateful, lying, conscienceless people of hagglers; for if we are to be bled to death, at least England shall lose India.’

#### ALLIANCE WITH GERMANY

The secret alliance was concluded on 2 August 1914. The Porte assured the military mission ‘effective control in the conduct of the war’, placing the Ottoman army under its control. Fritz Fischer, the German historian, wrote that the alliance ‘was concluded with an eye to the unleashing of a pan-Islamic movement, which was to lead off with a “Holy War” ... Turkey thereby acquired an important dual role in Germany’s war strategy. Guardian of the Straits, with the duty of severing communications between Russia in the Black Sea and the western allies, and of exercising a constant threat against Russia’s southern flank, she was also meant to act as a springboard from which Germany should attack Britain at her two most vulnerable points, India and Egypt.’

The Unionists saw the alliance with Germany as an insurance treaty designed to protect the empire from the ambitions of European imperialism. Like most observers at the time, they expected a war of short duration to be concluded with a negotiated peace in which they expected to be protected by their German patron. Britain’s decision to confiscate two warships built for the Ottomans in British yards had a profound effect on the mood in the country and strengthened Germany’s position in the empire. The British fleet had begun to blockade the straits long before Istanbul entered the struggle. The cabinet responded by mobilizing and declaring martial law on 3 August. Talat explained that mobilization was a defensive measure and the Porte would remain neutral until the end of the war if England and France gave separate guarantees to protect Ottoman territorial integrity and independence and accepted the abolition of the capitulations. London and Paris were unwilling to do that; the promise of dividing and sharing Ottoman territory was one of the principal means of keeping the Entente together.

The mobilization had grave consequences for the economy, especially for agriculture. Men between the ages of 18 and 40 were

called up just when they were needed to harvest the crops, and women were forced to take over their labour. The country's finances, already in a poor state, were also adversely affected, making the government even more beholden to Berlin. On 10 August, the escape of the two German warships, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*, into the Sea of Marmara, strengthened Germany's hand even more, especially over the Ottoman navy that had hitherto been controlled by the British naval mission. The Ottoman cabinet proposed disarming the ships. But Baron von Wangenheim, German ambassador at the Porte, refused to consider such a measure; he threatened to join the Russians and partition the empire if the Ottomans failed to comply. The cabinet refused to be intimidated and settled for the fiction that the Germans had sold the ships to the Porte. The Unionists were not timid men and they exploited the crisis to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the Powers. In September, they abrogated the capitulations unilaterally, despite diplomatic protests. At the same time, they hung on to their neutrality, arguing that they could not go to war until Bulgaria and Rumania had been won over to the Triple Alliance. French success at the battle of the Marne in September 1914 strengthened the hand of the neutralist faction in the CUP. After the setback in France, the German general staff was forced to make fundamental changes to its war plans and required a holding operation against Russia. That involved the Ottomans opening a front on the Caucasus against Russia. Thereafter, pressure on the Porte increased day by day; Berlin exploited the Porte's need for money, as the government had begun to feel the cost of six weeks of mobilization. Germany acquired total control of the Ottoman navy when Admiral Wilhelm Souchon was given command and the British naval mission under Admiral Limpus was recalled. Richard Crawford, who had served as adviser since 1904 at the Ottoman ministry of customs and later finance, also resigned. German experts virtually took over the Ottoman state! The American ambassador wrote that '... Germany has absolute control of Turkish Navy; their military mission almost controls Turkish Army. They have von der Goltz in the palace and German Ambassador advising the cabinet'.

On 27 September 1914, Cavid confided to his diary: 'I am certain Germany will never give us any money until we enter the war'. Berlin was told of the country's dire financial situation and in



October the first instalment of the loan arrived, with promises of more to come when the Ottomans entered the war. On 29 October, Admiral Souchon, supported by Enver Pasha's war party, attacked Russian shipping and ports on the Black Sea and the Ottomans became belligerents. The timing of the incident was determined by German strategy. The Germans had just launched an attack in Poland and they wanted to tie down Russian forces in the Crimea and the Odessa region. After the Black Sea incident, the Russians were forced to launch an offensive in the Caucasus and diverted troops from European fronts. The Ottoman entry had a similar impact on British forces in the Middle East, especially in Egypt, to which the Ottomans had a historic claim. Once Russia, Britain, and France had declared war on the Porte, the Ottomans were able to proclaim a *jihad* on these powers, declaring that it was a sacred duty of all Muslims to fight the enemies of the sultan-caliph. The goal was to foment rebellion among the Muslim population in the colonies and to motivate Muslim soldiers at home.

Guided by Germany's strategic needs, the Ottomans launched a major offensive in December 1914. The British responded by bombarding the outer forts at the Dardanelles, causing great anxiety in Istanbul that led to talk of moving the government to Anatolia and Thrace, to Konya and Edirne. The Sarıkamış offensive proved to be a military disaster for the Ottoman army, which was totally unprepared for such a campaign in the middle of winter. The army, led by Enver Pasha with Bronsart von Schellendorff as his chief of staff, was decimated, and Enver returned to Istanbul in January 1915 a chastened man.

## THE OTTOMAN ROLE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The Ottoman war may be divided into two principal phases: from November 1914 to March 1917, the outbreak of revolution in Russia, a period that may be described as the 'Years of Crisis and Revival'; and from March 1917 to October 1918, a period of 'Resurgent Ambition and Defeat'. During most of the first phase, the situation of the empire was often precarious. The Dardanelles campaign of 1915, launched by the British and French in order to lessen the pressure on Russia and open a supply line to southern Russia via the Black Sea, threatened the very existence of the

empire. By January 1915, the situation had become sufficiently dangerous for the Unionists to consider making a separate peace. They approached the British but were rebuffed. The first major bombardment of the outer forts began on 19 February 1915. Such was the fear that the Entente would break through the straits and reach the capital, that the Unionists began to prepare to retreat into Anatolia and Thrace in order to continue the struggle. By March, the situation had become quite desperate, though it eased when the French battleship, *Bouvet*, was sunk at the mouth of the straits on 18 March. Churchill's bombardment of the straits from the sea was essentially a political act designed to bring Greece and Bulgaria into the war on the Entente side. Churchill even hoped that the bombardment would provoke an uprising of the Greek and Armenian communities in the capital and a Muslim movement against the Unionists, who were described in British propaganda as atheists and freemasons, under the control of Ottoman Jews. The British were relying on the Liberal opponents of the CUP, led by Prince Sabadeddin, to overthrow the government in Istanbul should the opportunity arise. Thus apart from waging war on two fronts, the Unionists had to contend with the possibility of an internal coup d'état. The news from the other fronts was equally discouraging: in May 1915, Russian forces advanced into eastern Anatolia, captured Tutuk, Malazgirt, and Van, and began preparations for a major winter offensive. The British continued to advance in Iraq, capturing Kut on 3 June. The Ottomans, on the other hand, failed to make any impression on the Egyptian front. To make matters worse, Italy, which had remained neutral so far, seemed about to join the Entente.

The relocation and massacre of the Greek and Armenian communities in Anatolia began precisely at this point, the Ottomans convinced that the Greeks and Armenians had thrown in their lot with the enemy. As the Ottoman parliament had been adjourned in March 1915, the cabinet issued a temporary order on 27 May 1915 to relocate the Armenian, and later the Greek, population away from regions in the war zones to areas where they could not aid the enemy. In 1918, during the armistice period, Greek deputies in the Ottoman parliament held General Liman von Sanders and the German military responsible for imple-

menting the policy of relocation against the Greek community of western Anatolia. When the grand vizier asked him to explain the deportations of Ottoman Greeks from the *vilayet* of Aydın, von Sanders claimed that ‘if these deportations ceased, he could not guarantee the security of the Turkish army and stressed that military necessities in time of war outweighed political motives. He also stressed that the German General Staff approved entirely of his activities concerning the expulsion of the Greeks from the Aivalı [Ayvalık] district.’ The policy led to massacres and great suffering on the part of the non-Muslims. But Dr Harry Stuermer, the correspondent for the *Kölnische Zeitung* in the Ottoman Empire in 1915–16, wrote in his memoirs, *Two War Years in Constantinople* (London, 1917, 59–61), that ‘deportations began to abate in the summer of 1916 after the fall of the Armenian Patriarchate and more or less ceased in December 1916 with the gathering-in of all those who had formerly paid the military exemption tax.’ The situation deteriorated again in 1917 after the outbreak of revolution in Russia.

It is worth noting that the ideology that was promoted by the state was principally pan-Islamism and Ottomanism, and not, as is often claimed, Turkish nationalism. There was a growing awareness of nationalism in Unionist circles, manifested in the *Türk Yurdu* (The Turkish Homeland) group around people like Yusuf Akçura, a Turk from Russia. But this group, though extremely articulate, with a loud voice in the press and among the intelligentsia, did not influence the ideology or the policy of the government, especially in the field of foreign policy. The reason for this was only partly pragmatic and had to do more with the consciousness of both the ruling elite as well as the mass of the people who had to be mobilized. The majority of the population in the empire was Muslim and was therefore more likely to be swayed by an appeal to religious rather than national solidarity, for which there were as yet no symbols. The charisma of the Ottoman dynasty that united the sultanate and caliphate for generations facilitated the appeal to religion. Moreover, the appeal to Islamic solidarity was expected to be effective not only in the Arab provinces and North Africa but also in Iran, Afghanistan, and India – regions where the Germans and the Unionists hoped to foment rebellions against their enemies.

Throughout the second half of 1915, the military situation remained desperate. The success of the expedition at Gallipoli and the threat of an Anglo-French breakthrough continued to hang over the capital, aggravated by the fear of a Bulgarian attack. 'Had the Bulgarians attacked us from the rear while we were fighting ... at Gallipoli, our situation would have been disastrous', wrote Foreign Minister Halil Menteşe in his memoirs. The situation had become so desperate that in September, the Unionists agreed to surrender territory to Sofia in order to win her over to the Triple Alliance. This was seen as a turning-point in the war, an event that altered the balance of power in the Balkans. The Serbo-Bulgarian war that followed ended in Serbia's defeat, enabling Berlin to establish for the first time a direct road link with Istanbul. Moreover, the Dardanelles campaign seemed to be failing as well.

In January 1916, the Entente began to evacuate the Dardanelles peninsula. As soon as the news of the evacuation was announced, there were public celebrations in the capital, organized by the CUP. But the lasting significance of this event, described in the press as 'The Great Victory', was a tremendous boost to Ottoman/Muslim morale. In a single stroke, the trauma of the Balkan Wars was purged and with it the sense of inferiority. The Ottomans were convinced that they had won a decisive victory, having defeated the British fleet (and army) that had threatened their capital for a century. They were also sure that they had done more than their share within the alliance and expected the Germans to recognize and remember to reward their contribution.

However, the British evacuation of Gallipoli did not end the crisis; it now assumed a different form. In January 1916, the Russian army of the Caucasus launched a new offensive and captured Erzurum on 16 February, opening the road into Anatolia. Trabzon fell in April and Erzincan in July. Prior to the fall of Erzurum, General Falkenhayn had noted the precarious situation of the allies, particularly Turkey, observing that she 'would not be able to hold out much longer and already showed signs of wanting to make peace'. It was ironic that with the loss of these Anatolian towns, the chances of peace for the Unionists had become more remote. The Ottoman capture of the Iraqi town of Kut-ul-Amara from the British expeditionary force on 29 April 1916, and the surrender of General Townsend and his army, was the only bright

spot in the Ottoman war effort in 1916. But what rejoicing there may have been over this triumph soon gave way to despair and anger when the Unionists learned of the Arab revolt in the Hijaz in late June 1916. Given all the territory the Ottomans had lost in Anatolia and the Arab provinces, there was no question of making peace until this territory had been recovered. In September 1916, both Berlin and Istanbul promised not to sign a peace treaty so long as the territory of one was occupied by the enemy. The Unionists were now more dependent than ever on Germany. This was symbolized by the decision to send Ottoman troops to the European theatre, even though Anatolia was partially occupied by the Russians. The Porte recognized that if victory were to be won, it would only be won on the battlefield in Europe.

The general crisis continued to deepen into 1917. The continuation of the war became a heavy burden that might have been lifted by a mediated peace under the auspices of a neutral Washington. But Britain and France rejected President Wilson's peace proposals while Russian and British armies continued to advance into Anatolia and the Arab provinces, meeting resistance that grew weaker by the day. By 1917, the Ottomans had lost almost one-third of a million men and were quite disorganized. The Russian advance was also hampered by poor communications, by war weariness and the onset of revolutionary discontent. Had there been no revolution in March 1917, the Ottomans might well have collapsed before the Russian advance. The collapse of the tsarist autocracy gave a new lease of life to the Unionist regime, itself on the verge of collapse.

Talat, elevated to the rank of pasha, replaced Said Halim as grand vizier on 3 February 1917. But he could do little to resolve the internal contradictions of an exhausted state. Revolution in Russia revived hopes of an early peace, alarming the generals in Berlin, who still believed in victory. Enver Pasha assured them that the Ottomans would continue to fight. On 6 April, Washington's declaration of war on Germany and, under German pressure, the Porte's rupture of relations with the United States, was another demoralizing blow. Berlin pleaded with Istanbul to hold on until German submarines had brought Britain to her knees and forced her to negotiate an honourable peace. As a result of war weariness, the position of the war party, led by Enver, declined and political

power shifted back to other factions in the CUP. Enver Pasha was challenged within the CUP by such rivals as Fethi Bey [Okyar], a patron of Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]. There was now some talk of Turkish Anatolian patriotism (*Türk Anadolu milliyetçiliği*) rather than the ideology of Ottomanism. But Ottomanism/Islamism remained the dominant ideology.

As the situation in Russia deteriorated throughout 1917, the Ottomans recaptured territories that had been under Russian occupation since 1915. The Unionist press no longer spoke of peace at any price, hopeful of a negotiated peace that would restore lost territories to the empire, especially after the Porte sent troops to Galacia to support the Austrian army. After the Bolshevik revolution and what seemed like the impending defeat of the Entente, Unionist war aims became more ambitious. The government demanded the restoration of Egypt, the Arab provinces, and Cyprus, while the pan-Turkish press looked to the Caucasus and spoke of the union of Turkic/Muslim peoples of Russia, Persia, and even Afghanistan.

The Unionists viewed themselves as a potentially great regional power, the 'Japan of the Middle East'. They believed that the empire's geo-political position in the region required that she possess a powerful fleet, and they argued that the Porte ought to be given the lion's share of Russia's Black Sea fleet captured by the Germans. This self-image clashed with Germany's imperial ambitions and with the role she had assigned to the Ottomans in the new world order that she intended to establish after winning the war.

However, there was no change in the deplorable state of the country's economic situation. Food and fuel were virtually impossible to obtain and the people in the capital suffered great hardship but were not organized to resist. The treasury was empty and in October 1917, the government printed 50 million liras against the German deposit of the same amount in the Ottoman Public Debt. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918 between the Bolsheviks and the Germans, suggested that the Unionist gamble to enter the war had paid off. They had not only regained territory but seemed to have acquired a sphere of influence in the Caucasus that served 'as a rampart between us and the Russian provinces to the north'. The growth in Ottoman influence was an illusion that

the Unionists could not sustain, for they were now totally dependent on Germany.

The war weariness and demoralization that the Ottomans had suffered at the beginning of 1917 returned to haunt the Unionists after the failure of the German offensive of 1918. The problem of feeding the capital was more acute than ever. British aerial bombardments that began in July increased the demoralization and the yearning for peace. The civilian element in the CUP gained strength by the day. Political censorship was abolished on 11 June 1918, followed by military and postal censorship. The death of Sultan Mehmed Reşad on 3 July brought the anti-Unionist Vahdettin Mehmed VI (r.1918–22) to the throne. He immediately asserted his constitutional authority by declaring that he was the supreme commander and replacing Unionist appointees with his men as his personal aides-de-camp.

At the beginning of September, Berlin was forced to provide a loan so as to feed the people of Istanbul. So desperate was the situation in the empire that Talat Pasha went to Berlin to explain just how terrible it was at home. On his way back to Istanbul, Talat stopped off in Sofia to see Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria. But his audience was cancelled as Bulgaria was suing for peace. He realized that the war was over for the Ottomans, and the Unionists had to make way for a government not tarred with the brush of Unionism and the German alliance. Talat resigned on 8 October and was succeeded by Ahmed İzzet Pasha. After discussions in the assembly about the futility of carrying on the war, the government decided to sue for peace and signed the armistice of Mudros on 30 October.

It was this event that marked the end of the Great War for the Ottoman Empire. The war ended in defeat, but the ten years of constitutional rule, especially the war years, had transformed Ottoman society. For the Unionists, war had defined all that was social; it had defined society. By its very dynamic, war became the most all-encompassing phenomenon of a country's situation, the dominant process to which all other social, political, economic and cultural processes were subordinated, and which, directly or indirectly, affected all members of society. But this same absorbing quality of war should not lead us to ignore the different ways in which diverse groups and individuals were

affected: what represented ruin for most, proved to be a boon for a minority of Muslims. They enriched themselves and emerged as businessmen who constituted a new class, a nascent bourgeoisie.

The emergence of this 'new class' was perhaps the most significant development of the decade. Soon after restoring the constitution, some intellectuals had observed that the Ottomans would not survive in the world of the twentieth century unless they established capitalism and created their own bourgeoisie. The attempt to do so became one of the main tasks of the Unionists. The CUP led the campaign to establish a 'national economy' by founding small, private trading companies and banks throughout the empire, and in doing so created a small nucleus that had a vested interest in the new regime. After the capitulations were abolished in September 1914, capitalist landowners were able to sell their produce – wheat, cotton, tobacco, etc. – directly to the Germans and Austrians, and prosper. Such people became the backbone of the nationalist movement that was launched after the war to prevent the implementation of the Treaty of Sèvres.

Apart from the emerging bourgeoisie, the war also produced a small working class in the factories that had been established under German auspices for the purpose of war production. Artisans had been sent as apprentices to Germany to work in factories and learn new skills and methods of modern production. Not only did they acquire these skills, they acquired a new political consciousness and some even joined the communist revolution that broke out in Germany in late 1918.

Women also played a significant role during the constitutional period, especially during the war. A number of women's journals appeared, encouraging Ottoman women to liberate themselves from some of the most obscurantist practices of their society. They were told to educate themselves and play an active role within the family and society. It was generally agreed among the modernists that Ottoman society would make slow progress unless women were brought in as active partners. Beginning with the Balkan war in 1912, urban women began to work as nurses, and later to replace Christian women in such institutions as the telephone exchange. Peasant women had always worked in the fields, but in wartime they were made to work even harder when their men were



conscripted and sent to the front. Women continued to play a critical role when the new Turkey was created.

In short, the constitutional period had transformed the mentality of the Ottoman peoples, especially those who now began to see themselves as Turks rather than Ottomans. Writing on the 46th anniversary of the revolution, the author, Vala Nureddin observed: ‘if the Turks had had no experience of the second constitutional period, the ideas of “country and nation” (*vatan ve millet*) would not have become widespread. The country and the people would have remained the “Sovereign’s domain” (*Padişahın malı*). People would have continued to think in terms of “His Royal Highness does what he knows to be best; it is not for us to question his wisdom”. Under such conditions a national struggle would have been impossible. It is quite possible that there would have been no Republic of Turkey today, and Turkey may have been a monarchy in the Middle East.’

#### SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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