

Assessing the role of Turkey in British Foreign Policy, 1908-1914

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Abstract

The future of the Ottoman Empire was an important issue in international politics during the early years of the Twentieth Century. As more and more of its territory was chipped away, the events caused by this process of disintegration became central to Great Power relations in the period before the First World War. These developments were particularly significant from the British perspective, not only because the Young Turk revolution of 1908 seemed to promise a brighter future for Anglo-Turkish relations, but because the British interest in maintaining the Ottoman Empire for as long as possible, for fear of what came next, directly conflicted with the more aggressive designs of Russia, one of the two Powers with which Britain had recently become aligned.

Much of the literature on Anglo-Turkish relations of the period has tended to argue that a 'golden opportunity' existed for Britain to improve her relations with the Ottoman Empire following the coming to power of the 'Young Turks', who were, both at the time and in more recent scholarship, asserted to have possessed Anglophile tendencies. In the literature on Britain's Great Power relations of the period more widely, meanwhile, a discernible trend has emerged suggesting that Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Minister, was wedded to a policy of *ententes*, which blinded him to the wider realities of Great Power relations.

In understanding how historical events took place, it is important to view events through the eyes of those experiencing them. Through means of an analytical narrative, this work will reconstruct contemporary worldviews and decision-making processes within the British Foreign Office to examine these two conclusions critically, and demonstrate both that Grey was not fixated on a policy of *ententes* and that a 'golden opportunity' was no more than illusion.

Richard Higgins, 1926-2017

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Notes on names

In keeping with general practice, I have used modern spellings when referring to contemporary figures, hence 'Abdülhamid', 'Kâmil' and 'Charykov'. When an archaic spelling is used in a quotation, I have left it in place undisturbed.

Replacing place names with modern versions is an often unsatisfactory compromise, especially when terms such as 'Constantinople' or 'Salonica' have a certain resonance, and even, it seems, refer to places different in fundamental ways to their modern equivalents: the modern day 'Istanbul' of the Turkish republic is not the same as the old 'Constantinople', capital of the extant Ottoman Empire. Consequently, I have used period appropriate names for places, with the modern name offered in brackets where necessary.

Introduction

The period between the 1908 revolution in Turkey and the outbreak of war was one of contrasts. 1908 saw a new regime, the Young Turks, seize control of the Ottoman Empire. Seemingly pro-western and keen to improve their relationship with Great Britain, the Young Turks nevertheless entered the First World War alongside Germany, the power which had been closest to the previous regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Surprisingly, there is little literature on this period of change. Only two book length studies have been produced, and other treatments have been limited. The work which does exist has focused on the idea of a 'golden opportunity', following the revolution, for Britain to improve her political and economic position in Turkey. In general, much of this work has criticised the embassy and ambassador, and suggested that the poor performance of British officials in Turkey was a major contributing factor to the breakdown of relations. This is a reductive and unhelpful way of approaching the problem. The present work contends that such an 'opportunity' was no more than illusion.

Thinking about Anglo-Turkish relations from the point of view of an 'opportunity' is unhelpful both for its own sake, but also because the region was important more widely, both in terms of British policy and great power politics more generally. A narrow focus on a failure to grasp an opportunity risks obscuring the wider issues at play. In particular, British commercial dealings with the Turks in the latter part of this period demonstrate the extent to which her policy in the near east was focused on Persia, and more specifically the protection of India. This is suggestive of wider currents in great power politics of the period. With the Anglo-Russian convention, which was rooted in compromises over Persia, seemingly becoming unfit for purpose, British policymakers needed to seek other ways of maintaining their position in the lands bordering India, the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire.

This ties into other debates around wider British policy of the period. Keith Wilson wrote that much of British policy was focused around a core assumption that possession of India was all that maintained Britain's membership of the great power club, and that it must be protected at all costs. Certainly, the British focus on improving her position in the eastern hinterlands of the Ottoman Empire suggests that there is some truth to this. Egypt, a de facto British possession officially under the control of the Khedive, an Ottoman official, was also an area of concern, in particular as it contained the Suez Canal, an important shipping lane which shortened the route to India. British officials were concerned, following the 1908 revolution, that unrest might spread towards Egypt, threatening the British position there. ¹

Although Wilson's arguments concerning the importance of India have merit, his wider arguments about the foreign policy of Sir Edward Grey are less satisfactory. He argued that Grey implacably followed a policy of *ententes*, focusing his attentions entirely on his *entente* agreements with France and Russia to the exclusion of all else. Since the publication of Wilson's work, a number of scholars have followed his lead. ² The present work asserts that this argument fails to take in the full complexity of Grey's strategy from 1906 to 1914, and ignores the way in which policy naturally evolved towards the end of the period. Turkey was again important in demonstrating this. The Bosnian crisis of 1908 established that Grey was willing to explore, at the least, alternatives to the Russian convention, and the financial settlement of the matter caused some resentment in Britain towards France. Later, as war raged in the Balkans, Grey worked closely with Germany to

¹ For the background of Britain in Egypt, see Roger, Owen, *Lord Cromer: Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul* (Oxford, 2004); Tignor, Robert, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914* (Princeton, 1966).

² See for instance Charmley, John, *Splendid Isolation? Britain, the Balance of Power and the Origins of the First World War* (London, reprint 2009), and especially Ferguson, Niall, *The Pity of War, 1914-1918* (London, 1998).

prevent conflict enveloping the Powers. A wide study of Anglo-Turkish relations cannot fail to suggest that arguments about *ententes* miss the mark.

An examination of the British approach to the Ottoman Empire reveals both that much of the existing literature is narrow in its approach, and provides a valuable lens through which British foreign policy more generally can be understood. This work will rectify this, and argue that no ‘golden opportunity’ existed. In the light of this, a richer picture of British policy, both more generally and in Turkey specifically, will emerge.

Approaches

The literature on the period before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 is vast. As a recent author put it, the debate over the origins of the war has sometimes taken on the character of an ‘Agatha Christie crime drama’.³ In many ways, this was perhaps inevitable. The controversial Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty, affixing blame for the war on Germany, gave rise to a debate which has in many ways never abated. From the 1960s and Fritz Fischer’s *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, many have sought to judge and assign blame for the war. Fischer argued that German ambitions were the principal cause of the war, and that Germany had ‘willed’ war.⁴ Over time, the leaderships of other European Powers have also been blamed. Samuel Williamson, for instance, lay the blame at the door of Austro-Hungarian elites, Sean McMeekin on Russia, while Niall Ferguson blamed British indecisiveness for the outbreak of conflict.⁵ Other elements, such as the

³ Clark, Christopher, *The Sleepwalkers, How Europe Went to War in 1914*, (London, 2013) p. 561. For an overview on the scholarship, see Mulligan, William, *The Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, 2010).

⁴ Fischer, Fritz, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War* (London, 1967).

⁵ Williamson, Samuel, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War* (London, 1991); McMeekin, Sean, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA., new edn. 2013); Ferguson, *Pity of War*.

‘militarization of men’s minds’ have also been pointed to.⁶ The traumatic nature of the First World War, marking the sudden end of the ‘long nineteenth century’, and the pervasive notion of its futility, means that it is both natural and satisfying to seek to apportion blame and judge those deemed guilty of causing such a cataclysm. That the pointing of fingers played a role in contributing to an even more violent war mere decades later only added fuel to the fire.

Such a ‘blame game’ can be unhelpful. In trying to interpret the past in this way, the picture can be distorted. Trying to judge historical events and figures through the application of modern values can often make understanding more difficult. For instance, unlike today, war was regarded by the policymakers of 1914 as a normal, if regrettable, part of international relations. The war itself lies outside the scope of this work, but it can usefully demonstrate that modern sensibilities are not appropriate underpinnings for historical endeavour. Loosely connected to this is the fact that from a modern vantage point, a far fuller picture of events is possible than that which was available to contemporaries. Not only do historians know what ‘came next’, they also know what the other side was thinking, so to speak. It is easy to criticise a statesman when the analyst is in possession of more information than their subject, although that is not to say that a failure to consider or predict the future should be ignored. In the case of the First World War, policymakers, certainly in Britain, were largely aware of the risks of war and what it might entail; and one suggests that any future historians will be scathing at the failure of modern day policymakers to act in the face of climate breakdown. It is also not to say that there is no call to point out when historical figures might have done better. If history is to provide any ‘lessons’, then such a policy is essential. However, in general, the historian should be concerned with an understanding of the realities of historical situations, and not in serving

⁶ Stevenson, David, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe 1904-1914* (Oxford, 1996), p. 421.

as judge and jury on the past. Nevertheless, the present work does not advocate a kind of sterile, dry, neo-Rankean analysis of the past. To state situations plainly as they were would be both dull and unhelpful, and would ignore the fact that foreign policy is not made in a vacuum. Indeed, it is made by people with their own prejudices, views and approaches, many of them influenced from different quarters. For the purposes of the present work, a more human and live analysis is required.

An historian may well be best placed to observe and explain rather than judge, but this does not mean, again, that the human aspects of a historical situation should be ignored. There is long history of such an approach in pre-1914 international relations. Since the late 1960s, scholars have been engaged in trying to find James Joll's 'unspoken assumptions'.⁷ Zara Steiner, for instance, worked in this vein throughout much of her career.⁸ More recent work, for instance by Keith Neilson and T.G. Otte, has also tried to reconstruct the decisions made by British officials, in order to better understand the course of policy during this period.⁹

If foreign policy is made by people, then it is only by identifying them, their views and their ideas, that it can be understood. In particular, to appreciate the composition of policy, it is beneficial to build up an idea of the view which existed in the minds of contemporary policymakers. In this sense, insights from political science may be helpful. Robert Jervis wrote that 'it is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies

⁷ Joll, James, '1914: The Unspoken Assumptions', Koch, H.W. (ed.), *The Origins of the First World War, Great Power Rivalry and German War Aims* (Basingstoke, 1972) pp. 307-328.

⁸ Steiner, Zara; Neilson, Keith, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, (Basingstoke, 2nd edn. 2003); Steiner, Zara, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914* (Cambridge, 1970); Steiner, Zara, 'The Foreign Office under Sir Edward Grey, 1905-1914, in Hinsley, F.H. (ed.) *British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey*, (Cambridge, 1977) pp. 22-69.

⁹ Neilson, Keith; Otte, T.G., *The Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1854-1946* (London, 2009); Neilson, Keith, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917* (Oxford, 1995); Neilson, Keith, 'Incidents' and Foreign Policy: A Case Study', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9(1), 1998, pp 53-88; Otte, T.G., *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865-1914* (Cambridge, 2011).

without reference to the decision-makers' beliefs about the world and their views of others', and that they are often a direct cause of action. He added that such perceptions are often wrong.¹⁰ If this is so, then an approach aimed at discovering the objective 'truth' of a given situation will not bear fruit in understanding situations. The historian must, as another theorist put it, seek to understand the 'world in their minds', and recognise that perception can be a vital element of crisis management.¹¹ On one level, work such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* can be used to try and understand aspects of policymakers' views on Turkey. Superficial examples are easy to find: diplomats and officials regularly made reference to 'oriental methods of bargaining' or similar. Whether this represented, as Said might have held, the 'Orient' being 'almost a European invention... since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences', or more prosaic attempts by socially homogenous diplomatists to arrive at a kind of shorthand to help understand a political culture which seemed very different to them, is perhaps immaterial.¹² Such ideas can be valuable in framing contemporary ideas, but in this case a more detailed and less broad consideration is required.

The present work aims to consider the Anglo-Turkish relationship between 1908 and 1914 through the eyes of British policymakers, to understand how they saw their world, how they appreciated events as they unfolded, and how they conceptualised British

¹⁰ Jervis, Robert, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, 1976), p 28-30; 3.

¹¹ Vertzberger, Yaacov, *The World in Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking* (Palo Alto, CA, 1993); Richardson, James, *Crisis Diplomacy: The Great Powers since the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 363-7.

¹² Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), p. 1. Robert Irwin criticised this approach. He thought that attacks on the study of the east were both 'depressing' and 'unnecessary': *id.*, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies*, (London, 2006) p. 330.

Ussama Makdisi, suggested that, in the same way that western Powers often regarded Ottomans 'non-Western' despots, 'incapable of "progress"', the Ottomans themselves engaged with their own 'Arab periphery' in a similar manner, *id.*, 'Ottoman Orientalism', *The American Historical Review*, 107(3), 2002, pp. 768-796.

interests in response.¹³ In terms of the documentary record, this period is particularly fruitful for such an approach. The Foreign Office reforms introduced in 1906 increased significantly the role of junior staff, and have left a significant paper trail, not least in the form of extended minutes. These, rather than representing what John Tilley called ‘full dress’ papers, formed first impressions and preparation for later discussion – following which action and further minutes would be added.¹⁴ This allows the historian a glimpse into first impressions and opinions of Foreign Office staff, and to come as close as possible to uncovering discussions held. However, these are far from perfect. Junior clerks might (and often did) write at great length, or in an attention seeking style (for instance Robert Vansittart, who often wrote sarcastic or drily amusing remarks¹⁵). The nature of the system means that the voice of more senior policymakers can be diminished, too. Nevertheless, such an approach can bear considerable fruit in understanding the shape of British officials’ thoughts, and can be taken as an element in an attempt to understand contemporary world views and reconstruct decision-making.

Much of the literature on the Anglo-Turkish relationship in this period has focused on the idea that there had been an ‘opportunity’ which was missed by Britain to develop better relations with Turkey, in part because she was blind to it as a result of her focus on wider European alignments. Contingent on this critique is an element of ‘judging’ history. This work contends that this is unhelpful. Although British policymakers were focused on

¹³ T.G. Otte has written in this vein, seeking to understand the mind of Sir Eyre Crowe: *id.*, ‘Sir Eyre Crowe and British Policy: A Cognitive Map’, in Otte, T.G.; Pagedas, Constantine, (eds.) *Personalities, War and Diplomacy: Essays in International History* (London, 1997), pp. 14-37. See also Otte’s ‘Introduction’, same volume.

¹⁴ Tilley, John; Gaselee, Stephen, *The Foreign Office*, (London, 1933), pp. 169; 156-60; Tilley, John, *London to Tokyo* (London, 1942), p. 69; Nicolson, Harold, *Lord Carnock: A Study in the Old Diplomacy* (London, 1930), pp. 324-7.

¹⁵ For instance, reacting to reports that Turkish ships had burned a small Greek ship while it was coaling, he commented that ‘The Turkish fleet has at last hit something’ and added that it was ‘something quite small too.’ Vansittart minute, Elliot to Grey, tel. no. 6, 15 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1759/2211.

more than Turkey, they were not slavishly devoted to a ‘policy of *ententes*’.¹⁶ In any case, the ‘opportunity’ was in a large part illusory.

A ‘Golden Opportunity’?

Although the position of the Ottoman Empire, and the forces unleashed by its gradual disintegration, were an important consideration of European policymakers from 1912 through to the outbreak of the First World War, there has not been a profusion of literature dealing with the relations between the Turks and Britain. This is further surprising when it is considered that the seven years from 1908 and the Young Turk revolution, formed a self-contained period that seemingly lends itself to a study of relations between the two states. Only two book length studies have been produced, along with several articles.¹⁷

During this period, British policy remained stable. Under Sir Edward Grey, Sir Charles Hardinge, and later Sir Arthur Nicolson, the Foreign Office followed a largely consistent policy, aided by the relative longevity of the Liberal administration. Turkey, on the other hand, underwent a turbulent period, with several violent changes of government and contested elections. Having fomented an overtly pro-Western revolution, the ‘Young Turks’ or Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), finished the period entering the lists

¹⁶ Wilson, Keith, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904-1914* (Cambridge, 1985).

¹⁷ Temperley, Harold, ‘British Policy towards Parliamentary Rule and Constitutionalism in Turkey (1830-1914)’ *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 4(2), 1933, pp. 156-191; Ahmad, Feroz, ‘Great Britain’s Relations with the Young Turks 1908-1914’ *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2(4), 1966, pp. 302-329; Ahmad, Feroz, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914* (Oxford, 1973); Heller, Joseph, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914* (London, 1983); Kent, Marian, ‘Great Britain and the End of the Ottoman Empire’ in Kent, Marian (ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 2nd Edn. 1996) pp. 172-205; Miller, Geoffrey, *Straits: British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire and the origins of the Dardanelles Campaign* (Hull, 1997 out of print and reproduced <www.dardanelles.co.uk>); Miller, Geoffrey, *Superior Force: the Conspiracy behind the escape of Goeben and Breslau* (Hull, 1996, Out of print and reproduced <www.superiorforce.co.uk>); Miller, Geoffrey, *The Millstone: British Naval Policy in the Mediterranean, 1900-1914, the Commitment to France and British Intervention in the War* (Hull, 1999, Out of print and reproduced <www.the-millstone.co.uk>).

alongside Britain's enemy Germany. This drastic turnaround has been the subject of interest. Many scholars have characterised the period as a missed opportunity for Britain, contending that the British Government could have done more to earn the trust of the Turks, and entertained with more interest the two offers of alliance made. All scholars have agreed, nevertheless, that a primary reason for British disinterest was that improved relations with Turkey would, almost axiomatically, come at the cost of good relations with Turkey's traditional enemy Russia, who still harboured designs on the Straits, although there have been differing views as to the wisdom of this priority.

These accounts are however unsatisfactory. It is clear that British policy went further than a slavish devotion to the policy of the *ententes*. One need look no further than Grey's attempts to work with Turkey during the Bosnian Crisis in 1908-9, or his emphasis on cooperation with Germany during the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, to conclude that this assumption cannot fully explain the course of British policy. Rather than Britain being at 'fault' for the breakdown in relations, no such 'opportunity' existed. British optimism in the wake of the 1908 revolution was prompted by a misunderstanding of the nature and causes of the revolution, and gave rise to inflated expectations of Young Turk administration. These could never be fulfilled, and resulted in British officials fast losing interest in the Ottoman Empire, a process increased by the appreciation that other policy considerations made a policy of friendliness, or more, towards Turkey difficult. Having extracted concessions from the Turks which protected British commercial and strategic interests in the Persian Gulf, British policymakers focused on other priorities. Furthermore, the rupture in Anglo-Turkish relations in 1914 did not, in the considerations of contemporary policymakers, result in any particularly negative consequences for Britain.

The first attempt to discuss the Anglo-Turkish relationship directly was made by Harold Temperley in 1933.¹⁸ He was one of the few historians of the period privy to the Foreign Office papers, as a result of his editorship of the *British Documents on the Origins of the War* series with George Peabody Gooch.¹⁹ In discussing the British attitude to parliamentary rule and constitutionalism in Turkey, he placed the Young Turk revolution and the British reaction to it into a larger perspective. Temperley argued that British foreign secretaries from Palmerston to Lansdowne had been against constitutionalism in Turkey, in sharp contrast to British policy in many other parts of the world.²⁰ When the constitution was proclaimed, to ‘indescribable public joy’ in Turkey, Grey was in favour of the new democratic institutions, in contrast with his forebears.²¹ Temperley wrote that he might be considered ‘idealistic and humanitarian’ in his ‘earnest’ support for the ‘parliamentary régime.’²² Temperley’s focus on constitutionalism meant that he considered neither the reasons behind the collapse of the relationship in 1914, nor the possibility of an ‘opportunity’ becoming available, nor more cynical reasons for British support of the CUP.

In contrast to Temperley, Feroz Ahmad discussed the ways in which the Revolution had opened a door for Britain, changing the German dominated diplomatic order at Constantinople.²³ He also emphasised the dangers of the revolution for Britain more widely, in that a constitutional Islamic regime threatened the *status quo* in Egypt and India, but also that coming on too strong at Constantinople might arouse the ‘jealousies’ of other Powers. In this – that the Revolution presented an opportunity for Britain, but that

¹⁸ Temperley, ‘British Policy towards Turkey’.

¹⁹ Gooch, G.P. and Temperley, H.W.V, (eds.), *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (11 vols., London: HM Stationary office, 1928-38). See also Fair, John. D, *Harold Temperley: A Scholar and Romantic in the Public Realm*, (Newark, Del.,1992); Otte, T.G. (ed.), *An Historian in Peace and War: The Diaries of Harold Temperley* (Abingdon, 2016); Eyck, Franck, *G.P. Gooch: A Study in History and Politics* (London, 1983).

²⁰ Temperley, ‘British Policy towards Turkey’, p. 158.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 186.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 190-1.

²³ Ahmad, ‘Relations with the Young Turks’; Ahmad, *The Young Turks*.

this came with risks – and in his criticism of the Embassy and the Ambassador, who he argued ‘looked down’ upon the Young Turks, Ahmad set the tone for the future.

Ahmad discussed the nature of the Young Turk Revolution too, writing that the CUP were ‘liberals in a nineteenth century sense’ and looked to Westminster, as the ‘mother of parliaments’ as a model.²⁴ This conclusion has often been echoed since, but is unhelpful. British officials interpreted the revolution in this way, and this contributed to their failure to appreciate that the Young Turks were fundamentally conservative, trained within the state system and seeking to preserve the Ottoman state, not to fundamentally change it. Ahmad also criticised the British Embassy under Sir Gerard Lowther, another regular theme of historiography on this topic.

Throughout this period Great Britain's relations with the Young Turks were carried out at two different levels; on the one hand at the Foreign Office, where the policy was actually formulated in the context of British foreign policy as a whole; on the other hand there was the British Embassy at Constantinople whose function it was to execute as closely as possible the policy of the home Government. The Embassy also interpreted prevailing public opinion and explained to its Government the arguments and motives of the Porte. Whereas the policy was formulated in an atmosphere of considerable objectivity, with the various factors carefully weighed and analysed, it was executed in an atmosphere of almost total subjectivity where personalities and prejudices played a major part.²⁵

Certainly, Lowther failed to perform as well as might have been desired, but this and embassy ‘subjectivity’ on their own cannot explain the eventual breakdown in relations between Turkey and Britain. Indeed, as early as 1909, it was clear to the Foreign Office that Lowther’s reports were sometimes lacking in depth.²⁶

²⁴ Ahmad, ‘Relations with the Young Turks’, pp. 302-5.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 309.

²⁶ On the role of Ambassadors, see Neilson, Keith, ‘“Only a d_____d marionette?": The influence of Ambassadors on British Foreign Policy’, Dockrill, M; McKercher, B.J.C. (eds.), *Diplomacy and World Power: Studies in British Foreign Policy 1890-1951* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 56-78.

The first monograph study of the period is that by Joseph Heller.²⁷ He noted the ‘striking’ change in the British attitude from ‘sympathetic’ to ‘one of hostility’ from 1908 to 1914.²⁸ His core argument was that improved Anglo-Turkish relations were impossible in light of Britain’s commitment to a policy of *ententes*, in particular the agreement with Russia, and that the relationship could not be understood in isolation.²⁹ Indeed, he added that the Foreign Office destroyed the relationship with Turkey through its own actions in backing ‘Russia’s friends’ in disputes over Adrianople and the Dodecanese islands.³⁰ Unlike many, he did not overtly criticise this development, but instead argued that the failure of the Young Turk project presented something of a blessing in disguise for British policymakers, who now did not have to make a choice between Turkey and Russia, as they would had Turkey been successful in the Balkans.³¹ He did, however, criticise this implicitly, using emotive language. As with Ahmad, Lowther received much of the blame. His Embassy had ‘poisoned’ British policy, and the Foreign Office had failed, in Heller’s estimation, to manage this appropriately.³²

Marian Kent’s edited volume, *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, appeared a year later, in 1984.³³ Although much of Kent’s work has focused on more commercial, rather than purely political matters, she contributed a chapter on the Anglo-Turkish relationship in general.³⁴ She argued that Lowther was handed a ‘good chance’ by the Revolution, but allowed it to ‘slip’. Noting that by 1914 Germany had returned to

²⁷ Heller, *British Policy*.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 158.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 158; 162-3. British interests remained *entente* and Empire – and consequently, she could not back the Young Turks, Heller argued.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 160.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.159.

³² *Ibid*, p. 160.

³³ Kent, ‘Britain and the end of the Ottoman Empire’.

³⁴ See for instance Kent, Marian, *Oil and Empire: British Policy and Mesopotamian Oil 1900-1920* (London, 1976).

her 'prime position' at Constantinople, she further entrenched the idea that Britain had been handed an 'opportunity' of which she had failed to take advantage.³⁵

The other book-length treatment of the period was represented by Geoffrey Miller's trilogy, *Superior Force*, *Straits*, and *The Millstone*, which concentrated on naval matters relating to Turkey, Greece and the Mediterranean. The second of these works, *Straits*, discussed British policy towards Turkey in the years before the war.³⁶ Although written in a detailed manner, the analysis was limited by Miller's aim to produce an overriding narrative across his trilogy, which he hoped would demonstrate 'lost opportunities to foster better Anglo-Turkish relations'.³⁷ In 1908, 'for one big shining moment, British stock rose to unheard of heights', he argued. 'The pieces were there to be picked up, but Lowther would not stoop. Malign influence from within the Embassy, together with his own haughty personality and confusing signals from London, combined to bankrupt the British stock and leave the way open for Germany.'³⁸ Miller was intensely critical of Lowther, but even more so of Gerald Fitzmaurice, the controversial dragoman at the Embassy.³⁹ More generally, Miller criticised Lowther's 'pessimism', which 'infected' the Foreign Office. In a memorable turn of phrase, he argued that 'Lowther had sneezed and Grey had caught cold.'⁴⁰

Turning to the final year before the war, Miller regarded the selection of Mallet for the Constantinople Embassy as a signifier of a Foreign Office attempt to right the wrongs of the Lowther incumbency. In so arguing, he made some doubtful assertions, such as suggesting that Mallet was a 'rising star' within the Foreign Office. Although this had been true in the past, as Mallet went from being Grey's Private Secretary to Assistant Under-

³⁵ Kent, 'Britain and the end of the Ottoman Empire', p. 174.

³⁶ Miller, *Straits*; Miller, Geoffrey, *Superior Force*; Miller, *The Millstone*.

³⁷ Miller, *Straits*, 'Introduction'.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Ch. 5; Ch. 10.

secretary (AUS), Mallet's appointment represented something of a disappointment to him personally, as he had harboured dreams of the Permanent Under-secretaryship, and he had not been considered a success as an AUS.⁴¹ Mallet's failure to keep Turkey out of the war was regarded by Miller as being due to

a combination of the sinister forces that continued to operate within the British Embassy at Pera and a fatal defect in Mallet himself: seeing what he wanted to see. The flattery lavished on his hosts was used against him; paternal and gullible in equal measure, Mallet's mission was a failure. Whether it could have been otherwise if more support had been forthcoming from London is problematical.⁴²

This too is a difficult case to make. Miller's assertion that more support from London might have tipped the balance in 1914 is dubious in two ways. Firstly, as Miller himself acknowledged, more support from Britain might well not have had the desired effect, since Turkey had signed an agreement with Germany at the end of July, when Mallet was in any case away from Constantinople. Secondly, by this point, Turkey's eventual destination in the war was not a subject that aroused particular interest in the Foreign Office. Although naturally keen to avoid complications in the region, British policymakers had accepted the possibility of war, and were not unduly concerned by it.

Miller concluded that the reason for Britain's failure was that 'there was a lack of consensus over the policy to be pursued with regard to the Ottoman Empire and this in turn created a vacuum which was then filled by the personal views of the ambassadors and other advisers.'⁴³ This is not borne out by the evidence. What Miller identified as a 'lack of consensus' may, with equal justice, be regarded simply as a policy of ambiguity and openness to opportunity. During this period, an effort to avoid explicit over commitment on the part of Grey was never far away.

⁴¹ Steiner, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, p 106; Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 321-4.

⁴² Miller, *Straits*, 'Introduction'.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

G.R. Berridge's book on the much maligned Fitzmaurice, which appeared in 2011, was not, strictly speaking, a consideration of the Anglo-Turkish relationship, but given the importance which several scholars ascribed to him, and the period of time in which he was active, this is a central theme of the work.⁴⁴ As other scholars did, Berridge noted that Fitzmaurice, a man who resolutely identified with the 'old Turk', undoubtedly influenced Lowther's thoughts against the CUP. He noted that Fitzmaurice's anti-CUP writings were sometimes repeated, almost verbatim, in Lowther's despatches.⁴⁵ For Berridge, Lowther was a 'solid' man, although perhaps lacking in 'energy and imagination', a criticism with which it is hard to disagree. Berridge also demonstrated Fitzmaurice's ability to influence political events at the Porte: in 1908, for instance, he worked hard to keep the aged anglophile Kâmil Pasha in the Grand Vizirate, as he regarded him as a 'bulwark' against the CUP.⁴⁶ Berridge did not see the revolution as being as great an opportunity as some other scholars suggested. He emphasised the dangers to Britain, both in terms of Islam and Russia, of the new arrangements.⁴⁷ By the end of Lowther's period as ambassador, however, Berridge noted that he was seen as a 'failure', who had failed to take advantage of the 'flying start' which he had been presented with, suggesting that the idea of the 'opportunity' was present in the minds of many before the first historical accounts had been written.⁴⁸

Unsurprisingly, there has been rather more work written on the Ottoman Empire more generally. The final years of the Empire, before the eventual emergence of an independent Turkey under Atatürk, have fascinated many. Many of these works have

⁴⁴ Berridge, G.R., *Gerald Fitzmaurice (1865-1939) Chief Dragoman of the British Embassy at Constantinople*, (Leiden, 2007).

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp.130-1.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 125-32.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 121-5.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 184-5.

mentioned the British connection, at least in passing. They have also discussed the way in which the revolutionary period has been seen as a missed opportunity within Turkey.

Bernard Lewis, for instance, in his 1961 *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, noted that the revolution was greeted with ‘enthusiasm’ initially, and that it was believed that a new era of openness was coming.⁴⁹ The Young Turks failed, however, to establish significant constitutional reforms, although a number of smaller goals were achieved. Lewis noted that such matters as policing were improved and modernised during the Young Turk period, and that the strict religious rules governing the lives of women were relaxed significantly.⁵⁰ Feroz Ahmad, in his book length treatment of the Young Turk period, made the valuable assertion that the Young Turks were fundamentally conservative, aiming to save the state as it was, rather than change it in a fundamental way.⁵¹ Since then, this view has been accepted by many scholars of Ottoman History. Erdal Kaynar, for instance, noted that British observers, along with their European colleagues, failed to appreciate that the Young Turks hoped to save their Empire, as they had understood the Revolution to be in the tradition of earlier revolutions such as that of the French.⁵² On British policy, Ahmad echoed his views of five years earlier:

manifestations of friendship towards England, though motivated by political expediency, were far from insincere. They represented the very basis of whatever foreign policy the Young Turks had had since July 1908. The Committee’s desire to conclude an alliance with England has already been mentioned elsewhere. But Sir Gerard refused to respond in a favourable manner. He adopted a cold and patronizing attitude towards the Committee.⁵³

⁴⁹ Lewis, Bernard, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 206-14.

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 222-5.

⁵¹ Ahmad, *Young Turks*.

⁵² Kaynar, Erdal, ‘The Logic of Enlightenment and the Realities of Revolution: Young Turks after the Young Turk Revolution’ in Lévy-Aksu, Noémi; Georgeon, François (eds.), *The Young Turk Revolution and the Ottoman Empire: The Aftermath of 1908* (London, 2017) pp. 40-66.

⁵³ Ahmad, *Young Turks*, p 37-8.

He added that the failure of Britain to come to Turkey's aid when attacked by Italy in 1911 solidified the Turkish view that Britain, along with the other European Powers, was not sincere in her commitment to Turkish constitutionalism.

More general accounts of the period have also tended to consider an opportunity to have existed. Zara Steiner, for instance, considered Lowther to have sold the Young Turks short to Hardinge, the Permanent under-Secretary, which contributed to a cold British official attitude.⁵⁴ More recent work still echoes this sentiment. Sean McMeekin, at the time himself based in Turkey, wrote in 2010 that the Revolution represented a 'colossal missed opportunity' for Britain, and that liberal reformers in Turkey were 'left in the lurch by the liberal power they most admired'. He regarded Britain as having fallen under the 'spell' of Fitzmaurice, which resulted in the British rejection of the Turkish alliance proposal in 1908, a decision McMeekin labelled 'foolish'.⁵⁵ Otte suggested that Lowther's peers' chief criticism of him was his failure to be 'receptive' to the adulation with which he was greeted on his arrival at Constantinople, suggesting once again that the idea of an 'opportunity' had a contemporary root.⁵⁶

In general, much of the work on Anglo-Turkish relations in this period has, to a greater or lesser extent, pointed to the existence of an 'opportunity' for Britain to exploit in 1908. Two reasons have been proposed for the failure to take advantage of this: that Lowther was an incompetent or worse, representative who poisoned the Foreign Office against the Turks and worked against the CUP, and that external commitments, in particular the policy of *ententes*, meant that Britain could not align herself with the Ottoman Empire. Whilst both of these are valid, it is the contention of the present work that such an 'opportunity' did not exist, and that furthermore the Foreign Office was not interested,

⁵⁴ Steiner, 'Foreign Office under Grey', p. 31.

⁵⁵ McMeekin, Sean, *The Berlin to Baghdad Express* (London; Penguin, 2011) pp. 68-9; 74-5.

⁵⁶ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 316.

certainly after 1909, in a policy of alignment with the Ottomans, favouring agreements safeguarding British interests instead. Indeed, British interests in the region at the time did not suit a policy of strong support for the Ottomans. British policymakers, although they had accepted that change at the Straits would come, were happy to see them remain in Ottoman hands. A change in position was not likely to be positive for Britain, as the Admiralty made clear in 1908.⁵⁷ This was reason enough to hope to maintain the Empire as a going concern for as long as possible, and this consideration was true in other regions too: a collapse of Ottoman power would result in either instability and war or the aggrandisement of Powers that British policymakers would have preferred to see kept down as far as possible, such as Russia. Finally, this would also threaten British predominance in the Persian Gulf region, which was important both for commercial and strategic reasons. In general, although British policymakers might have felt that the situation in various Ottoman regions left something to be desired, it was clear that whatever followed was likely to be worse. For British policymakers, it was better to stick with what they knew, for fear of what they did not.

A Policy of *Ententes*?

The publication of Keith Wilson's 'The Policy of the *Entente*' in 1985 marked the starting point for a series of works seeking to explain the policy of Sir Edward Grey through his supposed reliance on a policy of *ententes*.⁵⁸ Wilson argued that Britain was not, in a true sense, a great power, and that from the turn of the century policymakers were aware that they lacked the resources to behave as such, and sought only to be recognised as

⁵⁷ The Admiralty held that the worst possible outcome at the Straits would be Russian domination – neutrality was held to be a favoured option, if change were to happen. See Slade to Grey, 8 Oct. 1908, FO 371/551/35002.

⁵⁸ Wilson, *Policy of Ententes*.

a power. He wrote that the Liberal Government, with ambitious domestic spending plans, was keen to avoid expenditure on defence. Grey was aware that in the absence of unlimited military spending, which made policymaking redundant, foreign policy would have to be carefully carried out in order to maintain dominance. This was the policy of *ententes*. Following 1909, the much vaunted ‘two power standard’ was tacitly abandoned, with naval building now focused only on hostile Powers: the *ententes* were now built into the naval estimates. India was considered a vital aspect of Britain’s Great Power status, and defending it, in particular from Russia, was considered Britain’s primary consideration.⁵⁹ The policy of *ententes*, therefore, became clear, Wilson contended. Britain had to work with France and Russia to try to improve relations with the latter, and avoid a threat to India. Wilson argued that claims of maintaining a ‘free hand’ in international politics were a ‘myth’, that the *ententes* were de facto alliances, and that Grey conceptualised them as such himself.⁶⁰ Wilson wrote that the external realities of Great Power politics were what locked Britain into the policy. Indeed, it is difficult to argue with his conclusion that Britain would have been likely to have gone to war, had it broken out, in 1906, 1908 and 1911, and that British interests compelled her to intervene in 1914. Britain could not allow France to be overrun, and her position would have been seriously eroded had she left Russia and France to fight alone.⁶¹ It is here that Wilson’s analysis falls down. The fact that British interests compelled her to treat the *entente* with France, and to a lesser extent with Russia, as quasi-alliances does not mean that Grey and other policymakers accepted this situation as final. While they understood that this was the case, it did not prevent them from exploring other ways of managing the great power system. Indeed, a recognition that the agreement with

⁵⁹ Ibid, 5-16; Grey defended his policy as such long after the event, writing that ‘In its primary and cardinal object, the security of the Indian frontier, the Agreement was completely successful. There were no more nerves or apprehensions about that. This was the real *raison d’être* and the achievement of it the real justification of the Agreement. But a long train of minor troubles followed.’ *Id.*, *Twenty-Five Years v.1*, (London, 1925) pp. 165-6.

⁶⁰ Wilson, *Policy of Entente*, pp. 88-9.

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 90-7.

Russia might be nearing its end in part prompted Grey's exploration of an agreement of some nature with Germany in early 1914.⁶²

John Charmley followed Wilson's lead in his discussion of British foreign policy. He argued that Grey, in a break with tradition, saw diplomatic isolation as a threat to Britain. In contrast to Wilson, Germany, and not Russia, was the chief bogeyman in Charmley's version of events. For him, this was a mistake. British policymakers had failed to appreciate that the German threat was receding. *Weltpolitik* lay in ruins, and feverish naval building had failed to force Britain into the triple alliance.⁶³ Germany was not, he said, bent on world domination, and it was only that it appeared as though she had been in 1919, (following her expansion of aims throughout the conflict) that has suggested she might have been.⁶⁴ The blame for this, Charmley said, lay with Grey, who remained stuck in 1890. The 'English have always preferred 'character' to 'intellect', he wrote.⁶⁵ Not content with blasting Grey's cognitive abilities, he also accused him of mendacity in failing to reveal Anglo-French staff talks to the Cabinet.⁶⁶ Grey was never prepared to risk what he had

⁶² For more on this, see Otte, T. G. 'Détente 1914: Sir William Tyrrell's Secret Mission to Germany.' *The Historical Journal* 56(1), 2013, pp. 175–204; Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*.

⁶³ In contrast to Charmley, Paul Kennedy argued that German economic development could not fail to cause British policymakers unease, *id.* *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914*, (London; Ashfield, 1980), pp. 465-6.

⁶⁴ Charmley, *Splendid Isolation*, pp. 399-400. Germany's aims during the war seemingly became more extreme as time went on, a development correlating with the emergence of Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff as silent dictators' and the sacrifices demanded by the war. Germany's more aggressive aims were demonstrated by the extremely harsh treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which suggested to many in 1919 that a similar fate would have lain in store for Western Europe, had Germany not been broken in 1918. See for instance Kitchen, Martin, *The Silent Dictatorship. The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916-1918* (London, 1976); Angelow, Jürgen, 'Germany during World War I. War aims, politics, and military leadership, 1906-1918' in Moses, John (ed.), *The German Empire and Britain's Pacific dominions, 1871-1919. Essays on the role of Australia and New Zealand in world politics in the age of imperialism*, (Claremont, 2000) pp. 105-128; Chickering, Roger, 'Strategy, Politics and the Quest for a Negotiated peace: The German Case, 1914-1918', in Afflerbach, Holger (ed.), *The Purpose of the First World War: War Aims and Military Strategies* (Berlin, 2015), pp. 97-116.

⁶⁵ Charmley, *Splendid Isolation*, p. 331.

⁶⁶ The question of the Anglo-French staff talks has been controversial, as seen here. Debate has long raged over whether they committed Britain to fight alongside France. It seems that, formally at least, they did not, although a 'moral' commitment probably existed, and in any case British interests more generally compelled her to fight with France in a large-scale war. See Hamilton, K.A., 'Great Britain and France, 1905-1911' in Hinsley, *Foreign Policy under Edward Grey*, pp. 113-132; Similarly, it is clear that claims that they were kept from the cabinet are at least exaggerated: Coogan, John W; Coogan, Peter, "The British Cabinet and the Anglo-French Staff Talks, 1905–1914: Who Knew What and When Did He Know It?" *Journal of British Studies* 24(1),

with France and Russia to seek better relations with Germany, a power always assumed to have 'hegemonic aims; and to be acting in 'bad faith''.⁶⁷ This, once again, is demonstrably false; Grey worked actively with the Germans in 1913, and a sense of détente had begun to emerge as a result, a fact glossed over by Charmley, who suggested that the achievements of the Conference of Ambassadors 'should not be oversold'.⁶⁸ While Wilson identified that much of British policy was based on fear of Russia, Charmley's analysis failed to appreciate that a concern with Russia was a central preoccupation, arguing that Britain hoped to avoid alienating Russia only so that she might not be left to face Germany alone.⁶⁹

Niall Ferguson also considered the issue of *ententes* from a similarly critical standpoint. Motivated by his conviction that 'the First World War remains the worst thing the people of my country have ever had to endure' and thus must be deplored and the reasons for its outbreak questioned, Ferguson criticised Grey at some length.⁷⁰ Following Charmley in doubting Grey's faculties, he labelled him a 'chronic underachiever' for whom 'love of fishing' was 'almost a character reference'. Stretching the metaphor, he suggested that Grey was in fact the 'fish' which France and Russia hooked'.⁷¹ Ferguson contends that Grey was 'inflexible' and that he was too trusting of others. His intellectual failings meant that he was unable to appreciate that there were no 'insuperable forces generating an ultimately lethal Anglo-German antagonism' and that he cherished an overriding desire to range Britain against Germany as early as 1902.⁷² Towards Russia,

1985, pp. 110–31. For the similarly controversial agreements on naval matters, see Steiner and Neilson, *Origins of the First World War*, pp. 105–111.

⁶⁷ Charmley, *Splendid Isolation?*, pp. 332–3; 345; 347.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

⁶⁹ Neilson argued that British leaders were not 'afraid' of Russia, but she was a primary 'concern' of policymakers. Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, p. 371.

⁷⁰ Ferguson, *Pity of War*, p. xxi.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–61. One question is what Ferguson would consider suitable achievement: Grey became an MP at 23, first served in Government at 30, held the Foreign Secretaryship for a longer continuous period than any other incumbent and finished his career as the leader of the Liberal party in the House of Lords, having also served as Ambassador to the United States.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 57; 45.

Grey demonstrated ‘appeasement’, with all the implications that an historian of Ferguson’s stripes would apply to that loaded term.⁷³ While Wilson had emphasised fear of Russia, and Charmley Germany, Ferguson argued that neither of these were as fearsome as British policymakers thought. He decried the ‘compulsive Germanophobia’ of the Foreign Office, and emphasised that he thought Germany in a financially weak position, and less threatening than she appeared. The position of Russia he also played down, glossing over her (faster than expected) recovery from the war with Japan and the threat she posed in Persia, and suggesting that a war with Russia would not be the natural result of the convention coming to an end.⁷⁴

These arguments suffer from the same weakness, namely that Ferguson is so keen to show that the war was unnecessary that he fails to examine his assertions closely enough.⁷⁵ Throughout this period Grey demonstrated flexibility, especially in Turkey, and a willingness to explore other options in his European policy. Ferguson fails to appreciate the very real threat which a resurgent Russia posed to Britain, and his claim that Foreign Office officials were Germanophobic to the point of reflex does not fit with the evidence, certainly in the final years before war.

Thus, a discernible trend has emerged in the historiography. Many, for instance Christopher Clark, argue even today that Grey was wedded to a policy of *ententes* and that these formed de facto alliances, condemning Britain to fighting a war which was against

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 62.

⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 69-76. Keith Neilson, in particular, argued that the Russian convention was only a temporary step in an ongoing process of rivalry between the two, *id. Britain and the Last Tsar*.

⁷⁵ Paul Kennedy perhaps hit the right note on this point in his assertion that Britain’s fundamental foreign policy aim was to maintain a ‘balance’ in Europe sufficient to prevent her from having to face a hostile power or coalition of Powers with near hegemonic status. When viewed in this light, it is clear that British policymakers, according to their own assumptions of Britain’s position, had little choice but to fight in 1914 – remaining aloof from the conflict would have meant being frozen out of either a German or Russo-French dominated Europe, most likely. *Id., The Realities behind Diplomacy: Background influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London, 1981) pp. 72-3; 129; 138-9

her interests.⁷⁶ It is the contention of the present work that this is an unhelpful and even inaccurate way of thinking about pre-war Europe.

In this case, a study of Anglo-Turkish relations is a valuable way of examining and discussing this narrative, as the period from 1908 to 1914 saw a number of wider European issues impinge on relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. In particular, Russia's antagonistic stance towards the Ottoman Empire meant that British and Russian objectives in the area were often at odds. On several occasions, this meant that Grey demonstrated that his overall conception of foreign policy went far beyond a restricted (and restrictive) reliance on *ententes*. Furthermore, from 1911 onward, all of the major crises which concerned European policymakers had their roots in the Ottoman Empire or adjacent areas. A discussion of Anglo-Turkish relations is therefore of value both for its own sake, and as a way to explore these wider issues. This work will analyse their course through a narrative account of the key events of the period, in order to demonstrate both that Grey's policy was both richer and more complex than he has sometimes been given credit for, and that the idea of a 'golden opportunity' was nothing but illusion.

⁷⁶ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*.

1. The Eastern Department: A Sketch

By 1908, the Foreign Office was much changed from the department that Salisbury or Palmerston would have known. As a consequence of the reforms put in place on 1 January 1906, the organisation had gone, in the younger Nicolson's words, from 'a stuffy family business into an efficient Department of State'.⁷⁷ The reforms, often attributed to Sir Charles Hardinge, although set in motion before his time as Permanent Under-secretary (PUS), had democratised the policymaking process, for the first time giving more junior clerks a more significant role in policymaking, their opinions being actively sought.⁷⁸ Harold Nicolson, who had himself served in the Foreign Office, wrote that the reforms made the Foreign Office a far more attractive proposition for juniors.⁷⁹

Foreign Policy is never made in a vacuum, as a drily academic exercise devoid of personality. Cold logic and analysis cannot alone explain the formation of policy. Neither is it formed by automation or by impersonal forces. Ideas of great 'historical forces', shaping long periods of time inexorably cannot adequately uncover the reasons behind decisions either. Instead, it takes shape as a result of the views, impressions and prejudices of individuals. With this in mind, in conjunction with the increased importance of minor staff in the early 1900s, a greater understanding of the personalities involved in policymaking can help to uncover more of the realities behind the formation of policy.

In 1908, the Foreign Office consisted of a number of departments, most corresponding to a geographical area. Each of these would have a handful of permanent staff attached to them, overseen by an Assistant Under-secretary, who would have responsibility for several such departments. Above these was the Permanent Under-

⁷⁷ Nicolson, *Lord Camock*, p. 325. For a fuller discussion, see Otte, *Foreign Office*, p. 243; Steiner, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*; Jones, Raymond, *The Nineteenth Century Foreign Office: An Administrative History* (London, 1971).

⁷⁸ For more on the PUS see Otte and Neilson, *Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs*.

⁷⁹ Nicolson, *Lord Camock*, pp. 324-7.

secretary, the bureaucratic head of the Office, who worked with its political head, the Secretary of State. This meant that officials were able (and were indeed encouraged) to become specialists in their own right. The department responsible for Turkey in this period was the Eastern Department, which also oversaw policy for Russia, Persia and the Near East. The Eastern Department had had a certain glamour and considered itself to be perhaps socially superior in the latter half of the 1800s, but by the Grey and Hardinge era, it had very much been supplanted by the Western Department, a development that was somewhat inevitable given the policy ideas and preferences of the Edwardian generation of diplomats.⁸⁰

Sir Edward Grey was the British Foreign Minister from 1905 to 1916, and therefore the only Secretary of State concerned with the Ottoman Empire from the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 through to the Turkish entry into the war in 1914.⁸¹ Born in 1862, into a family of Liberal politicians, Grey was educated at Winchester before progressing to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1880. Although the young Grey was not especially interested in foreign relations, preferring sport and the outdoors, his near contemporaries included the future Lord Curzon, viceroy of India and PUS, Cecil ‘Springy’ Spring-Rice, Ambassador to the United States and prolific correspondent,⁸² James Rennell ‘the Rotter’ Rodd,⁸³ Ambassador to Italy, and Louis Mallet, AUS at the

⁸⁰ Tilley, *London to Tokyo*, p. 12. On the ‘Edwardian Generation’, see Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, pp. 19-21; Steiner and Neilson, *Origins of the First World War*, pp. 190-193; Steiner, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, pp. 91-94; 101-104.

⁸¹ Neilson, Keith, ‘Control the Whirlwind’: Sir Edward Grey as Foreign Secretary, 1906-16’ in Otte, T.G. (ed.), *The Makers of British Foreign Policy from Pitt to Thatcher* (Basingstoke, 2002) pp. 128-49; Otte, T.G., ‘Postponing the Evil Day’: Sir Edward Grey and British Foreign Policy’, *The International History Review*, 38(2), 2016, pp 250-263(263); Mulligan, William, ‘From Case to Narrative: The Marquess of Lansdowne, Sir Edward Grey, and the Threat from Germany, 1900-1906’, *International History Review*, 30(2), 2011, pp. 273-302.

⁸² Otte, *Foreign Office Mind* p. 221. Gwynn, Stephen, *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice: a Record* (London, 1939).

⁸³ Hardinge and Bertie used this rather unfavourable name for Rodd, see Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 255.

Foreign Office and Ambassador to Constantinople.⁸⁴ Grey had his first experiences of government before the turn of the century, working as an Under-secretary under the 5th Earl of Rosebery. Even before the Liberal election victory of 1905, Grey had declared himself in favour of improving relations with Russia and Germany, and upon becoming Foreign Minister in 1905, soon worked to conclude the Anglo-Russia convention in 1907. In power, he initially focused on strengthening the ties that bound Britain to the *ententes*, although this faded as a priority as Grey sought improved relations with Germany towards the end of his tenure.⁸⁵

Grey has often been considered a simple man, straightforward and honest, keen on 'careful steering' rather than 'bold strokes'.⁸⁶ One scholar remarked that: 'To nearly all observers, he was hardworking, sincere, earnest, forthright, with a sense of detachment which kept him from passionate politics.'⁸⁷ In the earlier years of this period, Grey enjoyed a close relationship with his PUS, Sir Charles Hardinge, with whom he enjoyed a 'relationship of equals'.⁸⁸ Indeed, on Grey's death, Hardinge said that he 'had the highest opinion of his diplomatic skill, which was characteristic of his straightforward nature'.⁸⁹ Grey's relationship with Hardinge was based both on a strong personal regard and on their shared policy outlook, and the years before Hardinge's elevation to a peerage, which accompanied his appointment as Viceroy of India, ran smoothly, with little dissension in policy, in part because Hardinge worked to ensure that senior posts were filled by men of similar mind to himself. Hardinge's replacement, Sir Arthur Nicolson, was less of a success

⁸⁴ Robbins, Keith, *Sir Edward Grey* (London, 1971), Grey, Edward, *Twenty-Five Years*, (London, 2 vols 1925); Smith, Richard 'Sir Edward Grey: The Private Life of a Foreign Secretary', *The International History Review*, 38:2, 2016, pp. 339-355.

⁸⁵ Wilson, *Policy of the Entente*; Clark, *Sleepwalkers*; Otte, T.G., 'Entente Diplomacy vs Détente, 1911-1914' in Geppert, Dominik; Mulligan, William; Rose, Andreas, (eds.) *The Wars before the Great War: Conflict and International Politics before the Great War* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 264-282; Otte, 'Détente 1914'; "Lord Grey." *Times*, 8 Sept. 1933, p. 7.

⁸⁶ "Lord Grey." *Times*, 8 Sept. 1933, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Busch, Briton Cooper, *Hardinge of Penshurst: A Study in the Old Diplomacy* (Hamden, Conn, 1980), p. 100.

⁸⁸ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 259.

⁸⁹ "Tributes To Lord Grey." *Times*, 8 Sept. 1933, p. 14.

as PUS. Grey, having been in post for some time, was more sure of his own mind and more confident in its expression, and his desire to look outside the *entente* structure caused friction with the more Russophile Nicolson, with whom he did not share such an easy personal rapport.⁹⁰ In the Nicolson period, therefore, the focus of policymaking shifted more decisively towards Grey, along with others who shared similar views such as his influential private secretary, Sir William Tyrrell.⁹¹

Sir Charles Hardinge was born in 1858, educated at Harrow before graduating from Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1888, and joined the diplomatic service in the same year. By 1903, having married a lady-in-waiting to Queen Alexandra, he was an Assistant Under-secretary, and in a position to make his close royal connections count, accompanying the King abroad as a representative of the Foreign Office. Hardinge's relationship with the King would be useful to him, as the King retained influence in diplomatic appointments. In 1904, he went to Saint Petersburg as ambassador, where he hoped to be able to improve relations with Britain, a mission he completed in 1907 as PUS, having returned to London in 1906. Having enjoyed a fruitful period as PUS, Hardinge went to India as Viceroy in 1910, to the disappointment of Grey (who Hardinge remembered in his memoirs as having remarked that if men were ships, Hardinge, with the new Peerage which came with his appointment, would be a dreadnought).⁹²

⁹⁰ Neilson, Keith. "My Beloved Russians': Sir Arthur Nicolson and Russia, 1906-1916." *The International History Review*, 9(4), 1987, pp. 521-554; Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 322.

⁹¹ Tyrrell wielded significant power by 1914. Cromwell and Steiner remarked on the circumstances of his influence: 'Grey was increasingly troubled by his eyes and was preoccupied by the Ulster difficulties. His relations with Nicolson were strained and he had never been personally close to Eyre Crowe. In this atmosphere, Grey seems to have turned to Tyrrell for advice and assistance.', Cromwell, Valerie; Steiner, Zara S., 'The Foreign Office before 1914: a study in resistance', Sutherland, Gillian (ed.), *Studies in the Growth of nineteenth-century Government* (London, 1972), pp. 167-194(191).

⁹² Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, *Old Diplomacy*, (London, 1947). "Obituary." *Times*, August 3, 1944, p. 8; Otte, and Neilson, *Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs*, pp. 123-134.

As PUS, Hardinge enjoyed significant influence. Characterised as a ‘smooth courtier’ who was ‘forever striving and ambitious’, he was able to be ‘ruthless in his monopolising decision-making within the office’.⁹³ Although not a chief architect of the reforms of 1906, he was able to use these to put himself at the centre of the policymaking and information management processes, with almost anything of importance crossing his desk.⁹⁴

Within the office, Hardinge was a calm, level-headed presence, often reining in the more excitable impulses of his junior colleagues, and regularly advocating a middle ground on specific issues. During the Bosnian Crisis, Hardinge grew frustrated at what he saw as Turkish naïveté. He thought she failed to appreciate that she must seek to make the best of what was possible, rather than seeking an ideal situation.⁹⁵ He had little interest in Turkish feelings, finding a debate about the precise title of King Ferdinand of Bulgaria ‘tiresome’. By spring 1909, Hardinge had concluded that Turkish friendship was ‘ephemeral’ and that it was not worth Britain’s while to ‘sacrifice’ her interests seeking it.⁹⁶

Sir Arthur Nicolson, Hardinge’s successor as PUS, was born in 1849 and educated at Rugby school. He joined Brasenose College, Oxford, but left without taking a degree, spending a period of time in the Navy. He served as Private Secretary to Lord Granville when Secretary of State, and served at Constantinople when Lord Dufferin was Ambassador in the early 1880s. Postings to Tangier and Madrid gave him a front row seat to the creation of the Anglo-French *entente* and the Algeciras Conference where it was tested. In 1906, he took Hardinge’s place at Saint Petersburg, hoping to continue the work

⁹³ Otte, and Neilson, *Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs*, pp. 321; 192; 257.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 243.

⁹⁵ Hardinge minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 327, tel., 15 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35667.

⁹⁶ Hardinge minute, Bertie to Grey, no. 63, Tel., 19 Apr. 09, FO 371/757/14840.

of bringing Britain and Russia together. In 1910, he again replaced Hardinge, this time becoming PUS in 1910. It was not a happy appointment, marred by Nicolson's disagreements with Grey over policy, his own distaste for the administrative work of the Office, and his failing health.⁹⁷ Nicolson's attempts to secure escape in the form of an embassy abroad (which earned him the sobriquet the 'little blue eyed rogue' from Sir Francis Bertie, who would have been replaced by Nicolson at Paris⁹⁸) met with failure, and the Foreign Office proved his final appointment.⁹⁹

Nicolson was very much hand-picked by Hardinge as a successor. He hoped to install him as PUS as he shared his opinions and would ensure continuity of policy. Although Nicolson enjoyed a good relationship with Hardinge and the two men shared a similar outlook, Nicolson was perhaps less flexible and pragmatic than his predecessor. 'Austere and aloof', Nicolson failed to establish a rapport in the way that Hardinge had done.¹⁰⁰ In general a man of pessimistic bent, Nicolson has often been dismissed as a 'Russophile'. Bertie complained that Russia could 'do no wrong' in Nicolson's eyes.¹⁰¹ His own son considered Nicolson to have been a 'firm believer' in the German menace, having succumbed to that 'attractive form of charlatanism known as *'le charme slav'* [*sic*]. To counter this, he hoped that the triple *entente* would be strengthened. In addition, and with some justification, he was afraid of the prospect of Britain being in opposition to Russia. Keith Neilson also shared this view, arguing that although Nicolson liked many Russians personally, he was not blinded to the negative aspects of the Russian state. Rather, he saw

⁹⁷ Nicolson's letters are peppered with references to the pressure of work and complaints about his busyness. For example, see Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 12 Apr. 1912, Kunalp, Sinan; Tokay, Gül, *The Private Correspondence of Sir Gerard Lowther, British Ambassador to Constantinople, (1908-1913)* (Istanbul, 2018), no. 304.

⁹⁸ Hamilton, Keith, *Bertie of Thame: Edwardian Ambassador* (Woodbridge, 1990), p. 306.

⁹⁹ "Lord Carnock." *The Times*, 6 Nov. 1928, p. 21.

¹⁰⁰ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 321.

¹⁰¹ Hamilton, *Bertie*, p. 306.

putting up with difficult behaviour from Russia as being worthwhile to counter German influence and give Britain freedom of action in Persia.¹⁰²

Perhaps inevitably for one espousing a Russocentric policy, Nicolson was no great lover of Turkey. Appeals for an alliance on the part of the Turks in 1911, for instance, were both ‘childish’ and ‘naïve’.¹⁰³ During the Balkan Wars, he complained that a pro-Turkish policy would come at the cost of good relations with Russia and France, and would run the risk of putting Britain in a ‘most awkward and uncomfortable international position’.¹⁰⁴

George Russell Clerk served as a clerk in the Eastern Department, in 1913-14, having previously been in the Western Department. Born in 1874, and educated at Eton and New College, Oxford, he joined the Foreign Office in 1899. After serving time abroad in Addis Ababa, he returned to London. On the outbreak of the war, he was made head of the newly formed War Department of the Office.¹⁰⁵

Clerk was remembered as being in appearance like a ‘stage diplomat’, being ‘tall, erect and faultlessly dressed’.¹⁰⁶ In terms of policy, during his brief period in the Eastern Department, Clerk exemplified the dichotomy of British policy towards Russia. He was cynical about the Liman mission in 1913, considering Russian complaints to be an effort to gain concessions in Turkey, rather than a genuine protest.¹⁰⁷ He thought the possibilities that it suggested for the future were ‘dangerous’, because he thought that being on good terms with Russia, even at the cost of concessions in Persia, would be worth it to Britain.

¹⁰² Nicolson, *Lord Carnock*, p. 330; 246; Neilson, ‘My Beloved Russians’ p. 553.

¹⁰³ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 16 Oct. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 262.

¹⁰⁴ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 13 Nov. 1913, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 329.

¹⁰⁵ “Obituary.” *The Times*, 20 June 1951, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Clerk minute, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 393, Tel., 25 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1847/53521.

¹⁰⁸ Although cynical about some Russian actions, he understood that Russian policy was often formulated from a sense of insecurity – for instance, in 1914, he pointed out to his colleagues the Russian fear that with Turkey buying ships in Britain, there would be two dreadnoughts in the Black Sea, neither of which would be Russian. ¹⁰⁹ Clerk was also cynical about negotiations with Turkey. When the question of the capitulations was raised in the summer of 1914, as Britain tried to keep Turkey out of the war, he warned that this was not the kind of question that could be solved ‘in a day’, and that British policymakers should act with caution. ¹¹⁰

Sir Eyre Crowe was one of the better known figures of the period, widely regarded as an excellent administrator. He was born in 1864, in Leipzig, to a British consul-general and his German wife, and was educated in Düsseldorf and Berlin before travelling to Britain to study for the Foreign Office exam, entering in 1885. From his early time in the Office, Crowe was recognised as ‘one of the most promising officials among the Edwardians.’ ¹¹¹ He served at both The Hague Conference of 1907 and the London Naval Conferences, before becoming an Assistant Under-secretary in 1912, taking over the responsibilities of Sir Louis Mallet as he moved to Constantinople. He was appointed PUS in 1920, serving in that post until his death in 1925. ¹¹²

Harold Nicolson remembered Crowe as being ‘the perfect type of British Civil Servant – industrious, loyal, expert, accurate, beloved, obedient and courageous.’ ¹¹³ He has also been characterised as ‘tall and reticent’, with ‘few close friends and... in some

¹⁰⁸ Clerk minute, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 398, Tel., 1 Dec. 1913, FO 371.1847/54365; Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 379.

¹⁰⁹ Clerk minute, 3rd, Buchanan to Grey, No. 2, Tel., 2 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2114/206.

¹¹⁰ Clerk minute, Mallet to Grey, No. 620, Tel., 26 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/53531.

¹¹¹ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 268.

¹¹² "Sir Eyre Crowe." *The Times*, 29 Apr. 1925, p. 18; Otte, ‘Crowe: A Cognitive Map’, pp. 14-37.

¹¹³ Nicolson, *Lord Carnock*, p. 327; Crowe, Sibyl; Corp, Edward, *Our Ablest Public Servant: Sir Eyre Crowe* (Braunston, 1993).

ways isolated from his colleagues.’¹¹⁴ In general policy terms, Crowe has often been considered a rabid anti-German, in particular as a result of his famous memorandum, describing what he saw as German ambitions. This seems, however, to have been something of an overstatement. Crowe was in favour of the *ententes* and suspicious of Germany, to be sure, but he advocated managing the German challenge rather than meeting it with force.¹¹⁵ Within the Foreign Office, Crowe’s minutes and memoranda were generally lengthy, carefully considered and rooted in the facts of a situation. He did not serve much time in the Eastern Department before the outbreak of the war, but his expertise was sought out even before his promotion put that department under his supervision. In 1910, for instance, he was critical of those advocating an agreement with Germany over railway lines within the Ottoman Empire. He feared that to make an agreement with Germany would mean only that the Germans were in a better position, but still hostile to Britain.¹¹⁶

Ronald Lindsay would eventually be the first Ambassador to Atatürk’s new Turkey, after the war, but he spent a brief part of his earlier career in the Eastern Department. Born, as several of his colleagues had been, in 1877, he was a Wykehamist, before spending some time studying abroad rather than attending a British university, as had become usual. He entered the Foreign Office in 1899, and served at Saint Petersburg, in Persia, Washington and Paris before returning to London for a short time as Grey’s Private Secretary. He gave the appointment up on his marriage, but remained in the Foreign Office until 1911, when he became Head of Chancery at the Hague. After the war, he went to Turkey as the first British representative to the new republic, reaching

¹¹⁴ Busch, *Hardinge*, p. 103.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 103; Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, pp. 311; 14.

¹¹⁶ Crowe minute, Goschen to Grey, No. 25, Tel., 10 Apr. 1910, FO 371/991/12218.

Ambassadorial rank when the post was upgraded. He also served as Ambassador at Berlin and Washington. He died in 1945. ¹¹⁷

Lindsay was remembered as a man of ‘charm’, with lots of friends, and a ‘typical diplomat of the old school’. ¹¹⁸ He was nevertheless not afraid to make his feelings clear. During the debate on the use of kilometric guarantees in Turkey during 1909-10, Lindsay made his opposition to the advice of financiers that they be imposed, believing this tantamount to ‘exhort[ion]’, and that Britain was not compelled to follow such a course. ¹¹⁹ Lindsay’s obituary remarked that ‘his understating of, and tolerance for, opinions that were not his own endeared him to all who knew him well’. ¹²⁰ This was in evidence in 1909, when he considered it ‘only natural’ that the Turks would reconsider concessions made under the Sultan after the Revolution, especially given the ‘lavish’ manner in which Abdülhamid had handed them out. ¹²¹

Sir Louis Mallet was an important figure in Anglo-Turkish relations before the war, serving as the final Ambassador to Constantinople. Born in 1864, he was educated privately before progressing to Balliol College, Oxford, where he studied at the same time as Grey. Having joined the Foreign Office in 1885 and spent brief periods in Rio de Janeiro and in Egypt, he became *précis* writer to Lansdowne, Grey’s predecessor. He took over from Lindsay as Grey’s Private Secretary until 1907, when he became an Assistant Under-secretary, with responsibilities including the Eastern Department. Elevated to Ambassadorial rank in 1913 with his appointment to Constantinople, his posting was cut

¹¹⁷ “Obituary.” *The Times*, 23 Aug. 1945, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Lindsay minute 10 Jan, Board of Trade to Foreign Office, 7 Jan. 1910, FO 371/991/815.

¹²⁰ “Obituary.” *The Times*, 23 Aug. 1945, p. 7.

¹²¹ Lindsay minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 674, 17 Aug. 1909, FO 371/777/31632.

short by the outbreak of war with Turkey. Although he worked again in the Foreign Office for a brief period, this marked the end of his career, and he retired fully in 1920.¹²²

Mallet had the benefit of having caught Hardinge's eye early in his career, and enjoyed his patronage, being groomed for the PUSship.¹²³ This was, however, not purely based on merit – Hardinge hoped to maintain influence on policymaking after leaving for India, and also to increase his chances of getting the Paris Embassy at the end of his career.¹²⁴ In terms of general policy, Mallet was pro *entente* and has been considered by many scholars to be among the more anti-German members of the Foreign Office in this period.¹²⁵

Mallet has been described as 'sardonic', an apt description.¹²⁶ He was often cynical and active in suggesting policy, unlike Hardinge or Richard Maxwell, for instance, who were often more willing to counsel moderation or patience. He was critical of Sir Gerard Lowther, Ambassador to the Porte, as early as 1908, and complained that he had failed to speak up in the face of unfair tendering practices.¹²⁷ That is not to say he had much confidence in Ottoman Governance. As early as 1909, he reflected that Turkey would always lean upon the 'strongest Powers' and that for this reason, it was not worth Britain's while to make 'great sacrifice[s]' to improve relations with Turkey.¹²⁸ He thought that it would be important to attach 'stringent' conditions to loans made to the Turks, in order to prevent them from wasting the money on armaments and the like.¹²⁹ He was frustrated, too, that after all that Britain had 'done for the Turks' the Ottomans continued not to make concessions on the Baghdad Railway, preventing it from reaching Basra.¹³⁰

¹²² "Sir Louis Mallet." *The Times*, 10 Aug. 1936, p. 12.

¹²³ Busch, *Hardinge*, pp. 96; 102; Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, pp. 249; 252; 253.

¹²⁴ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 253.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 288-9; Busch, *Hardinge*, p. 102; Hamilton, *Bertie*, pp. 73-5.

¹²⁶ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 249.

¹²⁷ Mallet minute, Lowther to Grey, Confidential, No. 845, 8 Dec. 1908, FO 371/560/43482.

¹²⁸ Mallet minute, Bertie to Grey, no. 63, Tel., 19 Apr. 09, FO 371/757/14840.

¹²⁹ Mallet minute, Bertie to Grey, No. 70, Tel., 28 Sep. 1910, FO 371/993/35203.

¹³⁰ Mallet minute, Graham to Grey, 13 Mar. 1909, FO 371/764/11023.

Frustration also came from what he saw as the Turks' poor decision-making in not following the wishes of the Powers during the Bosnian crisis. Mallet thought that the Turks should have simply attempted to get as much money as possible, and ignore the political aspects of any solution.¹³¹ The Tripoli war saw Mallet confident that Turkish weakness could be taken advantage of by Britain.¹³² In general, however, Mallet had a healthy respect for the ability of the Turks to create trouble for Britain. The 'possibility of Naval expansion on the part of Turkey [was] a serious outlook' for Britain, he said.¹³³

Richard Ponsonby Maxwell was an experienced clerk, an expert on the East who refused promotion to Assistant Under-secretary.¹³⁴ Born 1853 and educated at Winchester, the young Maxwell travelled Europe, being in Paris at the outbreak of the 1870 war. He attended St. John's College, Cambridge, and entered the Foreign Office in 1877. He spent a period at Constantinople and served as private secretary to Sir Thomas Sanderson, Hardinge's predecessor as PUS, before the turn of the century. In 1913, he retired, hoping to see the world, but the war put paid to his plans and he returned to work in the Eastern Department. He died in 1928.¹³⁵

Maxwell was remembered as a charming man, close to many, including William Tyrrell, Grey's influential Private Secretary, and Crowe. As an expert and senior member of the department, Maxwell's 'footprint' in the documents was less than that of some of his colleagues. Although a rare minute writer, he often calmed the more excitable schemes of

¹³¹ Mallet minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 317, tel., 12 Oct 08, FO 371/551/35514; Mallet minute, Cartwright Grey, no. 76, tel., 17 Mar 09, FO 371/754/10301; Mallet minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 356, tel., 22 Oct 08, FO 371/554/36750; Mallet minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 893, Confidential, 29 Dec 08, FO 371/747/329.

¹³² Mallet minute, Turkish Embassy Communication, 15 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1484/16000.

¹³³ Mallet minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 311, Tel, 6 Sep. 1909, FO 371/780/33625.

¹³⁴ Steiner, 'Foreign Office under Sir Edward Grey, p. 25; Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 266: 'an acknowledged expert on the region'.

¹³⁵ "Mr. R. P. Maxwell." *The Times*, 28 May 1928, p. 17.

his juniors, such as Robert Vansittart.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, he was sometimes moved to comment. He was intensely frustrated at the actions of the Palmer's firm in 1911 when it appeared that they might wreck the negotiations of their rival Armstrong Whitworth with the Turkish Government for the building of a dreadnought.¹³⁷

Herman Cameron Norman was another of the more junior staff to occupy the Eastern Department for a time between 1908-1914. Born in 1872, he was educated at Eton and then Trinity College, Cambridge from 1890. He served in a succession of postings abroad, having been in Egypt under Lord Cromer, Constantinople, Washington and was part of Hardinge's embassy in Saint Petersburg. Having worked with several of the remarkable men of the British Foreign Policy establishment, and possessing an impressive array of linguistic skills, Norman was chosen to oversee the peace conference between the Balkan belligerents in 1912-1913, which was hosted by the Foreign Office.¹³⁸ Norman was remembered as a man keen on detail, fastidiously neat both in his personal appearance and his work.¹³⁹ However, where his opinions diverged from those of his colleagues, he was not afraid to make them clear. For instance, in 1912, during negotiations on Mesopotamian Oil extraction, Norman hoped to support a scheme other than that officially supported by the Foreign Office, headed by William Knox D'Arcy. Although he appreciated that British support was bespoke, he 'wish[ed]' that Britain could 'support this scheme' which was both 'grandiose and very largely British'.¹⁴⁰ Norman was also keen to remain in Turkey's good books, to maintain British influence. He worried, at the outbreak of the Tripoli war, that Italian friendship could be bought only at the cost of

¹³⁶ Vansittart and Maxwell minutes, Benckendorff Note, 30 Jan. 1912, FO 371/1524/4373.

¹³⁷ Maxwell minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 204, 29 Mar. 1911, FO 371/1239/12034.

¹³⁸ Obituary, *Times*.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Norman minute, Babington-Smith to Maxwell, 29 Aug. 1912, FO 371/1485/36674.

acquiescence in her aggressive actions. This, he thought, would 'alienate the sympathy of Turkey and throw her more and more into the arms of Germany'.¹⁴¹

Lancelot Oliphant had a distinguished diplomatic career, and spent some of his early years in the Eastern Department. He was born in 1881, and only entered the Foreign Office in 1903. He developed a certain affinity for the East through postings in Turkey and Persia. He reached ambassadorial rank upon being appointed British Ambassador to Belgium, but found himself incarcerated as a result of the German advance at the outbreak of the Second World War. Oliphant was an 'excellent and correct' official, with a strong eye for detail. Indeed, even in his early work as a member of the Eastern Department, he demonstrated this, often making fairly lengthy comments on Turkish matters. Although his remarks often showed a strong command of facts, they sometimes betrayed what might uncharitably be called a lack of originality or insight. Nevertheless, he was remembered fondly as an official who despite his regard for procedure possessed a 'boyish' sense of humour and 'many a dull official meeting... was enlivened by the play of his frolicsome banter'.¹⁴²

Alwyn Parker was another beneficiary of the drive to encourage staff members to find specialisms, becoming regarded as the Office's foremost expert on international railway disputes.¹⁴³ Parker was born in 1877, and educated at Harrow. Rather than attend a university, he spent some time travelling abroad, and entered the diplomatic service in 1900, being posted to St Petersburg in 1901. After time in London, he left the Foreign Office to take up a directorate at Lloyds Bank, in 1920, although he returned briefly to the

¹⁴¹ Norman minute, Rodd to Grey, No. 138, Confidential, 4 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/33685.

¹⁴² "Sir Lancelot Oliphant." *The Times*, 4 Oct. 1965, p. 12.

¹⁴³ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 244.

Office during the Second World War. ¹⁴⁴ Parker's expertise proved to be of great value during the long periods of negotiation with the Turks, both on railway matters and other issues. He worked closely with the former Grand Vizier Hakki Pasha, who travelled to London to negotiate on outstanding questions in 1913. He was well regarded by his colleagues, and was congratulated for his 'strenuous and prolonged labours' in the Anglo-Turkish commercial questions which were largely settled in 1913. ¹⁴⁵ He was often trusted to act in an almost independent manner, and to draft important letters and despatches. Nevertheless, Parker was not always shown the same respect outside of the Office. For instance, he grew frustrated in 1912 when progress on railway negotiations was ignored by the India Office, which had seemingly disregarded the process of negotiation and now seemed to be trying to turn back the clock. ¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Parker was not afraid to go against standard orthodoxies. His specialist knowledge and his clear sighted strategic view meant that he 'never believed that the question of what percentage we get in the fag end of the railway – i.e. from Baghdad to the Gulf, is nearly so important as it would be to secure a satisfactory preliminary Convention relating to all railways in Asiatic Turkey and definitely excluding preferential treatment.' ¹⁴⁷

Given Parker's desire for wide ranging agreements, he was quick to appreciate the value of Turkey's desire to raise customs dues by 4%, which required the consent of Britain, as a lever. ¹⁴⁸ Once identified, he was jealous in protecting this lever. When it was suggested, early in the first Balkan War, that Turkey might be permitted to raise her customs dues to help her fight, Norman warned that to allow this would mean that Britain's 'last lever would be gone'. ¹⁴⁹ When use of the lever was again contemplated in

¹⁴⁴ "Mr. Alwyn Parker." *The Times*, 17 Sept. 1951, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ Norman, Mallet and Grey minutes, Parker minute, 12 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1792/37322.

¹⁴⁶ India Office to Foreign Office, 10 Jun. 1912, FO 371/1485/24955.

¹⁴⁶ Parker minute, India Office to Foreign Office, 18 Jun. 1912, FO 371/1485/26183.

¹⁴⁷ Parker minute, Buchanan to Grey, No. 121, Tel., Confidential, 27 Mar. 1912, FO 371/1484/13119.

¹⁴⁸ Parker minute, Marling to Grey, No. 920, Confidential, 20 Dec. 1910, FO 371/992/46569.

¹⁴⁹ Parker minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 537, Tel., 28 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1519/45612.

1913, this time to encourage the Turks to again surrender Adrianople (now Edirne), he reacted with horror. He could not see a 'sufficient reason' to break off his negotiations with Hakki for the benefit of Bulgaria, which was reaping the 'just reward' of a policy of adventure, and it seemed 'quite uncalled for' for Britain to take the lead in 'checking' Turkey. For various reasons, he thought that there was no reason for Britain to 'take the initiative' in removing the Turks from Adrianople. He added that although Britain could not 'oppose the ejection of the Turks', there was no reason why she should 'promote it'.¹⁵⁰

Claud Russell, a member of the family of Whig grandees, was briefly a member of the Eastern Department before the outbreak of war.¹⁵¹ He was born in 1871, and was educated privately before progressing to Balliol College, Oxford. He joined the diplomatic service in 1897, and spent only a brief period at the Foreign Office before the war. In 1914, he was given permission to serve in France but returned to diplomatic service after the war, eventually achieving ambassadorial rank before his death in 1959.¹⁵²

Russell was described as a 'diplomatist of the old school', with an 'acute and clear' mind, able to write 'fluid, but precise and cogent prose'. Unfortunately, he was also a difficult personality, who disliked entertaining – a significant disqualification for a diplomat. He also cherished an 'almost oriental belief in the danger of haste', which unsurprisingly meant that he did not endear himself to Crowe, when parachuted into the Eastern Department on the outbreak of war.¹⁵³ During his time in the Eastern Department, Russell was deeply unimpressed by the Russian attitude during the Liman

¹⁵⁰ Parker minute, Marling to Grey, No. 344, Tel., 17 Jul, 1913, FO 371/1837/33024; Parker minute, Marling to Grey, No. 348, Tel., 18 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/33163; Parker minute, Marling to Grey, No. 407, Tel., 15 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1837/37886.

¹⁵¹ His father was Lord Arthur Russell, whilst his uncle was the better known Lord John, twice Prime Minister in the mid 1800s.

¹⁵² "Sir Claud Russell." *The Times*, 10 Dec. 1959, p. 17.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

von Sanders crisis, arguing that Britain should avoid becoming embroiled in a policy of 'competing demands'.¹⁵⁴

John Anthony Cecil Tilley was another of those to enjoy a distinguished career in the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service. Born in 1869 and educated at Eton and Kings College, Cambridge, he became a Foreign Office clerk in 1892. Unusually, as the Foreign and Diplomatic services were still separate, he spent a period at Constantinople under Sir Nicholas O'Connor.¹⁵⁵ After some time in the Eastern Department, Tilley was promoted to Senior Clerk in 1910 in the African department. He became an Assistant Under-secretary in 1919, and ended his career with an ambassadorial appointment to Brazil and Japan. He spent time after his retirement writing an official history of the Foreign Office.¹⁵⁶

Tilley was generally pessimistic about the prospects of Turkey after the Revolution. He wrote a lengthy memorandum on the future of Turkey in 1909, concluding in particular that Turkish finance should continue to be managed by the Powers, to prevent money being 'wasted'. Hardinge described Tilley as 'despondent of the future'.¹⁵⁷ He had developed this idea during the Bosnian Crisis, when he had feared that should Turkey receive money as part of a settlement with Austria, this would undoubtedly be wasted.¹⁵⁸ He had thought the Turks over-confident in their dealings with the Bulgarians in the early stages of the crisis, and his belief in Turkish weakness explained in part his support for a Balkan confederation, which would include the Turks.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Russell minute, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 393, Tel., 25 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1847/53521.

¹⁵⁵ Tilley, *London to Tokyo*, p. 65.

¹⁵⁶ "Sir John Tilley." *The Times*, 7 Apr. 1952, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ Tilley memorandum, 1 Mar. 1909, FO 371/770/13516; Hardinge minute.

¹⁵⁸ Tilley minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 50, 23 Jan 09, FO 371/749/4180.

¹⁵⁹ Tilley minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 523, 15 Sep 08, FO 371/550/3261; Tilley minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 365, tel., 26 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37298.

Robert Vansittart was another 'big name' to have spent a part of his early career in the Eastern Department. Vansittart was born in 1881 and educated at Eton, where he won prizes for French and German. He joined the diplomatic service in 1902, spending time in Paris, Tehran and Cairo before transferring to the Foreign Office in 1911. He would eventually rise to become PUS in 1930, although his tenure was ended in 1938 with the curtailment of his influence via a promotion.¹⁶⁰

As a young man and a junior staff member, Vansittart was apt to write lengthy, often sarcastic or drily humorous minutes, in an attempt to be noticed by his superiors. Keen to make his mark, this sometimes spilled over into what might be seen as over-excitable schemes and ideas. For instance, in 1911, he wondered at the possibility of exerting pressure on the Turks to give up Tripoli to the Italians, a scheme on which the more experienced Maxwell immediately poured cold water.¹⁶¹ Vansittart was often cynical. For instance, he thought Italian complaints of Turkish action in Tripoli exaggerated, though not without some justification.¹⁶² He was also against the idea of mediation in the conflict, because he believed it to be doomed to failure.¹⁶³ He complained that 'big talk' was the 'prevailing tone at Constantinople.'¹⁶⁴ The Turkish reaction to the Italian annexation was 'much as... [he had] expected, only a little more intransigent.'¹⁶⁵ Vansittart's views on the Balkan wars were similarly cynical. He remarked that Russia found herself in a tricky position, for 'having made the marriage' of the Balkan states, she now found herself 'compelled to wage divorce for fear of its first fruits'.¹⁶⁶ He

¹⁶⁰ "Lord Vansittart." *The Times*, 15 Feb. 1957, p. 13.

¹⁶¹ Vansittart and Maxwell minutes, Benckendorff Note, 30 Jan. 1912, FO 371/1524/4373.

¹⁶² Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 569, 11 Aug. 1911, FO 371/1251/32816.

¹⁶³ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 229, Tel., 2 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1252/38772.

¹⁶⁴ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 335, Tel., 7 Dec. 1911, FO 371/1259/48963.

¹⁶⁵ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 122, Tel., 23 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1524/17190.

¹⁶⁶ Vansittart minute, Barclay to Grey, No. 37, Tel., 22 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1498/39778.

thought that Turkey had little hope of success. Kâmil Pasha, the Grand Vizier's, assumption that Turkey would emerge from the opening exchanges 'on top' was a 'very big' assumption. ¹⁶⁷ The 'chief cause of the Turkish debacle', when it came, was the 'vast amount' of misspending of military funds under the CUP, which had left the Turkish 'materiel' a 'paper one', he thought. ¹⁶⁸ One attaché who suggested that the Bulgarian troops might be held outside Constantinople was an 'optimist', however much Vansittart hoped that he was 'right'. ¹⁶⁹ In 1913, Vansittart doubted the utility of making strong efforts on behalf of Russia over the Liman von Sanders case. He regarded the complaints to be exaggerated and was mindful of the similar position held by Admiral Limpus. ¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 503, Tel., 21 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1502/44456.

¹⁶⁸ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 944, Confidential, 28 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1504/4046.

¹⁶⁹ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 564, Tel., 1 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1503/46317.

¹⁷⁰ Vansittart minute, Mallet to Grey, No. 609, Tel., 10 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/55766.

2. The Revolution

In July 1908, the Young Turk revolution brought about the end of Sultan Abdülhamid II's domination of Ottoman politics. This event seemed to mark a break in the established pattern of diplomatic relations at the Porte. The German-leaning Hamidian regime had fallen from grace, replaced by an avowedly liberal, constitutional Young Turk government, which professed anglophile tendencies.¹⁷¹ This presented an opportunity for Britain to regain lost political influence at the Porte. This chapter will discuss the events of the revolution and consider how these events were viewed and approached by British policymakers. It will then consider the immediate aftermath of the revolution, and such matters as the loan of a British Admiral to the Turks. Finally, it will consider how much of an opportunity truly existed for Britain in the wake of this surprising change at Constantinople.

2.1. The Revolution

Before moving on to a discussion of the revolution and the British response to it, it is necessary to consider the situation in the Ottoman Empire before the events of July 1908. Few, indeed, would have considered the end of the Sultan's reign to be nigh. As G.R. Berridge put it, by 1906 Abdülhamid 'had no visible domestic opponents of whom to speak. His spies, for whom he was now infamous, were everywhere; troublemakers were being exiled to the nether regions of the Empire; and the press suffered from the strictest censorship.'¹⁷² Even in the final months of his reign, Abdülhamid remained comfortably

¹⁷¹ Ahmad, 'Britain's relations with the Young Turks', 302; 304-5; Kent, Marian, 'Constantinople and Asiatic Turkey, 1905-1914' in Hinsley, *Foreign Policy Under Grey*, pp 148-177(149).

¹⁷² Berridge, *Gerald Fitzmaurice*, p 73.

ensconced in his palace, protected, or at least so he thought, by his large army of spies. The Sultan's espionage apparatus, indeed, was kept busy, a secret tribunal always in session at the seat of Government, the Yildiz palace, to try those suspected of treason. A paranoid character, he was terrified of being usurped or killed, a fear perhaps stemming from his removal of his own brother in an 1876 coup. Naturally, so suspicious a character ensured that he was at the centre of governance. He worked, it was reported in 1908, 'day and night', and almost all state business was seen by him. When a break was required, this most paranoid of men apparently enjoyed reading French translations of the detective stories of Arthur Conan-Doyle. Indeed, the telling of this story represented a surprisingly indulgent attitude amongst some British officials towards the Sultan. Colonel Herbert Surtees, a British military attaché, concluded that there was

no doubt that the Sultan Abdul Hamid is sincerely desirous for the welfare of the State and has the firmest faith in the efficacy of his system, but it is self evident that he has taken upon his shoulders more than mortal men can achieve, and the consequence is that Turkey lags behind all the other Powers in Europe in what we consider progress of civilization.¹⁷³

Sir Nicholas O'Connor, the recently deceased Ambassador at Constantinople, had also enjoyed a cordial personal relationship with Abdülhamid.¹⁷⁴ Such attitudes towards the Sultan were perhaps inevitable, given his position as an absolute monarch. Nevertheless, attempts to cultivate friendly personal relations seemed fruitless, and Britain's position at the Porte remained poor. To the concern of the Edwardian generation in the Foreign Office, the Germans enjoyed more favour, as demonstrated by the recent award of a contract to build the Berlin to Baghdad on favourable terms. In effect, Germany was being

¹⁷³ Barclay to Grey, no. 151, 31 March 1908, FO 371/541/11647. Sir Charles Hardinge was not keen on Surtees. He privately told Lowther that he had 'never had a high opinion' of him, and thought that he had 'deteriorated' in recent years. He added that even 'in our Harrow days, he never was brilliant, and not particularly nice'. Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 21 Oct. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 13.

¹⁷⁴ Berridge, *Gerald Fitzmaurice*, p 35. Although O'Connor's charm offensive was initially successful, he found his influence declining as his health worsened and the German representative, Adolph Baron Marschall von Bieberstein, grew to dominate the diplomatic scene at Constantinople: pp 92-3.

paid to increase her own political and economic penetration into the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷⁵ Sir Edward Grey privately complained that ‘we had no bad disposition whatever towards Turkey, but that the Porte did not give us a chance of improving our relations with them. I had made an effort last year, in a speech to the Balkan committee, to give the Turks credit for what improvement had taken place in the civil administration of Macedonia’. He conceded that as ‘long as Turkey was incapable of decent government we could do nothing to help her’.¹⁷⁶ In private, officials were less restrained in their assessments. The Chief Dragoman at the Constantinople Embassy, Gerald Fitzmaurice, found himself almost despairing in April 1908.¹⁷⁷ In a letter to William Tyrrell, Grey’s Private Secretary, he complained that ‘our policy, if I may so call it, in Turkey, has been, and for some time to come will be, to attempt the impossible task of furthering our commercial interests while pursuing a course... which the Sultan interprets as being pre-eminently hostile in aim and tendency.’¹⁷⁸ Problematically for the British, trade was a ‘favour to be bestowed on the seemingly friendly, a category in which, needless to say, we are not included.’ The main reason for British unpopularity, according to Fitzmaurice, was the British involvement in Macedonia. The territory having been gained through the ‘spilling of Moslem blood’, the

¹⁷⁵ The term ‘Edwardian Generation’, in terms of the British Foreign Office, refers to the generation of diplomats and officials whose formative years came in the 1890s, and who came to dominate the policymaking establishment after 1905-6, when the Foreign Office underwent a significant restructuring and Sir Charles Hardinge became the Permanent Under-secretary. Although naturally this generation held differing views, Hardinge proved powerful in his new position, and used his close relationship with King Edward VII to promote men of a similar mind to himself. This meant that senior members of the Foreign Office were generally in agreement, in this case suspicious of Germany. T.G. Otte noted that the distinction was first made by the Earl of Onslow in his memoirs, and that it has come to be used as a general shorthand to refer to this group and their views: see Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, pp 19-21; Steiner and Neilson, *Origins of the First World War*, pp 190-193; Steiner, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, pp 91-94; 101-104. Sean McMeekin, in his book on the railway project, discussed one of history’s ‘greatest charm offensives’ on the part of German representatives in Turkey, and suggested that the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907 provided additional motivation to both parties to get the deal over the line. See McMeekin, *Berlin to Baghdad Express*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁶ Grey to Barclay, Private, 26 May 08, *BD v*, no. 197.

¹⁷⁷ For more on Fitzmaurice, see G.R. Berridge’s excellent biography: *id*, *Gerald Fitzmaurice*.

¹⁷⁸ See Corp, Edward, ‘Sir William Tyrrell: The Eminence Grise of the British Foreign Office, 1912-1915’, *The Historical Journal* 25(3), 1982, pp. 697-708.

This letter has been much used by generations of scholars, but for good reason - it pithily sums up the situation as it was before the revolution: for instance, Kent, *Constantinople and Asiatic Turkey*, p. 148.

Turks would be unlikely to give it up without a fight, and British gendarmerie proposals were hardly calculated to soothe Turkish fears of a Great Power carve up of their territories.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, until this ‘tangle’ had been solved, Fitzmaurice predicted, there would be no change in Britain’s position.¹⁸⁰ Macedonia was the main issue of interest for British Ottoman watchers, and in the years before the revolution was the question which came most readily to mind for British diplomatists when Ottoman issues were discussed. This state of affairs lent weight to the (largely accurate) British assumption that the apparent breaking up of the Empire had been a significant motivating factor for the Young Turk revolutionaries. Plainly, the governance of the Ottoman Empire was chaotic and centred on the person of the Sultan. Equally clear is that the British position, politically and economically, left much to be desired, had done so for some time, and that this was a fact that contemporary policymakers were not only fully aware of, but regretted.

2.1.a Events of the Revolution

At the basic level, a revolution can be defined as ‘the use of or the threat of the use of force either to recover a political system that appears to have been eroded or to bring into being a new political system. In many cases, revolution also involves the creation of different social or economic arrangements.’¹⁸¹ Although often called a ‘revolution’, certainly at the time, and being known so in most of the literature, the events which led to the Young Turks seizing power in Turkey cannot be termed a ‘revolution’ in the way in which it might be understood in the context of the French or the Russian Revolutions, as a convulsive, bloody and transformative event, completely upending the established order.

¹⁷⁹ For a discussion of British policy in Macedonia before 1908, see Bridge, F.R., *Relations with Austria Hungary and the Balkan States, 1905-1908*, in Hinsley, *Foreign Policy Under Grey*, pp. 165-177. Grey remembered the period as ‘intolerably wearisome, very disagreeable and painfully futile’, Grey, *Twenty-Five Years v.1*, p. 172.

¹⁸⁰ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 12 Apr 09, *BD v* no. 196.

¹⁸¹ Richards, Michael D., *Revolutions in World History*, (London, 2004), p 2.

¹⁸² In 1977, Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw concluded that the term revolution did not fit the bill, arguing that it was almost bloodless and Abdülhamid remained Sultan. ¹⁸³ More recent work has tended to agree. In 2010 Erik J. Zürcher also conceded that the Young Turk Revolution had been ‘curious’, again emphasising that it had been almost bloodless and that there was little in the way of systemic change. ¹⁸⁴

This section will first explore the events of the Revolution, before moving on to consider how these events were experienced and digested by the British Foreign Policy-making establishment. The events of the Revolution are generally the subject of agreement amongst scholars, and have not proved controversial. ¹⁸⁵ In the period before 1908, opposition to the Sultan and his regime centred around the ‘Young Turks’, a shadowy grouping that did not officially exist. Some members, having been open in their opposition to the Sultan’s regime, had been forced into exile abroad, often finding succour in Paris. These men, generally the more thoughtful and intellectual amongst the Young Turks, contented themselves with continuing their subversive activities from abroad, writing widely and publishing journals. ¹⁸⁶ In Turkey, those not forced into exile had begun to organise themselves into an underground body aimed at the restoration of the Ottoman constitution, first declared and then suspended in 1876. By 1908, the movement was rapidly swelling in size, and all seemed in readiness. The Young Turks were not yet masters of the situation, however. Their status as a secret organisation was threatened by the large and fast increase in membership, and the meeting of the Russian Tsar with his

¹⁸² Almost all scholarly literature uses the term revolution to refer to these events. Aykut Kansu’s work, a rare book length treatment of the revolution in English, uses the term in the title: Kansu, Aykut, *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey*, (Leiden, 1997).

¹⁸³ Shaw, Stanford J.; Shaw, Ezel Kural, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume II* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 267.

¹⁸⁴ Zürcher, Erik-Jan, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk’s Turkey* (London, 2012), pp. 26-27.

¹⁸⁵ For instance, see, Kansu, *Revolution of 1908*; Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*; Hanioglu, M. Şükrü, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (Oxford, 2001).

¹⁸⁶ Kaynar, Erdal, ‘Logic of Enlightenment’.

cousin King Edward VII at Reval (modern day Tallinn), suggested to Turkish observers that a Great Power carve-up might be on the cards in Macedonia. Consequently, they were compelled to action a few months ahead of their planned date.¹⁸⁷ The Sultan's security services had been aware, on some level, of the Young Turks' existence since September 1907. This provoked action, and the rebels declared their existence in early 1908, taking the name of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).¹⁸⁸ At this juncture, various members of the CUP, including Enver Bey, were invited by the Sultan to come to Constantinople and explain the situation. To protect themselves and the Organisation, these men, largely army officers, took to the hills with armed bands. The CUP soon found itself the master of the situation in the European provinces of the Empire, and assassinated those sent by the Sultan to try and calm the uprising. As pro-CUP troops seized telegraph offices and demanded that the constitution be reinstated, the Sultan, whose espionage network remained impressive, recognised a *fait accompli*. He reinstated the constitution of 1876, and tried to ban political associations in Macedonia, in a final attempt to face down the CUP. The Young Turks, however, were too strong, and now firmly held the advantage, which they pressed, achieving the removal from office of many who remained loyal to the Sultan – the much hated camarilla. By now dominant, the CUP prepared for the first elections of the new era in Turkey.

2.1.b British Views of the Revolution

How then did the British see this surprising development, and what did they think it would mean for future Turkish policy? G.R Berridge remarked that the Revolution took 'almost completely by surprise the entire Constantinople diplomatic corps, including

¹⁸⁷ Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, pp. 33-35. Sir George Buchanan, then in Bulgaria, noted that in that country the Revolution was initially seen as a 'ruse to going time for the nullifying of the reform scheme', *id*, *My Mission to Russia, and other Diplomatic Memories* (Boston, 1923), p. 76.

¹⁸⁸Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution*, pp. 263-5.

Gerald Fitzmaurice.’¹⁸⁹ The same is true for the Foreign Office, who were engaged in selecting a replacement for Sir Nicholas O’Conor, who had recently died in post.

Discontent in the Turkish Army first came to the attention of the Foreign Office in June, although Lancelot Oliphant remained unconcerned. Throughout ‘European Turkey the troops are at present faring badly as regards pay’, he observed, failing to recognise that the discontent appeared present in the officer class too.¹⁹⁰ Having later been enlightened by the British Press, he soon appreciated that a ‘most serious situation’ existed ‘as regards the army’.¹⁹¹ By the end of June, reports of Young Turk assassinations had filtered through to the Foreign Office. George Barclay, *charge d’affaires* after O’Conor’s death, reported a failed attempt on the life of one Nazim Bey, noting that the motivation for this had apparently had some connection with what he called the ‘Jeunes Turcs’. Furthermore, Harry Lamb, consul at Salonica (modern day Thessaloniki), added that it was openly discussed amongst junior officers that should Nazim return, another attempt would be made to kill him. Louis Mallet, head of the Foreign Office’s Eastern Department, seemed aware that something was afoot, bringing his colleagues’ attention to other murders made in the name of the Young Turks.¹⁹² His conviction was by no means universal at this stage. The consul at Monastir reported on a further murder, but did not suspect a Young Turk connection.¹⁹³ By the second week in July, it seems that policymakers were aware of the Young Turks’ involvement in events in Turkey, having received news of further murders and a report that a senior Government Official had been sent to Salonica, to take command of the troops stationed there and prevent the spread of Young Turk ideas.¹⁹⁴ Although the ‘Sublime Porte pretend[ed] to make light of the Young Turk movement... [it was

¹⁸⁹ Berridge, *Gerald Fitzmaurice*, p. 117.

¹⁹⁰ Oliphant minute, Barclay to Grey, no. 330, 12 June 1908, FO 371/544/21353.

¹⁹¹ Barclay to Grey, no. 380, 11 July 1908 FO 371/544/24449.

¹⁹² Barclay to Grey, no. 353, 23 June 08 FO 371/544/22225.

¹⁹³ Barclay to Grey, no. 362, 30 June 08, FO 371/544/23168.

¹⁹⁴ Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 160, 8 July 08, FO 371/544/23627; Barclay to Grey, no. 373, 7 July 08, FO 371/544/24038.

apparent] that they were extremely anxious about it', especially as it was at this juncture that the Young Turks approached the British Vice-Consul at Monastir, informing him that a revolution would take place shortly and asking for the British view, as the Young Turks hoped to be on good terms with them once in government. With Barclay's express approval, their overtures were ignored.¹⁹⁵ In London, officials still viewed the situation with equanimity. Barclay reported that the Young Turk movement had made 'real headway' in the army, and Surtees thought that if the movement proved able to mobilise Islamic opinion then there might be 'far reaching consequences'. Herman Norman, a junior clerk, did not see the transformative potential of the new movement. Only if it grew further would it be 'an important factor in the Macedonian situation'. Sir Charles Hardinge, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, also viewed the situation in this context. If the Young Turks were to join the Bulgarian bands, he thought, the proposed 'mobile force' might be more 'palatable' to the Sultan.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, Macedonia remained the frame of reference through which British policymakers were viewing events. The information received so far had not been enough to indicate that a change was afoot, and consequently officials continued to consider events within the terms of their pre-existing understanding of Ottoman politics and the British place within it. As the month of July went on, the Foreign Office was kept well informed of events as they unfolded, often through the consular network.¹⁹⁷ Barclay reported Niazi Bey's proclamation that the Young Turks sought the reintroduction of the 1876 constitution, for instance, although he

¹⁹⁵Hanioğlu, *Preparation for Revolution*, p. 273.

¹⁹⁶ Barclay to Grey, no. 378, 9 July 1908, FO 371/544/24315; Norman and Hardinge minutes.

¹⁹⁷ The consular network in this period has often come in for criticism, but in this case the Foreign Office knew of all major developments, accurate in most details, very quickly. Much of the 'action', so to speak, took place in areas distant from the capital, and indeed this was a reason for the movement's success. See Platt, D.C.M., *The Cinderella Service, British Consuls Since 1825* (Hamden, 1971); Townshend, Captain A.F., *A Military Consul in Turkey: the experiences and impressions of a British Representative in Asia Minor* (London, 1910).

erroneously labelled him the 'leader' of the Young Turks.¹⁹⁸ By 20 July, Barclay's reports, based on those of various consuls, reflected that British diplomats were starting to recognise that the Young Turks were gaining ground. Although the Porte still tried to 'make light' of the uprising, the possibility of events proving the prelude to 'more serious developments' could not be 'excluded'. Barclay remarked that the 3rd Army Corps – based in Salonica and at the forefront of the uprising – was 'honeycombed' with Young Turk propaganda, and that a serious organisation was clearly in place, based on the 'rapid succession of murders and attempted murders' of 'persons obnoxious to the Young Turkish party'. Oliphant remained cautious, emphasising that the movement was limited largely to the 3rd Army, which was the 'most corrupt', and that Young Turk ideas had not penetrated far into 'Asia Minor'.¹⁹⁹

The next day saw the arrival of a more detailed account from Constantinople, which added more information to the view the Foreign Office had constructed from telegrams. Barclay now reported that Young Turk propaganda had made significant progress even before the uprising had begun, and was now making steady headway, arguing that the Empire must be protected from foreign incursions. Furthermore, the 'rebels' insisted that 'plunder forms no part of their programme' and that their motto was 'liberty and equality for all'. Finally, he reported that 28 *redif*, or reserve, divisions were being brought from the Asian provinces of the Empire, movements which suggested that the Sultan still thought the uprising could be contained. This change of tone on the part of Barclay, reporting both that the uprising was more serious and covering the Young Turks themselves more favourably, was now reflected in the lower reaches of the Eastern Department. Oliphant considered that the calling up of reserve divisions meant that

¹⁹⁸ Niyazi was one of the Ottoman Officers who took to the hills of Macedonia. Although a figurehead, he had actually asked the CUP leadership for permission to take to the hills before he did so. See: Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, pp. 35-37.

¹⁹⁹ Barclay to Grey, no. 388, 15 July 1908, FO 371/544/25086; Oliphant minute.

Ottoman authorities had ‘grasped’ the ‘seriousness’ of the situation, whilst his colleague Herman Norman expressed sympathy, remarking that the ‘wonder is that the movement did not come to a head long ago considering the system of Govt under which these people are condemned to live.’²⁰⁰ Sympathy aside, British representatives in the Ottoman Empire and officials in London both remained largely ignorant of the import of the uprising. Barclay, along with some Consuls, reported that pay and promotion were more important to some of those protesting than politics. Oliphant concluded that some of the troubles were of ‘a professional, and not Young Turk, origin’.²⁰¹

On the 22 July, the Foreign Office learned that the ‘excitement’ had reached Smyrna (modern-day Izmir), and that demands had been made via telegraph for the restoration of the 1876 constitution. The significance of these developments was not lost on the permanent staff. Oliphant noted that Smyrna being a focal point for the supply of troops to the Ottoman Army meant that the movement had now manoeuvred itself into a strong position. Hardinge declared that ‘This is beginning to have a striking resemblance to revolution.’²⁰² Although, in his view, events were now ‘moving rapidly’, and the Office appreciated that the ‘events of the next few days... [would be] interesting’, the uprising was not yet having an effect at a senior policy level.²⁰³ Count Alexander von Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador to London, was concerned about the implications of the situation on Macedonia. After a private discussion, he and Grey decided that nothing should be done immediately, and that negotiations between the Powers relating to the proposed mobile force should continue. Once the Powers had come to an agreement, they would then reassess the situation and decide whether the Turkish situation still

²⁰⁰ Norman minute, Barclay to Grey, no. 392, 16 July 1908, FO 371/544/25303.

²⁰¹ Oliphant minute, Barclay to Grey, no. 398, 20 Jul 1908, FO 371/544/25648 It certainly seems that for many involved, this was the a primary motivating factor for their participation – but here it seems that these motivations were being considered more widely by British observers.

²⁰² Oliphant and Hardinge minutes, Barclay to Grey, Tel. no., 191, 22 Jul 1908, FO 371/544/25462.

²⁰³ Hardinge minute, Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 173, 22 July 1908, FO 371/544/25514; Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 177, 23 July 1908, FO 371/544/25632.

merited the presentation of a joint note.²⁰⁴ It seems that British policymakers remained unsure whether the uprising would lead to meaningful change, and opted to take a watching brief.

The wait for significant developments lasted just one day, as the constitution was proclaimed in various towns around the Empire.²⁰⁵ Lamb, in Salonica, remarked upon the ‘Fraternity and enthusiasm’ that prevailed on all hands, and the ‘practical unanimity amongst magistracy, civil service, population, and army’. ‘The order and skill which... characterized the conduct of this movement... caused astonishment to all Europeans who have witnessed it’, he thought.²⁰⁶ At Monastir, the new age was greeted with ‘great enthusiasm’ and ‘no disorder’.²⁰⁷ The British consular network was impressed by the absence of violence, despite the apparent disappearance of the police force in many places, as all ‘nationalities passed... [the day] in manifestations of popular rejoicing’.²⁰⁸ On the advice of his Grand Vizier, the Sultan declared a general political amnesty, and his notorious spy system was reported to have disappeared almost completely.²⁰⁹ The population of Constantinople, according to Barclay, realised that the constitution had really been revived when they saw that the press had become ‘free’, and gave ‘free expression to their joy’ by ‘decorating the town’ and making ‘enthusiastic demonstrations outside Government buildings.’²¹⁰ At Salonica, the ‘manifestations’ of support for the new order of things continued ‘on an even grander scale’ than before, the Foreign Office heard, and were informed that the ‘efforts of leaders’ were being ‘devoted to reconciliation and

²⁰⁴ Grey draft, 23 July 1908, FO 371/544/25718.

²⁰⁵ Consul-General Lamb to Grey, Tel., 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25703; Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 198, 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25748; Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 180, 24 July 08, FO 371/544/25754.

²⁰⁶ Consul-General Lamb to Grey, Tel., 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25703.

²⁰⁷ Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 198, 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25748.

²⁰⁸ Consul-General Lamb to Grey, Tel., 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25703.

²⁰⁹ Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 180, 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25754; Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 184, 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25887.

²¹⁰ Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 184, 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25887.

union of different nationalities'.²¹¹ Oliphant struggled to comprehend the changes that the Turkey he had known had undergone in so short a time. Even 'Armenians are popular and spies are a thing of the past'. Of perhaps more interest to most British policymakers were Barclay's observations on the Young Turk attitude to them. He reported that:

The Turks, who remember that both Kiamail Pasha and the new Grand Vizier have at various times sought British protection, and look upon England as the chain of constitutional liberty and the traditional friend of Turkey, showed special friendliness towards several Englishmen who happened to be circulating in the town.²¹²

They would lose no time in trying to push home their advantage. Barclay was soon received by the Sultan privately, as a part of the formalities surrounding his imminent departure. He had the impression that the new ministry, appointed in the wake of the granting of a constitution, would like him to make a statement that British public opinion met the news with 'sympathy', and proposed congratulating the Sultan on his granting of a constitutional regime.²¹³ In a sign of their eagerness to establish a good footing with the new regime, however, the Foreign Office had already sent him instructions. He was asked to avail himself of an opportunity of 'offering congratulations to the Grand Vizier' 'as soon as possible' and assuring him that 'the warmest sympathy' had 'been called forth by this event in England'. Given that the British involvement in the Macedonian question was likely to remain a source of friction, the new ministry was to be informed that all that had been done was aimed at 'helping Turkey', and that the mobile force proposal was no more than what the Turkish Government itself would do to 'secure life and property'. Furthermore, Britain did not wish to 'embarrass' Turkey, and when a new government was established and had dealt with the problems, HMG would 'reconsider' their involvement, although warning that she would have to consult with other Powers before

²¹¹ Consul-General Lamb to Grey, Tel., 26 July 1908, FO 371/544/25981.

²¹² Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 184, 24 July 1908, FO 371/544/25887.

²¹³ Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 191, 27 Jul 1908, FO 371/544/26166.

making a final announcement on the subject.²¹⁴ Thus, the pattern of British policy towards the Young Turks was established - warm words, but little in the way of action, and cautious temporising where other Powers were involved. Doubts persisted in Britain over the strength of the Young Turks and the shape which the new administration might take. Oliphant, reflecting on news of petitions to dismiss previous palace favourites, thought it 'almost inconceivable that the party which was strong enough to wring a constitution - even if only in name - out of the Sultan... [would] rest until Izzet... [was] definitely ousted.'²¹⁵ By the end of July, the aforementioned Izzet Pasha, the Sultan's former secretary, along with other hated members of the Hamidian inner circle, had been removed from the scene. Izzet had enquired of Barclay whether he might be protected by the British Embassy and been rejected, although the British *chargé* conceded that asylum would not be refused in the event of genuine threat to life. In the event, Izzet was removed without British involvement – at least at this juncture. Hardinge complained that even had Izzet's life been in danger, his presence 'would not have been desirable' at the British Embassy. He had been, for many years, an 'enemy not only to British interests but also to the interests of his own country' and he regretted even the small concessions Barclay had made. Referring to Izzet's plentiful connections with Germany, he mentioned that there were 'other embassies where persons such as Izzet Pasha should apply for protection.'²¹⁶ For the avoidance of doubt, Barclay was not to make representations to the Government on behalf of any members of the palace camarilla, and not in any circumstances 'incur the odium of receiving them at His Majesty's Embassy' as they had 'no claim whatever' on

²¹⁴ Grey to Barclay, Tel., no. 134, 27 July 08, FO 371/544/26166.

²¹⁵ Oliphant minute, Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 192, 27 July 08, FO 371/554/26169. Izzet Pasha was a palace functionary and the Sultan's secretary, who acted as something of a gatekeeper to the royal person, and therefore to influence. He was much identified with the ills of the old regime and also with the Germans, who had recently awarded him a German decoration. His remaining in office was the subject of some discontent. The Annual Report for 1909 labelled him 'a man known to have illicitly acquired great wealth, and to be guilty of great cruelty'. Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v.*

²¹⁶ Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 197, 28 July 1908, FO 371/544/26305; Hardinge minute.

Britain and had ‘thwarted continuously’ British ‘reform proposals’.²¹⁷ Oliphant observed that Izzet’s fall marked a ‘triumph for the reform party’ – and nor was this an event about which British policymakers were unhappy.²¹⁸ Having had something in common, the new Turkish Government now thanked Britain for their message of support, declaring that Britain could rely on the new administration doing all it could to establish good government throughout the Ottoman Empire.²¹⁹ The new ministry had declared its intentions and had succeeded in removing many of those it found objectionable within the palace, but still felt uneasy in its position. In what Norman saw as a ‘very clever move’, they compelled the Sultan, as *caliph*, to swear an oath on the Quran that the constitution would not be suspended again, as it had been in 1878. Oliphant, too, was impressed. The Sultan had ‘committed himself by such a step; but no alternative was open to him.’²²⁰

The situation at Yildiz having become more clear, attention in London turned towards the relationship with Russia. The Anglo-Russian convention being only a year old, and the matter of Turkey being a delicate one between the two Powers, meant that Grey and the Foreign Office were keen to ascertain Russian views of the new situation, particularly with regard to their proposed joint action in Macedonia. Alexander Izvolsky, the Russian Foreign Minister, was in agreement with the British view that representations for the establishment of a mobile force should be suspended. Although Ottoman rejuvenation was far from a desired outcome for many at Choristers Bridge, where designs on Constantinople and the Straits were still cherished, Izvolsky declared it ‘essential that

²¹⁷ Oliphant minute, Grey to Barclay, Tel., no. 136, 29 July 1908, FO 371/544/26305.

²¹⁸ Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 199, 29 July 1908, FO 371/544/26307.

²¹⁹ Barclay to Grey, no. 200, 29 July 1908, FO 371/544/26308.

²²⁰ Although it was questioned by Islamic Scholars, and others, Abdülhamid II, in common with his predecessors, claimed the title of *caliph* and used it for political purposes, although some have questioned the success of this strategy, see Quataert, Donald, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* (Cambridge, 2000), p 83. Edwin Pears related a story that the Sultan did not meet the requirements set out in sacred law for the *caliphate*, and that consequently these sections of the sacred texts disappeared from Constantinople mosques. See Pears, Edwin, *Life of Abdul Hamid* (London, 1917) ; Barclay to Grey, Tel., no. 201, 29 July 1908, FO 371/544/26424, Oliphant and Norman minutes.

Great Britain and Russia should avoid placing themselves in antagonism to a Mussulman movement productive of genuine reforms, and that a fair chance of showing what good it... [could] bring about should be afforded to that movement.'²²¹ In general, Russian officials expressed relief that under the terms of the new constitution, the laws made under the old regime would remain until superseded, meaning that there would not be immediate changes in Macedonia, and the Powers would retain a modicum of control over the process. Perhaps inevitably given their differing interests, Russian diplomats were less optimistic about the revolution than their British colleagues. The Russian Ambassador at Constantinople, Ivan Zinoviev, for instance, suggested that the Sultan would still be able to pull strings behind the scenes, and that the revolution would come to nothing. Hugh O'Beirne, *chargé* at St. Petersburg, meanwhile, expected that Foreign Officers would still be required in Macedonia, much to the disappointment of Grey, who hoped that the Turks would be able to put things right, rather than the situation remaining one which required 'the Powers... [to] continue to keep their fingers in the Macedonian pie.' For Grey, this solution would avoid friction between Britain and Russia, whilst at the same time protecting British interests, and preventing Russian incursions into the Ottoman Empire.

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As the immediate crisis receded, Barclay found time to digest what had occurred. His conclusions would prove representative of British understanding of the revolution and its causes. Firstly, he explained the feeling for Britain which had sprung up: aspirations for 'constitutional liberty... [could not] lack the moral support of Great Britain', a feeling 'doubtless strengthened by the fact that the two statesmen whom the Sultan... raised to power in this crisis... [had] both at different times enjoyed British protection'. Having warned that predictions would be 'rash at this stage', he prophesied that the fact that this

²²¹ O'Beirne to Grey, Tel., no. 131, 30 July 1908, FO 371/544/26555; See Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*.

²²² O'Beirne to Grey, no. 339, 28 July 1908, FO 371/544/26865.

was an organic development, without foreign involvement, coupled with the profound changes throughout the Ottoman State, would mean that the movement had a reasonable chance of success. Finally, he situated the movement firmly within what he saw as a tradition of Islamic dissatisfaction, which he said had been growing for some years.²²³ In his final reports before returning home, he adopted a notably positive view of the situation, feeling that he could move onto his next post with the satisfaction both of a job well done and the knowledge that the Ottomans had taken the first steps towards ‘saving the Empire’.

A notable aspect of the evolving British view of the revolution was the high degree of factual accuracy. Although cautious to avoid over committing themselves, British officials, both in London and the Ottoman Empire, were well informed about the events of the revolution, and seemed quick to draw reasonably accurate conclusions about the causes for the unrest. The Embassy’s annual report, issued at the start of 1909, proved even more strikingly accurate in its distillation of the events, correctly identifying, for instance, Niyazi Bey and Enver Bey as key instigators of the revolution, a fact perhaps missed a little at the time.²²⁴ However, they had failed to understand several aspects of the Young Turk mindset. The arrival of the new ambassador, Sir Gerard Lowther, did little to improve matters in this respect.

He arrived to a ‘considerable crowd in a state of some excitement’. A deputation greeted him in the name of the Turkish nation.²²⁵ Having previously served in Constantinople from 1885 to 1891, he found the changes ‘astonishing’ and ‘difficult to

²²³ Barclay to Grey, no. 419, 26 July 1908, FO 371/544/26572.

²²⁴ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v.*

Saadet Özen wrote on the idea of *hürriyet*, or ‘the freedom’, and how many of those involved in the revolution subsequently took care to present themselves as freedom fighters or guerrillas who had taken to the mountains and fought for freedom. Özen, Saadet, ‘The heroes of *Hürriyet: The Images in Struggle*’, in Lévy-Aksu *et al.*, *Young Turk Revolution and the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 15-39.

²²⁵ Lowther to Grey, Tel., no. 204, 30 July 1908, FO 371/544/26560.

realise for one who had known the country previously'.²²⁶ Grey thought he had 'reached Constantinople at the most favourable and interesting moment', privately remarking on how 'little we either of us foresaw, when you were appointed, the reception you would actually get!' The joy was not unrestrained, however, and both expressed doubts about the new order of things. Grey thought that things could not 'go on as well as they... [were] at present', and warned of trouble ahead. Even if the Turks did well, he warned, their strength would cause Britain trouble in Egypt, as the success of another Islamic power would encourage demands for autonomy and a constitution. He concluded that all that could be done for the present was to 'support the better elements' and wait upon events, a point which he also made to Parliament on 27 July, a speech commended to the Embassy as a statement of position.²²⁷ Lowther found himself with doubts. Upon arrival, he was 'at once struck with the impression that the Committee of Union and Progress lacked responsible leaders of position.' Although 'everyone is a Young Turk now', he complained, it seemed 'too much to believe that they... [would] for long be able to live up to their motto of "Liberty Equality & Fraternity"'.²²⁸ Despite his forebodings, Grey was 'anxious' that Lowther 'miss no opportunity of letting it be generally known' that the British attitude towards the new Government was 'entirely favourable', so long as it made for 'reform and good government in Turkey.' With an eye on appearances within Turkey, he asked Lowther to ensure that the British 'attitude and views should become as clearly and widely known as possible', suggesting again his speech to Parliament of 27 July as a model. Going further, he instructed that the new Government not be bothered with live questions relating to the old regime until they had had 'time to get control of affairs'.²²⁹ Plainly,

²²⁶ Lowther to Grey, Private, 4 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 2.

²²⁷ Grey to Lowther, Private, 31 July 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 1; HC Deb. (27 July 08. 500, 969-970, retrieved 2 July 2019 from <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1908/jul/27/class-ii#S4V0193P0_19080727_HOC_425>.

²²⁸ Lowther to Grey, Private, 4 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 2.

²²⁹ Grey draft, 31 July 08, FO 371/544/26427.

Grey considered that the success of the new regime would be beneficial for Britain. Failing that, a Government claiming kinship with Britain and possessing an apparent desire to operate in a more transparent and even-handed manner was at the very least an improvement on what had gone before. Grey was willing to make minor concessions to allow it to get up on its feet.

‘Unfortunately just as things were going so well’ for Britain, Lowther was presented with the first minor incident of his tenure.²³⁰ The so called ‘palace clique’ formed the subject of increasingly rancorous discussions within Ottoman politics. Anger was particularly focused on the fact that many of its members were being allowed to escape. Britain became an inadvertent lightning rod for such discontent when it emerged that Izzet Pasha, the Sultan’s erstwhile secretary, had managed to escape Constantinople aboard a British-owned vessel.²³¹ As Norman pointed out, Britain could not give him up, as he was not wanted on criminal charges – ‘although he was ‘doubtless a really great criminal’ – and no extradition treaty existed between Britain and Turkey in any case. Young Turk representatives threatened Lamb with the dissatisfaction ‘of the entire nation’ if Izzet was not handed over.²³² Despite ‘rather violent requests’, Louis Mallet concluded that nothing could be done.²³³ After his escape, it transpired that he had first claimed refuge at the German Embassy. Grey complained that it was ‘annoying that the German Embassy should have placed Izzet on a British vessel, but we could not help it. He is a political refugee.’²³⁴ Lowther shared his frustration that the British shipowner in question had allowed the ‘hope of large profits to momentarily warp his judgement’, and gave him a

²³⁰ Lowther to Grey, Private, 4 Aug 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 2.

²³¹ Lowther to Grey, Tel. no. 212, 3 Aug 1908, FO 371/544/26800.

²³² Consul-General Lamb to Grey, Tel., 2 Aug 1908, FO 371/544/26792; Norman minute.

²³³ Lowther to Grey, tel 208, 2 Aug 1908, FO 371/544/26789.

²³⁴ Grey minute, Lowther to Grey, Tel., no. 212, 3 Aug 1908, FO 371/544/26800.

‘polite headwashing’. He added that he did not believe the German action to have been deliberate. With this, the incident was ‘closed’, and Lowther hoped that the ‘bad effect... would gradually disappear.’²³⁵ This unfortunate incident soured the good impression which Lowther and Turkey had made on each other, but in the excitement of a new government, it soon blew over, and proved not to be a significant stumbling block.²³⁶ It did, however, demonstrate the extent to which the British were jealous of their new found influence at Constantinople – it is hard to imagine such disappointment at a similar incident a year previously, for instance.

2.2. Perceptions of the Young Turks

The changing perceptions of the Young Turk movement shaped Anglo-Turkish relations in the months immediately after the revolution. This chapter will consider first the British views of the CUP’s plans for government, their views on equality and their supposed love for Britain and British institutions. It will go on to outline their impressions of the Young Turks in general, for instance the position of Islam within the new Government and the causes of the revolution. It will then consider some minor questions arising between the two countries in the immediate post-revolutionary period, such as the loan of a British admiral, before concluding with a more general discussion of the nature of the British view compared to the Young Turks view of themselves, and how matters were in fact.

The new ministry did not take long to release its plans for the future. As Lowther understood it, they had a number of key aims. The primary aim was to put the finances of the heavily indebted Ottoman Empire in order, and modernise the way in which it was

²³⁵ Lowther to Grey, Private, 11 Aug. 1908, Kuneralp *et al*, *Private Correspondence*, no. 3.

²³⁶ Lowther to Grey, 30 July 1908, FO 371/544/26427.

run.²³⁷ Furthermore, they planned to work for an end to the capitulations, and to institute a programme of public works. Perhaps more controversially, they intended to reform the education and justice systems, and change the eligibility requirements for military service, widening it to all, regardless of religion. Although this would suggest an increase in the size of the armed forces, Lowther reported a statement on foreign affairs, as follows: ‘the Turkish Empire is at present on good terms with all neighbouring countries, and it will continue so, as its policy only aims at the maintenance of its sovereign rights and its Treaties, and the upholding of its prestige and its dignity.’ This programme seemed a modest and reasonable set of plans, and entirely within the bounds of what might have been expected, and indeed, entirely unobjectionable. Oliphant considered this a ‘sound’ beginning.²³⁸ There was a little more concern about the plans of the CUP. London got its first hints in mid-August, when the Salonica branch launched its political programme. They indicated their intention, as the new ministry had done, to restructure some aspects of the Ottoman State, removing elements of the old regime. They hoped, for obvious reasons, to introduce complete liberty of political association. More controversially, they suggested a platform of secularisation, and the use of Turkish as the only official language, including within the new state controlled education system. Some of these provisions proved unpopular amongst Bulgarians, as many of the proposed provisions would seem to act directly against Bulgarian statehood and nationality. Indeed, it is hard to see how proposals aimed at creating something approximating a unified nation state could fail to antagonise Bulgarian opinion, especially in the months before the Bosnian Crisis broke out. John Tilley, a clerk in the Eastern Department, found it ‘difficult to know what to

²³⁷ See Karaman, K. Kivanc; Pamuk, Sevket, ‘Ottoman State Finances in European Perspective, 1500-1914’, *Journal of Economic History*, 70(3), 2010, pp. 593-629; Geyikdagi, V. Necla, ‘French Direct Investments in the Ottoman Empire before World War I’, *Enterprise and Society*, 12(3), 2011, pp. 525-561; Issawi, Charles, *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800-1914* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 321-5.

²³⁸ Oliphant minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 494, 18 Aug. 1908, FO 371/546/29298.

believe about the future of things Turkish’, whilst his senior, Mallet, hoped that ‘the Young Turks... [would] not make a muddle of the Macedonian Question.’²³⁹ At the end of September, when the full CUP programme was revealed, such doubts still lingered, although Lowther found himself impressed at what seemed to him a ‘moderate and sensible document’. The main thrust was broadly similar to that of the Salonica branch in its focus on constitutionalism and democracy. The central CUP echoed the call of the Salonica branch for Turkish to be made the state language, and for a state education system to be created and opened for all. All this, which seemed again to be fairly moderate and unsurprising, was greeted cautiously by British officials. Lowther was concerned at proposals to rewrite the constitution and thought it better to settle down in government first before embarking upon so arduous a task. In addition to this, the CUP expressed its determination to stick to the constitutional requirement that no part of the Empire could be detached for any reason. This last part, in particular, was naturally antagonistic, once again, towards Bulgarians and other minorities. Mallet again found himself concerned that it would be ‘shortsighted of the Porte to ignore the demands of the Bulgarian elements.’ It seems in the main, however, that British officials were largely supportive of the plans for government made by the post-revolutionary ministry and the CUP, and thought them largely reasonable. Certainly, with these plans being widely published and discussed in the new free Ottoman Press, they were well informed of them, and had ample chance to consider them. For Britain, with some small exceptions, all seemed to be going well in Turkey.²⁴⁰

2.2.a Equality

²³⁹ Tilley and Mallet minutes, Buchanan to Grey, no 73, 24 Aug. 1908, FO 371/546/30269.

²⁴⁰ Lowther to Grey, no. 623, 28 Sep 08 FO 371/546/34310; Mallet minute.

A notable aspect of the programmes proposed, especially by the CUP, who would go on to form the largest party in Turkey's first elections, was an attempt to develop a distinct Ottoman identity and create a situation whereby those of different religions and ethnicities would be treated equally.²⁴¹ In a world where nationalism was an increasingly important force, it was clear to most observers that the Ottoman Empire would struggle to stay together in the face of demands for autonomy, if not indeed independence, from many of its constituent national groups. This attempt to create an Ottoman identity represented an effort to head off this danger before it was too late. The equality of Ottoman citizens in particular was widely seen as a likely outcome of the revolution. *The Times* newspaper's correspondent in Turkey summed up the judgements of many:²⁴²

All are invited to remember that they are Ottomans and citizens of a great empire. The Young Turks are firmly convinced that it is possible for Greeks, Bulgars, Serbs, Albanians, Vlachs, and Jews, all the warring medley of races and religions, to live as "brothers," and have a common patriotism as Ottomans, without forgetting – and it is not proposed to ask them to forget – their own blood, language, or faith. This belief in equality and in its magical effects is what the Western observer, who relies on his previous knowledge of the Turks, finds most difficult to accept as genuine.²⁴³

Grey remembered that 'for a moment the subject races in European Turkey seemed to lose their hatred of the Turks and each other'.²⁴⁴ T.E. Lawrence's comment that the revolution

²⁴¹ The creation of identity is confused. David Kushner has written that the Young Turks were under the influence of a specific kind of Turkish nationalism that grew to become the Turkish nationalism of Atatürk. This was, however, largely cultural, and did not interfere with Ottomanism. This can, it appears, be seen as a distinct period of identity, a 'Young Turk Identity', so to speak. See Kushner, David, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876-1908* (London, 1977), pp 98-99.

²⁴² There is much debate over when Nationalism can be seen to have emerged, and what constitutes it. For a broad synopsis, see Zimmer, Oliver, *Nationalism in Europe, 1890-1940* (Basingstoke, 2003) pp 18-26. Nationalism, as a new, observable force, can be seen to have come into its own at the time of the Congress of Vienna, where the relatively new idea of the nation state came to be recognized by the Great Powers as something to be resisted. Timothy Baycroft offers a basic introduction to this, see Baycroft, Timothy, *Nationalism in Europe, 1786-1945* (Cambridge, 1998) p. 13. Benedict Anderson suggested that at its core, nationalism is simply the creation of an 'imagined community'. For the purposes of the present work, this is a useful definition, and it holds that these imagined communities becoming fully self-aware, and their imagination and sovereignty being turned outwards, marked a significant change in the shape of International Relations – for scholars of international history, this development becomes especially marked during time of the Concert of Europe, and especially the revolutions of 1848. The Ottoman Empire, in many respects including this one lagging behind mainland Europe, this development became especially marked towards the end of the 1800s. See Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (London, New Edn. 2006).

²⁴³ 'The Young Turks: Their Aims and Successes', *The Times*, 19 August 1908.

²⁴⁴ Grey, *Twenty-Five Years v.1*, p. 174.

marked a moment when the ‘horizon momentarily broadened for the Arabs’, is suggestive of a sense, certainly outside British officialdom, of the revolution marking a moment when equality was intended and attempted.²⁴⁵ This impression was largely shared by British policymakers, although they were more sceptical of the chances of success of such a policy. As early as the end of July, reports from Turkey were emphasising the apparent seriousness of the commitment to equality, noting examples such as the punishment of two Muslim policemen at Drama, in Thrace, for beating a Christian man whilst ‘in a state of intoxication’.²⁴⁶ The Foreign Office heard that in the Hejaz, ‘no difficulties’ between religions had been reported. Lowther reported that local Islamic leaders had been praised for doing much to keep things calm and to assuage the fears of Christians who feared sectarian violence, by reinforcing the new equality of religions. On a less positive note, his report also noted the dissatisfaction of some local Christians with the revolution, as they feared that it would mean they were now required to perform military service, from which they had previously been exempt. Tilley noted that this would likely be unpopular with Christians across the Empire.²⁴⁷ Indeed, it seems to have been a widespread British fear that a policy of equality would have consequences, and that the people of the Ottoman Empire were not ready for such concepts. Fitzmaurice privately warned Grey’s Private Secretary, William Tyrrell, that he thought bringing all the nationalities together would prove to be extremely difficult. Equality as a stated aim would be dangerous without careful handling. The risk, he thought, was serious unrest between Christian and Islamic groups within the Empire.²⁴⁸ Lowther focused on what he saw as the problems of reconciling the Islamic tradition of Ottoman governance with a new more egalitarian state. He remarked upon the fact that in his recent interview with Young Turk leaders, no

²⁴⁵ Lawrence, T.E., *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (London, 2000), p. 43.

²⁴⁶ Barclay to Grey, no. 423, 28 July 1908, FO 371/544/26956.

²⁴⁷ Lowther to Grey, no. 57, 26 Aug. 1908, FO 371/546/30953; Tilley minute.

²⁴⁸ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 25 Aug. 1908, *BD v.* no. 210.

mention had been made of any spiritual reasons to maintain the Sultan, despite his pretensions to the title of caliph. Lowther believed that Islam could maintain 'dominance' only 'with the sword'. Consequently, unrest would be likely to result from a regime which considered all religions equal before the law, as he believed the new Government did. 'Of the many difficult tasks' which lay ahead, he opined, 'one of the most difficult' would be to reconcile 'Moslem predominance with constitutional government'. At the Foreign Office, Tilley agreed that both Muslim and Ottoman 'predominance' seemed 'almost impossible'. It underlined the degree to which many policymakers feared the consequences of forcing modern constitutional government on to a populace they feared was unready.²⁴⁹ In the Baghdad region, equality of religion had apparently yet to arrive. Trouble with the local Jewish population was reported in unflattering terms: 'a number of the less-intelligent Jews seemed to think they were entitled to be treated as equals by Mohammedans', and this had caused a riot. This statement, while symptomatic of the crude racial views held by a large number of European elites during this period, also reveals that British fears about rancour between religions were not mere prejudice or lazy stereotyping – sectarian violence had been ever present in the Ottoman Empire for many years.²⁵⁰ Crude racial views were also in evidence in Armenian regions. It was reported to Lowther that 'freedom' was causing problems in some areas. Armenians were discussed in strikingly Darwinist language, labelled a 'subject race'.²⁵¹ Other incidents of tension between religious and ethnic groups were reported. In the suburb of Pera, the 'European Quarter' of Constantinople, a 'Turkish woman, who had been several times divorced, and who appear[ed] to have been of loose morals, having become a widow by the death of her last husband, formed relations with a Greek gardener named Theodori, and finally deserted her father's house to live with

²⁴⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 567, 14 Sep. 08, FO 371/549/32606; Tilley minute.

²⁵⁰ Religion provided much of the identity in some troubled areas, for instance Macedonia, and massacres and fighting were very common between religious and ethnic groups.

²⁵¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 705, 24(30) Oct. 1908, FO 31/560/37689.

him.’ Her Father declared that she had been forcibly converted to Christianity by the unfortunate Theodori, and a ‘crowd composed of the ruffianly element of the Mussulman population quickly assembled’. The lovers both perished in the ensuing riot. As unfortunate as such an incident was, Maxwell saw a silver lining. The Turkish press took a notably restrained tone on the incident, which he considered ‘excellent’.²⁵² The turn of the year provided time for reflection. Fitzmaurice was extremely pessimistic. The elections, which he claimed had been marred by ‘anti-Christian jerrymandering’, had proved his predictions of sectarian strife correct, he said, despite claims of equal treatment.²⁵³ Lowther’s Annual Report for 1908, meanwhile, commented on the ‘remarkable community of enthusiasm on the part of all races and religions throughout the Empire’ which marked the early stages of the revolution. Using Greek displays of their national flag at Smyrna as an example, he praised the ‘admirable’ restraint shown by Turks in the face of what could have been taken as significant provocation.²⁵⁴

Plainly, British policymakers believed that equality of religion and ethnicity would be a leading feature of the Young Turk regime and the new Ottoman State.²⁵⁵ This was based upon a misreading of Young Turk ideology and intentions, however, and this circumstance hampered British policy towards the new regime in Constantinople. Recent literature suggests that the nature of Young Turk ideology was rather different from the simplistic views taken by British officials. Erik J. Zürcher has written of the ideological underpinnings of the Young Turks, arguing that by 1908, they had grown disillusioned

²⁵² Lowther to Grey, no. 683, 20 Oct. 1908, FO 371/560/37921; Maxwell minute.

²⁵³ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 11 Jan 1909, *BD v*, no. 211.

²⁵⁴ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v*.

²⁵⁵ Interestingly, Keith Neilson noted that a similar process could be observed in British approaches to Russia in this period: as the majority of Russians with whom British officials came into contact were of a liberal bent, so Russia herself was seen as being more moving in a more liberal direction than was actually the case. *Id.*, ‘Wishful thinking: The Foreign Office and Russia, 1907-1917’, McKercher, B.J.C; Moss, D.J., (eds.) *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895-1939* (Edmonton, 1984), pp.151-202(174-5).

with the idea of being the heirs to the ‘Young Ottoman’ movement of the 1860s, and rather than being interested in the associated idea of ‘unity of the elements’, saw their interests lying instead in what was good for the state and its preservation. The best ways of doing this, Zürcher argued, were to construct a shared Ottoman citizenship, and to run the state on the basis of a rational, ‘scientific’ order.²⁵⁶ M. Şükrü Hanioglu emphasised the extent to which the CUP was not a ‘popular constitutional movement’, dedicated to freedom and democracy. Indeed, he wrote, it soon became another elite, replacing the Yildiz camarilla. Indeed, the confusion of the British (and other European Powers) might well have been rooted in the CUP’s first official statement to them, in which they emphasised the liberal nature of their programme, in an effort to reassure the Powers.²⁵⁷ In so doing, they placed themselves self-consciously in the European liberal tradition inspired by the ideals of 1789. This seems to have had some success, as Erdal Kaynar attested. He wrote that in Europe, the Powers struggled to make sense of the revolution and so concluded that the Army must have been behind it, as this represented an ‘ordered element’ in the chaos. He added that it was widely thought that the regime would prove to be very liberal in a large part because of the existing Young Turk network of exiles in Europe, which had operated press campaigns to spread their views.²⁵⁸ These men were more liberal, traditional thinkers than the younger men of the CUP. This fed in to what Kaynar called a ‘classical’ understanding of revolution, seeing political ideas, their diffusion and the resultant revolution as part of a continuum, but this failed to explain the full story – the ideas being ‘diffused’ in Europe were not in step with the ideas in the minds of the revolutionaries in the Empire itself.²⁵⁹ Indeed, this meant that the perceptions held in Europe were inaccurate. As Hanioglu argued, the CUP saw themselves governing not as a

²⁵⁶ Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, pp 69-70; 57-8.

²⁵⁷ Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution*, pp. 312; 270-271.

²⁵⁸ Kaynar, ‘Logic of Enlightenment’, pp. 40-46.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

part of a sacred or mystical ideal of ‘the people’, but as an enlightened elite, showing the people what was right for them.²⁶⁰ The actual revolutionaries, as opposed to their intellectual cousins in Paris and London, were brought together, and motivated to act, largely by their urgency to ‘save’ the Empire. The CUP had studied the French (1789) and Russian (1905) experiences of revolution. From this, in particular from the Russian example, they had taken the lesson that the battle was only half won once the reins of power had been taken. Their achievements would have to be maintained and safeguarded. Thus, even the ‘ideologues’ in the party became actively involved in politics, and there was a distinct shift towards authoritarianism – a development in any case commensurate with the CUP’s self-image as an enlightened elite. Indeed, this helps to explain how ‘enlightenment’ and ‘authoritarianism’ were able to coexist. Although these appeared awkward bedfellows, in the logic and understanding of the Young Turks, the two could, and did, go together.²⁶¹ Plainly, as Hanioglu made clear, the philosophical and ideological background of the CUP, rooted in positivism, materialism and social Darwinism, was not geared towards an egalitarian, constitutional regime, and was more suited to the CUP’s real aim – the preservation of the Empire.²⁶² Hanioglu further argued that the structure of the pre-revolutionary Ottoman state itself had an important impact on the Young Turks. As almost all education, and thus intellectuals, were to be found within the state apparatus, and almost all of the CUPs members were employed by the state, they tended to have a loyalty towards it, and thought in terms of change from within, and a hostility to ideas which went against it such as communism or anarchism. Propaganda preaching equality was, to Hanioglu, simply that and not a serious position.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, pp. 214-5.

²⁶¹ Kaynar, *Logic of Enlightenment*, pp. 46-7; 47-52; 55-61.

²⁶² Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution*, pp. 313-4.

²⁶³ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, pp. 214-5; Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution*, pp. 314.

It is clear to see that British observers had got the Young Turk revolution wrong. It was not based upon highfalutin ideas of equality and liberty, nor yet of French revolutionary ideals that elevated 'the People' above all else. That the British would form this false impression is not surprising, given the general European experience of revolutions to date, and the extensive propaganda of the Young Turks. It did, however, make matters a little more difficult, and set many in the British policymaking establishment on course for significant disappointment when the Young Turks proved to be more interested in the preservation of their Empire than 'good government' and reform for its own sake.

2.2.b Turkish Views of Britain.

Another perception of the revolution widely held amongst British Officials was that the Young Turks were very keen on Britain generally, and would follow an anglophile line of policy. Sir Charles Hardinge, for instance, later asserted that the Revolution was not greeted warmly in Germany or Austria, as it was known there that the Young Turks were now in favour of Britain.²⁶⁴ Contrasting with the belief in the liberalism of the Young Turks, there was more substance to this belief, although perhaps for the wrong reasons, and it led to a British expectation of favourable treatment which was not matched in reality.

One could hardly condemn British policymakers for having their heads turned by the revolution, especially given the weaknesses of their previous position at Constantinople. Partiality towards Britain was visible at the earliest stages of the convulsion. At the end of July, a 'large and enthusiastic crowd', formed largely of medical students, made a demonstration in favour of Britain outside the British Embassy.²⁶⁵ Although no embassy staff were present, they being in Therapia, as was customary during the summer months, a

²⁶⁴ Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy*, pp. 157-8.

²⁶⁵ The fact that such a public demonstration was made by medical students is indicative of the educational and social level of many who were supportive of the Young Turks in the early days.

speech was made.²⁶⁶ The students declared the purpose of their demonstration to be to ‘tender the sincere sentiments of... [their] free hearts to Great Britain’, and to express their earnest desire for the new Turkey to be raised up by and with her. It was small wonder that Edward Grey found the address ‘rather touching’, as, indeed, did Lowther. He told Grey that the ovation on his arrival had been a ‘remarkable sight’, and, he believed, ‘quite spontaneous’. Britain, he believed from his contact thus far, was regarded as a ‘natural friend’ of Turkey.²⁶⁷ Discussing his arrival in more detail, he added that a CUP member had greeted him with a speech suggesting that the ‘constitutional movement’ depended ‘on the old friendship of England’. Upon presenting his credentials to the chastened Abdülhamid, he found him in a more positive frame of mind than might have been expected. He ‘gave expression to his sincere friendship for Great Britain and said he warmly appreciated the congratulatory message which... [Lowther] conveyed to him.’ Abdülhamid twice declared his intention to govern according to the constitution, and emphasised that he would depend on ‘material and moral’ support from Britain. Foreign Office officials were purring. Mallet recognised ‘a most unlooked for opportunity’ which ‘every endeavour’ should be exerted to maintain. Significantly, Grey was worried about the implications on his wider strategy. He recognised that the ‘delicate point’ would be ‘Russia’. Identifying the dichotomy which would trouble him for several years to come, he said that Britain could not ‘revert to the old policy of Lord Beaconsfield’, but instead would have to be ‘pro-Turkish without giving rise to any suspicion’ of being ‘anti-Russian.’ Nevertheless, he proposed to make hay at home while he could. Grey wanted to ‘circulate to the Cabinet’ a selection of despatches which would ‘give a good impression of recent

²⁶⁶ In the summer, the embassy would move to the ‘summer embassy’ in Therapia, outside of the city. Not only was this a healthier location, it was also more pleasant during the hot summers, and the majority of the Turkish Government and other diplomats would also move out of the city during the summer months. Berridge, G.R., *British Diplomacy in Turkey, 1583 to the present: A study in the evolution of the resident embassy* (Leiden, 2009) pp. 10; 22.

²⁶⁷ Barclay to Grey, no. 427, 28 July 1908, FO 371/545/326960; Grey minute. Lowther to Grey, Private, 11 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 3.

events at Constantinople'. These tended to suggest that pro-British feeling was to be found across the Empire, and that Grey's utterances in Parliament had taken advantage of such feeling.²⁶⁸ Grey was keen to show that his policy towards Turkey could be a success, and to convince his Cabinet colleagues, not to mention sceptical Liberal backbenchers, of the strength of pro-British feeling. Later in the year, Lowther reflected upon the domestic British reception of the revolution. He remarked that the press had been cautious until it became clear that the movement would be successful, at which point the acclamation was widespread. His comment that the 'general argument was to the effect that sympathy... [had] always existed between the people of Great Britain and the population of Turkey' and that problems in the past had been a result of the former Government suggested that the policymaking establishment were far from unhappy at the conclusions at which the press had arrived. Publicly, Lowther went on, Russia had been welcoming of the revolution, although her Ambassador had 'barely concealed his opinion that the Young Turk movement was for one reason or another doomed to failure.'²⁶⁹ Lowther's brief discussion of the Russian position disguised grave misgivings within the Embassy. Fitzmaurice privately thought that the Revolution must have been a 'bitter pill to Russia to see her cherished hopes jeopardised by a revolution' which could make Turkey a 'strong and aggressive' Power. He thought the Young Turk movement represented 'a virtual challenge to Russian policy... [of] the last 130 years', and considered it not unlikely that Russia would become involved in a future civil war.²⁷⁰ Lowther's Annual Report was more verbose on the subject of Germany, discussing with some relish attempts made by the German press to explain away the previous 'complete reliance on the Sultan and his corrupt Camarilla', and to try to cast aspersions on the stability of British rule in Egypt and

²⁶⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 528, 31 Aug. 1908, FO 371/546/30964.

²⁶⁹ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v.*

²⁷⁰ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 25 Aug. 08, *BD v.*, no. 210.

India.²⁷¹ Indeed, much to the delight of many officials, the German press seemed to struggle to find a positive angle on the situation. One piece, seen in London in September, suggested that the Young Turks could not, in reality, be as anti-German as they had often been presented, seeing as it was a movement dominated by military officers, the majority of whom had been trained by Colmar von der Goltz, a Prussian Field Marshal. Louis Mallet accepted that this argument contained some truth, as many army officers cherished a certain sympathy for Germany.²⁷² Although this had some basis in fact, the Turkish fondness for Goltz Pasha was not to come between her and Britain. Although it was proposed that von der Goltz return to Turkey, on a similar basis to other international experts helping to reorganise the rejuvenated state, Lowther was approached and asked whether his appointment might provoke ‘resentment’ in London.²⁷³ Certainly, it appeared to Lowther that the Turks were keen to massage the British ego by denigrating Germany. Having received a telegram of congratulation from the King, the Sultan was reported to be ‘very gratified’, and to have said that it meant more to him than the ‘Black Eagle’ recently awarded to him by Germany.²⁷⁴ The flattery continued as the Ottoman Parliament underwent its official opening in December 1908. The entire Constantinople diplomatic corps was invited, and Lowther believed that ‘no doubt special applause was reserved for... [him] as representing Great Britain... [that] country certainly enjoying the largest share of popularity at the present moment’. Hardinge believed that this would provide a ‘fitting close’ to a Blue Book on the revolution.²⁷⁵

It is plain that from the first, both the Foreign Office and the British Embassy in Constantinople were largely convinced that the new Turkish regime was pro-British.

²⁷¹ In fact this was a legitimate concern; Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v.*

²⁷² Lascelles to Grey, no. 398, 3 Sep. 1908, FO 371/546/30938; Mallet minute.

²⁷³ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v.*

²⁷⁴ Lowther to Grey, Confidential, no. 584, 17 Sep. 1908, FO 371/549/33225.

²⁷⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 868 17 Dec. 1908, FO 371/546/44631; Hardinge minute.

Certainly, the evidence suggests that this was a not unreasonable conclusion. The Turks saw Britain as the Power most likely to be supportive of her, and consequently took steps to gain the sympathy of the Power that had considered itself most neglected under the Hamidian regime, perhaps aware not only that their previous position meant that they would be most receptive to such overtures, but that Britain was not tarred by a strong association with the Yildiz Camarilla, as Germany was. Having established that the British saw the Turks as being keen to establish friendly relations, this chapter now turns to the British impressions of the Young Turks regime itself, and will consider how the nature of the regime was perceived in London.

2.2.c British Impressions of the Young Turks

Although Lowther had been positive about the new situation on his arrival, and remained so in his official correspondence, at least in the early days of the regime, he began to express doubts in private. He told Grey that upon arrival, he was ‘at once struck with the impression that the Ottoman League of Union and Progress lacked responsible leaders of position.’ He thought it a ‘wonder’ that all had gone off as well as it had, without bloodshed.²⁷⁶ After a few weeks, his views had solidified. He thought that things were going ‘pretty well’, especially considering that the country was being run ‘by the committee, a collection of good intentioned children’.²⁷⁷ Significantly, the term ‘children’ was also used frequently by Fitzmaurice to refer to the CUP, suggesting that after a few weeks in his post, Lowther and his Dragoman were at the very least of similar mind.²⁷⁸ Grey tried to keep Lowther in a more positive frame of mind. On the 11 August, he remarked that events in Turkey had already been so ‘marvellous’ that it was ‘not

²⁷⁶ Lowther to Grey, Private, 4 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 2.

²⁷⁷ Lowther to Grey, Private, 25 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 8.

²⁷⁸ For example, Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 11 Jan. 1909, *BD v*, no 211: ‘like children newly born into the world of freedom’. Geoffrey Miller argued that Lowther soon fell under the spell of Fitzmaurice and his ‘malign influence’ poisoned him against the committee. See *id*, *Straits*, ch. 4.

impossible' that she would establish a working constitution, although he conceded that 'the habit of vicious and corrupt government' might prove too strong. Despite this, he thought good influences were 'uppermost', and the prospect of a new regime 'genuine'. Britain's course was 'clear', she 'must welcome and encourage this project as long as it continue[d]'.

²⁷⁹ With this in mind, he gave Lowther some talking points for a future meeting with Ahmed Riza, in many ways a spiritual leader of Young Turk intellectualism and a prominent member of the CUP:

1. The Young Turks should not try to go too fast; if they do they may either create confusion or provoke reaction. The first important point is to get the Government in the hands of honest and reliable men. If they do that then the rest will follow; 2. Sound finance is the basis of all good Government... 3. We shall do all in our power to encourage them so long as they do well and we will not embarrass them by demands of our own; just as we used all our influence, when the Turkish Government was bad, to press reforms from outside, so now if reforms are being developed from inside we shall use all our influence to prevent their being interfered with from outside. ²⁸⁰

Grey's views were clear. Although rather more positive about Turkey's future prospects than Lowther, he remained cautious, and aware that matters could change for the worse very quickly. While he considered the Young Turks to be the 'better elements', that is not to say that he cherished a strong faith in their ability to reform the Ottoman State and save its Empire. Lowther, on the other hand, had only grown more pessimistic about the Young Turks since arriving at Constantinople, and viewed them as naïve and idealistic.

When their meeting finally took place, Lowther was unimpressed with Riza. He felt Riza's prominence in Young Turk circles was 'hardly justified', thinking him 'too loquacious', with 'immature' views, and apt to make statements 'without sufficient ponderation'. 'He does not seem to be a very great man', complained Tilley, whilst Mallet found the despatch 'most disappointing', and hoped that this interview was not

²⁷⁹ Grey to Lowther, Private, 11 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 4.

²⁸⁰ Grey to Lowther, 23 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 7.

‘representative of the Young Turkish intelligence.’ He added that Riza was ‘not much listened to’, and was ‘considered an “idealist” – a euphemistic expression’.²⁸¹ Mallet’s intuition was correct, as far as Riza’s position was concerned. Erdal Kaynar characterises him as a leading ideological figure in the Young Turk movement, certainly before the revolution, but far from a typical member of that organisation. He was very much a man of letters, who conceptualised the post-revolutionary Ottoman State as being run by an enlightened class of *Ulema*, religious leaders who would dominate the situation. Since Riza was in exile, he played no significant role in the actual revolution. Indeed, as Kaynar states, the revolution had come as more of a surprise to him than to Abdülhamid, and he had been being gradually removed from his position of power within the party since 1905 – his value, by 1908, lay in his reputation as an iconic Young Turk rebel, forced into exile by a tyrant.²⁸² His belief in an enlightened ruling class, directing policy to the mass of the people, would be maintained, to some extent, however. In the context of the Ottoman State in 1908, it did not seem appropriate for the Young Turks themselves to take power directly. Seeing as statesmen were culturally seen as older men (Kâmil, for instance, was in his eighties, although this was used against him on occasion²⁸³), and of a higher social class, the largely youthful, professional, CUP saw themselves as being unsuited to Government. As a result, they became a ‘watchdog’, the power behind the throne that Lowther so deplored, complaining that ‘the real Committee, of which so much is talked, remains plunged in the utmost mystery, so that no one is able to say of whom it is composed’.²⁸⁴ He thought that the CUP, rather than working in tandem with the Government,

²⁸¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 657, 12 Oct 1908, FO 371/560/36118; Tilley and Mallet minutes.

²⁸² Kaynar, *Logic of Enlightenment*, pp. 46-7; 47-52.

²⁸³ Although ‘old’, considered to have ‘lots of energy’: Lowther to Grey, Confidential, no. 541, 2 Sep 1908, FO 371/559/31787.

²⁸⁴ Ahmad, *Young Turks*, p. 17; Zürcher, Erik-Jan, ‘31 Mart: A Fundamentalist Uprising in Constantinople in 1909?’, in Lévy-Aksu *et al*, *Young Turk Revolution and the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 196-211; Lowther to Grey, no. 818, 2 Dec. 1908, FO 371/561/42605.

‘dominated’ it. ²⁸⁵ Fitzmaurice, a man who had been very much at home in the old system, was also critical of the secretive nature of the CUP, and thought by the end of 1908 that it would be best if the Committee were now to disappear. ²⁸⁶ John Tilley, too, offered similar reflections in his memoirs. The ‘new leaders’ after the revolution were not worthy of their position, he thought, and it would not be until the emergence of Kemal Atatürk that a ‘real man’ took power. ²⁸⁷ Charles Hardinge worried that the Committee might, in time, become similar to, and even as ‘dangerous’ as, the old palace camarilla. ²⁸⁸

In general, British officials were largely ignorant of the aims and ambitions, let alone the origins of those loosely described as ‘Young Turks’. Other than the fact that these men were largely army officers, their background aroused little interest. The Annual Report for Turkey for 1908 detailed some of the more high profile members. Space was given over to complaints about the ‘occult’ and secretive nature of the CUP, and the paucity of recognisable (to the British) leaders other than Ahmed Riza, Niyazi Bey and Enver Bey, all of whom had largely become figureheads by 1909, icons of revolution and heroes of *hurriyet* (‘the freedom’). ²⁸⁹ Discussion of the backgrounds of the revolutionaries was limited to the (in)famous 3rd Army Corps of Salonica, which was considered to be in favour of the revolution, although largely for professional reasons, such as arrears in pay and unfair promotion. ²⁹⁰ Understandably, the focus remained on the policy of the CUP and the plans they hoped to enact. In terms of the CUP itself, Lowther’s focus remained on its lack of obvious leadership, and its close connection with the army, a fact which led him to dark predictions of a ‘military dictatorship’. ²⁹¹

²⁸⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 855, 13 Dec. 1908, FO 371/546/43987.

²⁸⁶ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 11 Jan 1909, *BD v*, no. 211.

²⁸⁷ Tilley, *London to Tokyo*, p. 71.

²⁸⁸ Hardinge minute, Lowther to Grey, no. 855, 13 Dec. 1908, FO 371/546/43987.

²⁸⁹ Kaynar, ‘Heroes of Hurriyet’.

²⁹⁰ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v*.

²⁹¹ Lowther to Grey, Private, 14 Sep. 08, Kuneralp *et al*, *Private Correspondence*, no. 11.

A clear view of the British perception of the Young Turks thus comes into view. They saw them as idealistic and a little naïve. In terms of background, they were clear that a large part of their support came from the army. This view was accurate, to a point, but it seems that officials had been a little hasty in their desire to understand the new forces reshaping the Ottoman Empire. As Erik Zürcher has shown, the assumption that CUP members were military men was broadly correct – the CUP membership was approximately made up of two thirds men in the armed forces. In keeping with their name, the membership was largely younger men, at an average age of about 29, as well as being well educated for the time and place, and largely Muslim.²⁹² On the other hand, however, the military connection can be taken too far. Zürcher argues that the movement was not as military as many thought, especially in the earlier stages. Although Niyazi and Enver were officers, when they took to the hills very few of their own troops followed them, with the vast majority choosing to stay behind, loyal to the Sultan.²⁹³ Kaynar has argued that the willingness of the European Powers, including Britain, to see the army as the dominant factor lay in their difficulty to understand a chaotic event outside the typical frame of reference of an early twentieth century official. The army, he argues, represented an ordered element, which explained why it was considered responsible for fomenting the Revolution. Further to this, as a result of their general experience both of Young Turks in Europe, and their understanding of revolution in general, it was widely considered that the new regime would be very liberal and ideological. This came about, Kaynar argued, as a result of a ‘classical’ understanding of revolution – political ideas, their diffusion and then political revolution all acting as a continuum.²⁹⁴ In the case of Britain, officials educated on a diet of enlightenment principles and the French Revolution would be susceptible to

²⁹² Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, pp. 99-102.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, pp. 37-8.

²⁹⁴ Kaynar, ‘Logic of Enlightenment’, pp. 40-46.

such beliefs, and likely to follow the line of reasoning set out by Kaynar. In reality, what European diplomats of all nationalities failed to appreciate was that the Young Turks were neither particularly liberal nor constitutional in their outlook, being instead ideologically influenced by positivism and social Darwinism. They saw themselves, as Hanioglu has argued, as an enlightened elite, ruling according to scientific laws. Feroz Ahmad characterises the revolutionaries as ‘fundamentally conservative’, bringing in a constitution in order to save the Ottoman state, not to change it.²⁹⁵ From this, it is plain that in terms of fact, the Foreign Office and the Embassy were largely accurate in their understanding of what had gone on in Turkey in 1908. In terms of interpretation, however, it appeared that they missed the mark a little.

2.2.d Causes of the Outbreak

While the longer term causes of the revolution – dissatisfaction with the autocratic regime of the Sultan, and a desire to save the Empire - are clear, there is more debate about the more immediate causes. The revolution was launched earlier than planned; indeed, Lowther speculated that it had been planned as a ‘birthday present for the Sultan’ in September.²⁹⁶ The reasons generally given for this are, as discussed above, fears of Great Power involvement in Macedonia, but also fear that the Young Turk support was growing too fast, and that the Sultan might take steps to neutralise the growing threat.

It would be remiss, however, not to mention in passing another factor that contributed to the Young Turk’s confidence: the recent success of Japan in the war with Russia. The Japanese success in the war of 1904-5, which marked the victory of an ‘Oriental’ power over a Great Power had sent shockwaves throughout the European establishment, but also prompted a renewed surge in confidence amongst others outside

²⁹⁵ Ahmad, *Young Turks*, pp. 15-16.

²⁹⁶ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v*.

the ranks of traditional Powers, including the Ottomans.²⁹⁷ The success of Japan, both in winning the War and in successfully reorganising and modernising the state, ‘greatly impressed’ the Turks, Tilley thought.²⁹⁸ Fitzmaurice felt that the success of Japan over Russia, the ‘traditional enemy’ of Turkey, had caused ‘every fibre’ of the Turkish ‘body’ to ‘tingle’.²⁹⁹ Hanioglu argued that the Japanese victory energised the Young Turks, and encouraged them to adopt European ideas of race and social Darwinism.³⁰⁰ Indeed, the success of Japan seemed to light the way ahead for Turkey, and gave the Young Turks hope that the country was not doomed to be absorbed by the European Powers.

The prospect of the Empire being broken up was considered by the British to be the main reason for the timing of the revolution. The recent meeting between Nicholas II and Edward VII was seen to have brought these fears to a head. Lowther wrote that the news ‘wafting down’ from Reval led the Young Turks ‘to believe that if the Anglo-Russian plan were to be put into effect, they might say good-bye to Macedonia, and probably ere long to the whole of Turkey in Europe.’ He thought that Young Turk pride could not stand the acceptance of the principle of European control, and labelled this a ‘justifiable and commendable feeling’.³⁰¹ Fitzmaurice, too, was convinced. He remarked that the Turks felt the situation before the revolution to be a ‘desperate one that required a desperate remedy’. ‘The meeting at Reval...quickened their decision which was to attempt their *coup* before the British proposals born at Revel were presented to the Porte.’³⁰² At the

²⁹⁷ Rotem Kowner notes the way in which the war, in particular the victory of a ‘little’ Asiatic Power over ‘mighty’ Russia, had great effects on figures as diverse as Adolf Hitler, Mohandas Gandhi and Sukarno, the first president of independent Indonesia. Kowner, Rotem, ‘Between a Colonial Clash and World War Zero, The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War in a global perspective’, in Kowner, Rotem (ed.), *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War* (Abingdon, 2007) pp 1-25(2). T.G. Otte discusses the way in which the war forced the attention of the European Powers onto a wider canvas, and the way in which the war began the process of breaking down the old world order, that had existed since 1815, culminating at Sarajevo, *id.*, ‘The Fragmenting of the old world order: Britain, the Great Powers, and the war’, in Kowner, *Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, pp. 91-108.

²⁹⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 546, 6 Sep. 1908, FO 371/549/31790.

²⁹⁹ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 25 Aug. 1908, *BD v*, no. 210.

³⁰⁰ Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution*, pp. 215-6.

³⁰¹ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v*.

³⁰² Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 25 Aug. 1909, *BD v*, no. 210.

end of the year, having reflected on developments since the revolution, he remained certain that it 'was the Reval meeting which made them quicken their pace and evolve [*sic*] before the appointed time.'³⁰³ Hanioglu wrote that the Macedonian question was central to Young Turk thinking before the Revolution, and that it presented both opportunities and problems. While justifiably worried at the prospect that a Governor and the removal of Ottoman troops would lead to the loss of the territories, the Young Turks were able to use these fears to add force to their propaganda, and it allowed an opportunity to get Macedonian elements, such as the Albanians assembled at Ferisovitch considered so important by Lowther, on board.³⁰⁴ The Reval pact, as important as it was, added to a sense of urgency amongst the ranks of dissidents in Turkey. The rapid success of the Young Turk message in 1908, and the consequent increase in the size of the organisation, meant that the Sultan's much feared security services were closing in, and it seemed likely that revolution could be stopped before it had begun.³⁰⁵ Fitzmaurice explicitly linked the two events together. The increase in pace following the Reval meeting had raised palace awareness of the plot.³⁰⁶ According to Zürcher it seems clear now that the Reval pact was the primary reason for the earlier than planned date of the revolution.³⁰⁷ Indeed, the evidence of British sources would also suggest that Reval was considered a key reason for the revolution in official circles, both in Constantinople and London. Although this was broadly accurate, it is also suggestive of the British habit of viewing Turkey through a European, strategic lens, and perhaps giving wider developments greater weight in what was often a more local matter.

2.2.e. Islam

³⁰³ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 11 Jan. 1909, *BD v*, no. 211.

³⁰⁴ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v*, Hanioglu, 'Preparation for Revolution, pp. 232-237.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 262-3.

³⁰⁶ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 25 Aug. 1908, *BD v*, no. 210.

³⁰⁷ Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, pp. 33-35.

Another element of the Revolution worth discussion is the role played by Islam. Before the Revolution, the Young Turks hoped to remove religion from public life. Young Turk ideology being based on positivism and scientific rationalism, religion was seen to have little place. Islam, the dominant religion in the Ottoman Empire, was strongly associated with the Sultan's regime, and the Sultan maintained a claim to be the *Caliph*, or leader, of Islam. Furthermore, religion was a major fault line and cause of conflict in the Empire, in a large part because of its being an important aspect of group identities. For all these reasons, the CUP hoped to establish a more secular and equal society.³⁰⁸

This was grasped by the British. In October, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, Lowther reflected that many Muslims were uncomfortable with the new regime, and that if Ramadan could be got through without 'serious disturbances' between traditional Muslims and others, then this would reflect 'great credit' on the Government. He considered that the idea of equality with Christians 'more than foreign... abhorrent' to Muslims. Tilley reinforced Lowther's opinion, remarking that 'this despatch... [was] very important ... it.. [called] attention to the Moslem character, to which the idea of equality with Christians... [was] abhorrent'.³⁰⁹ On several other occasions, too, Lowther reflected that pious and conservative Muslims were unhappy with the more liberal aspects of the CUP programme.³¹⁰ It is plain to see that whilst British policymakers were fully cognisant of the secular intentions of the CUP, they were also aware of how things might look.

Britain was, in the early 20th Century, the power with the most Muslims within its territories. This meant that developments within Islam were naturally of interest to the Foreign Office. From the off, it was clear to British observers that a revolution, followed by

³⁰⁸ Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution*, pp. 214-5.

³⁰⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 690, 23 Oct 1908, FO 371/560/37320.

³¹⁰ For instance, the lifting of the requirement for women to wear facial coverings in public, which Lowther thought was 'bound to cause trouble', Lowther to Grey, Private, 25 Aug 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 8.

a regeneration of the Turkish state, would appear to Muslims in the British Empire as a sign that the time had come for them too to stand alone as strong, independent Islamic countries. Although the truth of the matter was not so clear cut, Grey was especially aware of the risks vis-à-vis India and Egypt, where Britain ruled over large Muslim populations.

³¹¹ He urged Lowther to say as little as possible to the Khedive of Egypt, notionally an Ottoman official who was in Constantinople, on the subject of any possible constitution for Egypt. ³¹² Over time, too, the CUP resistance to Islam lessened. Islam was used as a kind of shorthand in propaganda aimed at creating a unified sense of identity in the Ottoman Empire, and in both 1908 and 1909, the CUP used religious instruments in their dealings with the Sultan. ³¹³ It seems clear that although religion was intended to be kept out of public life, it remained a part of the Young Turk toolkit, as well as being an important consideration for the British. ³¹⁴

2.2.f. Views of the administration

A factor of particular interest to British policymakers was the administrative ability of the new regime. It was generally thought across Europe, with justification, that the Ottoman Empire was badly run, and that the Sultan's Government maintained very little control. The revolution seemed, to British observers, to have rather improved the picture. In the autumn of 1908, as the new regime became more firmly established, things began to return to normal. Grey exulted at positive reports from the Asiatic provinces, where things

³¹¹ Ahmad, 'Britain's Relations with the Young Turks' pp. 302-4.

³¹² Grey to Lowther, Private, 11 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 4.

³¹³ For instance, in getting him to swear loyalty to the constitution on the Koran, and then using this against him to remove him after the 1909 counter revolution.

³¹⁴ In Sean McMeekin's book on the Baghdad railway, he discussed the German attempt to harness Islam, through declaration of Jihad, for their own ends during the war. Although this was an issue only after the declaration of war in 1914, it demonstrates the way in which Islam was viewed by many Western observers. *id.*, *Berlin Baghdad Express*. Adeeb Khalid offers a critique of the simplistic way in which many western observers approached the concept of 'pan-islamism', both at the time and since: *Id.*, 'Pan-Islamism in practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim unity and its uses' in Özdalga, Elisabeth, (ed.) *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London, 2005), pp. 203-226.

were ‘quiet’, and ‘corrupt’ officials were removed from their posts. He thought this a ‘great contrast to the reports we used to have from these Provinces & were having up to two months ago.’ The improvement of order in the provinces was one aspect of the new regime that Grey could wholeheartedly support, and he ensured that this despatch in particular would be seen by the Cabinet, emphasising that the Young Turks were heading in the right direction.³¹⁵ The Foreign Office remained optimistic even when the news was less good. In November, for instance, an increase in ‘Brigandage’ was reported, as a result of ‘inefficient’ local leadership. Although John Tilley, who maintained in his memoirs, with some justification, that he had always been vocally sceptical of the Young Turks, complained that this was ‘far from satisfactory’, his superiors were not so despondent.³¹⁶ Hardinge reminded his colleagues that: ‘One must not expect too much in a short time. The new Govt. has to settle down in the saddle, & one should look at the general aspect of affairs rather than at the disorders accruing at isolated & distant points. There can be no doubt that there has been a general improvement’.³¹⁷

Although order in the more remote provinces of the Empire was seemingly being restored, the revolution did not prove a panacea for all ills. Corruption seemed alive and well in some areas, for example arms procurement. In November 1908, the German armaments producer Krupp was awarded a contract to supply the Turkish Army with 300,000,000 cartridges, following a bidding process that seemed to have been unfair. Herbert Surtees, Military Attaché in Constantinople, believed that the Ordnance Service in Turkey was in the pay of Krupp. Mallet was concerned, and thought it reflected ‘discreditably on the new régime’.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 650, 12 Oct 1908, FO 371/560/36112.

³¹⁶ Tilley, *London to Tokyo*, pp. 70-71.

³¹⁷ Tilley and Hardinge minutes, Lowther to Grey, no. 806, 24 Nov. 1908, FO 371/560/41703.

³¹⁸ Lowther to Grey, Commercial, no. 167, 6 Nov. 1908, FO 371/560/39826, Mallet minute.

A key aspect of the Young Turk Revolution had been their keenness to save the Empire. A significant element of their programme would be devoted towards solving the various problems that had bedevilled the Ottoman State, most of which were matters requiring modernisation, but there were other issues too, for instance the huge amount of debt that the Ottoman Treasury had run up.³¹⁹

2.2.g Turkish Finance after the Revolution

After the revolution, it was clear that the new Turkish Government would need ready cash to pursue its modernisation plans. As early as September, a loan from the Ottoman Bank to help the new regime to meet its immediate needs was being discussed. London was clear that such a loan would most likely be ‘settled in Paris’, as the Ottoman Bank was dominated by its French directors. Still, Grey, in a departure from the Foreign Office’s usual policy, was keen that a loan was offered to Turkey on reasonable terms, and quickly, in order to prevent the Turks from looking elsewhere, for instance Germany, for funds. Sir Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador in Paris, was instructed to open communication on the subject, both for these reasons and because ‘the constitutional cause... [might] suffer if money... [was] not forthcoming’.³²⁰ Despite this, it appeared that the terms offered by the bank would be ‘onerous’, and Kâmil asked Lowther whether Britain might not be able to interest other parties in the question and create competition. To add an incentive to his request, he mentioned German offers of finance, but claimed that neither he nor his finance minister wanted to accept them. It was clear to the Foreign Office that finding those willing to compete with the Ottoman Bank was unlikely, and that

³¹⁹ Feis and Platt noted the extent to which the Ottoman Empire became indebted, leading to the Powers taking significant control of Turkish financial policy in the 1870s. Platt, D.C.M., *Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1968); Feis, Herbert, *Europe, the World’s Banker, 1870-1914* (New York, reprint 1964), pp. 314-5.

³²⁰ Lowther to Grey, tel., no. 249, 6 Sep. 1908, and reply, tel., no. 138, 7 Sep. 1908, FO 371/549/30912. D.C.M. Platt showed how, by modern standards, the Foreign Office generally maintained a strict division between diplomacy on the one hand and trade and finance on the other: *id.*, *Finance, Trade, and Politics*, pp. 73-76.

the best route to a loan for Turkey would be in discussions with the French.³²¹ From the French, at first, little more than warm words was forthcoming. The Ottoman Bank apparently desired to see the new regime succeed, and would make arrangements for some money to be advanced on good terms.³²² In terms of a larger loan, however, matters were less clear. Stephen Pichon, the French foreign minister, expressed the view that Anglo-French cooperation in Turkish finance was important, to counterbalance the German dominance of the Army, and, further, that as a joint Anglo-French institution the Ottoman Bank was the ideal instrument to achieve this. Tilley worried that such words were ‘satisfactory’, but that they did not bring a loan to the Turks on favourable terms any closer.³²³ In the meantime, the Turkish Government had instructed its representative in London to seek out the best possible terms for a loan, raised in London. This request presented problems. Mallet worried how this could be reconciled with the French desire to work together, and considered the request to be part of a strategy aimed at extracting better terms from the Ottoman Bank. He recommended informing the French, in confidence, of the development, and telling them that they felt bound to accede to the request. Grey agreed that the Ottoman Bank should be kept informed, but also suggested making direct contact with Lord Rothschild, of the banking dynasty, and asking him if he would be willing to open negotiations with the Turks himself – as Britain could not negotiate with him on their behalf.³²⁴ The answer was disappointing. Although the Rothschilds were ‘always very anxious to meet the views of the Government’ they did not see their way to entering into negotiations, as floating Turkish loans tended not to prove economically competitive. With this reverse, the matter receded somewhat from

³²¹ Lowther to Grey, tel., no. 253, 7 Sep. 1908, FO 371/549/31240.

³²² Bertie to Grey, no. 341, 10 Sep. 1908, FO 371/549/31551.

³²³ Bertie to Grey, no. 342, 10 Sep. 1908, FO 371/549/31552; Tilley minute.

³²⁴ Communication from Turkish CdA in London, 9 Sep. 1908, and Mallet minute on the same, FO 371/549/31640.

importance at the Foreign Office, as focus turned to the Turkish desire for Sir Arthur Chitty, a customs official working in Egypt, to be seconded. ³²⁵

2.2.h External Experts

The leaders of the new regime ‘appeared fully to realize [*sic*] that outside experience was indispensable to enable them to put their house in order’. A number of foreign experts were engaged, including Sir James Willcocks, a British engineer, to assist with public works, and a Frenchman, Charles Laurent, as a financial advisor. ³²⁶ Of particular interest were the appointments of an admiral and a customs specialist, both of whom were appointed from Britain.

Britain being the world’s preeminent naval power, it seemed logical that a British Admiral would be appointed to oversee the regeneration of the Turkish Navy, which was in a moribund state, and in dire need of modernisation. Its large number of ‘social’ officers needed training in their profession. A report by a British Admiral in 1908 revealed that the Turkish Navy suffered from a shortage of ships, many of which were not in a seaworthy condition. Those that were, were now so outdated as to be useless in fighting terms. The report recommended the selling of the majority of the Turkish fleet – or at least that which would fetch any money at all – and reform to be commenced ‘from the very foundation’.

³²⁷ Other reports were no more encouraging, emphasising the poor state of the organisation, dockyards and ships. More positively, however, it was noted that many Turkish Naval Officers were convinced of the superior workmanship of British shipyards, and it was widely believed that when the time came for new vessels to be built, they would be built in Britain. Maxwell was pleased that this would offer a ‘good chance for English

³²⁵ L. De Rothschild to Mallet, 16 Sep. 1908, FO 371/549/32246.

³²⁶ Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v.*

³²⁷ Lowther to Grey, no. 614 26 Sep. 1908, FO 371/559/34302.

Ship-builders.’³²⁸ To capitalise on this, as well as Britain’s improved standing in Turkey after the revolution, the Foreign Office moved quickly to grant the Turkish request naval assistance, although, as Tilley recognised, they were almost overreaching themselves, as the Turks had thus far asked only for information, and communication would have to be ‘rather carefully worded’. The Admiralty was told that Grey considered the issue one of ‘the highest political importance’, and the Lords Commissioners were asked to select, with as little delay as may be convenient, an officer of high reputation and ability, whose name could be submitted to the approval of the Sublime Porte as soon as their formal application’ was received’³²⁹ The Admiralty, for their part, lost no time, and Admiral Douglas Gamble had been offered the job by 7 October.³³⁰ Gamble, who was afraid that the cost of living and entertaining would be very high at Constantinople, had accepted on the basis of an agreed salary and certain reassurances about his rank in Turkey.³³¹ Hardinge emphasised that the Turks had not yet asked for an Admiral, although this was ‘no doubt... implied’ and proposed that Gamble’s conditions be sent to the Turks. He could then be appointed if they agreed, and Rifat, the Turkish Ambassador in London, could be privately informed that an Admiral was ready.³³² All seemed lined up nicely, from a British point of view, but the new Turkish Minister of Marine was worried that a full Admiral would be too much, given the poor state of the Turkish navy, and suggested that a Captain, Commander or even Lieutenant might be more suited to Turkish needs. The Minister seemed to have little idea of what needed to be done, it was reported, but he was aware that almost all of the ships at his disposal had to be replaced, and that there were huge numbers of officers who would need to ‘retire’ and therefore be paid off. Instead

³²⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 742, 4 Nov. 08, FO 371/560/38848; Maxwell minute; Annual Report for Turkey for 1908, *BD v.*

³²⁹ Turkish Embassy Comm. 14 Sep. 08; Tilley minute; and to Admiralty, 17 Sep. 08, FO 371/549/32033

³³⁰ Admiralty to Foreign Office, 7 Oct 08, FO 371/549/34893.

³³¹ Admiralty to Foreign Office, 7 Oct. 08 and Grey to Rifat Pasha, 13 Oct. 08, FO 371/549/34893.

³³² *Ibid*; Hardinge minute.

of an officer with an agreed period of service, he suggested that a group of officers assemble on an *ad-hoc* basis, to help him prepare a report to present to the new Ottoman Parliament. Such views caused disquiet in London, where it was hoped that Britain could achieve the strategic and moral coup of having an officer loaned, on a solid footing, to counterbalance the traditional German domination of the army. Nevertheless, the Foreign Office was prepared to declare Britain willing to 'reconsider' any elements of the proposals that the Turks were unhappy with.³³³ The reason for the Turkish reluctance became more clear in November. Kâmil suggested the shelving of the proposal, as the Ottoman Treasury did not have the funds at its disposal to begin a wholesale naval reorganisation. This development provoked a surge of frustration in the Foreign Office, where it was felt that Lowther had not been as active as he might have been in pushing the British case. Tilley thought his actions 'most unsatisfactory'. Maxwell thought the 'main thing' would be to make it clear to the Turks that Britain was 'willing and able' to supply a Naval advisor of any rank they chose, whilst Mallet thought Lowther must do all he could to 'keep the matter open'. Hardinge was all the more frustrated, having privately suggested to Lowther that he should move in the question, some days before.³³⁴ These views were conveyed to Lowther, and he was instructed to 'see that the question... [was] not allowed to drop'.³³⁵ The Turks continued to press for a more temporary arrangement, claiming cashflow difficulties. The Minister of Marine's plans for a new force, including six dreadnoughts, caused consternation in Whitehall. Tilley thought the idea 'grotesque', and criticised Lowther for allowing such ideas to develop without a rebuttal.³³⁶ In December, however, the Turks crumbled, and Gamble was appointed, at a salary of £3,000 a year.³³⁷ Lowther thought

³³³ Lowther to Grey, no. 687, 23 Oct 1908, FO 371/549/37318.

³³⁴ Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 17 Nov. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 28.

³³⁵ Lowther to Grey, tel., no. 397, 19 Nov. 1908; Tilley, Mallet and Hardinge minutes, reply tel., no. 452 20 Nov. 1908, FO 371/549/40474.

³³⁶ Lowther to Grey, no. 790, 21 Nov. 1908, FO 371/549/41688; Tilley minute.

³³⁷ Communication by Turkish Embassy, 7 Dec. 1908, FO 371/549/42617.

Gamble was a reasonable appointment, but ‘useless’ without money being available for development. The saga had revealed two facets of the Anglo-Turkish relationship after the Revolution. The Turks were shown to be somewhat muddled in policy terms, but clear in their preference for Britain, not to mention willing to lay the flattery on thickly. Britain, on the other hand, was shown to be very keen to capitalise on the unlooked for advantage she had been handed, and was willing to press naval officials onto the Turks without much thought for their utility.

It was also to Britain that Turkey turned for an official to overhaul the customs system. They hoped for Sir Arthur Chitty, known as Chitty Bey, who had been Director-General of the Egyptian Customs. He, convalescing from surgery, turned the offer down, much to the disappointment of the Turks.³³⁸ Eventually, Richard Crawford emerged as a favoured candidate, and after some wrangling over his salary, he was accepted.³³⁹ Lowther hoped that this was not a decision that Britain would ‘live to regret’. He thought Crawford had been ‘forced down’ the Turkish throat, and that if they had had time to ‘swallow him slowly’, he would have been as ‘appetizing’ as anyone else, and he would have to show ‘great tact’ on arrival. In an interesting side note, he thought Sir Adam Block, the British representative on, and president of, the Council of Ottoman Debt to blame, a ‘bull in a china shop’ and ‘frightfully unpopular with the Turks’.³⁴⁰ This demonstrated further how close his views had come to those of Fitzmaurice, who detested former Dragoman Block as a rival, in so short a time.³⁴¹ The case of a customs officer, as with the case of an Admiral, showed Britain’s willingness to push for representation in the corps of Foreign Experts being employed by the Young Turks, and demonstrated her desire to make the most of the advantage she had been handed.

³³⁸ Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 17 Nov. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 28.

³³⁹ Communication by Turkish Embassy, 7 Dec. 1908, FO 371/549/42617.

³⁴⁰ Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 8 Dec, 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 36.

³⁴¹ Berridge, *Gerald Fitzmaurice*, p. 62.

2.3. The Young Turk Revolution

The revolution of 1908 has been much misunderstood. The British view suggested two aspects of the revolution were important. Firstly, British policymakers concluded that it had reshuffled the deck at Constantinople in their favour; and secondly, they considered that the revolutionary movement had been one animated by liberalism and a desire to establish a semi-democratic, constitutional regime based on the principle of equality – in short, a revolution that looked very similar to that of France at the turn of the previous century, or that in Britain in 1688. There is little doubt that in the first case, they were not wrong. Following the revolution, the position of Britain could hardly have failed to improve. So low down the diplomatic pecking order had she been, any change would be likely to be beneficial. Furthermore, the German Embassy, under Baron Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein, was so associated with the hated Hamidian regime that it was inevitable that any regime wanting to distance itself from this would have seek different company. In this case, it might as well have been Britain as any other – indeed, it could not be Austria, which remained closely connected to Germany, nor Russia, the traditional enemy of the Turks. France was connected to Russia by recent alliance, and had significant financial interests in the Ottoman Empire, making her a threat to Turkish independence. Britain, really, was the only one of the Great Powers that could reasonably be approached by the Young Turks, and so she was. Indeed, aside from these practical considerations, many of the more ideologically inclined Young Turks had a genuine admiration for British institutions, and the ‘Westminster System’ of constitutional monarchy was seen as the ideal model to follow in the creation of representative institutions.

On the second point, as has been shown above, they rather missed the mark. There seemed something of a tendency in the Foreign Office to understand revolutionary movements through the cognitive lens of the familiar French revolution.³⁴² The revolution in Turkey had appeared suddenly, and all that most British officials knew of ‘Young Turks’ were the idealists in exile in Europe, who were not representative of the movement that swept away the absolutist regime in Turkey. A certain sense of superiority, too, suggested itself amongst some officials, who saw the Young Turks as inferior peoples ‘playing’ at western style government.³⁴³ The revolutionaries, far from being flushed with idealistic enthusiasm for liberty and love for their fellow man, were men educated within the state system, and proved themselves unable to operate outside this comforting structure. They acted out of a desire to save their Empire, which seemed to be under imminent threat.³⁴⁴ They hoped to show that the moribund empire still had vitality, to shock it into life. The profession of liberal, ‘European’ values, would, they knew, prove to be beneficial to them in their dealings with some of the European Powers. This point, certainly at first, British officials failed to grasp.³⁴⁵

³⁴² Zara Steiner has discussed the strikingly small educational base of Foreign Office employees at this time, the majority coming from Oxbridge via Eton. See *id.*, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, p 217. All Foreign Office (and Diplomatic Service) employees had to pass an entrance exam, which was reasonably difficult, and required attendance at a so called ‘crammer’, such as the well-known ‘Scoones’ of Garrick Street, to learn the material in question. The French Revolution formed an important aspect of the Modern History paper, the content of which started in 1789. See Tilley, *et al.*, *The Foreign Office*, pp 88-9; Jones, Raymond, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815-1914* (Gerrards Cross, 1983), pp 159-160; Jones, *Nineteenth Century Foreign Office*, p 43; Otte, T.G., ‘Old Diplomacy: Reflections on the Foreign Office before 1914’, *Contemporary British History*, 18(3), 2004, pp 31-52; Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*.

³⁴³ Keith Neilson has suggested that some British officials of the time demonstrated a sense of ‘cultural chauvinism’: ‘since Britain had moved towards constitutional Government, it seems to have been widely assumed that such a trend was a universal one’, *id.*, ‘Wishful Thinking’, p. 174.

³⁴⁴ ‘The leaders had not come to power to preside over the liquidation of European Turkey... The movement was liberal to a point, but the nationalistic elements far outweighed the liberal’, Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey*, p. 187.

³⁴⁵ This was a fact recognised by Ernest Edmonson Ramsaur, who wrote in 1957 that ‘The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 was the culmination of many decades of activity by a small group of liberals or pseudo-liberals who had gradually, under the influence of western ideas and concepts, come to the conclusion that the Ottoman Empire was doomed to extinction if drastic steps were not taken to check the decay which had set in’, *id.*, *The Young Turks: Prelude to the Revolution of 1908* (New York, NY, 1957), p. 3. Grey made similar reflections some years after his tenure, remarking that he had failed to heed ‘warnings’ at the time, and that the French, Turkish and Russian revolutions demonstrated that as ‘bad’ as despotism was, ‘the first fruits of its overthrow are not love and liberty.’ *Id.*, *Twenty-Five Years v. 1*, p. 174.

2.3.a. Did a ‘Golden Opportunity’ exist?

Such analysis leads on to the question of whether an opportunity existed for Britain in the wake of the revolution. Feroz Ahmad considered the revolution to have opened a door for Britain, not only removing an anti-British regime but also seeking encouragement from a constitutional monarchy.³⁴⁶ Certainly, this is true. But this essay does not seek to be ‘judge and jury’ on the matter of historical fact. It is well and good to make judgements, with the benefit of hindsight, on what could and should have happened, and better courses that should have been followed, but in the final analysis, what matters is how the situation was seen at the time by those involved, in order to understand how and why they acted as they did.³⁴⁷

British policymakers grasped that the changes at Constantinople could present opportunities. Fitzmaurice exulted that the ‘ball is at our feet’, and suggested that a ‘golden opportunity’ lay before Britain to increase her influence at the Porte.³⁴⁸ Lowther, soon after his arrival, saw ‘great openings for bona fide British business’ and hoped that the ‘shyness regarding Turkey in financial circles’ would disappear, as there should be ‘no reason why their finance should not very easily be put right’. He added that the Turks

³⁴⁶ Ahmad, ‘Relations with the Young Turks’, p. 302.

³⁴⁷ A Rankean ‘scientific’ analysis of the past is neither, it would appear, possible nor in the present work useful. Attempting to come to an exact knowledge of the period would not be helpful. It would provide, in the unlikely event of its coming near to success, a better picture than that available to actors of the time, especially as the historian is able to hear the thoughts of the other side, so to speak. From this standpoint, the benefit of hindsight, and the ability to judge what ‘could and should’ have been done better, does not help to understand nor to explain the past. Nevertheless, the ‘interaction between the historian and his facts’, as E.H. Carr had it, is important, and the present work seeks to reconstruct the views held by contemporary actors, in order to understand and interpret the way in which they saw their own world, much as James Joll called for with his ‘unspoken assumptions’, even if, as Zara Steiner remarked ‘Any complete answer involves areas beyond the historian’s normal terms of reference. These include psychology, sociology and, one occasionally feels, the craft of the astrologer.’, In this way, one can ‘find out how it happened and reach some tenable although always less than final conclusions about what it all meant’. See Boldt, Andreas, ‘Ranke: Objectivity and History’, *Rethinking History*, 18(4), 2014, pp 457-474; Carr, E.H., *What is History* (London, Second Edn. 1987), p. 30; Joll, James, ‘1914: The Unspoken Assumptions’; Steiner, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*; Evans, Richard, *In Defence of History* (London, New Edn. 2000), p 253; Vertzberger, *World in Their Minds*.

³⁴⁸ Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, Private, 25 Aug. 08, *BD v*, no. 210.

would 'surely want to buy ships'.³⁴⁹ Grey agreed that the revolution had presented financial opportunities for Britain. He had been 'distressed', he told Lowther privately, on taking office, to find 'how completely' British commercial enterprises had been ousted from Turkey, and he thought that the revolution offered a chance for Britain to increase her influence in 'things like the Ottoman Bank'.³⁵⁰ This cautious optimism, however, soon faded. By the end of August, Lowther complained that the reputation of Turkey was so bad 'in the City' that it would be some time before British money flowed into the Ottoman Empire.³⁵¹ Regardless, he still saw the opportunity as existing. Visions of a political opportunity were less in evidence. Hardinge hoped that the revolution would provide an opportunity to kill off the German Berlin to Baghdad Railway project, perhaps in favour of a project geared more towards British influence.³⁵² An attempt was made to make political capital on the opening of the new Ottoman Parliament. The British Parliament sent a message of congratulation, 'from the oldest of Parliaments' to the 'youngest on the auspicious occasion of its opening'.³⁵³ Nevertheless, on the political side, threats were seen more readily than opportunities. Grey was alive to the risks to British rule in India and Egypt posed by a strong, constitutional Islamic regime in Turkey. As he explained to Lowther, it would 'never do' to suppress by 'force and shooting' an uprising in favour of a constitution in Egypt whilst supporting constitutional government in Turkey.³⁵⁴ More widely, Grey also saw problems for his wider policy. He worried that support for Russia, with whom he had recently signed a convention, and support for Turkey, her traditional enemy, was incompatible: 'We must be careful not to give Russia the impression that we

³⁴⁹ Lowther to Grey, Private, 11 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 3.

³⁵⁰ Grey to Lowther, Private, 23 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 7.

³⁵¹ Lowther to Grey, Private, 31 Aug. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 9.

³⁵² Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 21 Sep. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 13.

³⁵³ Foreign Office Minute, 10 Dec. 1908, FO 371/561/43208. Tangentially, it is interesting to note that the name of G.P. Gooch, who would later work with Harold Temperley in compiling the official collections of 'British Documents on the Origins of the War', appears as one of the signatory MPs.

³⁵⁴ Grey to Lowther, Private, 31 Jul. 1908, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 1.

are reverting to the old policy of supporting Turkey as a barrier against her and should continue to show willingness to work with Russia when possible.’³⁵⁵

Here lay the nub of the matter. British policymakers saw that matters had changed at Constantinople, and that there were chances for Britain. These were, however, largely of a financial nature, rather than political. The revolution had the potential to cause problems as much as it promised their solution. Britain, although she was willing to support the Turks and to try and increase her influence there, had not lost sight of her wider ideas of policy, and was not prepared to throw them over in favour of gaining a foothold in the Ottoman Empire. The ‘golden opportunity’ was, perhaps, a little less lustrous than the turcophile Fitzmaurice had declared.

³⁵⁵ Grey to Lowther, Private, 11 Aug. 08, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 4.

3. The Bosnian Crisis: the ‘Golden Opportunity’ meets reality

The Bosnian Crisis proved to be the first test of the new optimism which had been engendered by the Young Turk revolution, both in Turkey and Britain. Initially, British policy towards Turkey was indulgent, hoping to maintain the strong position which Whitehall believed was being established in the wake of the Revolution. The fact that no particularly cherished British interests appeared to be at stake only encouraged this policy. However, as the crisis continued, and as it became clear that the future direction of Great Power politics was increasingly intertwined with events in the Balkans, British policymakers became increasingly frustrated at a perceived tendency to indecision and at Constantinople’s ‘difficult’ attitude. Throughout the crisis, Russia remained firmly in the minds of Foreign Office officials, and it became clear that whilst Britain was willing to curry favour with the Porte, she was not willing to do this at the expense of her new ties with Russia. This chapter will first consider the events of the crisis, with a focus on those elements relating to Turkey and Britain, such as the negotiations with Austria and Bulgaria, and the discussions of the Straits. It will then consider the implications of this crisis on the relationship between Britain and the new regime in Turkey, and what this meant for the idea of a ‘Golden Opportunity’.

The history of the Bosnian Crisis is classically related from early October 1908 when Bulgaria declared her independence, closely followed by the Austrian annexation of the (nominally Ottoman) provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.³⁵⁶ The roots of the incident lay in the infamous meeting at Buchlau, at which Alexander Isvolsky, the Russian

³⁵⁶ Whilst two classic works on the crisis - Bernadotte Schmitt and D.W. Sweet – touch upon the railway and birthday questions they are not dealt with in depth. However, in keeping with their nature as general accounts of the crisis as a whole, most work dealing with the crisis has a tendency to focus on the Austro-Serbian question, rather than the Turkish elements of the crisis. The present work aims to provide a more Turkish focused view. Schmitt, Bernadotte, *The Annexation of Bosnia* (Cambridge, 1937); Sweet, D.W., ‘The Bosnian Crisis’, in Hinsley, *Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, pp. 178-192.

Foreign Minister and Alois von Aehrenthal, his opposite number, had agreed that if Russia did not oppose Austria-Hungary's annexation of the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina then Vienna would be supportive of, or at least not block, Russian demands to change the *status quo* at the Turkish Straits. Russia, naturally, had no great love for the Ottoman Empire, the preservation of which formed a significant barrier to pan-slavist ideas of the future in the Balkans. Furthermore, she had long nursed designs on the Straits, or at the least on them being opened for warships, and had made various failed attempts to capture Constantinople. Indeed, it was her success in war against the Ottoman Empire which had precipitated the Congress of Berlin and the resulting Treaty, which still formed the basis for the situation in the Balkans. When Aehrenthal called Isvolsky's bluff and annexed the provinces without a warning, earlier than Isvolsky had expected, and seemingly coincidentally, the day after the long feared Bulgarian declaration of independence, this action set off the crisis that was to engulf Eastern Europe for the next six months. Britain was to discover the challenges of a closer working relationship with the Turks.

3.1 Early Rumbblings

3.1.a The Geshov incident

It is useful to begin the narrative slightly earlier, with two incidents which demonstrated the increasing tension between Turkey and Bulgaria, the latter still a notional Ottoman possession. The first of these, relating to a perceived diplomatic slight, was 'trifling in itself', but demonstrated an increasingly assertive policy on the part of Bulgaria.³⁵⁷ The second, which was provoked by the Bulgarian seizure of sections of the Oriental Railway, was more serious, and proved to be one of the main bones of contention

³⁵⁷ Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia*, p. 77.

between Turkey and Bulgaria throughout the crisis. These incidents, although perhaps seeming minor on their own merits, were brought to an added pitch by the British impression that Bulgaria contemplated a declaration of independence, a matter that had already been in discussion a year previously. Indeed, Grey had gone so far as to authorise Sir George Buchanan, the British minister to Bulgaria, to consult with his Russian and French colleagues, in order to be prepared for a sudden declaration.³⁵⁸

The initial incident, in mid-September 1908, was provoked when Bulgaria's chief diplomatic representative at Constantinople, Ivan Geshov, did not receive an invitation to a dinner being put on by Tevfik Pasha, the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, in honour of the Sultan's birthday. As Turkey maintained suzerainty over Bulgaria, the Turkish Government was entitled not to recognise the representatives of Bulgaria as Ministers, and thus not to treat them as they would the representatives of a fully sovereign nation. It being confirmed that this was not an oversight, Geshov returned to Bulgaria, in accordance with his instructions. Lowther believed that this represented a deliberate slight on the part of the Turkish Government and Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Anything suggestive of recognising Bulgarian statehood, after all, could only encourage other parts of the Empire in their own national aspirations. Adding insult to injury, it was proposed that another dinner take place, to which Geshov would be invited, and 'at which he would find his proper place amongst Turkish officials.'

In London, Foreign Office officials were in no doubt that the Turks were in the right, from a legal perspective, but were concerned at the possible consequences of the incident. Although the Porte was 'no doubt right in principle', Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS) Sir Charles Hardinge mused, it was a 'great pity' that the incident 'was not avoided'.

³⁵⁸ Buchanan to Grey, Very Confidential, 7 Aug 08, *BD v*, no. 261.

Prophetically, he remarked that Britain had ‘not heard the last’ of the incident.³⁵⁹ Despite such foreboding, the mood in Constantinople remained optimistic. Kâmil Pasha, the Grand Vizier, told a supportive press that there was little to worry about, pointing to the unofficial position of the Egyptian representatives in the country. He added that he was not afraid of a Turco-Bulgarian dispute, as he believed in the presence of ‘friends to reconcile us’, in effect suggesting that Britain might be called upon to help maintain order within the Ottoman Empire. From the British perspective, this was a mistake. J.A.C. Tilley, a junior clerk in the Foreign Office’s Eastern Department, worried about the over-confidence of the Turks, and thought it unlikely that Britain would be supportive of a Turkish attempt to regain control of Bulgaria.³⁶⁰ Buchanan, for his part, argued that such Turkish tactlessness might ‘bring... home to the Bulgarian nation the disadvantages attaching to the position of a Vassal State’.³⁶¹ Others had a similar view. On 22 September, the Russian Acting Foreign Minister, Nikolai Charykov, suggested to Sir Arthur Nicolson, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, that Russia was ‘willing’ to join in a joint, simultaneous communication at Constantinople and Sofia, counselling moderation. He suggested that Bulgaria be told that she would not be helped if she pushed matters to war, and claimed to have told the Bulgarian *chargé d’affaires* that strictly speaking, the Turks were in the right. To compel the Turks to cooperate, meanwhile, he proposed that the European Powers should threaten not to agree to the withdrawal of the international Macedonian Gendarmerie officers.

It was this latter point which proved controversial in London. Louis Mallet, the head of the Eastern Department, was ready to join in the proposed communication to

³⁵⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 559, 13 Sep 08, FO 371/550/32598; Minutes Tilley, Maxwell, Hardinge.

³⁶⁰ Lowther to Grey, no. 523, 15 Sep 08, FO 371/550/32612; Tilley minute.

³⁶¹ Grey to Egerton, 5 Oct 08, *BD v*, no. 307.

Bulgaria, but felt that the note, which he considered ‘petty’, was too much of a ‘threat’.³⁶² Sir Edward Grey, too, was uncomfortable with the idea and thought that if Britain informed the Turks of what had been done at Sofia, whilst emphasising the confidence in Turkey which the planned withdrawal of Gendarmerie Officers demonstrated, then Britain might be able to prevail upon the Turks to avoid future incidents of this nature. In the event, it was decided to seek out the opinion of Lowther before anything was done. The mood remained bleak. Mallet found the situation ‘very disagreeable’, and worried that it presented an ‘opportunity for the Germans to squash the Young Turks’. Indeed, the Ottoman Government seemed to have decided not to give way, and Lowther speculated that elements within it might ‘welcome extreme measures being forced upon the country, as tending to produce unity and providing a means whereby troubles in Turkey may be avoided.’³⁶³ The communication made to the Bulgarians by the Turks, the details of which did not reach London until about a week afterwards, bore this out, there being no attempt to ‘smooth over matters or express regret’. To prove his point, Kâmil had claimed that other envoys had expressed ‘surprise’ at the presence of Geshov at those diplomatic gatherings that he had attended. Lowther cast doubt on this story and stated that his colleagues had denied making such remarks. Tilley noted that Kâmil’s language seemed to ‘wander a good deal from the truth.’³⁶⁴ Despite this, when asked the next day, Lowther thought it best to avoid a communication as proposed to the Turks, as she was both ‘technically’ in the right and in a seemingly ‘conciliatory’ mood. He thought that Turkey would be happy to adopt a ‘face saving’ solution that allowed her not to sacrifice the principle. In London, Tilley disagreed, worried about the consequences of not warning the Turks. Although the effects of making representations at Constantinople would ‘no doubt

³⁶² Nicolson to Grey, no. 173, tel., FO 371/550/31911; Mallet minute, Mallet letter to Hardinge, contained within.

³⁶³ Lowther to Grey, no. 268, tel., 23 Sep 08 FO 371/550/33029.

³⁶⁴ Lowther to Grey, no. 602, 28 Sep 08, FO 371/55033541; Tilley Minute.

be bad', war, if it came, 'would be worse'. He thought Britain would not be able to 'allow' Turkey to crush Bulgaria. In contrast, Richard Ponsonby Maxwell, another Clerk in the Eastern Department, emphasised that representations at Constantinople had never been British policy, and had been suggested by the Russians. Hardinge tried to tread a middle road, explaining that while Britain had decided to 'abstain' from a joint representation, Lowther had been instructed, unofficially, to urge a conciliatory attitude. He instructed Nicolson that while the Bulgarian communication would be made, the Turkish one would not. Furthermore, to avoid difficulties with Russia, he decided that the Turks should not be told of the joint action at Sofia until it had been completed.³⁶⁵

At this juncture, the outline of British policy throughout the crisis was foreshadowed. There was a clear desire to give the Turks a sympathetic ear in order to maintain the position gained by the revolution. The intention to work with the Russians, too, was equally obvious, as were the gently diverging paths on which Russian and British policy found themselves. While keen to work with the Russians, Foreign Office opinion seemed keener on the idea in principle rather than practice when it became clear that Russia hoped to back Bulgaria. Britain already faced the difficult realisation that she might be forced to choose between two Powers with which she had recently established better relations.

On this occasion, she was not forced into making a decision, as the situation took a 'more hopeful' turn.³⁶⁶ Perhaps motivated by the seizure of the railway (see below), the Turkish Government expressed their regret at the incident to the Bulgarians, but maintained that Geshov should never have been treated as a full envoy, and also stated that he would be welcomed on the same terms as before when he chose to return.

Although this was a half-apology, British policy remained to support Turkish *amour propre*,

³⁶⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 271, tel., 24 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33124; Minutes Tilley, Maxwell, Hardinge.

³⁶⁶ Buchanan to Grey, no. 23, tel., 25 Sep 09, FO 371/550/33285, Tilley minute.

and to prevent further escalation. Buchanan welcomed this development, but nevertheless told the Bulgarians unofficially that they could not expect help from Britain were they to 'push matters to a rupture'.³⁶⁷ Kâmil, his mind perhaps focused by the ongoing railway incident, indicated to Lowther that Turkey had expressed her willingness to restore friendly relations with Bulgaria over the incident of the birthday party.³⁶⁸

The spat over Geshov's status seemed to be winding down. The spectre of Russia, however, once again reared its head. Tilley had remarked on St. Petersburg's 'strong' support for Bulgaria over the incident. Indeed, it transpired that Russia had advised the Bulgarians to say that when a representative returned, they hoped that he would be treated on the same 'courteous' lines as before, and suggested that it might be desirable to send a new man in place of Geshov.³⁶⁹ This was not met with delight by Britain. Nicolson suggested that the proposed joint communications be dropped, and confidentially explained to London that despite claiming that he wanted to act in step with the British, Charykov was pursuing his own lines of policy. He proposed waiting for further developments, and 'intimating this in a friendly way' to Charykov, who agreed to stop the joint note. This matched the views of the Foreign Office. Britain did not 'especially wish to make representations at Sofia other than those already made', and in any case this would mean that the Porte would have 'no reason to complain'. Grey agreed that it would be best to let the question of joint communications drop, as he hoped to avoid being 'forced to make' representations at Constantinople.³⁷⁰ This, indeed, is what was done, as the question of the railway pushed itself ever more to the forefront of policymakers thoughts. By 29 September, with no further communications from the Bulgarians, Kâmil considered

³⁶⁷ Buchanan to Grey, no. 23, tel., 25 Sep 09, FO 371/550/33285.

³⁶⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 274, tel., 26 Sep 08, FO 371/550/3347.

³⁶⁹ Ibid, Tilley Minute; Nicolson to Grey, no. 176, tel., 26 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33352.

³⁷⁰ Nicolson to Grey, no. 176, tel., 26 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33352; Minutes Tilley, Grey.

the incident to be ‘satisfactorily at an end’.³⁷¹ The diplomatic tightrope that Britain would have to walk in the Near East for the next half a year had thus already been revealed. London hoped to support the Turks, as far as was practical and reasonable, in order to maintain and press home the advantage that the revolution had given her. However, it was fast becoming clear that Bulgaria was likely to be Turkey’s main rival in the Balkans in the near future. This put Britain in direct conflict with Russia, her freshly minted convention partner, who hoped to restore herself to the position of primacy she had previously held there, and ward off recent Austrian attempts to gain the admiration and loyalty of the Bulgars. The choice between ties with Russia and a ‘golden opportunity’ in the Near East would animate the next six months of Britain’s European diplomacy.

3.1.b The Railway Incident

The railway incident proved to be more serious than a wrangle over diplomatic etiquette. A dispute over something concrete, combined with the very real threat of armed confrontation, fed into an already febrile atmosphere, in which Bulgaria, it was speculated, continued seriously to consider the possibility of independence.

London learned that Bulgarian troops had seized sections of railway in Eastern Rumelia on 26 September. Tevfik immediately asked Britain that something be done about it at Sofia. Tilley counselled caution. He thought it best to wait and see how the other Powers reacted. In this, he was to be overruled by Grey who decided that the Turks had done the ‘conciliatory thing about the Bulgarian Agent’, and that they should be supported over the railway. He proposed action at Sofia ‘at once’, provided the Russians agreed.³⁷² London’s initial response captured British policy in microcosm. Although

³⁷¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 282, tel., 29 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33785.

³⁷² Lowther to Grey, no. 273, tel., 25 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33221, Tilley minute, Grey minute; Nicolson was duly asked to ascertain Russian views, see Grey to Nicolson, no. 395, tel., 26 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33221.

broadly supportive of Turkey, this was filtered through Grey's wider worldview and the strategic realities of his wider conception of foreign policy – in this case, this meant that the position of Russia had to be considered. As events developed, Lowther reported that there remained a fear in Turkey that the Bulgarians might declare independence, and worried what he should say. Tilley summed up the difficult position that this put Britain. 'We could not encourage the Porte to take any active steps', he wrote, but nor would Britain 'wish to be the first to tell it to accept the situation'.³⁷³ The Bulgarians, for their part, seemed willing to try and deescalate the situation, stating officially that the reports had been a misunderstanding, and that they had merely taken over the working of the sections of the railway that were in Bulgarian territory. They added that there had been no intention to 'infringe... proprietary rights or material interests' and that they did not believe that this question would 'disturb' the 'good relations' that they hoped to maintain with Turkey.³⁷⁴ As it transpired, this was broadly accurate. The seizure had taken place after a decision, 'injurious' to Bulgarian economic interests, was made in Constantinople by the directors of the Railway, but Bulgaria had maintained that the proprietary rights of the company would be respected.³⁷⁵

The Bulgarian Government nonetheless came under intense domestic pressure over the matter, so that its fall could not be ruled out. Despite this, Buchanan still believed that the aims of the Government were limited to taking over the working of the line to prevent it from being used against their interests. Since only Austria and Germany had made any official representations at Sofia, he suggested it would be best for Britain to refrain from action for the time being, and wait and see what happened.³⁷⁶ Tilley

³⁷³ Lowther to Grey, no. 274, tel., 26 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33347; Tilley Minute.

³⁷⁴ Buchanan to Grey, no. 24, tel., 26 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33356.

³⁷⁵ Buchanan to Grey, no. 78, 30 Sep 08, FO 371/550/34337.

³⁷⁶ Buchanan to Grey, no. 25, tel., FO 371/550/33357.

bemoaned the complications of the situation. Both Austria and Serbia wanted to be ‘friends’ to Bulgaria, he wrote, a position which Russia ‘no doubt’ wished ‘to occupy also’. Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria, meanwhile, had recently been received in Budapest by the Emperor Franz Joseph, and speeches of a flattering nature had been exchanged. This suggested that Bulgaria might be disposed to follow a pro-Austrian line on the matter.³⁷⁷ This was an added complication to an already difficult situation, but little more could be done until the Russians had clarified their position. The next day, Hardinge met the Turkish Ambassador in London. He reassured him that Britain hoped to clear obstacles on the path of reform, and counselled the Turks that it would be ‘unwise’ to raise questions, especially those of ‘mere form’ with Bulgaria, especially as she was at the ‘peak of her power’.³⁷⁸ He also spoke to the Bulgarian agent, warning him that if Bulgaria took any action that ‘hampered the new régime’ she would forfeit the sympathies of both the British Government and Public.³⁷⁹ Having thus sought to moderate the ambitions of both sides, the British waited to hear further from Russia.

On 28 September Nicolson reported that Russia favoured joint action by the Powers, in particular because the Turks had applied jointly to the signatories of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin. Charykov, however, went further, minimising the action that Bulgaria had taken and suggesting that in the light of recent changes in the Near East, there was scope for changes to the 1878 settlement. Tilley broadly agreed with the procedure suggested by the Russians, but suggested that it would be as well to decide what British policy would be when the note was received. The best solution seemed to be that Bulgaria would return the Railway to the operating company, and then negotiate with the Turks for

³⁷⁷ Ibid; Buchanan to Grey, tel. 27 Sep 08, *BD v*, no. 268.

³⁷⁸ Grey to Lowther, no. 253, tel., 28 Sep 08, FO 371/550/34061.

³⁷⁹ Grey to Buchanan, no. 25, tel., 28 Sep 08, FO 371/550/34061.

its official hand-over. Hardinge agreed that waiting was the best policy, although he predicted that the Turkish note would not contain anything that Britain did not ‘already know’, and thought that consequently the Foreign Office ‘should be ready’ to state their views. He appreciated, too, the proposal for handing the line back to Turkey as being engineered to soothe Turkish ‘*amour propre*’ and suggested that Britain would exert pressure on the Turks not to ‘make difficulties’ once this had been satisfied. As so often, Grey was of the same mind as his PUS. In the meantime, he decided that ‘the first step’ would be to ‘discreetly’ find out whether the Turks and Bulgarians would be likely to accept a proposal of this nature.³⁸⁰ Serendipitously, the Turks were already thinking in this vein. Kâmil floated the idea of selling or leasing the Railway to Bulgaria, following its formal return to Turkey.³⁸¹ This solution seemed to be the perfect compromise. Bulgaria would get what she wanted and be satisfied, but this would not come at the cost of Turkish *amour propre*. British representatives in Rome, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin and Paris were asked to push this solution on their host Governments. Sensing a chance of an early negotiated settlement, Britain seemed keen to strike while the iron was hot.

By early October, a sense of foreboding had settled in. Hardinge wrote privately to his protégé Nicolson that the ‘relations between Bulgaria and Tukey’ were ‘causing us some anxiety’, and predicted that although the situation was ‘not at present critical in any way’, a declaration of independence by Bulgaria might prove to be the perfect moment for Austria to annex Bosnia.³⁸² On 2 October, the Foreign Office found itself in receipt of information from an ‘unnamed but trustworthy’ source which suggested that the Bulgarian Government was preparing itself to declare independence and call up 40,000 reservists.

³⁸⁰ Nicolson to Grey, no. 179, tel., 28 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33652; Minutes Tilley, Hardinge, Grey.

³⁸¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 282, tel., 29 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33785.

³⁸² Hardinge to Nicolson, Private, 30 Sep 08, *BD v*, no 274.

Maxwell was cynical, and emphasised that a telegram containing assurances that independence was not contemplated had been received only two days before. Hardinge accepted that this 'disquieting' news might 'not be true', but thought that 'inaction' would be open to criticism if the news was accurate. He promptly circulated this information to the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin, and urged these Powers to deprecate this course of action at Sofia. He also took notice of the Bulgarian assurance that independence was not contemplated. The instructions to Lowther, meanwhile, were forceful. British support was promised, but the urgent need to avoid a war, both for the benefit of Turkey internally and for wider European reasons was made explicit.³⁸³ Independence, however, was not mentioned. Through promising support, Britain hoped to buy enough influence with the Turks to restrain them from taking active measures that would make it even harder for Britain to manage the situation. As rumours swirled, Buchanan reported that it seemed as though Russia would be the first to recognise the Bulgarians, should they declare independence, and that Russia was keen to show the Austrians who was the 'mistress' of the Balkans. Tilley also found himself worried about the implications of these comments. It was 'unfortunate' for Russia and Austria that they could not both 'hold the same cards', he wrote, but perhaps the present moment might present an opportunity to 'settle Balkan Affairs in their own interests not unamicably.' This would suggest that they might 'give Bulgaria a free hand'.³⁸⁴ The tensions implicit in British policy in the region then became apparent, as Russian attempts to regain influence in Bulgaria appeared increasingly at odds with British ambitions regarding Turkey.

³⁸³ Buchanan to Grey, no. 29, tel., Secret, 1 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34000; Minutes Maxwell, Hardinge; Annexed Drafts.

³⁸⁴ Buchanan to Grey, no. 286, tel., 2 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34127; Tilley Minute.

3.2. The Crisis Begins

Soon, it would be more than just Bulgaria giving European statesmen cause for anxiety. British policymakers were aware of the meeting at Buchlau by September, and by the beginning of October, the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria was being widely rumoured.³⁸⁵ It came as little surprise then, when, on 3 October, Count Mensdorff, the Hapsburg Ambassador in London, paid a private call to Hardinge and informed him of Vienna's intentions. He added that in compensation, Austria would abandon the Sandjak of Novi Bazaar, territory that remained contested following the Treaty of Berlin.³⁸⁶ The annexation was announced the same day, on much the same lines, and couched in careful language that avoided the term 'annexation' and tried to give the whole proceeding a temporary air.³⁸⁷ There was little time to react. Days later, Bulgaria declared her independence.³⁸⁸

With that, the two poles of the crisis were established. The brief delay between announcements gave rise to some suspicion. Grey privately informed Sir Edward Goschen, about to be appointed ambassador at Berlin, but still at Vienna, that he could not believe that there had been no prior communication, at the very least, between Austria and Bulgaria before dropping their respective bombshells.³⁸⁹ This belief, indeed, was widely held at the time, although it seems that the Bulgarian action was opportunistic rather than a part of an Austro-Bulgarian plot.³⁹⁰ As for Turkey, Kâmil thought it a 'severe blow' to the prestige of the new regime, and asked Lowther for advice. Lowther suggested

³⁸⁵ Goschen to Grey, 28 Sep 08, *BD v*, no. 269, see also nos. 270, 273, 276.

³⁸⁶ Mem. Respg. Interview between Hardinge and Mensdorff, *BD v*, no. 287.

³⁸⁷ Bertie to Grey, no. 49, tel., Confidential, 3 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34321.

³⁸⁸ Buchanan to Grey, no 37, Tel., 5 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34391.

³⁸⁹ Grey to Goschen, 5 Oct 08, *BD v*, no. 389.

³⁹⁰ Ünal, Hasan, 'Ottoman Policy during the Bulgarian Independence Crisis, 1908-9: Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria at the Outset of the Young Turk Revolution', *Middle Eastern Studies* 34(4), 1998, pp. 135-176(146-7).

remaining calm, and trying to pin the blame for what had happened on the old regime, as far as was possible. ³⁹¹ In Whitehall, his chief was tendering similar advice to Rifat Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador in London. Grey laid out the British approach to Turkey's problems. Turkey needed 'time and money', both of which could be got through diplomatic means, if she avoided war. ³⁹² In this advice, he was consistent throughout the crisis, and senior officials were confident that Turkey would follow it. On hearing that Serbia planned to mobilise her troops if Turkey did so, Hardinge mused that 'fortunately Turkey is not going to give Servia the opportunity of taking up arms against Bulgaria.' ³⁹³ 'The general feeling' in London was that Turkey had met with 'bad treatment' and that the new regime was 'worthy of consideration'. ³⁹⁴ Consistently with this, Austria was told that Britain could not recognise the annexation as it was contrary to the Treaty of Berlin, and that Vienna ought to reconsider. ³⁹⁵ The Turks, meanwhile, took matters into their own hands and issued a telegraphic protest to the Powers, asking that their interests be safeguarded. For the moment, Turkey would abstain from military measures. ³⁹⁶ The Turkish 'official' protest was met with already familiar words by Grey. Britain would not recognise anything without consulting all of the signatories to the Treaty of Berlin, although what form such 'consultations' might take remained open. ³⁹⁷ Seeing as the 'most important' element of the crisis would be the 'settlement of some form of compensation for Turkey', and to shore up the position of the new regime at Constantinople, Grey proposed a loan to Turkey, guaranteed by the Powers. ³⁹⁸ Whilst the Turks turned this down, perhaps fearing yet more external control of their financial affairs, they did ask Britain to

³⁹¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 294, tel., 5 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34514.

³⁹² Grey to Lowther, no. 284, tel., 5 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34595.

³⁹³ Whitehead to Grey, no. 7, tel., 5 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34523, Hardinge Minute.

³⁹⁴ Grey to Nicolson, no. 432, tel., 5 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34597.

³⁹⁵ Grey to Goschen, no. 96, tel., 5 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34596.

³⁹⁶ Lowther to Grey, no. 300, tel., 7 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34753.

³⁹⁷ Grey to Lowther, no. 428, 9 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35410.

³⁹⁸ Grey to Lowther, no. 335, tel., 12 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35412.

help them in securing a smaller loan, not guaranteed by the Powers, in order to meet their immediate expenses.³⁹⁹ Grey feared that the moment was not ‘favourable financially’ but he was ‘anxious to give such support as may be possible’.⁴⁰⁰ There were limits to British support. When a territorial guarantee to Turkey was raised, Grey was opposed: ‘It would not be an acceptable proposal’, and ‘would raise more difficulties than it would solve’.⁴⁰¹ As the initial shock wore off, the Turkish attitude stiffened, provoking frustration in London. Hearing that Turkey now claimed to be unable to accept the loss of Eastern Rumelia, a province that had been gradually assimilated into Bulgaria and now formed part of the land claimed by the Bulgarian Government, Hardinge exclaimed that the Turks must be ‘made to understand’ that it was ‘quite impossible to put back the clock’ and that the ‘fait accompli’ must ‘eventually be accepted on Austria’s terms’. He went on to complain of Turkish naiveté. A war, even if successful, would still end up with Turkey losing the territory as Europe ‘would not allow it’, International forces protecting it for them would be a ‘burden that no Power could tolerate’, and if the clock were to be wound back to 1878, then Russia would be in occupation – a situation ‘obviously objectionable’ to Turkey.⁴⁰² It was clear that the attitude of the Turks was already proving irritating to the British, who were trying to support the new regime whilst keeping more than one eye firmly on the wider international implications of their actions.

From this point onwards, the crisis diverged into several different strands, as different issues emerged. The next section will take those strands which relate specifically to Turkey and British policy towards her. In this manner, rather than taking a synoptic

³⁹⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 324, tel., 14 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35652; Grey to Lowther, no. 353, tel., 14 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35652.

⁴⁰⁰ Lowther to Grey, no. 326, tel., 15 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35666.

⁴⁰¹ Lascelles to Grey, no. 54, tel., 13 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35545; Minutes.

⁴⁰² Lowther to Grey, no. 327, tel., 15 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35667, Hardinge Minute.

view of the crisis, the British approach to Turkey can be analysed, by considering, in turn, the Turkish negotiations with Austria and Bulgaria, discussions for a conference, and finally the Russian financial proposal to the Porte that eventually formed the basis of the settlement between Turkey and Bulgaria.

3.2.a Military Posturing Between Turkey and Bulgaria

In the first months of the crisis, both Bulgaria and Turkey made military preparations, seemingly in response to actions by the other, a perfect illustration of the ‘security dilemma’.⁴⁰³ Britain wished to avoid such escalation. War would be of no benefit to Turkey, even if she were to win it. With this in mind, London took steps to calm the situation, by suggesting reciprocal Bulgaro-Turkish assurances. Circumstances seemed propitious as Prince Ferdinand had intimated to the French that Bulgaria was willing to countenance Turkish claims for compensation.⁴⁰⁴ In any case, senior policymakers were not unduly concerned for the present. Hardinge thought it ‘very improbable’ that Bulgaria would declare a war in the winter.⁴⁰⁵ Grey informed Goschen, in private, that the winter season would prove a ‘likely sedative’; a not unreasonable view.⁴⁰⁶ Nevertheless, military movements continued to take place in Turkey, in a manner that Lowther found ‘difficult’ to ‘reconcile... with purely pacific intentions’.⁴⁰⁷ He suggested that a minor mutiny might be the cause for the movements, but this was dismissed by Tilley as ‘insufficient to justify the military measures taken’.⁴⁰⁸ When some 50,000 Bulgarian troops were stood down, Buchanan had a crisis of conscience. If Turkish preparations continued, Britain would incur a ‘grave responsibility’ towards Bulgaria. Tilley was less moved. He saw the

⁴⁰³ Herz, John H. “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma.” *World Politics* 2(2), 1950, pp. 157–80.

⁴⁰⁴ Buchanan to Grey, no. 55, tel., 16 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35900.

⁴⁰⁵ Buchanan to Grey, no. 55, tel., 16 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35900.

⁴⁰⁶ Grey to Goschen, Private, 5 Nov 08, FO 800/61.

⁴⁰⁷ Lowther to Grey, no. 370, tel., 30 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37763.

⁴⁰⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 375, tel., 31 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37876; Tilley Minute.

responsibility, but he could not believe that the Bulgarians would have taken the risk merely to be ‘in the right’.⁴⁰⁹ Certainly, the situation was becoming unbalanced, with one military attaché suggesting that the Turks were ‘almost on a war footing’.⁴¹⁰ By the start of November, Hardinge privately admitted that the Turks were very much dominant, a situation about which he was not unhappy, seeing as it allowed Turkish interests to predominate without obvious British involvement.⁴¹¹ Nevertheless, Lowther was instructed to join the French and Russian Ambassadors in informing the Porte of the Bulgarian troop reductions.⁴¹² In Bucharest, a Turkish attaché suggested that the Bulgarians had ‘wasted’ their chance, and that the Turks were now the masters of the situation. Grey dismissed such ‘bragging’, but found ‘indiscreet’ comments unhelpful.⁴¹³ Not for the first time, Lowther was pessimistic. Although he thought ‘pacific assurances’ would be forthcoming, he doubted that anything further was likely.⁴¹⁴ His predictions proved to be accurate. The Turks claimed that they would reciprocate the Bulgarian action, but only after their own troops had finished their training. This ‘valueless’ assurance provoked a certain frustration in the Foreign Office, and the Turks were invited by the Powers to supply a date by which they would have carried out these steps, and warned that if this was not done, then there would be no further help from Britain at Sofia.⁴¹⁵ The Turkish response to the joint French, British and Russian representation was lukewarm. The Turks made various excuses about where their troops were needed, and promised that some would soon be let go again, explanations that nevertheless seemed to satisfy the Bulgarian representative at Constantinople. From here, matters seemed to cool a little, as negotiations between Bulgaria and Russia directly, on a financial basis, began.

⁴⁰⁹ Buchanan to Grey, no. 72, tel., 31 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37841; Tilley minute.

⁴¹⁰ Buchanan to Grey, no. 89, 28 Oct 08, FO 371/555/37974.

⁴¹¹ Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 3 Nov *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no 23.

⁴¹² Grey to Lowther, no. 427, tel., 2 Nov 08 FO 371/554/37877.

⁴¹³ Greene to Grey, no. 10, tel., 31 Oct 08 FO 371/554/37889; Grey Minute.

⁴¹⁴ Lowther to Grey, no. 377, tel., 1 Nov 08, FO 371/554/37877.

⁴¹⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 379, tel., 2 Nov 08, FO 371/555/38214; Tilley Minute.

Whilst it was clear that Britain had no desire to see a war, and in fact had tried to calm matters and prevent a conflict from breaking out, it was also clear that she was far from unhappy at the advantage that the Turks seemed to enjoy. At this stage of the crisis, London remained consistent to her policy of pursuing a peaceful settlement that would prevent, so far as possible, both war and damaging changes to the 1878 order. However, Grey also adhered to the idea that this would not come about at the cost of the Turks, and by extension, not at the cost of the new British position in Turkey.⁴¹⁶ However, this fragile equilibrium could not last when also faced with complications from other Great Powers.

3.2.b The Straits: Early Negotiations between Russia and Turkey

Russia was a central element of British thinking during this period. That in the early stages of the crisis, questions arising between Russia and Turkey would be of significant interest is of little surprise. The British emphasis on financial assistance for Turkey seemed to present an opportunity for Isvolsky to save face by using such weakness to force concessions at the Straits, negating his defeat by Aehrenthal at Buchlau. In early October, Charykov sounded Nicolson out about the possibility of the Turks allowing the Straits to be opened to Russian, Bulgarian and Romanian warships in return for the war indemnity still owed by Turkey after the war of 1877 being waived. Britain was reluctant to acquiesce in this proposal, as Hardinge pointed out: 'It must be remembered that we are in no way bound to give Russia our support for this particular proposal which gives her advantages while denying any to us.' Mallet took a mediating position by suggesting that any agreement could take the shape of the Porte renouncing the neutrality clause in the Berlin Treaty, thus not only opening the Straits up in a way which was less objectionable to Britain, but also relieving Britain of the responsibility of pressing for the Straits to be

⁴¹⁶ Lowther to Grey, no. 385, tel., 5 Nov 08, FO 371/555/38550.

opened to all. Grey was unsure how to proceed, but felt that there was time to wait until more facts became clear, and military opinion had been sought.⁴¹⁷ He was not anxious for the question to be raised. Mallet hoped that Isvolsky could be persuaded not to raise the question for the moment. A ‘great point’ would ‘have been parried’, if it was avoided for the present.⁴¹⁸ Russian control of the Straits was the one outcome which the Admiralty wished to avoid, as it would allow the Russian fleet to hide in the Black Sea, sallying out when desired, making her a ‘formidable Mediterranean Power’. From a strategic point of view, neutrality of the Straits was seen as being a more attractive option for Britain than the current *status quo*, as Britain would then be able to use the Straits against Russia, if required – a preferable state of affairs to Russia being prevented from the use of the Straits by only a few Turkish forts.⁴¹⁹ This suggests that in the Admiralty, the Anglo-Russian convention was viewed as a temporary arrangement, or at least one which was likely to end. This expert opinion went unchallenged by the Foreign Office, characterising the convention as an attempt to put on ice Anglo-Russian competition in Asia, rather than the beginnings of a fruitful working partnership. This preference for neutrality, combined with the British desire to maintain good relations with the Russians (at least for the moment), meant that Britain was not entirely averse to discussion on the future of the Straits, as Grey told Isvolsky during his visit to London in October. However, deflecting the Russian Foreign Minister’s desire for change, he cited the opposition of the Press, Cabinet and public opinion to any arrangement that might appear one-sided. Emphasising to Isvolsky that he had not given the flatly ‘negative answer’ which he was sure that the Russian feared, he entreated him to focus on ‘settling the... crisis in the Near East satisfactorily

⁴¹⁷ Nicolson to Grey, no. 192, tel., Most Confidential, 7 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34787; Minutes Hardinge, Grey, Maxwell.

⁴¹⁸ Bertie to Grey, no. 389, 7 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34802, Mallet Minute.

⁴¹⁹ Slade to Grey, 8 Oct 08 FO 371/551/35002. For further discussion of the Anglo-Russian relationship, see Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*.

without seeking advantage for Russia or England'.⁴²⁰ Gradually, the question of the Straits receded from view. The problem was, from the British perspective, the intense (and historically, justified) suspicion of Russia in Turkey. Tilley doubted whether the Turks were 'yet prepared', nor would be for 'some time', for 'friendly and neighbourly relations with Russia.' Mallet did not disagree, but he thought that it was Britain's role to do everything possible to promote more friendly relations.⁴²¹ This would remain a problem at the close of the crisis, almost half a year later, when the Russian financial offer was initially greeted with scepticism in Turkey. This central element of the crisis – the antipathy between Russia and Turkey – was to remain a challenge for Britain. The British would consider various options to extricate themselves from this difficult position. One of these, the idea of a Balkan Alliance, will be considered next.

3.2.c. A Balkan Alliance

One of the solutions suggested during the crisis was the proposal to create a general defensive Balkan alliance, to maintain the regional *status quo*.⁴²² This, indeed, became a key aim of British diplomacy, for as long as it continued to appear possible. The appeal of the scheme was obvious – this was a low-cost method of preventing war, putting the Balkans back on ice, and of protecting the interests of the Turks. The idea was floated by Kâmil at the end of October. Seeing that the Austrians hoped to keep Bosnia out of the programme for a conference, he suggested that Bosnia be set up as an independent principality, and that Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia and Bulgaria could all join in an alliance. The idea of an

⁴²⁰ Grey to Nicolson, no. 324, tel., 13 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35990. Grey claimed to have foreseen 'from the beginning that, if we were to maintain friendly relations with Russia, we must abandon the policy of blocking her access to the sea. I was therefore prepared to discuss the matter.' This demonstrated that the Russian connection remained the only reason that Britain was willing to discuss the matter at all, given the Admiralty position related above. *Id.*, *Twenty-Five Years v. 1*, p. 178.

⁴²¹ Nicolson to Lowther, no. 203, tel., 15 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35778, Minutes Tilley, Mallet.

⁴²² Geoffrey Miller discussed the plans in his *Straits*. He placed the blame for the eventual collapse of the scheme firmly at the British door, suggesting that when Grey expressed his support for an alliance that was only defensive, this killed the plan off. Miller, *Straits*, Ch. 2.

independent Bosnia was considered to be a 'childish' scheme by Hardinge, but he wanted to avoid the 'odium' of being considered a 'wet blanket'. Although the idea of a Bosnian principality was considered 'out of the question', British policymakers seized on the idea of a Balkan confederation. Though there were concerns that the idea amounted to an 'anti-Austrian confederation', some welcomed the proposal, Tilley because he saw it as the best option for the short term, and Mallet with the proviso that it would remain defensive in nature.⁴²³ Grey and Hardinge were cautious, but both saw the value of a defensive alignment. Lowther was instructed to encourage the idea, but to warn that Britain would not support an aggressive grouping.⁴²⁴ In short, Britain was in favour of an alliance, so long as it remained fundamentally conservative rather than revisionist. Weeks later, the Turkish ardour had cooled, at least so far as alliance with Bulgaria went. According to Kâmil, it was not a 'political possibility', although the idea had not been abandoned altogether, and Turkey was engaged in discussions with Serbia. Tilley offered a useful summary of British intentions. Turkey might last only another twenty years, but an

'alliance with the Balkan states would give her as good a chance as anything, would help to secure her moral independence, and for us would have the great advantage of being a bar to Austrian and German expansion South Eastwards'.⁴²⁵

The Foreign Office therefore continued to keep a close eye on the course of negotiations. Serbo-Turkish negotiations did not run smoothly. On 13 November, Beethom Whitehead, the *Chargé d'affaires* at Belgrade, reported that the latest Turkish amendments to the draft, aimed at the dismemberment of Bulgaria, were so ridiculous that the Serbs suspected that they had been introduced deliberately to sabotage negotiations. This did not concern Tilley, who dismissed such discussions of post-war indemnities as

⁴²³ Lowther to Grey, no. 365, tel., 26 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37298; Minutes Hardinge, Maxwell, Tilley, Mallet.

⁴²⁴ Grey to Lowther, no. 411, tel., 28 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37298.

⁴²⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 751, 6 Nov 08, FO 371/555/39505, Minutes Mallet, Tilley.

‘humorous’. He noted with approval that the Serbs saw the convention as a framework for a wider Balkan alliance, and expressed the hope that it would be achieved.⁴²⁶ Hardinge was worried about the offensive aspects of the convention, and Whitehead was to inform the Serbs that Britain could not support anything which contained aggressive elements, but would ‘regard with favour any arrangement of a purely defensive character, come to by the Balkan States with Turkey, for their mutual defence and against possible future encroachments.’⁴²⁷ A few days later, although there seemed to be an ‘air of unreality’ about their discussions, and the Foreign Office believed that the point was arriving at which an agreement would be signed. Tilley was doubtful about the value of such a convention, as he thought that it would be of little use without Bulgarian adhesion.⁴²⁸ Mallet noted, with relief, that Lowther had reported that so far as he knew, the offensive parts of the proposed convention had been dropped, although this seemed to devalue the proposed alliance further, as the defensive aspects were said to be aimed towards Bulgaria.⁴²⁹ Negotiations continued to be difficult.⁴³⁰ A stumbling block was the hostility of Isvolsky to any agreement aimed against Bulgaria. Instead, he favoured a Balkan-wide defensive confederation. That Russia and Britain shared the same view on an aspect of the crisis gave cause for some celebration in the Eastern Department, but their hopes were to be dashed.⁴³¹ By 10 December, Mallet surmised that the ‘negotiations had come to nothing’, and that it was ‘short sighted’ of the Turks not to conclude a defensive alliance. Grey was more sanguine. He thought that Serbia had been a ‘poor horse to back’ for the Turks in any case, so long as they still stood alone.⁴³² By the end of the year, the Serbian delegates

⁴²⁶ Whitehead to Grey, no. 24, tel., Very Confidential, 13 Nov 08, FO 371/555/36596; Tilley Minute.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, Hardinge Minute; Grey to Whitehead, no. 43, tel., 14 Nov 08, 371/555/36596.

⁴²⁸ Whitehead to Grey, no. 83, Confidential, 10 Nov 08, FO 371/555/39856, Tilley Minute.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, Mallet Minute; Lowther to Grey, no. 394, tel., 16 Oct 08, FO 371/ 556/40059.

⁴³⁰ Whitehead to Grey, no. 27, tel., 20 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40592, Tilley Minute.

⁴³¹ Nicolson to Grey, no. 279, tel., 1 Dec 08, FO 371/557/42020; Minutes Tilley, Hardinge.

⁴³² Whitehead to Grey, no. 29, tel., Very Confidential, 2 Dec 08, FO 371/557/42134; Whitehead to Grey, no. 96, Confidential, 10 Dec 08, FO 371/558/43516; Lowther to Grey, no. 418, tel., 14 Dec 08, FO 371/558/43731; Grey Minute.

had returned home empty handed, and no deal had been concluded. Officials thought that Turkey had merely been using the negotiations as a tactic to increase the pressure on Austria. Hardinge doubted whether the Turks had ever seriously contemplated signing a deal with the Serbs.⁴³³ So ended British hopes of an easy method to exert control over the Balkans. As much as they had hoped for, and worked towards the conclusion of an alliance, Turkey failed to see a need. Indeed, British influence had actually been used as an excuse for not signing by the Turks, making the matter worse. Other methods would need to be tried to get the situation under control.

3.2.d Suggestions for a Conference

Whilst the idea of a Balkan alliance was popular with British policymakers and received their support, it was not the only method tried to bring about an end to the crisis. Almost as soon as the crisis began, Isvolsky, smarting from being played so effectively by Aehrenthal, was calling for a conference to settle the questions – a conference at which he hoped to be able to secure the rights at the Straits which remained his goal. Days after the annexation was announced, Russia unofficially suggested to Britain that a conference of the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin should be called, in light of the changed regional situation, to amend the Treaty. Hardinge was open to a conference, but only with prior agreement that it would not be used to extract more from Turkey. Grey, consistent in his views on conferences throughout his time at the Foreign Office, thought that it should only take place if there was a preliminary agreement on topics of discussion and their likely shape. He wanted an agreement on Turkish compensation for ‘advantages gained by other Powers at her expense’ to be made in advance.⁴³⁴ Nicolson was informed that the question of how best to support Turkey would receive careful consideration in any planning for a

⁴³³ Whitehead to Grey, no. 98, Confidential, 21 Dec 08, FO 371/558/45073; Hardinge Minute.

⁴³⁴ Nicolson to Grey, no. 184, tel., Confidential, 5 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34519; Minutes Hardinge, Grey.

conference, and suggested that money was what she needed more than anything.⁴³⁵ The French, hearing that Russia contemplated calling a conference as early as 8 October, wanted it to be proposed jointly by Britain, Russia and themselves, as this would have a ‘great moral effect in Europe’.⁴³⁶ Grey was less keen, trying to delay the French, pointing out once again that without preliminary agreements, ‘the conference would inevitably fail.’⁴³⁷ The Russians, in the face of British appeals not to jump the gun and announce a conference alone, responded that their proposed circular would still go ahead, largely to keep up appearances, but that it would say that the programme, date and place of the conference would be the subject of later agreement by the Powers.⁴³⁸ Grey was relieved, as this meant that Britain need not say anything until after Isvolsky’s planned visit to London. He mused that if the conference were to be held at Constantinople, then that would be a ‘solution’ to the *amour propre* of the Turks, although this would make it all the more important that the programme was not objectionable to them. Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, the Balkan expert and anti-Russian chief foreign policy spokesman in the Lords, poured cold water on this embryonic idea. He thought that the ‘oriental intrigues’ of Constantinople might prove to be ‘unfavourable to honest diplomacy’.⁴³⁹

Oriental intrigues or not, the French remained worried at the prospect of war, and pressed the British not to delay a conference for too long. Bertie, who although an Ambassador was an informal member of the senior policymaking establishment, presented Grey’s case strongly, arguing that the Congress of Berlin had succeeded only because of pre planning, and had itself come perilously close to ‘disaster’.⁴⁴⁰ The French, although still worried, agreed to work with Britain to delay a conference for as long as possible, to

⁴³⁵ Grey to Nicolson, no. 436, tel., 6 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34519.

⁴³⁶ Bertie to Grey, no. 58, tel., 6 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34662.

⁴³⁷ Grey to Bertie, no. 156, tel., 6 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34662.

⁴³⁸ Nicolson to Grey, no. 188, tel., 7 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34770; Grey to de Salis, 26 Oct 08, *BD v*, no 408.

⁴³⁹ Nicolson to Grey, no. 188, tel., 7 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34770, Minutes Grey, Fitzmaurice.

⁴⁴⁰ Bertie to Grey, no. 59, tel., 7 Oct 08, FO 371/551/34777.

allow such negotiations to take place. Turkey, although she had called for a conference, was concerned that such a meeting might give rise to other issues being discussed, such as the Straits, and hoped that discussion could be limited to the questions raised by Bulgaria and Austria.⁴⁴¹ Hardinge summed up the difficulties of this question. If the conference were to be limited to these questions, then Austria would refuse to attend and Russia would be in opposition too. On the other hand, if the conference were opened and Russia won concessions at the Straits, there would be an outcry in Britain unless something could also be done to support the Turks and improve their position. His solution to this conundrum, first suggested by William Tyrell, Grey's private secretary and '*eminence grise*' of the Foreign Office, was to offer a loan to the Turks, guaranteed by Russia, France and Britain. This would allow the Turks to discuss concessions, as she would be materially and morally strengthened. Hardinge felt sure that other Powers had already agreed to modification at the Straits, and so this seemed to him to be a way out of the difficulty. Grey thought that such a plan, if it proved practical, was a good one.⁴⁴² Although this plan eventually came to nothing – as discussed above, the Turks turned down the idea of a loan guaranteed by several Powers - this discussion shows British policymaker's clear view of the tightrope upon which events had forced them to walk.

Matters moved apace. A matter of weeks after the crisis had broken out, Isvolsky, whilst in London, communicated his proposed programme for a conference to the British. Along with the obvious discussions of Bulgaria, Bosnia, the Sandjak and 'advantages to be acquired by Serbia and Montenegro', he proposed wide ranging discussion of Macedonia and the Armenian question, as well as discussion of the rights of the Balkan states on the Danube, and the capitulations. Such a wide ranging programme was not welcomed by the

⁴⁴¹ Lowther to Grey, Private, 8 Oct 08, *BD v*, no. 338.

⁴⁴² For more on Tyrell's career, see Corp, 'Sir William Tyrrell'; Lowther to Grey, Private, 8 Oct 08, *BD v*, no. 338, Hardinge Minute.

British. In particular, Tilley suggested that if Bulgaria were to make a financial proposal to Tukey, then the whole conference could be avoided – indeed, this was to become British policy.⁴⁴³ Despite this, the programme was thought acceptable, largely because the Straits question was omitted, and Grey informed Rifat so.⁴⁴⁴ The Turks had a similar view of the situation. They hoped that the Straits question would not be discussed, and they were in favour of full opening, if they were to be opened at all, rather than, as the Russians had suggested, being opened only to the riverain states in the Balkans. Unsurprisingly, they were against discussions of the capitulations, preferring to resolve such matters themselves. On the Bulgarian question, they were against the province of Eastern Rumelia going to Bulgaria, as this would be a stepping stone towards Macedonia. Having seemingly come to the conclusion that the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina could not be reversed, they were in favour of not discussing it, and therefore not formalising it, with the matter allowed to rest as it was, with a standing Turkish protest. Mallet was unsurprised that the Porte had failed to arrive ‘at the same conclusion’ that the British had, that is to say, that Turkey should accept the situation as it had been created by Bulgaria and Austria, in return for the ‘financial and moral support of the three Powers to the new regime’. It was the question of Eastern Rumelia which he thought was the most important. He thought that Bulgaria would not yield on this point, and that it was foolish to ‘risk the future of reform in Turkey for the sake of insisting on a claim that is mainly sentimental’, especially as the it was difficult, legally, to consider Eastern Rumelia as separate from Bulgaria under the terms of the Treaty of Berlin. Maxwell went even further, remarking that if the Turks insisted on this point, then a ‘peaceful solution will be impossible’.⁴⁴⁵ Grey summed up government policy on these points to Rifat. Turkey should not focus on ‘matters of form’, and instead

⁴⁴³ Note Communicated by Isvolky, 12 Oct 08, FO 371/551/35468; Tilley Minute.

⁴⁴⁴ Grey to Lowther, no. 339, tel., 12 Oct 08, FO 371/551/35468.

⁴⁴⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 317, tel., 12 Oct 08, FO 371/551/35514; Minutes Mallet, Maxwell.

get significant financial compensation from Bulgaria, and allow discussion of Bosnia in order to get the Austrian evacuation of the Sandjak solemnised. The Turkish arguments about Macedonia, meanwhile, were given short shrift. Whilst Grey 'understood' the Turkish concerns, he reminded Rifat that the best way to protect Macedonia was 'good government' and military strength.⁴⁴⁶

Grey showed the draft programme to Rifat. He took the opportunity to urge, once again, that Turkey did not press on questions of 'form', although he asked Rifat to communicate his sympathy to his Government on these matters. Indeed, the whole communication was geared towards Turkish sensibilities, and he emphasised to Rifat that on many questions, such as the Straits, nothing would be done without the approval of the Turks. Rifat was concerned that were the Straits kept out of discussions, relations with Russia would suffer. On this score, Grey was sympathetic, and suggested that they would not, so long as the answer was couched in careful terms, suggesting that the question might be reopened in future.⁴⁴⁷ Planning seemed to be going well until mid-October, when Austria announced that she would not allow Bosnia to be discussed at a conference. This meant that the annexation could not be discussed by the Powers. With some concern, Rifat reflected that this development made a conference 'very unlikely'. Grey, irritated, said that Austria could not put difficulties in the way of the only possible peaceful settlement if the Powers and the Porte had agreed to it. He advised Rifat not to give any answer, and said that the Turks should not remove their protest unless the Austrians agreed not to act against them at the conference and to support pro-Turkish proposals.⁴⁴⁸ Austria tried to buy off the Turks, offering them guaranteed possession of the Sandjak in return for keeping Bosnia out of the programme. Ironically, as Grey and Hardinge were aware, the Sandjak

⁴⁴⁶ Grey to Lowther, no. 348, tel., Very Confidential, 13 Oct 08, FO 371/551/35514.

⁴⁴⁷ Grey to Lowther, no. 434, 15 Oct 08, FO/371/553/36443.

⁴⁴⁸ Grey to Lowther, no. 367 tel., 17 Oct 08, FO 371/553/36445.

had been promised to Turkey after the annexation in any case.⁴⁴⁹ Unsurprisingly, this gambit failed, although not until Austria had asked Britain to help her in pressuring the Turks to accept.⁴⁵⁰

After consideration of the various questions, the Turks presented their preliminary views on the proposed programme. Believing that Austria would pay compensation for Bosnia, they proposed leaving it out of the programme. They also indicated that they would not ask the Powers for a territorial guarantee of their Empire. Indeed, their version of the programme was limited almost exclusively to the discussion of Bulgaria. Hardinge thought that the Turks were 'still wrong' in their attitude to Bosnia, and that the matter needed to be discussed to regularise and guarantee the return of the Sandjak to them. Grey was more understanding, suggesting that the Turks were 'afraid of a conference'.⁴⁵¹ Nevertheless, the draft remained the same as that presented to Grey by Isvolsky after their discussions in London, at least so far as the Foreign Office saw it.⁴⁵² This version of the heads of conference would gain further strength when Germany, after discussion with Russia, agreed, subject to certain reservations, to the holding of a conference. The most notable exception was that they insisted, no doubt at the behest of their ally Austria, that the annexation of Bosnia should be treated as a *fait accompli* and indisputable. Nevertheless, Britain welcomed this move towards fixing a set basis for negotiations. Mallet thought it 'very satisfactory on the whole'.⁴⁵³ The Turks, on the other hand, were becoming worried about the possible implications of a conference. They wanted the Conference to be strictly limited in scope to the questions 'which necessitated its meeting'. They planned to communicate this to the Powers, but sought British views first. Hardinge thought that this

⁴⁴⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 347, tel., 21 Oct 08, FO 371/553/36562, Minutes Grey, Hardinge.

⁴⁵⁰ Lowther to Grey, no. 360, tel., 23 Oct 08, FO 371/554/36886.

⁴⁵¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 343, tel., 19 Oct 08, FO 371/553/36384; Minutes Hardinge, Grey.

⁴⁵² Lowther to Grey, no. 344, tel., 19 Oct 08, FO 371/553/36385.

⁴⁵³ de Salis to Grey, no. 59, tel., 27 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37430; Mallet Minute.

was foolish. Once the Powers had assembled a conference, they should be able to discuss any and all matters pertaining to the crisis.⁴⁵⁴ Indeed, in general, the Foreign Office thought that the new situation had to be discussed, in order to settle the various questions.

The Bulgarian negotiators in Constantinople, too, were worried about a conference. Lowther thought that they hoped to reach a deal with the Turks through direct negotiations, but were concerned that at a conference they might be forced to make further concessions. With this in mind, the Bulgarian negotiators had asked Lowther for assurances that a conference would not reopen the question in a manner prejudicial to Bulgarian interests, as they did not want to give all the concessions they were able if negotiations were to be reopened at a later date. Though Mallet believed the situation put the Turks at an advantage, Hardinge thought that assurances should still be made that if the Turks and Bulgars came to an agreement, Britain would do all it could to guarantee its ratification.⁴⁵⁵ Certainly, the Foreign Office was happy for arrangements to be made that would settle the issue outside of a conference, despite Lowther's assertion to the Bulgarian negotiators, on 18 November, that Britain regarded a conference as 'essential'. Hardinge had the agreement of his subordinates in stating that Britain certainly did not 'regard a conference as essential'.⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, Britain had been insisting on this throughout. At the outset of the crisis Grey had privately told Nicolson that he was 'not at all wedded to a Conference about the Near East if any other solution is easier later on, and acceptable to France and Russia.'⁴⁵⁷ His staff in the Foreign Office agreed. Mallet thought, as early as mid-October, that there seemed a reasonable chance of Turkey and Bulgaria coming to an

⁴⁵⁴ Note Communicated by Rifaat Pasha, 3 Nov 08, FO 371/555/38406; Hardinge Minute.

⁴⁵⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 393, tel., 13 Nov 08, FO 371/555/39593; Minutes Mallet, Hardinge; This was later communicated to Lowther and Buchanan officially – if an agreement was reached, then so long as it was not prejudicial to the interests of a third party, then Britain would do all within her power to secure ratification: Grey to Lowther, no. 439, tel., 14 Nov 08, and Buchanan, *mutatis mutandis*, FO 371/555/39593.

⁴⁵⁶ Lowther to Grey, no. 768, 13 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40221; Hardinge Minute.

⁴⁵⁷ Grey to Nicolson, Private, 26 Oct 08, FO 800/73.

agreement, and that it would be better for Britain to 'lie low' about the programme.⁴⁵⁸ This seemed to be a pragmatic position, particularly as Austria continued to insist that the annexation could not be discussed at the Conference.⁴⁵⁹ This continued to prove a stumbling block as the year drew towards a close, despite the Russian willingness to pledge that compensation for Serbia and Montenegro would not come at the cost of Turkey.⁴⁶⁰ This angered Grey. He told Mensdorff that 'form mattered', and that the conference would be pointless and achieve nothing if Bosnia was on the programme and not discussed. He hoped that Austria and Turkey would be able to come to an agreement that would allow discussion at the conference.⁴⁶¹ Privately, Hardinge thought that if participants were to be 'gagged', then it was unlikely that a conference would take place at all.⁴⁶² Towards the end of the year, Mensdorff sought out Grey, to ask his opinion on preliminary agreements before they both left London for the Christmas break. Grey, who had been in favour of these throughout, was supportive, and suggested that France, Germany and Britain were unlikely to cause difficulties if the other Powers had made agreements before the conference.⁴⁶³

The possibility of a conference hove more firmly into view in the new year. Turkey and Austria had come to an arrangement, which removed one source of danger, but a conference presented danger to the Anglo-Russian convention. Grey had promised diplomatic support to Russia over the question of compensation for Serbia and Montenegro, and this seemed likely to split Britain and Russia at a conference. Hardinge thought it important that Britain worked closely with Russia to avoid the risk, as this would force France to act in concert, unwilling to work with Austria and Germany. Luckily,

⁴⁵⁸ Nicolson to Grey, no. 216, 20 Oct 08, FO 371/556/36541, Mallet Minute.

⁴⁵⁹ Nicolson to Grey, no. 260, tel., Confidential, 18 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40352.

⁴⁶⁰ Nicolson to Grey, no. 275, tel., 27 Nov 08, FO 371/556/41467.

⁴⁶¹ Grey to Carnegie, no. 140, 26 Nov 08, FO 371/557/41826.

⁴⁶² Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 1 Dec 08, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 33.

⁴⁶³ Grey to Cartwright, no. 153, 16 Dec 08, NO 371/558/44564.

Tilley thought that there now seemed a 'good chance' of a conference being avoided altogether.⁴⁶⁴ As Russian and French aims at a conference continued to diverge, Britain seemed to be even more keen than before on avoiding one.⁴⁶⁵

In March, Bülow, the German Chancellor, offered Britain a way out of a conference, suggesting that the matter could be solved with an exchange of notes. Although proposed for the benefit of Austria, it was greeted with enthusiasm in the Foreign Office, as albeit for different reasons, Anglo-German interests coincided. Maxwell was keen, as it would avoid Britain having to discuss the difficult subjects of the capitulations and customs increases. Mallet was also supportive. Whilst he cautioned that it was for the Russians to agree or disagree, he thought that the fact of the proposal being made by Bülow was ideal for Britain, as it avoided the appearance, in Constantinople, of Britain having been the one to sink the conference idea. Despite the general excitement, Hardinge poured cold water on such hopes. Britain could not do anything but follow the Russians, as she was committed to giving them diplomatic support in some questions, and he thought that Isvolsky would turn down the suggestion.⁴⁶⁶ Unsurprisingly, Aehrenthal was keen on the idea, but Hardinge again dampened his hopes. Whilst he believed that a conference held 'many dangers', he thought that the question could wait in any case for the Austro-Serbian crisis to come to an end.⁴⁶⁷ From here, the conference question receded, the general unpopularity of the idea having caused its end.⁴⁶⁸ The Turks, hoping for relaxation of the capitulations, were one of the last to hold out, even making an abortive attempt to force one by making their agreement with the Russians contingent on a

⁴⁶⁴ Nicolson to Grey, no. 23, tel., 20 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2686, Minutes Mallet, Hardinge, Tilley.

⁴⁶⁵ Bertie to Grey, no.16, tel., Confidential, 21 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2823; Minutes Grey, Hardinge. An exchange of notes or conference of ambassadors at Constantinople were both considered as possible methods of solving the questions.

⁴⁶⁶ Cartwright Grey, no. 76, tel., 17 Mar 09, FO 371/754/10301; Minutes Parker, Maxwell, Mallet, Hardinge.

⁴⁶⁷ Cartwright to Grey, no. 44, 18 Mar 09, FO 371/754/10854; Hardinge Minute.

⁴⁶⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 94, tel., Confidential, 22 Mar 09, FO 371/755/11069.

conference for ratification. This was a question of some delicacy for Britain. It was important not to irritate the Turks, as Britain would have then gone through the crisis and ‘incurred the enmity of Austria’ and the ‘distrust of Bulgaria’ for nothing. Hardinge suggested that when the time came, Britain could point out that the Turks had received substantial amounts of compensation largely through the efforts of the British.⁴⁶⁹ Privately, however, he accepted that the non-running of a conference would ‘irritate’ the Turks.⁴⁷⁰

This marked the end of another scheme for solving the crisis. In contrast to the Balkan alliance proposal, Britain had never been keen, and was not unhappy to see the death of the proposal. The building of a Balkan alliance and the proposal for a conference had both, in the end, come to naught. Direct negotiations now seemed to point the way out of the crisis.

3.2.e Direct Negotiations with Austria

Austria, as the offending party in annexing nominally Turkish territory, was a central antagonist for the Turks. For present purposes, the negotiations between the two proved to be one of the main elements of the crisis. From here, this section will consider the course of Austro-Turkish relations and the British approach to these.⁴⁷¹ The annexation of land which, officially at least, still belonged to Turkey caused a predictable level of outrage in a country that had just undergone a revolution motivated, at least in part, by the concerns of the army that the Empire was becoming weak. The Young Turks, having instigated such change, fanned the flames, by encouraging a boycott of Austrian goods and appealing to Turkish patriotism. In Constantinople, large crowds formed,

⁴⁶⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 94, tel., Confidential, 22 Mar 09, FO 371/755/11069, Minutes Mallet, Hardinge; Lowther to Grey, no. 204, 22 Mar 09, FO 371/755/11847; Minutes Mallet, Hardinge.

⁴⁷⁰ Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 6 Apr 09, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 84.

⁴⁷¹ For more, see Bridge, F.R., *From Sadowa to Sarajewo: The Foreign Policy of Austria Hungary 1866-1914* (London, 1972); Bridge, F.R., *The Hapsburg Monarchy among the Great Powers, 1815-1918* (Oxford, 1991).

blocking access to the principal Austrian shops.⁴⁷² The Austrian response was predictably furious. After five days, the Turkish Government was being warned darkly that it would ‘not be tolerated’ for much longer. Mallet disapproved of such ‘bullying’, and suggested that something be said at Vienna. Indeed, the British reaction to the boycott seemed to rather minimise it, although it should be pointed out that she stood to benefit from a boycott of the goods of a competitor. Hardinge thought that if ‘the Turks prefer to wear white fezes (*sic*) instead of red ones made in Austria, the Austrian Govt. have no cause for complaint.’ Even so, he felt that Britain should not intervene for the benefit of the Turks unless sure that nothing illegal had been done.⁴⁷³ Grey agreed that it was not in ‘accordance with international comity that one Government should be held responsible by another for the existence of an ordinary trade boycott.’⁴⁷⁴ It seems, however, that the action was not merely an ‘ordinary trade boycott’, and had been organised and encouraged by the Young Turks – not the Government, but very close to it. The boycott proved to be a significant stumbling block in relations between Austria and Turkey. By mid-November, it continued to gather pace, having spread even to the porters who worked at Constantinople’s custom houses. Kâmil claimed that the Government had ordered them to cease, but ‘popular feeling’ proved to be ‘too strong’ for his orders to have any effect. The Austrian Ambassador maintained that he would not enter negotiations on the annexation until the boycott had ceased. British opinion remained calm.⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, in the early days of the crisis Britain stood behind the Turks. Lowther was told in October that it was not for Britain to press Turkey to accept the Austrian action. If ‘an inducement’ was offered, it was up to Turkey to decide whether to accept it.⁴⁷⁶ Privately, Grey told Sir

⁴⁷² Eyres to Grey, 10 Oct 08, *BD v* no. 357.

⁴⁷³ Lowther to Grey, no. 332, tel., 15 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35775; Minutes Mallet, Hardinge.

⁴⁷⁴ Grey to Lowther, no. 363, tel., 16 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35775.

⁴⁷⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 400, tel., 23 Nov 08, FO 371/556/41015.

⁴⁷⁶ Grey to Lowther, no. 448, 26 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37601.

Francis Bertie that the Austrians had created the situation, and it was for them to make an arrangement to ‘condone’ what they had done.⁴⁷⁷ The inherent logic of this eventually worked on the Austrians, and having long refused to negotiate because of the Boycott, showed signs of being ready to come to an agreement of a financial nature with the Turks at the start of December. Isvolsky thought that the damage done by the boycott, along with internal pressures, had brought Aehrenthal to the point where he was willing to consider paying Turkey to end the dispute.⁴⁷⁸ This was just what Britain hoped for. Though paying compensation to the Turks would be an ‘extraordinary humiliation’ for Austria, Britain ‘need not mind that’, as it would not affect their hopes of bringing Turkey and Bulgaria together – indeed, Tilley thought that it made it more likely, as the Austrians would want revenge in the future.⁴⁷⁹ The Turkish position also seemed to be softening. Port workers employed to unload Austrian shipping had been attacked by their colleagues for breaking the boycott, and in a bid to calm matters, Kâmil offered them protection whilst they were occupied in this task. Although this offer was unsuccessful in persuading men to work, as they argued that they could not be protected when at leisure, it was indicative of the Turkish Government’s real attempts to bring the boycott under control. Despite his efforts, Kâmil feared the boycott would not cease until the an offer of pecuniary compensation was received from Austria.⁴⁸⁰ The moment seemed right for an attempt to solve the problem. Sir Fairfax Cartwright, the British Ambassador in Vienna, suggested to Aehrenthal that the time had come when Austria could make a financial offer ‘without loss of prestige’.⁴⁸¹ A solution on financial grounds was the preferred solution of Britain, and Grey would ‘welcome’ a solution of this nature.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁷ Grey to Bertie, Private, 24 Nov 09. FO 800/50.

⁴⁷⁸ Nicolson to Grey, no. 573, 9 Dec 08, FO 371/558/44370.

⁴⁷⁹ Nicolson to Grey, no. 291, tel., 9 Dec 08, FO 371/557/43037, Tilley Minute.

⁴⁸⁰ Lowther to Grey, no. 412, tel., 9 Dec 08, FO 371/557/42919.

⁴⁸¹ Cartwright to Grey, no. 99, tel., Very Confidential, 11 Dec 08, FO 371/557/43269.

⁴⁸² Grey to Cartwright, no. 213, tel., 14 Dec 08, 371/557/43269.

Two days later, the Austrians officially announced their willingness to reopen official negotiations with the Turks, claiming that as both sides now wanted the boycott to cease, talks could begin.⁴⁸³ The Austrian Ambassador, Johann Markgraf von Pallavicini, suggested that a portion of the debt might be apportioned to Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with a number of concessions that Austria could make to the Turks, such as allowing them to increase customs import rates to 15% and abolishing Austrian Post Offices in the Empire. Such suggestions, particularly the customs increase, were not met with unrestrained joy in Constantinople or London. As Kâmil pointed out, such concessions were not really concessions at all. Under the various complicated instruments of European control over Ottoman affairs, the suggestions would require the consent of all the Powers, not just Austria. Worse, the Austrians contemplated charging the Turks for losses caused by the boycott, seeming to rather undermine any offer of compensation. Despite the gloom, Mallet, tried to focus on the positives. Although he thought that Aehrenthal would have to 'climb down', he saw the Austrian admission of the principle of Bosnia taking on a portion of the debt as a 'hopeful symptom'. Hardinge soothed his colleagues, pointing out that this marked 'only the first proposal'. In the end, a 'financial basis' would be essential to any agreement.⁴⁸⁴ The Turks agreed. The new Ottoman Ambassador to Vienna, Reshid Pasha, confidentially informed Cartwright that the Turks thought of referring the debt question into arbitration, and asked the British view. Cartwright rejoined that such a half-baked idea would 'greatly annoy' Austria, and she should be given time to make further suggestions. London agreed. Tilley thought that 'even the Turks cannot propose seriously to refer a question to an arbitration court without the consent of the other party', adding that the dispute did not seem one suitable for arbitration.⁴⁸⁵ Grey thought it would simply

⁴⁸³ Cartwright to Grey, no. 101, tel. *en clair*, 13 Dec 08 FO 371/557/43405; Cartwright to Grey, no. 215, 14 Dec 08, FO 371/558/43995.

⁴⁸⁴ Lowther to Grey, no. 419, tel., 14 Dec 08, O 371/558/43732; Minutes Mallet, Hardinge.

⁴⁸⁵ Cartwright to Grey, no. 112, tel., 29 Dec 08, FO 371/558/45444; Tilley Minute.

make the chances of any settlement less likely, as it would alienate the Austrians, who had, after all, only just returned to the table. He told Cartwright this, although he did not add his private thoughts that arbitration might be used as a last resort.⁴⁸⁶

The Germans, too, were worried about the course of negotiations, and urged their Austrian allies to come to some arrangement with Turkey. It was suggested that Austria did not want to appear to pay for the provinces, and therefore a formula needed to be found which would 'save her dignity'. Britain was not keen to help. Having already suggested that a portion of the debt be allotted to the provinces, Hardigne thought that the Austrians should be left to find their 'own formula'. Grey agreed with his assessment that it would be 'unwise' to make any further suggestions.⁴⁸⁷

As the new year began, negotiations continued. The French, mindful of the apparent impasse, suggested joint action of the Powers to urge Austria to end the crisis with a financial offer. This seemed premature, as Hardinge suggested. Tilley was worried about the implications of such a move on the wider world. He could not, he said, help feeling that it would be 'undesirable' for what amounted to the European Concert acting for an Asiatic Power against a European one. Grey took a more practical view. Turkey was willing to receive money, and Aehrenthal was willing to give it, but the Hungarian side of the Austro-Hungarian Government was blocking the move. In terms of Austria, he thought that, given the present attitude of animosity towards Britain in the Austrian press, any move to press for compensation would be resented and would possibly stiffen the resolve of the Austrians. Finally, he reminded his colleagues that it was important to avoid giving the impression of working against Slav interests, and therefore antagonising the Russians, although he qualified this by saying that the situation was so 'ominous' that 'in

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, Grey Minute; Grey to Cartwright, no. 221, tel., 31 Dec 08, FO 371/558/45444.

⁴⁸⁷ de Salis to Grey, no. 80, tel., 29 Dec 08, FO 371/558/45447; Minutes Hardinge, Grey.

the interests of peace' whatever seemed to be the first practical means of a settlement should be encouraged.⁴⁸⁸

Britain still hoped that Turkey would get compensation. Negotiations continued on the basis of the Austrian proposals, leading Kâmil to ask for British views on the terms relating to the raising of customs duties. Mallet feared this was an attempt on the part of Austria to 'rush' Britain on the question of customs duties. While the British were happy to give their assent for Turkish raises, the question of the Baghdad Railway loomed large – Britain could not allow further funds to go to this German project.⁴⁸⁹ Consequently, Britain expressed her willingness to listen to any proposal that might be made, so long as Rifat's 'formal assurance', made the previous November, that any customs increases would be spent on the general needs of the country and not pre-existing commitments (for instance, the Railway) would be adhered to.

Aehrenthal was confident that a solution was getting closer. He told Cartwright that he had managed to get Hungary on side, intimating to Cartwright that he hoped for British support in getting the Turks to accept the offer of cash. He added that he had 'washed his hands' of the Austrian press that had been so antagonistic to Britain. Grey remarked darkly that Aehrenthal had 'let his hands go unwashed for a long time'.⁴⁹⁰ Despite his sarcastic asides, Grey hoped that the Turks would take up a financial settlement. They lost 'nothing but shadow' by the deal.⁴⁹¹ This time, the Turkish Government agreed with Grey's assessment, and negotiations were soon proceeding without a hitch, with Turkey and Austria going so far as to begin drafting protocols. Although the British were concerned by the continued discussions of raised customs duties,

⁴⁸⁸ Bertie to Grey, no. 10, 7 Jan 09, FO 371/747/911; Minutes Hardinge, Tilley, Grey.

⁴⁸⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 7, tel., 11 Jan 09, FO 371/747/1459; Minutes Mallet, Tilley.

⁴⁹⁰ Cartwright to Grey, No.12, tel., Confidential, 11 Jan 09, FO 371/747/1486; Grey Minute.

⁴⁹¹ Grey to Lowther, no. 17, 16 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2057. Grey Minute.

and made some preparations for its discussion, they were glad to see that one of the main points of conflict appeared to be nearing a conclusion.⁴⁹²

When the full draft of the protocol reached London, it was plain that many of the concessions agreed by Austria were dependent ‘upon the consent of the other Powers to divest themselves of very large and valuable rights’.⁴⁹³ Tilley expressed his doubts at some length. He was pessimistic about the future course of Turkey, and suggested that the money raised would likely as not be wasted. Despite his cynicism, born of experience in Constantinople, he concluded that Britain must consent to the increases if she wished to retain her position in Turkey.⁴⁹⁴ These discussions revealed the negative view which some Foreign Office officials held of the Turks, and of the way in which concerns about this were put to one side to remain in Turkey’s ‘good books’ and to find a peaceful solution to the Austro-Turkish dispute. By the end of January, the protocol was almost ready to be signed, with only a few details still being haggled over.⁴⁹⁵ Cartwright warned Grey that parliamentary approval would be required to ratify the deal in Austria, and this would not be forthcoming if the boycott had not ceased.⁴⁹⁶ In response, Grey instructed Lowther to ‘do anything in... [his] power to discourage maintenance of the boycott, though... [he] fear[ed that] the power of the Turkish govt itself... [was] limited in this respect.’⁴⁹⁷ On this front, the news was less promising. The boycott had continued, despite Government efforts to stop it. Lowther was cynical. He thought that the boycott would continue until those goods that ‘could not stand Austrian competition’ had been sold off. For Hardinge, this latter remark added a ‘sordid aspect to the proceeding’.⁴⁹⁸ In the end, the boycott proved

⁴⁹² Lowther to Grey, no. 14, tel., 20 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2678.

⁴⁹³ Grey to Lowther, no. 45, Confidential, 20 Jan 09, FO 371/748/3132.

⁴⁹⁴ Lowther to Grey, no. 50, 23 Jan 09, FO 371/749/4180; Tilley Minute.

⁴⁹⁵ Cartwright to Grey, no. 25, tel., 26 Jan 09, FO 371/748/3484.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 26, tel., 30 Jan 09, FO 371/749/4097; Hardinge Minute.

counter-productive in any case in that Turkey appeared to have been the principal loser in financial terms.⁴⁹⁹

Despite this, the protocol was eventually signed on 26 February.⁵⁰⁰ Although delays were caused by political turbulence in Turkey, a version of the protocol almost identical to the version which had been signed in February passed the Turkish Parliament at the start of April, and the dispute was at an end.⁵⁰¹ Attention now turned to the Bulgarian question.

3.2.f. Negotiations for a Financial Compensation Package for Turkey from Bulgaria

The negotiations between Turkey and Bulgaria were the longest running element of the crisis. Furthermore, the final steps taken by Russia to solve the crisis meant that there was significant Great Power involvement in this element of the question. For present purposes, this element of the crisis is instructive in the way in which it shows Britain caught between Bulgaria, supported by Britain's supposed convention partner, Russia, and Turkey, demonstrating that Britain would always favour Russia over Turkey. The negotiations between Turkey and Bulgaria largely revolved around the question of a financial compensation package from Bulgaria, covering the seized section of the Oriental Railway and the lost territories of Bulgaria itself. Indeed, mere days after the declaration of independence, Bulgaria sent Stoyan Danev, Prime Minister in 1902, to Constantinople, apparently with the intention of negotiation for independence herself rather than getting it through the actions of the Powers. Foreign Office officials, although sceptical of the value of such a move, welcomed anything tending to promote peaceful relations.⁵⁰² Personally,

⁴⁹⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 142, 28 Jan 09, FO 371/752/3905.

⁵⁰⁰ Lowther to Grey, tel. *en clair*, 26 Feb 09, FO 371/751/7773.

⁵⁰¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 150, 3 Mar 09, FO 371/752/8913; Lowther to Grey, 12 Apr 09, FO 371/757/14536.

⁵⁰² Buchanan to Grey, no. 51, tel., 12 Oct 08, FO 371/551/35288; Minutes.

Lowther thought that the Turks would take money in settlement of the situation. He thought that perhaps a hundred million francs would be what was looked for. For such an early prediction, this proved to be strikingly accurate.⁵⁰³ Tilley thought that it would be wise to investigate what a fair sum for an indemnity might be, as this would enable Britain to avoid a conference, if they decided to.⁵⁰⁴ The question began to take more definite shape, and payment for the railway and compensation for the Tribute paid to Turkey on account of Eastern Rumelia was being discussed informally by the end of October. Mallet thought that a lump sum for these two questions would not be considered sufficient compensation by Turkey, and returned to Tilley's proposal of seeking a professional opinion on a suitable sum.⁵⁰⁵ The Turkish claims against Bulgaria soon followed, asking for compensation for both the Bulgarians and a grossly overestimated Eastern Rumelian tribute. Mallet found the claims 'preposterous', but reassured himself that if Turkey asked for too much at first, then their chances of fair compensation increased.⁵⁰⁶ Indeed, so outlandish were these claims that they were soon withdrawn, on the protest of the Austrian member of the Debt Commission. Hardinge was relieved. The figures were 'too fantastic to be of any practical use', as they suggested that Bulgaria owed Turkey Fr 26,700,000, on annual revenues of Fr 5,000,000.⁵⁰⁷ Although the figures seemed to be exaggerated, the Foreign Office believed that Turkey had a case, since neither Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece nor Montenegro had taken on any share of the Turkish debt in 1878, despite this being a stipulation of the peace treaty. Grey thought that Serbia and Montenegro, 'who maintain themselves aggrieved parties', would resist, but felt that the Bulgarians should pay 'for getting their own way'.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰³ Lowther to Grey, Private, 13 Oct 08, *Private Correspondence of Lowther* no. 18.

⁵⁰⁴ Lowther to Grey, no. 320, tel., 13 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35537, Tilley Minute.

⁵⁰⁵ Buchanan to Grey, no. 57, tel., 17 Oct 08, FO 371/553/36139; Mallet Minute.

⁵⁰⁶ Lowther to Grey, no. 356, tel., 22 Oct 08, FO 371/554/36750; Mallet Minute.

⁵⁰⁷ Lowther to Grey, no. 357, tel., 23 Oct 08, FO 371/554/36855; Hardinge Minute.

⁵⁰⁸ de Bernhardt Memorandum, 22 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37251, Hardinge Minute; Grey Minute.

In the meantime, the Bulgarian negotiators had left Constantinople, their mission at an end, having informed Kâmil that they could not discuss compensation beyond the railway. In Sofia, Buchanan heard that the Turks had proposed independence in return for a sum derived from capitalising the tribute for Eastern Rumelia.⁵⁰⁹ Hardinge believed this sum to be, if based on recent payments of the tribute, to be about Fr 3,000,000. In light of this, Buchanan was authorised to make joint representations with his French and Russian colleagues, calling for peace and a solution to the dispute.⁵¹⁰ By now, the Bulgarian position had hardened. There were, Buchanan reported, voices in the Cabinet ‘strongly opposed to the idea of paying for independence in hard cash’. Bulgaria went so far as to suggest that since they had paid for Eastern Rumelia since 1878, they would not pay for it now. Ominously, they added that ‘while they had neither the wish nor the inclination to attack’ Turkey, they knew ‘how to defend themselves if attacked’. Buchanan thought that the ministers were trying to strike a bargain ‘oriental fashion’, refusing the idea of compensation in the hope of paying the smallest possible amount.⁵¹¹ Tilley, recently returned from Constantinople, agreed and added that the Porte not only understood but would use such tactics itself.⁵¹² Rifat, meanwhile, complained that Bulgaria had deliberately spent all the money that could have been paid as compensation on military build-up, in the hope of avoiding paying it to Turkey. Hoping to get Grey on side, he told him that Turkey placed ‘more confidence’ in Britain than other Powers, and that they would seek British advice before acting in the present question. Finally, he named the sum Turkey hoped to get from Bulgaria: 10m ‘pounds Turkish’ (lira).⁵¹³ Grey thought it unlikely that Turkey would succeed in getting Bulgaria to pay this much, and told them so.

⁵⁰⁹ Buchanan to Grey, no. 64, tel., 23 Oct 08, FO 371/554/36887.

⁵¹⁰ Lowther to Grey, no. 353, tel., 21 Oct 08, FO 371/553/36631; Minutes.

⁵¹¹ Buchanan to Grey, no. 86, 23 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37322.

⁵¹² Buchanan to Grey, no. 86, 23 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37322.

⁵¹³ Grey to Lowther, no. 44826, Oct 08, FO 371/554/37601.

⁵¹⁴ Despite the break in negotiations, the Turks remained confident, expecting delegates from Bulgaria to return in the near future. ⁵¹⁵ The Bulgarians, it seems, did not agree, complaining to the Powers that Turkey's attitude had been so unhelpful that Bulgaria would soon have no choice but to mobilise her troops. Buchanan remained optimistic, reporting that:

‘In appraising [the] above statements, it is necessary to make allowance for Eastern methods of bargaining employed on either side. It is nevertheless a fact that Bulgaria will pay for no compensation except on account of the railway and of the tribute for Eastern Rumelia.’

This seems to have had some weight in the Foreign Office, where officials did not seem overly concerned. Hardinge thought that the joint *demarche* at Constantinople on 5 November, calling on the Turks to demobilise and show a conciliatory attitude, was all that needed to be done. ⁵¹⁶ While Turkish Government continued to discuss their hopes for compensation, Grey warned Rifat ‘personally and unofficially’ that he should focus on what could actually be achieved. The sum eventually paid was likely to come down to what Bulgaria could afford to pay, rather than the large sums that Turkey had suggested. ⁵¹⁷ Such warnings, combined with the realities of negotiations still at an impasse, persuaded senior members of the Turkish Government that a lower amount would have to be accepted. Lowther thought that Kâmil was resigned to the final sum being named by the Powers, which would allow him to deflect the negative attention that this would attract

⁵¹⁴ The financial negotiations are hard to follow in some ways, as discussions were made with sums quoted in both French francs (Fr) and Turkish Lira (Tk₺), usually without any conversion offered. Historical Currency conversion is an inexact science. Publicly available statistics published at <<http://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>> would suggest that in 1908, Tk₺1 was worth (very) approximately Fr 22. The Turkish compensation figure of 10 million quoted here is therefore worth, again very roughly, somewhere in the region of Fr 220 million – this is significantly higher than the figures negotiations would later centre around, and what was eventually funded by Russia. Schmitt's conclusions support this. Although he did not state how he arrived at them, he suggested that Tk₺ 5-10 million would convert to Fr 125-150 million. See Schmitt, *Annexation of Bosnia*, p. 128.

⁵¹⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 369, tel., 29 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37658.

⁵¹⁶ Buchanan to Grey, no. 76 tel., 5 Nov 08, FO 371/555/38553; Hardinge Minute.

⁵¹⁷ Grey to Lowther, no. 466, Confidential, 7 Nov 08, FO 371/555/38794.

from the Turkish press and public.⁵¹⁸ Whilst the Turks were becoming more flexible, the Bulgarians remained set in their demands. They thought that too much money was being asked for, especially for the railway, the value of which was ‘overstated’. Tilley was angry, suggesting that it was clear that Bulgaria thought very little of the Turkish armed forces, to be acting in such a way. He added that the ongoing debates over the value of the Eastern Rumelian tribute were ‘worthy of the bazaar’.⁵¹⁹

The Turks continued to argue for wide ranging payments. They suggested that it was unfair for her to be unable to recoup the losses caused by the Bulgarians having failed to pay their share of the Turkish Debt. Although the natural justice of such a claim was not doubted in Britain, officials were less convinced that it would stand up legally. In any case, British policy had hardened on the financial question. They thought Turkey had a right to claim for various things, including the Bulgarian and Eastern Rumelian tributes and the Bulgarian share of the debt, but that the final sum must be reduced to what Bulgaria could reasonably afford to pay.⁵²⁰ In financial terms, British officials saw between Tk£ 5m to Tk£ 10m to be a fair settlement.⁵²¹ Events would prove that even this figure seemed optimistic. Mallet was disappointed to learn that Bulgaria was even ‘worse off than we were aware’. Hardinge thought it was ‘hard’ on Turkey but that it was ‘useless to press Bulgaria for more than she can pay’.⁵²²

Although numbers were being discussed, Bulgaria and Turkey had not yet come to agreement on what Turkey would be compensated for. Stefan Paprikov, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, complained that public opinion prevented him from discussing and paying either a Tribute for Bulgaria itself or a Bulgarian share of the Ottoman debt.⁵²³

⁵¹⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 751, 6 Nov 08, FO 371/555/39505.

⁵¹⁹ Buchanan to Grey, no. 75, tel., 7 Nov 08, FO 371/555/38817; Tilley Minute.

⁵²⁰ Lowther to Grey, no. 390, tel., 11 Nov 08, FO 371/555/39247; Minutes Tilley, Maxwell, Hardinge.

⁵²¹ As Russia was informed: Nicolson to Grey, no 252, tel., 12 Nov 08, FO 371/555/39495; Grey to Nicolson, no. 593, tel., 13 Nov 08, FO 371/555/39495.

⁵²² Buchanan to Grey, no. 94, 10 Nov 08, FO 371/556/39886; Minutes Mallet, Hardinge.

⁵²³ Buchanan to Grey, no. 79, tel., 16 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40028.

Mallet suggested that the best way out of this difficulty, for all concerned, would be for the Bulgarians to pay a lump sum to Turkey, without detailing what it was for specifically.⁵²⁴ Hardinge was supportive of this idea, and Buchanan was instructed to urge the Bulgarians to offer a lump sum, in settlement of all claims.⁵²⁵ Paprikov was bellicose. He doubted that Bulgaria could afford a lump sum that Turkey would accept, and he added that Bulgaria would not submit to the discussion of a tribute or share of the debt without force.⁵²⁶ Lowther thought that Kâmil would listen to proposals for a lump sum, and reported that Constans, the French Ambassador, in a foreshadowing of what was to come, had told Tevfik that Bulgaria could afford only Tk 4m.⁵²⁷ A few days later, Grey set down British policy. Britain would ‘certainly not discourage any arrangement’ that Turkey was inclined to accept, but they would not pressure her to take what Bulgaria offered and ask for no more.⁵²⁸ Buchanan, meanwhile, interceded on behalf of the Bulgarians. He informed London that the Bulgarian financial system was not as strong as it might appear, and that it would be foolish to ruin one of the more promising Balkan states.⁵²⁹ Maxwell found the conclusions ‘pertinent’, whilst Hardinge thought that the figures contained within the despatch suggested that Bulgaria persisted in offering rather less than she could afford to pay.⁵³⁰ British policy was clear. She favoured a financial compensation package to settle the Turco-Bulgarian question, ideally without a conference. She hoped to see a lump sum paid, at a rate less than Turkey was demanding but about as high as Bulgaria could afford.

At the end of November, negotiations again broke down. The Bulgarians left Constantinople, leaving behind them an offer for Fr 82m (About Tk£ 3,280,000 by Tilley’s calculation), not including the vexed tribute and debt questions. This last offer was

⁵²⁴ Buchanan to Grey, no. 79, tel., 16 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40028.

⁵²⁵ Ibid, Hardinge Minute; Buchanan to Grey, no. 80, tel., 18 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40350.

⁵²⁶ Buchanan to Grey, no. 80, tel., 18 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40350.

⁵²⁷ Lowther to Grey, no. 396, tel., 19 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40473.

⁵²⁸ Buchanan to Grey, no. 81, tel., 23 Nov 08, FO 371/556/41014, Grey Minute.

⁵²⁹ Buchanan to Grey, no. 99, 24 Nov 08, FO 371/556/41670.

⁵³⁰ Ibid, Maxwell Minute, Hardinge Minute.

‘absurdly small’, according to Hardinge, especially considering that Lyapchev, one of the negotiators, had told Lowther that if the Turks wanted more, they would have to go to Sofia to get it.⁵³¹ Grey spoke to the Bulgarian *charge d’affaires* at some length, warning him that Bulgaria’s attitude was unhelpful and arguing that the controversy could be ended by a payment of a lump sum, without too much discussion of the details. He stressed the importance of compromise, and emphasised that this was a good one.⁵³² To help inform future interventions, the British requested an estimated figure from the French, the Power most financially interested in Bulgaria. At the same time, the Russians were asked to help in pressing the Bulgarians to come to an agreement.⁵³³

London learned of the initial French estimate on 12 December. It put the figure just below Tk£ 10m, including the raising of a loan.⁵³⁴ Britain continued to consider how best she could facilitate an agreement. Grey told Alexander von Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador in London, that Britain would be willing to guarantee a loan to Bulgaria to help her pay, but only as a last resort.⁵³⁵ Tilley worried at the possibility of having to fight a war with both Austria and Bulgaria in Turkey’s defence. In the meantime, British policy followed a Micawberish line, hoping that ‘something will turn up’ between Bulgaria and Turkey in the new year.⁵³⁶ Grey found himself at an impasse. He could not ask the Turks to accept the Bulgarian offer, nor, could he remain passive if the Bulgarians continued to refuse to ‘budge’.⁵³⁷ As 1909 dawned, the clouds appeared to be lifting. Kâmil planned to begin negotiation again on the 12th, after the end of the Bulgarian holidays. Tilley was encouraged that he was now talking about a sum of Fr 140-150m, whilst the Bulgarians

⁵³¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 407, tel., 30 Nov 08, FO 371/557/41878; Hardinge Minute.

⁵³² Grey to Buchanan, no. 75, 2 Dec 08, FO 371/557/42433. The Turks were informed of this interview. See: Grey to Lowther, no. 506, 3 Dec 08, FO 371/557/42752.

⁵³³ Nicolson to Grey, no. 285, tel., 4 Dec 08, FO 371/557/42376.

⁵³⁴ Bertie to Grey, no. 109, tel., 12 Dec 08, FO 371/557/43451.

⁵³⁵ Grey to Nicolson, no. 412, 15 Dec 08, FO 371/558/44182.

⁵³⁶ Buchanan to Grey, no. 105, Confidential, 22 Dec 08, FO 371/558/45050, Tilley Minute.

⁵³⁷ Nicolson to Grey, no. 320, tel., 30 Dec 08, FO 371/558/45545.

had apparently mentioned 120 to him.⁵³⁸ As the figures converged, the Foreign Office was increasingly resigned to Fr 125m.⁵³⁹ Mallet again emphasised that Turkey should drop any mention of the tribute and get a lump sum agreed to. Kâmil would then be left to say whatever he liked about the tribute for domestic consumption.⁵⁴⁰ With British policy fixed in this direction, Hardinge suggested that Turkey might use various railway questions in Macedonia as ‘bait’, to induce the Bulgarians to offer a little more, an idea which Grey thought ‘a very good move’, as even if it failed to bear ‘direct fruit’, would show the Turks that Britain was serious about a settlement.⁵⁴¹ As negotiations reopened, Grey thought that the Bulgarians would offer the Turks five million lira, a sum which he would advise them to accept. On 8 January, Kâmil told Lowther that Turkey would accept Tk£ 6m, despite claiming to be owed Tk£ 20m. Hardinge was heartened by this news. If the ‘two estimates’ were Tk£3 ½ million and Tk£ 6 million, it should be possible, ‘with a little good will’ to arrive at a settlement.⁵⁴² The Bulgarians, again, were to throw a spanner in the works, unwilling to be seen to pay for independence, and claimed that they could negotiate no further on a financial basis.⁵⁴³ Mallet and Hardinge, frustrated by this, thought that the Bulgarian negotiators should avoid travelling to Constantinople until they were ready to offer Fr 125m to Turkey, as a further breakdown in negotiation would make it even harder for Bulgaria to ever climb down.⁵⁴⁴ More bad news was to follow. The French recommendation, which the Foreign Office had been relying upon to shift the obstinate Bulgarians, was indicated privately to Britain as being Tk£ 5,680,000. ‘Financial interests have prevailed’, complained Mallet, reflecting the general belief that France, who

⁵³⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 1, tel., 2 Jan 09, FO 371/747/245; Tilley Minute.

⁵³⁹ Buchanan to Grey, no 1, tel., 2 Jan 09, FO 371/747/249, Tilley Minute.

⁵⁴⁰ Lowther to Grey, no. 893, Confidential, 29 Dec 08, FO 371/747/329, Mallet Minute.

⁵⁴¹ Communication by Rifaat, 2 Jan 09, FO 371/747/451. Grey to Lowther, no. 7 11 Jan 09, FO 371/747/451.

⁵⁴² Lowther to Grey, no. 6, tel., 8 Jan 09, FO 371/747/999; Hardinge Minute.

⁵⁴³ Bertie to Grey, no. 3, tel., 8 Jan 09, FO 371/747/1003.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, Hardinge Minute, Mallet Minute.

had significant financial interests in Bulgaria, hoped to profit from a smaller payment. Hardinge recommended that the Varna Railway junction, which had been suggested as a sweetener, would have to drop out of the negotiation if only Fr 100m was to be offered, but Grey disagreed, arguing that Britain should hold out for the Turks to get 125m, with the railway junction included.⁵⁴⁵ In the meantime, Austria and Turkey had come to terms, settling their dispute with a financial settlement. This left Bulgaria isolated, and it was decided to follow the Austrian example and settle, with the sum of Fr 100m being suggested at Sofia.⁵⁴⁶ Hardinge and Grey thought that negotiations should be left alone for the time being, as they still hoped to hold out for 125m.⁵⁴⁷

Upon receiving the full French financial recommendation, Grey made a statement of British policy on the question:

‘I think it will take some pressure to get the Turks to accept 125 million francs. We must let the negotiations begin at 100 millions & say nothing ourselves: if the Turks do accept that that so much the better, but if not we must hope that the real desire of Russia & France to see a settlement will induce them to combine with us in the figure of 125 [million] francs’.⁵⁴⁸

He restated his views, this time to the French, when they announced suddenly that previous figures had been estimated, and that now they could not back more than one hundred million.⁵⁴⁹ Britain’s position seemed less stable. Isvolsky, having seen the French numbers, suggested that one hundred millions could now be fixed, and that Turkey might well be compelled to accept this. Hardinge was aware that Britain was in a ‘minority of one’ on this question, but he thought Britain was still following the ‘right line for the time being’.⁵⁵⁰ The Turks, meanwhile, continued to try and find a way to make a deal. The

⁵⁴⁵ Bertie to Grey, no. 6, tel., *en clair*, by post, 12 Jan 09, FO 371/747/1642; Minutes Mallet, Hardinge, Grey.

⁵⁴⁶ Buchanan to Grey, no. 4, tel., 13 Jan 09, FO 371/747/1764.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Hardinge Minute, Grey Minute.

⁵⁴⁸ Bertie to Grey, no. 33, Confidential, 17 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2453, Grey Minute.

⁵⁴⁹ Bertie to Grey, no. 12, tel., 20 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2612; Grey to Bertie, no. 36, tel., 22 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2612.

⁵⁵⁰ Nicolson to Grey, no. 21, tel., 20 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2684; Hardinge Minute.

suggestion of a rectification of the Eastern Rumelian frontier was resurrected. Kâmil thought it 'useless', but thought it could be useful to soothe public opinion if Turkey were forced to accept less than she hoped for.⁵⁵¹ In any case, the Foreign Office was not keen on opening a question such as this, and discouraged it.⁵⁵² Kâmil also suggested that the Turks could take 100m from Bulgaria in settlement, with an additional twenty five million promised in the future, perhaps under the control of the Powers. The Foreign Office disliked this suggestion too. It would simply form a bone of contention between the two in the future, thought Hardinge, although Grey, becoming desperate, thought that it could be kept in mind, as any 'means of bridging the gap' between Turkey and Bulgaria was worth considering, he thought.⁵⁵³ As negotiations continued, without much movement, Hardinge thought that the moment would soon arrive when the Powers would have to impose a solution on to Turkey and Bulgaria.⁵⁵⁴ Grey, by now rather frustrated, upbraided the Bulgarian Chargé for Bulgaria's selfishness. While she thought only of her own interests, Turkey had several times changed what she would accept in the search for a solution. He said that Bulgaria could certainly pay more than Fr 82m, and they should do so.⁵⁵⁵ Privately though, he was beginning to accept the realities, and he began trying to prepare the Turks to accept one hundred million, suggesting that it could be imposed by the Powers if they would prefer it for domestic reasons.⁵⁵⁶ As the Bulgarians complained yet again of Turkish delays, and said that their offer of eighty two millions was time limited, Grey despaired. He saw 'no chance of arriving at a solution by discussing details, till the Powers decide whether they will in principle take the matter in hand & force

⁵⁵¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 18, tel., 24 Jan 09, FO 371/748/3082.

⁵⁵² Lowther to Grey, no. 41, 20 Jan 09, FO 371/748/3128, Minutes.

⁵⁵³ Lowther to Grey, tel 20, 26 Jan 09, FO 371/748/3491; Minutes Hardinge, Grey.

⁵⁵⁴ Lowther to Grey, no. 21, tel., 27 Jan 09, FO 371/749/3688.

⁵⁵⁵ Grey to Buchanan, no. 8, 26 Jan 09, FO 371/749/3834.

⁵⁵⁶ Grey to Lowther, no. 44, tel., 27 Jan 09, FO 371/749/3904; Grey to Lowther, no. 36, tel., Confidential, 25 Jan 09, FO 371/794/3903.

Turkey & Bulgaria to refer it to them.’⁵⁵⁷ Little did he know that a solution was nearer than he thought.

3.2.g Russian Funding for a Financial Solution

It was at this point that the final solution of the question was first floated, in the form of the Russian offer to fund the Bulgarian payment. The Turks would show some reluctance in accepting the deal, in part due to a subpar performance from Lowther, but eventually, and after a change in Turkish government, the deal was accepted. The idea was that Russia would write off some of the war indemnity owed to her by Turkey after 1877, which would then be made up to them by Bulgaria, in instalments.

The idea of writing off a section of the indemnity was not a new one. It had been discussed in October 1908 in St. Petersburg, as a possible inducement for the Turks to open the Straits.⁵⁵⁸ The Russians, too, were worried about losing their position with Bulgaria. They had been concerned that Austria might step in to offer her a loan to cover the indemnity, and were loath to press her too hard, in case this pushed her into the arms of Austria.⁵⁵⁹ Britain first heard of the Russian proposal at the end of January 1909, when it was suggested that Russia loan the money to the Bulgarians, in the interests of an end to the deadlock. Naturally, this was welcome news, and Buchanan was told to cooperate with his Russian colleague.⁵⁶⁰ The details, when they appeared, were even more welcome to Britain. Russia would charge Bulgaria interest on eighty two million francs, whilst cancelling sections of the war indemnity to the Turks. As Tilley put it, Bulgaria was to pay less, whilst Turkey got more, and all at the Russian expense.⁵⁶¹ Grey told Nicolson that the

⁵⁵⁷ Buchanan to Grey, no. 18, tel., 29 Jan 09, FO 371/749/4036; Communicated by Rifaat, 28 Jan 09, FO 371/749/4273.

⁵⁵⁸ Nicolson to Grey, Private, 8 Oct 08, FO 800/73.

⁵⁵⁹ Nicolson to Grey, no. 19, tel., 17 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2142; Nicolson to Grey, no. 23, tel., 20 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2686; Bertie to Grey, no. 14, tel., 20 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2688.

⁵⁶⁰ Communicated by Benkendorff, 27 Jan 09, FO 371/749/3844.

⁵⁶¹ Nicolson to Grey, no. 39, tel., 30 Jan 09, FO 371/749/4099, Tilley Minute.

Foreign Office were ‘very keen on the proposal’.⁵⁶² The only British figure not delighted appeared to be Lowther, who complained that the proposal would result in a financial loss to the Turks.⁵⁶³ Mallet and Tilley quickly surmised that this was because he was not in possession of all the figures, and he was put right. At the same time, Britain expressed the British hope that the Turks would accept the proposal in principle.⁵⁶⁴ Despite this, Kâmil and Tevfik were worried about the details, suspicious that it meant Russia would expect concessions at the Straits.⁵⁶⁵ Hardinge, in a state of some irritation, pointed out that Britain had already secured the assurances of Russia that the Straits question would not to be raised, and that this proposal offered more money than any other to the Turks.⁵⁶⁶ Lowther was still unsatisfied. The proposal came ‘just as the clouds had begun to break’, and he disliked it.⁵⁶⁷ Grey again tried to allay all of these concerns, suggesting to the Turks that they should accept, as it was the best deal they could get financially, and reassuring them that it was a ‘clean bargain’ that would not expect any more of them.⁵⁶⁸ Despite these reassurances, the Porte remained dissatisfied. The proposal had not yet been communicated officially to them, and thus they could not examine it. Furthermore, they were unhappy that this solution would not limit the future aggression of the Bulgarians.⁵⁶⁹ The ‘real Turkish objection’, therefore, was the ‘fear of Bulgaria’.⁵⁷⁰ The Porte also complained that the proposal would not supply ready money, and that Bulgaria would fall under Russian influence.⁵⁷¹ The Foreign Office found such complaints frustrating, and Lowther was told to try and allay these fears, by pointing out that it was a purely financial

⁵⁶² Grey to Nicolson, Private, 2 Feb 09, FO 800/73.

⁵⁶³ Lowther to Grey, no. 28, tel., 31 Jan, FO 371/749/4112.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, Mallet Minute, Tilley Minute; Grey to Lowther, no. 61, tel., 1 Feb 09, FO 371/749/4112.

⁵⁶⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 30, tel., 1 Feb 09, FO 371/749/4342.

⁵⁶⁶ Grey to Lowther, no. 63, tel., 2 Feb 09, FO 371/749/4342.

⁵⁶⁷ Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 3 Feb 09, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 51.

⁵⁶⁸ Grey to Lowther, no. 45, 2 Feb 09, FO 371/749/4588.

⁵⁶⁹ Lowther to Grey, no. 34, tel., 4 Feb 09, FO 371/749/4618.

⁵⁷⁰ Nicolson to Grey, no. 52, tel., 5 Feb 09, FO 371/750/4859, Tilley Minute.

⁵⁷¹ Lowther to Grey, no. 36, tel., 5 Feb 09, FO 371/750/4851.

transaction.⁵⁷² When the Russian Ambassador finally presented the proposal officially to the Porte, albeit verbally, Lowther, who remained personally unconvinced, but followed instructions, thought that the ‘tide was turning’.⁵⁷³ British policymakers thought that ‘It would be excessively unwise for... [the Turks] in their own interests to wreck... [the proposal].’⁵⁷⁴ By the 8th, Russia indicated to Britain that she was aiming to settle on the basis of presenting the Turks with Fr 125m.⁵⁷⁵ The Turks, meanwhile, continued to try and negotiate. They countenanced a counter proposal, which would solve all outstanding political questions between the two countries, and in return, the Russians would write the war indemnity off entirely, instead of giving up only enough to be worth Fr 125m to the Turks.⁵⁷⁶ They asked for British support, which Grey was willing to give in principle, although he reserved the right to see it first. Nicolson was given permission to support it, so far as was possible ‘without giving offense’.⁵⁷⁷ Privately, Grey wrote to Lowther criticising him for his lack of support for the Russian plan. Grey explained that had he failed to support the proposal, then Britain would have lost Russia’s support, and triggered a reconfiguration of the Powers. He added that he believed the proposal to be in Turkey’s best interests.⁵⁷⁸ This statement exemplified British policy throughout the crisis. Britain supported the Turks, and certainly wanted to be seen to have done her best for them, but if she had to choose, Russia (and therefore wider notions of strategy) would always be her preference.

In February, the Kâmil ministry, which had been very positive towards Britain, fell, and he was replaced as Grand Vizier by Hilmi Pasha.⁵⁷⁹ Upon taking power, Lowther

⁵⁷² Grey to Lowther, no. 75, tel., 5 Feb 09, FO 371/750/4851.

⁵⁷³ Lowther to Grey, no. 37, tel., 6 Feb 09, FO 371/750/4882.

⁵⁷⁴ Grey to Lowther, no. 82, tel., 6 Feb 09, FO 371/750/4882.

⁵⁷⁵ Nicolson to Grey, no.60, tel., Confidential, 8 Feb 09, FO 371/750/5286.

⁵⁷⁶ Lowther to Grey, no. 38, tel., 6 Feb 09, FO 371/750/5048.

⁵⁷⁷ Grey to Nicolson, no. 156, tel., 8 Feb 09, FO 371/750/5436.

⁵⁷⁸ Grey to Lowther, Private 8 Feb 09 *Private Correspondence of Lowther* no. 55.

⁵⁷⁹ Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 16 Feb 09, No. 57.

advised him to settle, and reported that he seemed inclined to do so.⁵⁸⁰ Aehrenthal too, was of the opinion that Hilmi would accelerate matters and get a deal done.⁵⁸¹

Accordingly, the proposal was offered again. Hilmi accepted in principle, but once more proposed a capitalisation of the indemnity.⁵⁸² Bulgaria, meanwhile, worried about the situation, proposed a return to direct negotiation, in order to secure independence more quickly. Grey thought this meant Turkey might accept 80 million francs, to see an end to the crisis.⁵⁸³ In this he was wrong. The Turks rejected Bulgarian overtures as being likely to irritate the Russians, now that a deal in principle had been agreed. Hilmi added that he would accept almost anything that would end the deadlock and remove the indemnity question. Hardinge, by now significantly irritated by this latest hitch, complained that ‘M. Isvolsky seems incapable of any statesmanlike action at present & fails to recognise the urgency of an immediate agreement with Turkey.’⁵⁸⁴ The Turks asked for British support for the capitalisation proposal. Grey stopped short of full support, but said he would say what he always had – that he could think of nothing better.⁵⁸⁵ The Porte used this assurance, to Nicolson’s irritation, to claim that they had British support for the proposal at St. Petersburg.⁵⁸⁶ After being put right, they again proposed to Russia a capitalisation, of which they would receive Fr 125m.⁵⁸⁷ On this occasion, they had more luck. Lowther heard that Rifat was on his way to St. Petersburg, to discuss the proposals. He suggested that as Rifat had said that he would not go to St. Petersburg until he would not have to leave empty handed, this meant a deal was probably in the offing.⁵⁸⁸ Sadly, matters were

⁵⁸⁰ Grey to Nicolson, no. 66, 16 Feb 09, FO 371/750/6484.

⁵⁸¹ Cartwright to Grey, no. 41, tel, 17 Feb 09, FO 371/750/6504.

⁵⁸² Lowther to Grey, no. 56, tel., 19 Feb 09, FO 371/751/6796; Lowther to Grey, no. 57, tel., 19 Feb 09, FO 371/751/6797.

⁵⁸³ Cartwright to Grey, no. 45, tel., Secret, 20 Feb 09, FO 371/751/6975; Grey Minute.

⁵⁸⁴ Lowther to Grey, no. 63, tel., 22 Feb 09, FO 371/751/7266; Hardinge Minute.

⁵⁸⁵ Grey to Nicolson, no. 229, tel., 22 Feb 09, FO 371/751/7380; Minutes.

⁵⁸⁶ Nicolson to Grey, no. 95, tel., 23 Feb 09, FO 371/751/7417.

⁵⁸⁷ Nicolson to Grey, no. 100, tel., 25 Feb 09, FO 371/751/7657.

⁵⁸⁸ Lowther to Grey, no. 64, tel., 25 Feb 09, FO 371/751/7665.

not as simple. Rifat was greeted with yet another Russian counter proposal – that while they would agree to wipe the whole indemnity clear, they asked some small political concessions such as changes to the Turco-Persian frontier and a railway for Serbia to the Adriatic, although to the relief of British officials, the Straits were not mentioned.⁵⁸⁹ By now, the Foreign Office was tiring of the negotiations. Although Tilley admitted that Britain would have rather let the Turco-Persian border wait, Grey told Nicolson that he could support anything which would get the indemnity cleared and the agreement made.

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Another week dragged on. Rifat announced that he was leaving St. Petersburg in response to yet another Russian proposal, just when the Porte had indicated acceptance of the agreement he had made. A despairing Mallet thought that both sides were being ‘very unbusinesslike’.⁵⁹¹ This stumbling block, however, was overcome, and the Turks agreed not to delay their recognition of Bulgarian independence, as they had been threatening to do, and the protocol was initialled *ad referendum* on 16 March, just before the German move to threaten Russia, and St Petersburg’s subsequent capitulation brought the risk of war between the Powers to a close.⁵⁹² Constantinople and St Petersburg had agreed that Russia would renounce 40 years-worth of the indemnity, and Turkey would recognise Bulgaria and renounce the railway.⁵⁹³ The protocols were now ready to be ratified, but the Turkish Parliament, still suspicious of Russia, delayed its acceptance.⁵⁹⁴ This further slowed matters just as Turkey underwent the failed counter revolution.⁵⁹⁵ The delay went on so long that Bulgaria threatened war if their independence was not confirmed soon, leading Britain, France and Russia to press the Porte to ratify the agreement as soon as

⁵⁸⁹ Nicolson to Grey, no.117, tel., 4 Mar 09, FO 371/752/8578.

⁵⁹⁰ Grey to Nicolson, no. 275, tel., 5 Mar 09, FO371/752/8578, Minutes

⁵⁹¹ Nicolson to Grey, no. 144, tel., 15 Mar 09, FO 371/753/10008; Mallet Minute.

⁵⁹² Nicolson to Grey, no. 145, tel., 16 Mar 09, FO 371/753/10156.

⁵⁹³ Lowther to Grey, no. 90, tel., 18 Mar 09, FO 371/754/10403.

⁵⁹⁴ Buchanan to Grey, no. 49, tel., 9 April 09, FO 371/756/13419.

⁵⁹⁵ Lowther to Grey, no. 114, tel., 15 Apr 09, FO 371/757/14176.

possible.⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, Britain even discussed recognising Bulgaria against Turkey's wishes in order to avoid war, providing yet more evidence of Grey's priorities.⁵⁹⁷ By this time, however, the heat had gone out of the international situation, as a result of the Russian capitulation. Despite another final hitch, caused by a Turkish request for thirty days after signing before ratification, the protocol was finally signed and completed on 21 April.⁵⁹⁸ Bar a minor dispute over the royal title of Prince Ferdinand, which Hardinge dismissed as 'tiresome', the crisis was over.⁵⁹⁹

3.3 Bosnian Annexation

The Bosnian Crisis both revealed and set the future course of the Anglo-Turkish relationship. It demonstrated that whilst the British hoped to maintain the advantage which they saw the Young Turk revolution as having given them, they were not willing to compromise their wider strategy by being too favourable to the Turks. The initial result of this was an indulgent and supportive policy towards Turkish aspirations. This did not last, as many in the Foreign Office began to lose patience with the Turks, and by the end of the crisis, a palpable sense of frustration towards the Porte had developed.

There is no doubt that British policy aimed to support Turkey, or, at the very least, to give the Turks the impression of British support. Indeed, most scholars have asserted as much.⁶⁰⁰ Grey regarded himself as having still been in 'the stage of hope and sympathy

⁵⁹⁶ Nicolson to Grey, no. 198, tel., 15 Apr 09, FO 371/757/14192; Lowther to Grey, no. 118, tel., 15 April 09, FO 371/757/14197.

⁵⁹⁷ Nicolson to Grey, no. 204, tel., 16 Apr 09, FO 371/757/14324.

⁵⁹⁸ Buchanan to Grey, no. 26, tel., 21 Apr 09, FO 371/757/15381; 757/294 Buchanan to Grey, no. 63, tel., 22 Apr 09, FO 371/757/15153.

⁵⁹⁹ Communicated by Rifaat, 7 May 09, FO 371/758/17469, Hardinge Minute.

⁶⁰⁰ Bernadotte Schmitt wrote of Britain having 'much sympathy' with Turkey. It having been so long since such 'consideration' had been shown her, she 'naturally tried to exploit' this: Schmitt, *Annexation of Bosnia*, p. 101. D.W. Sweet referred to Turkey as Britain's 'protégé', although he was more circumspect on the material underpinnings of such support, noting the contradictions inherent in a policy aiming to support both Turkey and Russia: Sweet, 'Bosnian Crisis', pp. 181; 179. From the Ottoman Perspective, Hasan Ünal characterised

with young [*sic*] Turks' when the crisis broke out.⁶⁰¹ From the very beginning of the crisis, Britain asserted the right of Turkey to be heard, and repeatedly insisted that she would not try to compel the Turks to accept anything that they did not want to.⁶⁰² The Foreign Office was willing to guarantee that any advantages gained by Serbia and Montenegro would not come at the cost of Turkey, for instance, and the sentiment that Turkey was not to blame for the difficulties in finding a solution and that she should be kept strong was easily found in the Foreign Office in the later months of the 1908.⁶⁰³ Even junior members of the Foreign Office, such as Tilley, were fully aware of the need to appear sympathetic towards the Turks, even when the realities of European politics meant that it might not be possible.⁶⁰⁴ British support persisted into 1909, demonstrated by the refusal to accept the French estimate of what Bulgaria could pay and the attempt to try and find support for a higher figure.

Although support for the Turks persisted, both in words and deeds, until the conclusion of the crisis, frustration built amongst British policymakers at the Turkish attitude. As early as October, the Turkish prioritisation of the Eastern Rumelian question caused disquiet. Hardinge thought that the Grand Vizier 'must be made to understand' that it would be 'quite impossible to turn back the clock' and that he must accept 'the *fait*

British support as a 'godsend' for the weak Ottoman Government, although he too was cognisant of the 'strict limits' within which British support operated: Ünal, Hasan, *Ottoman Foreign Policy during the Bosnian Annexation Crisis*, (University of Manchester PhD Thesis, 1992) pp. 240-1.

⁶⁰¹ Grey, *Twenty-Five Years*, v. 1, pp. 174-5.

⁶⁰² The British public response to Bulgarian independence suggested that nothing should be done until the views of the Powers were known, not least those of Turkey, 'the Power most affected': Grey to Buchanan, no. 51, tel. *en clair*, 6 Oct 08, FO 371/550/34528. Grey personally informed Mensdorff that Britain would not compel the Turks to accept an offer that they were not happy with, and Lowther was informed that this was British policy: Grey to Goschen, no.123, 26 Oct 08, FO 371/554/37547; Grey to Lowther, no. 448, 26 Oct 09, FO 371/554/37601.

⁶⁰³ Minutes on note communicated by the Turkish Ambassador, 19 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40467; For instance, see Grey to Bertie, no. 591, 16 Dec 08, FO 371/558/44365, or Memo of 21 Nov 08, FO 371/556/40705.

⁶⁰⁴ Speculating on the possibility of having to advise the Turks to accept less in compensation from the Bulgarians than they might have otherwise desired, Tilley remarked that Britain would not want to be the first Power to propose a low sum: Tilley Minute on Rodd to Grey, no. 195, Confidential, 15 Dec 08, FO 371/558/44131.

accompli'.⁶⁰⁵ By the time that the agreement with Austria was on the table, this frustration had increased. Mallet was irritated at the 'unreasonable' Turkish demand that the agreement be made unconditionally.⁶⁰⁶ As the Bulgarian negotiations dragged on, British annoyance at Turkish prevarication reached a peak. Lowther was told, as it appeared that the Turks might reject the Russian financial proposal, that it 'would be excessively unwise for... [the Porte] in their own interests to wreck it.'⁶⁰⁷

Some of this frustration at the Turkish refusal to act in accordance with British wishes owed something to the fact that Britain was trying to reconcile two fundamentally unreconcilable lines of policy – closer cooperation with Russia, alongside supporting the Turks. From the start, British policymakers kept in close touch with their Russian counterparts, and tried to act in concert with them.⁶⁰⁸ At the end of the crisis, the British greeted the Russian financial suggestion with enthusiasm, and part of their frustration at the Turks stemmed from the desire to accept a Russian focused solution to that aspect of the crisis, and found Turkish suspicion of Russia to be tiresome.⁶⁰⁹ When Britain's policy towards Turkey and Russia showed signs of clashing, it was Russia which won out. As keen as he was to make the most of the opportunity that he had been handed, Grey was not

⁶⁰⁵ Hardinge Minute on Lowther to Grey, no. 55, tel., 15 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35667. Lowther was instructed to bring this home to the Porte in forceful language, taking credit for the removal of the Straits from the programme and emphasising the importance of taking 'material advantages' before 'empty forms', an early use of an argument which became something of a favourite for Grey throughout the crisis: Grey to Lowther, no. 358, tel., 16 Oct 08, FO 371/552/35667; Grey to Lowther, Private, 13 Nov 08, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no 26.

⁶⁰⁶ Rather than being conditional on the acceptance of the concessions by the other Powers. Hardinge remarked that this was partially the fault of the Austrians, having initially suggested that the concessions would be unconditional before changing their minds: Minutes on Cartwright to Grey, no. 25, Tel., 26 Jan 09, FO 371/748/3484.

⁶⁰⁷ Grey to Lowther, no. 82, Tel., 6 Feb 09, FO 371/750/4882. Frustration was widespread in the Foreign Office. Tilley bemoaned the Turkish attitude after a settlement had been almost arrived at 'enormous pains': Tilley minute on Lowther to Grey, no. 66, 30 Jan 09, FO 371/750/5066. The request of the Turks to delay ratification of the Russian agreement by 30 days also drew an exasperated response from the Foreign Office: Buchanan to Grey, no. 57, Tel., 18 Apr 09, FO 371/757/14500.

⁶⁰⁸ In September, before even the declaration of Bulgarian independence, Maxwell worried about the implications of acting without the Russians: Lowther to Grey, no. 282, Tel., 29 Sep 08, FO 371/550/33785.

⁶⁰⁹ Not least, in time, because of the Russian collapse in other aspects of the question. D.W. Sweet hit the mark when he described the British as 'enchanted' by the proposal: Sweet, *Bosnian Crisis*, p. 184.

going to allow it to disrupt his wider strategy of loose working arrangements with France and Russia.⁶¹⁰

The Turkish counter revolution of April 1909 also proved an annoyance to the Foreign Office. Having almost found a solution to the crisis, negotiations were delayed by the change in the Turkish Government. This event, which also accelerated the feelings of frustration being felt by Britain towards the Turks, forms the subject of the next chapter.

⁶¹⁰ For more on Grey's policy of 'studied ambiguity' and his use of alignments with other Powers, see Otte, "Postponing the Evil Day".

4. The Counter-Revolution of 1909 ⁶¹¹

The Bosnian Crisis demonstrated that the good feeling engendered by the Young Turk revolution was likely to be short-lived. Turkish intransigence at the close of the crisis, along with the collapse of the Kâmil ministry, had led policymakers to doubt the possibility of a close working relationship with Turkey. The counter-revolution of April 1909, which delayed the final acceptance of the Russian offer, compounded British frustrations. It suggested that Turkey could not be a reliable partner to Britain, and that the Young Turk regime was not a significant improvement on what it had replaced. These events also laid bare the growing rift between the Foreign Office and the Ambassador, Sir Gerard Lowther, who subtly followed his own lines of policy during the reactionary spasm. This chapter will first consider the views of key British policymakers, both in London and Constantinople, as the Bosnian affair drew to a close. It will then relate the events of the crisis, focusing again on the views of British statesmen, before discussing the period of reflection which followed these events.

4.1. Views of CUP Government in the light of the Bosnian Crisis

In March 1909, as the great Bosnian crisis drew towards its conclusion, John Tilley penned a lengthy memorandum, reflecting on events in Turkey since the revolution of 1908. His conclusions would not have made pleasant reading for the Young Turks. He argued that the revolution had not been as 'profound' as the Foreign Office had originally thought and hoped. Reflecting racial attitudes shared by almost all of his contemporaries, he remarked that having shaken free from Abdülhamid, Turkey had reverted to the level of 'normal misgovernment and backwardness' that was, he said, natural to Turks. Since

⁶¹¹ There is no accepted terminology for the events of April 1909. In Turkey, it is known as the '31st March Incident', as the Ottoman Empire had not yet adopted the western calendar. This essay will use the terms Counter Revolution, or Counter-Coup. See Zürcher, '31 Mart'.

then, matters had got worse. Being ‘suspicious by nature’, the Turks had not accepted the Russian offer until they had come under significant pressure from Britain, something which seemed to be held against the Turks. The fall of the Kâmil government was seen, with some justification, as ‘a great blow’ to Britain’s influence in Turkey, but it was also bad for the Ottoman Empire. Kâmil was considered an atypical Turkish statesmen, which Tilley ascribed to his Jewish heritage. ‘His fall meant the establishment of the despotism of the committee, which governs the country without taking responsibility, and is accused already of developing Hamidian methods.’ Such developments did not auger well for the future, Tilley thought. If the Turks were to become a ‘regenerate race’, he ventured to think it would be after their long prophesied exit from Europe. After some fourteen pages of pessimistic commentary on recent events and doom-laden predictions on the future of the Ottoman Empire and Britain’s position in it, Tilley summed up his thoughts with some understatement: ‘The outlook, therefore, is bad’.⁶¹²

Tilley’s pessimism seemed to owe something to the negative reports by Lowther. He quoted various despatches approvingly, apparently sharing Lowther’s sentiment that ‘the Turks have not ceased to be Turks’. Lowther used this turn of phrase to add force to his argument that the Turkish state had not developed very far since the revolution. The relaxation of the capitulations would be ‘absolutely out of the question’ for the present. It would be ‘safer’, furthermore, for the Turks to be kept short of money, as that which was not ‘altogether wasted’ would be spent on ‘extravagant’ military measures.⁶¹³ Lowther had not always felt this way. His arrival in Constantinople in 1908 had been greeted by a ‘considerable crowd in a state of some excitement’, a manifestation of the pro-British sentiments created by the revolution.⁶¹⁴ By September, Lowther had met several members

⁶¹² Tilley Memorandum, 1 Mar. 1909, FO 371/770/13516.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Lowther to Grey, Tel., No. 204, 30 July 1908, FO 371/544/26560.

of the CUP privately, and had been cautiously impressed by their ‘moderate’ tone.⁶¹⁵ It would not be long, however, before his optimism evaporated. By October, he felt he had detected an undercurrent of dissatisfaction in Turkish politics. This was particularly ‘unwholesome’ in that it suggested a lack of respect for the Sultan.⁶¹⁶ Lowther’s respect for traditional values, as demonstrated here, seems compatible with assessments of his character. He was apt to act as a ‘*grand seigneur*’, who saw the firmly professional CUP as beneath him, and disliked the sometimes grubby realities of politics at Constantinople.⁶¹⁷ In 1909 he found him further disillusioned. In February, he complained to Sir John Eldon Gorst, Consul General in Egypt, that despite 90% of the country being against them, the CUP had won the support of 95% of the Turkish Parliament. Although the truth of these figures may be doubted,⁶¹⁸ Lowther himself had little doubt how they had been achieved – with the aid of ‘threats and revolvers’. He concluded that it was not a ‘happy state of affairs’.⁶¹⁹ His discomfort remained. In March, he ‘hardly knew what to tell’ of the situation, except that it was ‘bad’, and that the only surprise was that it ‘did not get any worse’. He feared that despite the committee’s protestations that they merely hoped to develop a parliamentary system, they hoped to dominate Turkish politics and ‘get all the billets filled by their own men’. Although he still cherished ‘hopes’ that things would get better, he admitted to feeling discouraged.⁶²⁰ By the end of the month, encouragement seemed in short supply. ‘No one I see has much hope for the future unless the Committee goes and I do not believe in the likelihood of that’, he told Hardinge, adding that the best he could

⁶¹⁵ Lowther to Grey, Confidential, No. 541, 2 Sep. 1908, FO 371/559/31787.

⁶¹⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 670, 14 Oct. 1908, FO 371/560/36131.

⁶¹⁷ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 316. Otte notes that by 1912, Lowther was widely considered to have been a failure at Constantinople, and ‘rather a dull dog’. Geoffrey Miller too criticised Lowther’s inflexibility and his distaste for the Young Turks: Miller, *Straits*, ch. 4. Ahmad also highlighted Lowther’s disdain for the Young Turks: Ahmad, ‘Britain’s relations with the Young Turks’, p. 310.

⁶¹⁸ A possible explanation for this may come from Feroz Ahmad, who suggested that in the wake of the fall of Kâmil in early February, the opposition in Turkey courted him, informing him that 80% of the country was against the CUP: *id.*, ‘Britain’s relations with the Young Turks’, p. 312.

⁶¹⁹ Lowther to Gorst, Private, 26 Feb. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 64.

⁶²⁰ Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 10 Mar. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 70.

hope for was that the worst elements of the CUP would be weeded out, with the better becoming a part of the Government proper. Lowther's concern about the unofficial nature of Committee governance was very real,⁶²¹ but he comforted himself with the belief that even the 'worst elements of the Committee' felt that they 'must lean' on Britain. Turning boastful, he added that

in spite of some unpleasant remarks on the part of the violent papers our position remains the same. Indeed, I am on the best of terms with many members of the committee and have kept my disapproval of their methods to myself, but they are common folk, and they have consciences and know that they are disapproved of by all respectable members of society.⁶²²

In March, Hardinge had declared himself unaffected by the general gloom. He was not, he said, so 'despondent of the future as Mr Tilley', but he was already deeply concerned by the shape events in Turkey were taking.⁶²³ He professed himself 'entirely [to] share' Lowther's views on the Committee, and thought it 'desirable' that it disappear in the near future, lest they become a new 'Palace Camarilla'.⁶²⁴ Naturally, the fall of the Kâmil government caused him disquiet. The Foreign Office was 'not very happy' about the turn of events, and Hardinge feared that matters were 'gradually tending to a military despotism of a nationalist and chauvinist character', an eventuality to which he was not entirely opposed, if it reduced the Committee's influence.⁶²⁵

4.2. Divergences of view between Lowther and London

Hardinge was supportive of Lowther in private, even going so far as to tell him in February that the Foreign Office was 'quite satisfied with the way in which... [he was

⁶²¹ The committee was not, officially, a part of the Government, but exercised a strong influence. See: Shaw, Stanford J.; Shaw, Ezel Kural, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume II* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 274. Lowther believed that the Government was 'not allowed to act without the dictation of the Committee' (Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 31 Mar. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 80.)

⁶²² Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 31 Mar. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 80.

⁶²³ Tilley Memorandum, 1 Mar 09, FO 371/770/13516, Hardinge Minute.

⁶²⁴ Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 29 Dec. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 43.

⁶²⁵ Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 23 Feb. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 60; Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 6 Apr. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 84.

running affairs] in Constantinople, and everybody seems pleased.’⁶²⁶ His colleagues in London, on the other hand, had grown increasingly frustrated with him, even before the Bosnian Crisis had broken out. By November 1908, the wheels were in motion for the selection of a British Admiral to go to Constantinople to begin the task of rebuilding the Turkish Navy. The Turks having made tentative contact, the Foreign Office was frustrated by Lowther’s lack of energy in pressing the matter. Tilley urged that he ‘should be told to arrange that’ any officer, not necessarily an Admiral, ‘shall be accepted at once’. Maxwell agreed, hoping that it would be made clear to the Turks that Britain was ‘willing and anxious’ to provide an officer of any rank. Hardinge was disappointed to find that ‘Lowther... [was] not helpful in suggestions’.⁶²⁷ Later on, Tilley reflected that it was ‘extraordinary’ that Lowther had sat and listened to the ‘grotesque’ schemes of the Turkish Minister of Marine without making ‘any sort of reply’, and compared him to Lord Raglan, of Crimean fame, who had allowed a French commander to talk him into making a tactical error which resulted in a heavy defeat.⁶²⁸ Lowther’s taciturnity further frustrated the Foreign Office when it became clear that the German firm Krupp was winning arms contracts with the Turkish Government after a tendering process which appeared unfair. Tilley considered Lowther’s reporting on the case to be unhelpful as he had neglected to add any of his own comments to the despatch. Mallet, reading between the lines, felt that the greater sin was Lowther’s failure to say more to the Turks about the unfairness of the tender.⁶²⁹ Other matters brought a similar response. For instance, a report on conditions

⁶²⁶ Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 23 Feb. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 60. It would be remiss not to mention that Lowther had been a Hardinge appointment, and something of a surprise at that. It would seem only reasonable that Hardinge would wish to support his man, particularly in the context of what Otte calls an ‘uninspired’ set of appointments in 1908: See Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p. 315.

⁶²⁷ Tilley minute, Lowther to Grey, Tel., No. 397, 19 Apr 1908, FO 371/559/40474; Maxwell and Hardinge minutes.

⁶²⁸ Tilley minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 790, 21 Nov. 1908, FO 371/559/41688.

⁶²⁹ Tilley minute, Lowther to Grey, Confidential, No. 845, 8 Dec. 1908, FO 371/560/43482; Mallet minute.

in Baghdad garnered the complaint that ‘Lowther as usual makes no comment’ – not only to the Foreign Office but also to the Consul in question, who deserved a response.⁶³⁰

The Bosnian Crisis would make these tensions worse. Lowther’s failure to transmit information in a timely manner would be criticised during the Counter-Revolution, but this was already cause for comment in January. He had reported by despatch, rather than by telegram, that military stores were being transported to Adrianople (now Edirne), near the border with Bulgaria. Mallet complained that Lowther ought to have telegraphed this, as it justified the recent Bulgarian mobilisation, and the British Government’s ignorance of this had put them in an awkward position. Hardinge, who was supportive of Lowther in private, also became more critical:

I think this should have been sent to us by telegraph. Ignorance of facts such as these places us in a false position in our commu[nication]s with other Powers. On a previous occasion when the Turks were making Mil[itar]y preparations Sir G. Lowther gave us no information until they were completed. I think he should be warned against this.⁶³¹

Disappointment with Lowther would intensify later on during the crisis. Lowther was far from happy at the Russian financial proposal of February 1909, and complained that it had come at a time when the ‘clouds seemed to be clearing away’, and had done nothing but arouse suspicions in all quarters. He added that he feared he would be unable to produce convincing arguments in favour of its acceptance.⁶³² As this letter made its way to London, its author was unaware that a ‘private and friendly hint’ from Hardinge was travelling in the opposite direction. He informed Lowther that his despatches had prompted ‘remarks’ in the Foreign Office, as a result of his neglecting to report the lines of argument he used in discussion with Turkish leaders, and suggested that he report in a fuller manner in future. Although couched in careful terms, with references to the ‘good

⁶³⁰ Tilley minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 796, 23 Nov. 1908, FO 371/560/41694.

⁶³¹ Mallet and Hardinge minutes, Lowther to Grey, No. 37, 19 Jan. 1909, FO 371/748/3124.

⁶³² Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 3 Feb. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 51.

and effective spadework' being done by Lowther, and entreaties for him to consider this in his own self-interest, this rebuke speaks volumes about how the Foreign Office saw the ambassador settling in at Constantinople. Hardinge also took the opportunity to express his opinion that the Turks were living in a 'fool's paradise at Constantinople', if they seriously thought to reject the Russian proposal, further underlining the divergence of views between Lowther and his chiefs. ⁶³³ Lowther remarked that in the confusion which reigned on the Bosphorus, he thought that neither his French, Russia nor German Colleagues enjoyed the full confidence of their respective foreign ministries. It would not have been unreasonable to include himself in this undistinguished list. ⁶³⁴ As Lowther mused on the failings of his ambassadorial colleagues, Grey wrote to him, explaining his reasons for supporting the Russian proposal despite the fact that Lowther had 'grudged' it. ⁶³⁵ Lowther's performance as a representative, and his ability to understand British policy, were both in question. The Counter Revolution, coming as it did before the Bosnian Crisis had been concluded only added to the febrile atmosphere, and would again lay bare the divergence between Britain and the occupants of her Constantinople embassy.

4.3. The Counter Revolution of April 1909

The Counter Revolution proved to be a brief interlude in Turkish politics. Reactionary elements in Constantinople succeeded in returning Sultan Abdülhamid to full power, before CUP elements, raising a large force as they went, marched from Salonica (now Thessaloniki) to the capital, regaining their grip on power after some minor skirmishing. In the longer term, the significance lay in the deposition of the Sultan and the

⁶³³ Hardinge to Lowther, Private, 6 Feb 09, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 52.

⁶³⁴ Lowther to Grey, Private, 8 Feb 09, *Ibid.*, no. 54.

⁶³⁵ Grey to Lowther, Private, 8 Feb 09, *Ibid.*, no. 55. Underlining still further the differences in opinion, Hardinge wrote that it was 'absurd' to claim that the clouds had been lifting at the time of the Russian proposal: Hardinge to Lowther, Private, no date 'Sunday', *Ibid.*, no. 61.

tightening of the Committee's grip on power.⁶³⁶ For present purposes, however, the significance lay in Lowther's support for the reactionary forces, which meant that for a while his actions ran counter to stated British policy.

The Foreign Office first became aware that something was afoot in Constantinople on 14 April, when Lowther reported that Kâmil had been appointed Grand Vizier by the Sultan, in response to a military uprising. Alwyn Parker, a junior clerk, met the news with cautious optimism, being of the opinion that his return to power might mean that all would yet 'be well.'⁶³⁷ This was not to last. The arrangements fell through, and Ahmed Tevfik Pasha, Foreign Minister in the previous Kâmil Government, was made Grand Vizier instead, much to the disappointment of Louis Mallet. He thought that Tevfik was a 'cypher', appointed by the Sultan to allow him to govern again.⁶³⁸ Lowther too was no fan of Tevfik, remarking that he was 'not the man' to deal with such a 'dangerous' situation. In a 'hurried scrawl', Lowther gave Hardinge a sense of the chaos at Constantinople. It was 'all very bad', he said, and he worried what this might mean for the future attitude of the Turkish Government. He added that Rifat, recently returned from the Ambassadorship at London, was 'speechless' and had 'no idea' what to do.⁶³⁹ The atmosphere of confusion at Constantinople left officials in London uncertain how to respond.⁶⁴⁰ Suggesting further evidence of Lowther's shortcomings, Parker found that *The Times* provided 'much more' information than Lowther.⁶⁴¹ At this point, Lowther made his first of several requests for British ships to be sent, at first to Beirout, Smyrna and Salonica, to try and keep matters

⁶³⁶ The Counter Revolution saw the CUP gain almost absolute power, as Abdülhamid was replaced with his brother, Sultan Mehmed V, who was a mere puppet. As G.R. Berridge demonstrated, Turkey was now practically a military dictatorship: *id.*, *Gerald Fitzmaurice*, p. 137.

⁶³⁷ Lowther to Grey, No. 108, Tel., 13 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/13942; Parker Minute.

⁶³⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 109, Tel., 14 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14033; Mallet Minute.

⁶³⁹ Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 14 Apr. 1909, FO 800/192. Lowther, although he later appeared to favour the reactionaries, at least when the alternative was Committee domination, thought that 'we must look in the future for a violently chauvinistic attitude'.

⁶⁴⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 109, Tel., 14 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14033, Cocks Minute.

⁶⁴¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 112, Tel., 14 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14049, Parker Minute: 'all this & much more is in the "Times"'.

calm. These requests would take on greater importance later, as Lowther tried to dissuade the CUP from taking back power forcibly. At this juncture, the Foreign Office was supportive of the request. Mallet had heard from Sir Adam Block, British representative on the Ottoman Debt Council, that violence seemed likely in the areas around Smyrna (today Izmir), and that British ships might help to pacify the situation in the provinces. Accordingly, a squadron was held in readiness to sail to Smyrna, if required.⁶⁴² Lowther took the moment to take stock and pen his report. He reflected:

It is premature to forecast the ultimate results of the events of the last twenty-four hours, but on main lines it is a distinct defeat for the Committee of Union and Progress and their ultra-liberal ideas, for which the country as a whole is not ripe. It also means a restoration of the Sultan and Caliph's prestige and authority, which the Committee of Union and Progress had practically annihilated. This will perhaps work for a diminution of the anarchy at present prevailing in the provinces, though the attainment of the result by revolted soldiery and the clergy is somewhat disquieting.

Although this did not reach London for some days, it shed valuable light on Lowther's thought process at the time. He was not unhappy at a defeat for the Committee, especially as it seemed to represent a resurgence for traditional, conservative values. Indeed, his characterisation of the CUP as 'ultra-liberal' spoke volumes. He saw the Sultan's renewed power as a positive, and likely to bring calm to the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁴³

Meanwhile, the new Cabinet and the Sultan declared their intention to adhere to the constitution, and asked for British support for their new regime. Smartly, the vessel for this appeal was Rifat, who had been popular in London during his Ambassadorship.⁶⁴⁴

Grey privately indicated to him, that evening, that he was satisfied to learn that he had retained control of the foreign affairs portfolio in the recent changes.⁶⁴⁵ Rifat, in delivering

⁶⁴² Lowther to Grey, No. 111, Tel., 14 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14035; Mallet minute.

⁶⁴³ Lowther to Grey, No. 264, 14 Apr 09, FO 371/770/14544.

⁶⁴⁴ Grey informed Lowther that 'Rifaat was a great success and I am very sorry to lose him.': Grey to Lowther, Private, 8 Mar 09, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 69. Hardinge too, considered him an 'able' man who was too independently minded to put up with the committee for too long: Hardinge to Lowther, private, 23 Feb 09, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 60.

⁶⁴⁵ Grey to Lowther, Private, Tel., 15 Apr 09, FO 800/79.

the message, said that he hoped his government could rely upon the ‘sympathy and goodwill’ of the British Government. After some discussion, the Foreign Office decided that assurances would be given, albeit with caveats. Mallet drafted the reply, which read: ‘We shall continue to extend our hearty sympathy to any Government in Turkey which proves itself zealous in the safeguarding of the public interest and which honestly endeavours to secure a good and just administration and to adopt a policy of reform.’⁶⁴⁶ British support was thus conditionally pledged. The line of policy being followed, though, was clear – Britain would remain aloof, and offer only limited support to any government which seemed capable of offering a genuine chance of progress in Turkey. Although not delighted with the way in which events had transpired in Turkey, it might be said that for Britain, anything was better than the situation as it had been before 1908, and therefore she was keen to support anything which suggested a change.

4.3.a. A divergence in policy

Lowther, meanwhile, was following a slightly different tack. His attachment to the new Government was less conditional, and he took it upon himself to telegraph to Salonica, the hotbed of CUP support in the Empire where the committee had been formed. He reassured the Consul there, Harry Lamb, that all was tranquil in the capital, and that the few casualties incurred had been accidental.⁶⁴⁷ The Committee at Salonica, unhappy with events in Constantinople (where they in fact enjoyed only scant support⁶⁴⁸) demanded the reinstatement of the previous Hilmi ministry, or else the 3rd Army, based at Salonica, would march on the capital. Mallet thought that this ultimatum ‘looked bad’, but there seemed ‘nothing’ Britain could do to prevent the troops from marching. Better then

⁶⁴⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 115, Tel, 15 Apr 09, FO 371/770/14182; Mallet minute.

⁶⁴⁷ Lowther to Salonica Consulate, Tel., 15 Apr. 1909, FO 294/44.

⁶⁴⁸ See Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 133; Berridge, *Dragoman Fitzmaurice*, p. 133; Palmer, Alan, *The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1992), p. 203.

to ‘await events’.⁶⁴⁹ The reactionary Government was less afflicted with such a sense of powerlessness, and called upon the Council of *Ulemas*, the body which represented the Islamic clergy, to declare that the constitution was in accordance with Sharia law and appeal for calm. This being done, Lowther judged that it had had a ‘good and calming effect’.⁶⁵⁰ He was wrong. Lamb reported from Salonica that public opinion there thought that the Sultan had been behind the coup, and that he intended to undo the constitution.⁶⁵¹ This strengthened the CUP’s already strong hand there, and significant numbers of troops were observed leaving Salonica, seemingly intent on joining the march to Constantinople.⁶⁵² In light of this, Lowther again tried to intervene. Telegraphing to Lamb at Salonica, he asserted that the ‘real bearing’ of the ‘present movement’ in Constantinople was against the ‘ultra-liberal and anti-Mahomedan tendencies of Cabinet and prominent Committee men’.⁶⁵³ Not content with playing down the threat of the reactionary uprising to the committee, he took more drastic steps. Another telegram to Lamb gave him explicit instructions to play down the uprising, for the benefit of the Salonica Committee members: ‘As the Committee is apparently stopping government

⁶⁴⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 120, Tel., 16 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14223.

⁶⁵⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 122, Tel. *en clair*, 16 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14318; Lowther to Grey, No. 124, Tel., 16 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14320.

⁶⁵¹ The question of the Sultan’s involvement remains a little unclear. At the time, Lowther seemed convinced that he was not. As early as 19 April, he referenced the rumours swirling around Constantinople, but noted that ‘no actual evidence of guilt is forthcoming’: Lowther to Grey, No. 143, Tel., 19 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14797. After the Committee had returned to power, he conceded that the Sultan might have ‘condoned’ the uprising, but maintained that no evidence had yet come to light which suggested active support: Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 25 Apr. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 88. Later on, he was further convinced, arguing that evidence would have come to light, if it existed, and that the decision of the CUP not to hold an enquiry further suggested that there was little to find. Tefvik, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, was apparently convinced of the Sultan’s innocence: Lowther to Grey, No. 322, Confidential, 5 May 1909, FO 371/772/17613. Shaw and Shaw found that the Sultan did not participate in planning, but that funds and help came from inside the palace, including from one of his sons: Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 280-1. Alan Palmer agreed that the Sultan’s fourth son was involved with conservative groups, and noted rumours of money coming from inside the palace: Palmer, *Decline and Fall*, p. 208. Berridge noted that suspicions that Abdülhamid was involved were symptomatic of the Committee ‘winning the propaganda war’, rather than their being much basis for this: Berridge, *Dragoman Fitzmaurice*, p. 135. Altogether, it seems that Abdülhamid was not directly involved in the planning of the uprising, although there can be little doubt that he took full advantage once it began.

⁶⁵² Lowther to Grey, No. 124, Tel., 16 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14320.

⁶⁵³ Lowther to Salonica Consulate, two Tels., FO 294/44.

Telegrams, it would be well that you should discreetly and unofficially suggest to the malcontents to agree to send a small deputation to Constantinople to assure themselves that the constitution is not in danger.’⁶⁵⁴ Having tried to use Lamb to dissuade the Salonica committee from action, Lowther requested that British ships be sent to calm matters. Repeating his belief that, in Macedonia, the CUP was spreading the story that the constitution was threatened, he informed London that ‘several prominent Turks’ had told him that Turkey would lose her confidence in Britain if ships were not sent. Mallet was against such a proceeding, arguing that the sending of ships could be misconstrued as intervention. His chief, Grey, saw the merits of this argument. He also worried that it might appear as though Britain hoped to gain something out of the troubles for herself, and that such an action might therefore provoke similar actions from other Powers. He decided that such risks should be run only if British subjects were in danger.⁶⁵⁵ Lowther would be presented with a further opportunity to try and put the brakes on the CUP, whose forces had now reached the outskirts of Constantinople. Although massed outside the city walls, the troops had agreed to remain there, unless attacked. The Turkish Government requested that Gerald Fitzmaurice,⁶⁵⁶ the influential and controversial first dragoman, join a deputation of religious figures and members of Parliament seeking to persuade the troops that there was no danger and that they should disperse. According to Lowther’s telegram, Fitzmaurice was seen as something of a trump card by the reactionary Government:

[The] Turkish Government believe that an independent authority, especially English, is more likely to influence these men than anything they can say. I am fully aware of the danger of our immixtion [*sic*] in internal politics, but Rifaat Pasha assured me that it was [the] unanimous wish of [the] Cabinet that this effort should

⁶⁵⁴ Lowther to Salonica Consulate, Tel., FO 294/44.

⁶⁵⁵ Lowther to Grey, No. 127, Tel., 17 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14471; Mallet and Grey minutes.

⁶⁵⁶ Fitzmaurice was influential, as one of the most experienced men at the Constantinople Embassy, and in a position of significant power as first Dragoman. However, he was personally opposed to the CUP, and believed it to be dominated by what he saw as the malign influence of Freemasons and Jews. For more, see Berridge, *Dragoman Fitzmaurice*.

be made to save the situation, which was fraught with danger not only to Turkey but to the whole of Europe.⁶⁵⁷

Although Fitzmaurice's assistance was eventually rejected by the Government, Lowther's action was significant. In allowing him to act, along with requesting a ship and playing down the situation in his communications with the Salonica Consulate, his policy regarding the counter-revolution had diverged from that of London, however subtly.

4.3.b. A march on Constantinople

The crisis in Turkey continued to worsen. On 19 April, Lowther reported that the number of men massed outside the city walls had again increased. He estimated their number at 10,000, and reckoned that this could double within a day. To combat this, the Government had sent some of their own troops outside the walls to camp, in the hope that some kind of 'joint feeling' might spring up and convince those loyal to the CUP to disperse. Lowther took this opportunity again to press London to send ships, as there was 'naturally some danger of a collision between the two forces.' Given that there seemed a real prospect of conflict, Hardinge and Mallet agreed that a naval force be sent to Lemnos.⁶⁵⁸ Although ships had already been sent to the general area, this was the first time during the period of tumult that there had been a British naval presence so close to Constantinople.⁶⁵⁹ As the uncertainty dragged on, thoughts in London turned towards the fall-out from Bosnian Crisis. Before their respective removals, neither the Hilmi nor the Kâmil Governments had ratified the Turco-Bulgarian agreement which would officially bring to a close that aspect of the question. Alwyn Parker, a junior clerk, voiced his hope that events in Turkey would not delay the ratification of the protocol. He suggested that

⁶⁵⁷ Lowther to Grey, No. 129, Tel., 17 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14474.

⁶⁵⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 139, Tel., 19 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14560; Mallet and Hardinge minutes.

⁶⁵⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 138, Tel., 18 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14604; Admiralty to Grey, 19 Apr 09, FO 371/770/14723.

Britain might be able to use Lamb or Lowther to ‘influence the committee on the subject’ in some way. His more senior colleagues rejected such interference as futile at best or inappropriate at worst.⁶⁶⁰

The British Government thus resolved to wait matters out. The uncertainty of the situation provided fertile ground for rumours. One such rumour, which gained some traction in the confused days before Committee troops entered the city, was that the Turkish navy might fire on foreign embassies in order to cause further complications and force a solution. In a revealing aside, Parker was sceptical: it was ‘doubtful whether the guns would go off’.⁶⁶¹ This eventuality would not come to pass. Admiral Douglas Gamble, the British officer loaned to the Turkish Navy, took the fleet out to sea, away from temptation.⁶⁶² On dry land, the CUP entered the city, sweeping away the reactionary Government, much to Lowther’s despair. Writing while his ‘blood was still hot’, he told Hardinge that he found the events ‘nauseating’, and gave a one-sided account of events, taking great pains to emphasise the superiority of the CUP’s forces, and the apparently excessive force which they had used. He remained convinced that the ‘so-called reactionary movement could have been dealt with in a milder and more satisfactory manner’, but the ‘Young Gentlemen’ were determined to put their own stamp on proceedings.⁶⁶³ A period of time to allow his blood to cool found Lowther in a more reflective mood, if no better disposed towards the CUP. He was not, he said two days later, ‘favourably impressed with the appearance of the guardians of public security’, in part because ‘in many cases the patrols included Albanians and Bulgars of the wildest types’, but he was forced to ‘confess that there... [had] been nothing to complain of in their

⁶⁶⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 143, Tel., 19 Apr. 1909, FO 371/770/14797; Parker, Mallet and Hardinge minutes.

⁶⁶¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 147, Tel., 20 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/14916; Parker Minute.

⁶⁶² Lowther to Grey, No. 152, Tel., 22 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/15074.

⁶⁶³ Lowther to Hardinge, Private, 25 Apr. 1909, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, no. 88.

conduct so far.’ The better than expected behaviour of the troops had not calmed Lowther’s fears for the future. He noted that ‘younger men and irresponsible hot-heads’ were calling for the Sultan’s deposition, and he thought that the National Assembly was ‘very hostile’ to the Sultan too. ⁶⁶⁴ In this, at least, Lowther proved to be an astute observer, and the Sultan was removed on 27 April, replaced by his otherworldly brother, crowned Mehmed V. This development caused disquiet in London; Hardinge fretted about the matter of protocol and in the end it was decided that a simple acknowledgement would suffice. ⁶⁶⁵ The Ex-Sultan, his days of absolutism now firmly behind him, was conveyed to exile in Salonica, ‘accompanied by two sons and eleven ladies’. ⁶⁶⁶ Lowther suggested that ‘Right-minded Moslems’ thought his treatment to have been unjust, and reported the rumour that the Sheik-ul-Islam, the foremost spiritual authority in the Ottoman Empire, had refused to issue a *fatwa* stating that the Sultan had broken his oath to the constitution, and had consented only to say that it was legal, under Islamic law, to remove the Sultan or invite him to abdicate. ⁶⁶⁷

Having had more leisure to reflect upon the deposition of the Sultan and the position of Britain with the new Government, Grey indicated to the Turkish Chargé his favourable impressions of the way in which order had been restored and civil interests protected. To drive home the point, he added that he hoped Britain could rely on good government and justice winning out in the Ottoman Empire. Lowther was instructed to make similar comments at the Porte, rather, one might well speculate, to his dismay. ⁶⁶⁸

4.3.c. A period of reflection

⁶⁶⁴ Lowther to Grey, No. 303, 28 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/16537. The ‘National Assembly’ here referred to was a sort of rump Parliament, made up of those members who had retreated to San Stefano during the recent uprising.

⁶⁶⁵ Communication made by Turkish Charge d’Affaires at Foreign Office, 27 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/15929; Hardinge minute.

⁶⁶⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 173, Tel., 28 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/16053.

⁶⁶⁷ Lowther to Grey, No. 171, Tel., 27 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/15930.

⁶⁶⁸ Grey to Lowther, No. 288, Tel., 288, 29 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/16324.

The speed of events, and the subsequent confusion which reigned at Constantinople, meant that the attempted counter-coup had a lengthy afterlife in correspondence between London and the Embassy, as the meaning of the events was digested. This process began even before the crisis reached its *denouement*, when Lowther made his report on the revolt, attempting to justify those actions he had taken which ran counter to the stated British policy of conditional support for the new Government. After a lengthy treatment of events, during which he cast doubt on various CUP assertions and praised the conduct of rebel troops, he turned to his telegrams to Salonica. These had been sent, he said, in the light of 'barefaced distortions' sent by the CUP to the provinces. Although he had hoped that he would be able to distribute his own version of events via British consuls, he conceded that it had done little good. Lowther also defended giving Fitzmaurice permission to join the deputation sent to parley with the CUP forces camped outside Constantinople. Although anxious to avoid official interference in the internal affairs of Turkey, he claimed that a 'collision' seemed likely, and that Fitzmaurice's presence was meant to avoid it.⁶⁶⁹ Lowther then turned to the initial causes of the revolt. He proclaimed the Sultan blameless, and instead pointed the finger of blame at 'bigoted mussalmans'. Pessimistically, he added that the incident was a 'bad omen' for the future of Turkey, if it suggested that party rivalries would have to be solved by the army.⁶⁷⁰ In London the fast and decisive intervention by the CUP, in response to the threatened loss of their influence in the capital, elicited admiration. Maxwell remarked that the Young Turks had acted with 'remarkable foresight... [and] promptitude', and also found much to praise in the 'discipline of the Salonica troops'.⁶⁷¹ Indeed, the Foreign Office as a whole were rather less inclined to gloom than Lowther. Commenting on a discussion of the Sultan's

⁶⁶⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 287, 20 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/15582.

⁶⁷⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 291, 21 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/15586.

⁶⁷¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 305, 18 Apr. 1909, FO 371/771/16539; Lowther to Grey, No. 307, 28 Apr 09, FO 371/771/16841, Maxwell minute.

culpability, Hardinge remarked that this was a matter of purely 'historical interest'; of 'real interest' was the fact that he had been dethroned, which he 'richly merited'. As for Lowther, he noted that he seemed 'depressed by what... [had] taken place', and added that he would like to see 'signs in him of a more hopeful spirit.'⁶⁷² Grey did not take so sanguine a view. Following the conclusion of the counter-coup, he sent Lowther a lengthy private letter, gently rebuking him for his conduct. He began in a sympathetic tone, discussing recent events. He said that he felt no sympathy for Abdülhamid, and expressed his doubts about whether the Turks would be able to 'put things right'. Grey then moved to discuss Lowther's views, noting that he saw he had become 'pessimistic', and admitting that he had become so too, but that he 'could not help but be impressed by the decision, purpose, discipline, and strength which have characterised the leaders of the Army now in power.' He thought it was 'clear' that Britain had 'greatly under-estimated the strength of the force at the disposal of the committee.' He conceded, too, that he did not like the fact that the CUP remained a shadowy body, and that they had made plenty of mistakes. It was though, he said, clear to him that 'the best elements' in Turkey were on the side of the Young Turks, and that Britain must back those elements. Grey thought that Britain had been too critical of the CUP. Recent events had shown that they had 'real stuff' in them, and they should therefore be supported. Besides, there seemed to be little choice: 'Whether the chance of really permanent reform is great or small, we must back the chance as long as it exists, and I should like you to do everything in your power to keep in touch with the best men and to retain their confidence.' Signing off, he delivered a final rebuke, arguing that Britain needed to be on 'the side on which there is hope for Turkey'.⁶⁷³

Although couched in careful terms, Grey's letter was clear evidence that the Foreign Secretary was aware of Lowther's deviations from official policy, and that he was

⁶⁷² Lowther to Grey, No. 322, Confidential, 5 May. 1909, FO 371/772/17613, Hardinge minute.

⁶⁷³ Grey to Lowther, Private, 30 Apr. 1909, Grey MSS FO 800/79.

determined to bring him back into line. Lowther remained gloomy. He even regretted that Turkey was not under a military dictatorship. On the news that the Army was to keep the money confiscated from the ex-Sultan, he remarked that this did ‘not sound very constitutional but [was] perhaps prudent’. He did not want to be ‘a pessimist but... [he feared] that we have many troubles before us.’⁶⁷⁴ Indeed, his views on the committee did not undergo much change. The counter revolution had taken place, he said, because of the actions of the CUP who had ‘jerrymander[ed]’ the elections and dominated Parliament from the shadows. Having thus provoked the coup, they used it as an excuse to remove the Sultan and establish their own ‘salutary despotism’. He complained about having to go behind the backs of the Government to deal with the real power in Turkey, and thought that ‘in itself the Committee... [was] not a great positive material force.’⁶⁷⁵ In this case, time did not prove a healer. Almost a year later, in his annual report for 1909, Lowther devoted significant space to a discussion of the strong Jewish elements within the CUP, going as far as to suggest that the Committee was dominated by Zionists. Although it is likely that Fitzmaurice, who has been shown to have held strongly antisemitic views, had a hand in drafting this section, the fact of its appearing in the final report is evidence enough that Lowther did not dispute this. Indeed, he went on to complain that the ‘net result’ of the year had been nothing, and that equality, ‘so much spoken of in the early days of the revolution, remains a dead letter’. Worse, a ‘violent nationalist feeling’ had ‘permeated all ranks, amounting often to a violent chauvinism’.⁶⁷⁶ It is this view which has generally come to be remembered. In his memoirs, Hardinge suggested that the counter-coup was a largely positive event, insofar as it removed the Sultan, but argued that in the aftermath, Turkey was left in the hands of a ‘corrupt committee’ made up of Jews. Later scholarly

⁶⁷⁴ Lowther to Grey, Private, 5 May. 1909, Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Lowther to Grey, Private, 12 May 1909, Grey MSS, FO 800/79.

⁶⁷⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 55, 31 Jan 09, FO 371/1002/4235.

assessments also have emphasised that the counter-revolution had set a dangerous precedent in heightening the role of the Army in politics.⁶⁷⁷

4.4. A Constantinople Coup

The Turkish counter-coup revealed a significant divergence in thought and action between the Foreign Office and the embassy. The events of March-April 1909 changed British views of the Turkish regime. After the revolution of 1908, British attitudes towards the new leadership were largely positive, and there was a distinct sense of future possibilities in Foreign Office assessments of Ottoman affairs. This was reflected in the indulgent stance adopted in the early stages of the Bosnian crisis. As has been shown, British patience had been much tried by the spring of 1909, and it rather seemed as though the scales were beginning to fall from British eyes, as was demonstrated by the increasing irritation at what appeared to be Turkish prevarication.

Despite this, British policy remained supportive of the Young Turk regime. It was, after all, better than what had gone before, being less in hock with German interests and not reliant on the Sultan's elaborate and extensive system of spies. The coup did not change London's attitude. Almost as soon as possible, Grey declared support for the reactionary Government. Upon their overthrow, British support was again pledged to the CUP. This revealed that Britain was not committed any specific type of regime as might be expected from the protestations of Young Turk enthusiasm, both in Turkey and Great Britain, that had broken out in 1908.

⁶⁷⁷ Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy*, p. 175. Berridge discussed the question of Jewish and Freemason involvement in the CUP in depth. It seems that whilst Jews and Freemasons were perhaps over-represented in the CUP, and the CUP used the apparatus of freemasonry to keep itself secret in its early years, there is little to suggest that they had any special power: Berridge, *Dragoman Fitzmaurice*, p. 151. It has also been noted that following the revolution, Fitzmaurice was widely blamed in Turkey for helping the reactionaries, by extension damaging the position of Britain in Turkey. Indeed, it seems that whether or not this was the case, the fact of his being blamed was what caused the damage, see: Ahmad, *Young Turks*, pp. 45-6. G.R. Berridge, an expert on Fitzmaurice, wrote that he was widely blamed on the British side for having 'backed the wrong horse', and this damaged his career, and his credibility in Turkey.

Sir Gerard Lowther and his staff at Constantinople, perhaps inevitably, were more interested in the minutiae of Turkish politics. Indeed, the ambassador took active steps against official policy in April 1909. That is not to say, as has been suggested, that the embassy was in some way involved in actually bringing about the coup in the first place. There is no evidence to suggest this was the case, and that consequently it either did not happen or Lowther went to ‘great pains’ to cover his tracks.⁶⁷⁸ If anything, the rushed and incoherent nature of Lowther’s reports rather suggests he and his staff were caught by surprise. This story, indeed, may well have had its roots in anti-British sentiments at Constantinople in the years afterwards. Indeed, what is of more significance for the position of Britain in Turkey, as ever, was that people thought that it had happened. Although the embassy was not likely to have been behind the coup, it certainly did intervene in it once it had begun. Lowther took three active steps in favour of the reactionary Government. Firstly, in repeatedly requesting ships, he hoped to discourage violent resistance. Secondly, in allowing Fitzmaurice, a figure well known and well connected in pre-revolutionary Constantinople, to throw his weight on the side of reaction, he sought to prevent the CUP from entering the city, where it seemed inevitable that they would prevail. Finally, and perhaps most drastically, in telegraphing to Salonica, he tried to prevent troops from marching to Constantinople in the first place. All of these marked deliberate actions against the CUP, and ran counter to stated British policy of supporting any Government which at the least paid lip service to development and good government.

Ironically, the coup simultaneously weakened and strengthened British faith in Turkey. The coup suggested that Turkey was an unreliable partner, thus deepening the impressions already formed during the Bosnian incident. However, as Grey’s letters to Lowther demonstrated, the coup, and the efficient manner in which it was disposed of, had

⁶⁷⁸ Ahmad, ‘Great Britain and the Young Turks’, p. 312.

impressed him. The Foreign Office had concluded that the CUP were the right horse to back, and that they presented the best chance of Turkey being effectively modernised. However, their faith that Turkey could be effectively reformed was hit, and much of the optimism of the previous year had evaporated.

5. The Railway, and other Commercial Questions

5.a. From Berlin to Baghdad

In 1909, Louis Mallet reflected that Turkey would always lean upon the ‘strongest Powers’ and that for this reason, it was not worth Britain’s while making ‘great sacrifice[s]’ to improve relations with Turkey. More senior policymakers agreed. Sir Charles Hardinge thought that Britain must not ‘sacrifice’ her interests in search of ‘ephemeral’ ‘Turkish Friendship’. Grey thought that the ‘test’ of Turkish attitudes would come when Britain asked for ‘some concession on an honest basis’. Only then would British policymakers know if the Turkish regime now tried to act in an even-handed way.⁶⁷⁹ These statements, coming soon after the Counter-Revolution, proved prophetic. Throughout the period 1908-1914, British policymakers remained cautious in their approach to commercial matters in Turkey. Before the revolution in 1908, Britain had been singularly unsuccessful in the Ottoman commercial sphere. As Fitzmaurice complained in 1908, commercial success had been largely dependent on personal success with the Sultan.⁶⁸⁰ Indeed, before the revolution, there were no published accounts for the Empire, instead published as the personal accounts of the Sultan. As Britain had generally been unwilling to overlook the Macedonian situation or the abuses of the Sultan’s system of government, she found herself, by 1908, a long way behind other Powers, especially Germany.⁶⁸¹ This mattered, as several scholars have pointed out, because Egypt, still notionally an Ottoman possession, had become the focus of British policy and strategy, supplanting the previous dominance of the Straits. India, too, was a key interest for Britain, which meant that in strategic terms Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf were also key to British strategy. These areas, too, were

⁶⁷⁹ Mallet, Hardinge and Grey minutes, Bertie to Grey, no. 63, Tel., 19 Apr. 09, FO 371/757/14840.

⁶⁸⁰ Fitzmaurice to Tyrell, Private, 12 Apr 09, *BD v*, no. 196

⁶⁸¹ Platt, D.C.M., *Finance, Trade, and Politics*, pp 187-8.

largely under the more or less nominal control of the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁸² Unsurprisingly, they were the focus of British commercial policy in the Ottoman Empire, and commercial interests were used as the fundamental language of British strategy.⁶⁸³ For an avowedly 'free trade' state such as Britain, 'commercial policy' was difficult, and meant that she had few economic levers to influence other countries. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, however, she had more power, on account of the capitulations and the level of control which she and other Powers had forced the Ottoman Government to give up over fiscal policy.⁶⁸⁴ With such clear strategic aims, and such clear methods available to deal with them, the various commercial questions which faced Britain in this period were in a large part interconnected, and were dealt with as a whole during negotiations with Turks in 1913.

The first major commercial matter in this period proved to be the 1910 loans issue, when an abortive attempt on the part of Britain to work in conjunction with France resulted in disaster, as the loan was offered by Germany. After this, attention turned to the central commercial issue of the period: the Berlin to Baghdad Railway. This project, which had in 1903 marked the zenith of Turco-German economic collaboration, was the preeminent threat to Britain by 1909. By 1913, after extensive negotiation, Britain was able to come to a solution with Germany and Turkey which left her in a far stronger position. She had used the Ottoman desire to increase customs rates (which required Great Power consent) to negotiate with the Turks, and negotiations had also involved the concession for river traffic on the Euphrates and Tigris (which competed with the Railway) being renegotiated. Furthermore, Britain had made arrangements with the Sheik of Kuwait which went further towards protecting her vital interests in the Persian Gulf, and

⁶⁸² See Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire*, p. 2; Platt, *Finance, Trade, And Politics*, pp. 182-4; Kent, 'Great Britain and the End of the Ottoman Empire' p. 171.

⁶⁸³ Platt, *Finance, Trade, and Politics*, pp. 177-8.

⁶⁸⁴ See Platt on the Capitulations, Platt, *Finance, Trade and Politics*, p. 196.

which offered a degree of protection against the land routes to India being dominated by foreign Powers. Finally, this period saw extensive negotiations on oil concessions, and saw the Foreign Office helping the British Armstrong Vickers group to secure a contract to build dreadnought class battleships for the Turkish Navy.

By the end of the period, it was clear that although Britain was keen to help Turkey (and moreover improve her own position), she was not willing to jeopardise her own interests and standing relative to other Powers to do so. Nevertheless, by 1913, the Foreign Office had negotiated a position for Britain that was far superior to any that she had had for some time. The threat of the Baghdad Railway had largely been negated, and relations with Germany had thawed as a partial result.⁶⁸⁵ Furthermore, she seemed likely to achieve a reasonable degree of control of the Mesopotamian Oilfields, and Turkish warships were being built in British yards. All this had been achieved despite (or perhaps caused) the deterioration in the political relationship between the Young Turks and the British Government.⁶⁸⁶

5.b. 1910 Loan Question

As soon as the dust had begun to settle from the Young Turk revolution, British policymakers were aware that the new Government would need money for reforms, and that it would need to take out loans to achieve this. Britain had been willing to help the Turks, contrary to usual practice, to meet their immediate needs, but it became clear that

⁶⁸⁵ For the importance of railways in this period see Neilson, Keith, and Otte, T.G., ‘Railpolitick’: An Introduction’, in *id.*, *Railways and International Politics: Paths of Empire, 1848-1945* (London, 2006) pp. 1-20. On the Berlin to Baghdad Railway, see McMurray, Jonathon S., *Distant Ties: Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and the Construction of the Baghdad Railway* (Westport, 2001); Özyüksel, Murat, *The Berlin-Baghdad Railway and the Ottoman Empire: Industrialization, Imperial Germany and the Middle East* (London, 2016); For a recent discussion of the ways in which oil concessions and railway concessions were intrinsically linked, see Ediger, Volkan Ş; Bowlus, John V., ‘Greasing the wheels: the Berlin-Baghdad railway and Ottoman oil, 1888–1907’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 56(2), 2020, pp. 193-206. For a discussion of the Railway in British policy see Cohen, Stuart A., ‘Sir Arthur Nicolson and Russia: The Case of the Baghdad Railway’ *The Historical Journal*, 18(4), 1975, pp. 863-872.

⁶⁸⁶ Marian Kent explained the strong position of Britain in 1913: *id.*, *Oil and Empire*, p. 11.

more significant funds would be required.⁶⁸⁷ Towards the end of 1909, there was an increasing sense that it might be in Britain's interests to help the Turks find money on a reasonable basis. In September, Sir Adam Block, British representative on the Ottoman debt council and former dragoman, suggested that Britain might take advantage of the Turkish need for money by offering a loan on good terms, perhaps almost foregoing profit, which could then be used as leverage to extract concessions on the Berlin to Baghdad Railway.⁶⁸⁸ Sir Charles Hardinge recognised that the Turkish priority was to 'get money'.⁶⁸⁹ Although British policy in this period was generally against becoming involved in the decisions of financiers, Grey told Sir Henry Babington Smith, a director of the largely British National Bank of Turkey, that for 'political reasons' he 'should gladly see cooperation between British and French finance, if it could be on equal terms'.⁶⁹⁰ The Foreign Office could not rely upon the patriotism of the financial sector, however, as Alwyn Parker was aware: he doubted if 'gratitude' was the 'return most desired by Sir E[rnest]. Cassel', the Prussian-born British banker.⁶⁹¹ As the loan issue began to take shape, Block warned that should the Turks fail to secure a loan floated on the Paris market, then the prestige of both Britain and France would suffer, and the Turks would begin to feel that the Powers of the triple alliance offered them better prospects in the future.⁶⁹² This being so, the next few months would see Grey working closely in conjunction with Sir Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador at Paris, to cooperate with the French Government for mutual benefit and to reduce the threat of Germany returning to her pre-revolutionary position.⁶⁹³ By May 1910, both the British and French foreign ministries were in

⁶⁸⁷ Platt, *Finance, Trade, and Politics*, pp. 73-6.

⁶⁸⁸ Block to Hardinge, 14 Sep. 1909, FO 371/263/34938.

⁶⁸⁹ Hardinge Minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 742, 14 Sep. 1909, FO 371/763/35007.

⁶⁹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation with Sir Edgar Speyer, 5 Jan. 1911, FO 371/1235/977; Cassel to Hardinge, 17 Sep 1909, FO 371/763/34939.

⁶⁹¹ Parker Minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 820, 5 Oct. 1909 FO 371/763/37545.

⁶⁹² Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 35-6

⁶⁹³ Platt, *Finance, Trade and Politics*, pp. 194-5.

agreement that Turkey would struggle to get any loan if she continued her ‘reckless’ spending.⁶⁹⁴ By June, Hardinge was complaining that the Turkish financial situation had become ‘deplorable’. Lowther reported that ‘the need for money... [was] growing acute’, in part because of the Turkish tendency to ‘waste’ what money they did have on the Army. Although the Finance Minister was on the point of departing for Paris to try and conclude a loan, Lowther worried that the French might delay negotiations, to increase the needs of the Turks, allowing the French to extract more concessions.⁶⁹⁵

Initially, it seemed that Lowther’s gloomy predictions had been too negative. By the end of August, Mehmet Cavit Bey, the Ottoman Finance Minister, was able to agree a loan for £T10,000,000, to be offered to investors in October. Louis Mallet, however, did not think that it would be so easy, and wondered what the French would ask for in the shape of a *quid pro quo*.⁶⁹⁶ Such concerns soon passed through the Turkish Government, and Lowther reported that he had been gently sounded out about the possibility of a loan being made through Cassel in Britain, should the French offer fall through. The Foreign Office was not to be separated from France so easily, however. Parker thought that if Cassel was approached, then he should make conditions relating to the Baghdad Railway sufficient to satisfy both British and French interests.⁶⁹⁷ Talk of such conditions was already reaching the Foreign Office. It seemed likely that that in addition to conditions relating to the Railway, the French would attach other conditions aimed at maintaining Turkish ‘financial stability’. Foreign Office officials were concerned that, now that Cassel was involved in the negotiations, his group might offer the Turks money under less onerous conditions, undercutting the French. Parker worried that ‘a most awkward situation’ would be created, especially as he knew that Cavit had recently spent a weekend at Cassel’s

⁶⁹⁴ Bertie to Grey, No. 183, Confidential, 4 May 1910, FO 371/993/15531.

⁶⁹⁵ Hardinge Minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 434, Very Confidential, 27 Jun. 1910, FO 371/993/23954.

⁶⁹⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 599, 23 Aug. 1910, FO 371/993/31382; Mallet minute.

⁶⁹⁷ Lowther to Grey, No. 186, Tel., Confidential, 9 Sep. 1910, FO 371/993/32741; Parker minute.

house. Richard Maxwell thought that the French were alive to the danger, and suggested the time had come to speak to Cassel and bring him into step with the Government. Mallet, although less worried, thought that Cassel should be asked, at the least, to consult with the Government if it seemed that the money might be used to fund further development of the Railway.⁶⁹⁸ As September went on, it seemed that these fears were likely to be realised. Negotiations with France seemed to be falling through, and Lowther believed that Cavit was looking towards Cassel's group for the loan. Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, was also concerned. He pointed out the importance of Anglo-French cooperation in the Balkans and worried that if Turkey managed to get the money from elsewhere, without the French conditions, then she would likely use it to start a war with Greece. Grey took this solemnly. It was a 'serious warning', as the Foreign Office could not urge Cassel to adopt the French conditions.⁶⁹⁹ To add to the tension, reports suggested that Cassel had agreed to arrange the loan in London, and that furthermore he would work with Arthur von Gwinner, the German president of the Baghdad Railway Company in issuing the loan.⁷⁰⁰ Worse, Gwinner's group would apparently take on a larger percentage than the British concerns. Officials, however, avoided panic. Both Hardinge and Mallet doubted the veracity of the reports, while their chief mused that if true, this arrangement would 'not suit us at all'.⁷⁰¹

The logical solution was a meeting with Cassel. When it took place, he told Hardinge that he remained undecided on which course of action to take, and he had informed the Turks that they would get better financial terms from the French. On the other hand, the French terms were onerous, Hardinge heard, involving protection for

⁶⁹⁸ Bertie to Grey, No. 349, Confidential, 14 Sep. 1910, FO 371/993/33592; Parker, Maxwell and Mallet minutes.

⁶⁹⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 196, Tel., 20 Sep. 1910, FO 371/993/34141; Grey minute.

⁷⁰⁰ 'Times' Extract 21 Sep 1910, FO 371/993/34252.

⁷⁰¹ De Salis to Grey, No. 55, Tel., 21 Sep. 1910, FO 371/993/34265; Mallet, Hardinge and Grey minutes.

French industry and the French dominated Ottoman Bank becoming the Empire's de facto treasury. Cassel was, however, willing to work with the French to find a compromise arrangement. Grey greeted this news with pleasure, but in a sign of converging priorities between London and Paris, thought that something should be added to any agreement to prevent the funds being used to launch aggressive action against the Greeks.⁷⁰² Cassel, indeed, seemed sympathetic to the Foreign Office position. He told Hardinge that he knew the French were not keen on him being involved, and pledged not to follow up on the loan should the Turks reject conditions that the British Government had approved. Grey hoped that his assurances would carry some weight. It was 'most desirable that he should cooperate with the French', as it would be 'very awkward' were he to do 'the business after the French [had] declined'.⁷⁰³ A couple of days later, more detail on the French position emerged. Bertie understood that the French 'best case' was that both British and French groups would abstain from making the loan until it appeared that the Turks would spend it more wisely, and were less likely to use it to fight with Greece. Stephen Pichon, the French Foreign Minister, privately held that this was safe, as the German market would not be able to produce the cash required. He therefore thought that Cassel was indirectly working in the German interest.⁷⁰⁴ More publicly, he went on a charm offensive towards Britain, flattering Bertie by praising Anglo-French cooperation thus far, adding that he was sure that French interests would eventually get the loan. He was anxious, he said, to avoid giving Turkey money which would be spent on armaments and 'other extravagant expenditure'. Mallet and Hardinge responded as Pichon would have hoped. Mallet agreed that 'stringent conditions' would be required, whilst Hardinge, by now a Lord and soon to depart for his viceroyalty, trumpeted a likely 'opening of a new era in Anglo-French

⁷⁰² Grey to Bertie, No. 326, Tel., Secret, 22 Sep. 1910, FO 371/993/34385; Grey minute.

⁷⁰³ Cassel to Hardinge, 22 Sep. 1910, FO 371/993/34391; Grey minute.

⁷⁰⁴ Bertie to Grey, No. 69, Tel., 24 Sep 1910, FO 371/993/34627.

finance' which 'we should do our utmost to encourage'.⁷⁰⁵ With such enthusiasm for Anglo-French economic cooperation, it was not surprising that a later proposal for the amalgamation of the Ottoman Bank with the struggling, British-backed, National Bank of Turkey was met with pleasure in Whitehall. Both Grey and Sir Arthur Nicolson, the new Permanent Under-secretary, were keen on this proposal, and Grey was willing to support it 'warmly' at Paris.⁷⁰⁶ In the light of the news that a preliminary agreement had been made on a loan, Grey emphasised that Cassel's 'fusion scheme' would need to be supported if it was the 'only way to avoid future trouble'.⁷⁰⁷

Despite reports, the Turks had on this occasion decided against accepting the French conditions.⁷⁰⁸ A particular sticking point was the demands of the French to be given a right to be involved in appointments to positions within the Ottoman Financial machinery. Reportedly Cavit was not averse to French officials being given roles in Turkey, but he hoped to retain control over personnel himself, in part, Lowther speculated, because he cherished a strong dislike for Charles Laurent, the French financial adviser appointed in the wake of the revolution, and wanted to prevent his appointment.⁷⁰⁹ The French negotiations having seemingly failed, Cassel hoped, having worked in tandem with the Government, that he might be allowed to act as he wished. He wrote to Nicolson that Cavit now looked towards the National Bank, with which he was involved, but that it was for the Bank to make the first move.⁷¹⁰ Nicolson had in fact already proposed giving the National Bank their freedom of action, and Grey agreed that if negotiations had failed, then the French should be told, and informed that if they had no

⁷⁰⁵ Bertie to Grey, No. 70, Tel., 28 Sep. 1910, FO 371/993/35203; Mallet and Hardinge minutes.

⁷⁰⁶ Cassel to Nicolson, Confidential, 8 Oct 1910, FO 371/994/37190; Nicolson to Cassel, Confidential, 10 Oct. 1910, FO 371/994/37190.

⁷⁰⁷ Bertie to Nicolson, Tel., 13 Oct. 1910, FO 371/994/37328, Grey minute, Bertie to Nicolson, Private, 15 Oct. 1910, FO 371/994/37499.

⁷⁰⁸ Bertie to Grey, No. 83, Tel., 20 Oct. 1910, FO 371/994/38227.

⁷⁰⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 280, Tel., 21 Oct. 1910, FO 371/994/38377.

⁷¹⁰ Cassel to Nicolson, 30 Oct. 1910, FO 371/994/39656.

further proposals to make, then Britain must put her support behind “independent action on the part of the National Bank”.⁷¹¹ In the meantime, an offer had been made from Germany. Parker was unconcerned, and believed the terms to be too poor for the Turks to be tempted.⁷¹² Unfortunately for Cassel, Parker was mistaken, and terms were reported to have been agreed a week later. Unwilling to give up, Parker sought solace in the fact that the terms had not yet been signed.⁷¹³ Grey warned the French that although he was ‘still most anxious to secure Anglo-French financial cooperation and [would] use any influence [he had] to support any reasonable proposals, which may now come from the French side’, he would now have to allow the National Bank to take independent action, although he had, even at this late stage, asked them to keep the door open for French cooperation.⁷¹⁴ This had still not taken place a couple of weeks later, when Babington Smith asked Nicolson when the National Bank might expect freedom of movement to be restored. Germany, having completed the loan, had made a strong position stronger, he remarked.

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Babington Smith was not wrong. In trying to cooperate with the French, Britain had left the door ajar for Germany – a door which she pushed open with enthusiasm. Scholars such as Marian Kent have been critical of this, seeing the restriction of the National Bank as a failure of British policy. Although allowing the loan to pass to Germany was no doubt unfortunate, this is an unhelpful characterisation. Kent argued that the National Bank had been held back to allow the French to take the loan, but it seems that

⁷¹¹Nicolson Minute, 29 Oct 1910, FO 371/994/45473, Grey minute, Babington Smith to Nicolson, 31 Oct. 1910, FO 371/39792.

⁷¹²Lowther to Grey, No. 243, R., Tel., 1 Nov. 1910, FO 371/994/39840.

⁷¹³Lowther to Grey, No. 244, Tel., 7th Nov. 1910, FO 371/994/40350; Parker minute.

⁷¹⁴Grey Minute, 9 Nov. 1910, FO 371/994/40867.

⁷¹⁵Babington Smith to Nicolson, 30 Nov. 1910, FO 371/994/44172.

Grey's aims were more cooperative.⁷¹⁶ A clear Franco-British plan existed to better their mutual position with regard to Turkey, and to reorganise the Turkish financial system. Furthermore, policymakers in Whitehall and at the Quai d'Orsay believed that the Germany would be unable, financially, to compete for the loan. British policymakers were nevertheless clear that the National Bank would get a chance, if negotiations failed, and warned the French as such. In the context of the time, with Britain trying to extract concessions from the Young Turk Government but with minimal levers with which to do so, it is far from surprising that they should attempt to make hay when an opportunity presented itself. More widely, cooperation with France was always likely to be treated as being of greater value than a good deal for the National Bank. Throughout this period, British dealings with Turkey were always influenced by and reflected through Grey's wider sense of strategy. The partnerships with Russia and France were at the forefront of his mind, and he would be unlikely to allow a chance to work with the French in this way slip. Regardless, the matter soon receded. Commercial attention turned towards the key question in Ottoman diplomacy in the pre-war period – the fabled Berlin to Baghdad Railway.

5.1. Strategy and Commerce

5.1.a. The Railway: A threat to Britain

The Railway has often caught the imagination of scholars. This grandiose project, to construct a railroad from Berlin to the Persian Gulf, 'opening up' Mesopotamia to European trade as it went, was being built in partnership by the German and Turkish Governments. Through a complicated system of kilometric guarantees, the Ottoman

⁷¹⁶ Kent, 'Britain and the End of the Ottoman Empire', pp. 162-4. Kent, Marian, 'Constantinople and Asiatic Turkey, 1905-1914, in Hinsley, *British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey*, pp. 148-164(178-9).

Government funded the building of the railway by German engineers. The most recent agreements, in 1903, had arranged for the construction of the railway as far as Baghdad at very generous rates.⁷¹⁷

Construction of the line carried a wide ranging threat to Britain. Marian Kent sketched out the problems that the development would cause for Britain. It would cross an area, in Mesopotamia, that had traditionally been dominated by Britain. Worse, the concession came with ‘mineral rights’ – giving Germany a head start in extracting the fuel of the future, oil, from an area where it was believed to be plentiful. Once constructed, it would threaten the long-standing British concession for waterborne transport on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, as well as the increasingly lucrative transport of Indian Pilgrims to Islamic holy sites, such as Mecca. It would also threaten British maritime trade in the Persian Gulf. Finally, it would make the land journey to India easier, and would damage British prestige across the Middle East.⁷¹⁸ With such risks, and with the change in Ottoman Governance seeming to present an opportunity to change the future of the line, the question became one of special importance to British policymakers.

Initially, the Foreign Office considered supporting the building of a competing railway to manage the damage. In March 1909, William Willcocks, a British engineer working on a project to irrigate Mesopotamia, suggested that a line built in the Tigris valley could be linked with a proposed line from Tripoli to Homs, competing with the German line. This idea found favour in London. Mallet could not contemplate a ‘more serious blow’ to the British position in the gulf than the German line reaching Basra, and could not see why, in return for all that Britain had ‘done for the Turks’, she should be

⁷¹⁷ For more on the progress of railway agreements see Issawi, *Economic History of Turkey*; Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire*, McMeeekin, *The Berlin to Baghdad Express*; Kent, *Great Britain and the End of the Ottoman Empire*.

⁷¹⁸ Kent, ‘Constantinople and Asiatic Turkey’, pp. 150-3.

allowed to connect the line to the Mediterranean. Hardinge speculated that if Britain were able to build into Mesopotamia first, then she would be far enough ahead of Germany that the latter might not find it worth her while to extend the line beyond Baghdad.⁷¹⁹ This proved a popular idea, and following an interdepartmental report, Lowther was instructed to ask for a concession to build the line.⁷²⁰ In time, however, as the question developed, the British focus turned instead to using the customs increase as a lever to try and secure British involvement in the building of the existing railway. In pursuing such a strategy, the Foreign Office had been emboldened by warm words from the Grand Vizier, Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, who had suggested to Lowther that the line needed British involvement. Grey thought that this augured well, and wondered whether this might be used to come up with a formula that could be offered in return for consent on the customs question.⁷²¹

5.1.b. ‘In what other way are we to secure any conditions?’ The Customs Lever⁷²²

An important aspect of the Capitulations, which enshrined the privileges of the Great Powers in Turkey, was the right of the Great Powers to veto or approve any change to the customs duties charged on foreign goods coming in to the Empire. This was used as a ‘weapon’ by Britain, and indeed other Powers, throughout the pre-war period.⁷²³

Although this was a powerful lever for Britain, it was not without risks. Most fundamentally, as the Foreign Office was well aware, any additional funds gained could easily be used to fund further development of the Baghdad Railway. John Tilley noted that, in 1909, the money provided by customs duties (in their unadjusted form) was almost completely used to provide for the building of the railway. In effect, the majority of

⁷¹⁹ Graham to Grey, 13 Mar. 1909, FO 371/764/11023, Parker, Mallet and Hardinge minutes.

⁷²⁰ Grey to Lowther, No. 245, Secret, 18 Aug. 1909, FO 371/764/27901.

⁷²¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 535, 10 Jul. 1909, FO 371/764/27083, Grey minute.

⁷²² Grey to Lowther, Private, 14 Jul. 1909, FO 371/764/28402.

⁷²³ See for instance Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire*, p. 44.

Turkish customs receipts found their way into German pockets. Understandably, the British Government were not keen to increase the size of this pool without strong assurances that the money would be spent on other projects. Grey knew that Britain would 'have to make a stand about the Baghdad Railway and resist any increase of customs [until she] got [her] way.'⁷²⁴ Sir Adam Block warned that there must be no movement on the customs question until there was a written assurance that the raise would not go to the Railway company in any way – although he was aware that Britain would run the risk of being accused of blocking Turkish progress.⁷²⁵ The Ottoman Government hoped for permission to increase the customs duty by 4%, made more urgent by the continued budgetary struggles it faced. This was not lost on Alwyn Parker, who appreciated that a 'large deficit' would mean the Turks were 'all the more anxious for the customs increase'.⁷²⁶ Ottoman officials seemed to understand the situation. In September 1909, Britain was asked to take a 'favourable view' of the customs increase, in return for a willingness to make assurances on the Railway.⁷²⁷ With the beginnings of an understanding on the horizon, British requirements for her half of the bargain became clear. Lowther was given permission to discuss the question at Constantinople. He was told that the Railway, the right to navigate the Euphrates and Tigris, and oil concessions in Mesopotamia were all areas of interest to the Government. British officials also hoped to secure the removal of the Turkish Government veto on Egyptian borrowing powers. In addition to their power relating to the customs increase, Grey sought to remind the Turkish Government that Britain had given Turkey much support during the recent Balkan crisis. The despatch also noted that British trade was at a 'disadvantage'.⁷²⁸ This last point suggested that British

⁷²⁴ Lowther to Grey, No. 71, 1 Feb. 1909, FO 371/762/5071; Tilley, Maxwell and Grey minutes.

⁷²⁵ Block to Hardinge, 21 Jun. 1909, FO 371/762/23941.

⁷²⁶ Parker minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 848, 22 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1235/47181.

⁷²⁷ Turkish Embassy communication to Grey, 14 Sep. 1909, FO 371/763/34716.

⁷²⁸ Grey to Lowther, No. 298, 23 Sep. 1909, FO 371/763/34716; Lowther to Grey, No. 840, 11 Oct. 1909, FO 371/763/38361.

officials felt that they had a special position relating to the customs increase, compared to other Powers. Upon Pichon suggesting that the 4% rise should not be used as a lever for special interests, Ronald Lindsay complained that Pichon failed to see that Britain was 'specially affected by the rise in customs'.⁷²⁹ On a superficial level, this was not an unreasonable claim, and also reflected the British awareness that in the absence of the 4%, she had no lever whatsoever to influence Turkish policy. Hardinge had argued, pointedly, in May that:

Sooner or later we shall have to agree to the Turkish import duties being raised... and as the raising of these duties will inflict a certain loss on British trade it seems only right that we should endeavour to obtain from the Turkish Govt. something that might be regarded as compensation for our commercial losses.⁷³⁰

Grey argued that he was not interested in 'special advantages' for Britain so much as he was in preventing damage to British interests by the construction of the railway. He did 'quite see how' Britain could protect herself unless she took advantage of 'of such opportunities as the increase of the customs dues may give... for making conditions'.⁷³¹

Negotiations moved slowly. By October, Lindsay and Mallet thought that there had been no progress in discussions on Egyptian borrowing powers, and that there had been little in the way of commitments on the railway. Mallet questioned whether Lowther had made the point on Egypt forcefully enough.⁷³² Thoughts turned to possible alternatives to a commitment on Egypt. Hardinge speculated whether an arrangement with France not to block Egyptian financial manoeuvres might fit the bill, while Grey thought that if a formal commitment proved politically impossible for the Turks, then a written undertaking not to block Egyptian loans might suffice. In any case, there was no

⁷²⁹ Lindsay minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 840, 11 Oct. 1909, FO 371/763/38361.

⁷³⁰ Hardinge minute, Graham to Grey, 13 Mar. 1909, FO 371/764/11023.

⁷³¹ Grey to Lowther, Private, 14 Jul. 1909, FO 371/764/28402.

⁷³² Lowther to Grey, No. 840, 11 Oct. 1909, FO 371/763/38361, Lindsay and Mallet minutes.

rush. Hardinge thought that Britain must ‘move very slowly about the extra 4%’.⁷³³ In any case, events would be moved forwards by a surprising move from Germany.

5.1.c. A German Offer

In November, London heard that the Baghdad Railway Company (and by extension, the German Government) were willing to allow British participation in the building of the next stage of the Railway, from Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. Struggling to finance the building, the Company sought additional capital from Britain. Arthur von Gwinner, president of the Company, suggested that negotiations might begin on the lines of British control of the section once built, but without their participating in other sections. The offer was met with caution in London. Mallet and Lindsay were circumspect, given Britain’s application for another line. Hardinge agreed that some thought was required, but thought that Britain could not go far wrong in wresting some control of the line from Germany.⁷³⁴ Indications soon suggested that this offer was genuine, as Sir William Whittall, an associate of Gwinner, made his way to London to discuss the matter with Cassel. Mallet and Hardinge, whose views had softened a little, thought that Britain should seek construction and control of the relevant section, and the former observed that Britain was in ‘a very strong position for a good bargain and must act with great reserve’.⁷³⁵ The Turks were also keen on the proposal. It would help them to get the Railway built, possibly at a lower cost to themselves, and would please both Britain and Germany, reducing the likelihood of their blocking the customs increase.⁷³⁶ Rather overzealously, Grey was promised that Rifat had succeeded in persuading the Railway company to admit Britain

⁷³³ Lowther to Grey, No. 861, 19 Oct. 1909, FO 371/763/39233, Hardinge and Grey minutes.

⁷³⁴ Marling to Grey, No. 351, Tel., 5 Nov. 1909, FO 371/764/40694, Mallet, Lindsay and Hardinge minutes.

⁷³⁵ Marling to Grey, No. 353, Tel., 9 Nov. 1909, FO 371/764/41245, Mallet and Hardinge minutes.

⁷³⁶ The proposal would possibly cost the Turks less, owing to the British reluctance to use kilometric guarantees.

on equal terms. Seeing as this went beyond the construction and control deal they hoped for, Hardinge and Grey doubted the truth of this, although they were keen to discuss the proposals.⁷³⁷ A more realistic assessment of the situation was provided by Whittall, who explained to Hardinge that the proposed arrangement would see Britain have a 50% share of the controlling body of the new line. Both men agreed that this was insufficient, but Hardinge thought that this represented a good start for negotiations. The British position was a 'very strong one' and she 'must now take care to get all that' she wanted. Grey took a similarly pragmatic view. He saw the negotiations as a way to secure control of the line after Baghdad, to be taken in return for the customs increase.⁷³⁸

As the year drew to a close, the German Government seemed to be getting cold feet. Wilhelm von Schoen, the German State Secretary, had told Sir Edward Goschen, British Ambassador at Berlin, that should Cassel and Gwinner come to an agreement, the German Government would likely still require a '*quid pro quo*' for the purposes, he said, of public opinion, in part because of the bad feeling caused by H.F.B. Lynch's recent renewal of exclusive riverain rights on the Euphrates. Hardinge was furious. He complained that this was 'very typical of German methods' and if Cassel were to come to terms with Gwinner, this would be a matter for them. That Britain would have to make a concession to Germany, as a result of a this and the Lynch concession was not 'logical'. Grey was similarly irritated. To him, the case was the other way around, and any agreement between Cassel and Gwinner would serve as compensation for the damage which the Railway would do to established British interests below Baghdad.⁷³⁹ British irritation was compounded by the belief that the German Government had been aware of the proposals before Gwinner had made them, and that Britain had not made the first move, or even

⁷³⁷ Grey to Marling, No. 350, Secret, 12 Nov. 1909, FO 371/765/41367, Grey and Hardinge minutes.

⁷³⁸ Marling to Grey, No. 893, 9 Nov. 1909, FO 371/765/41730, Hardinge and Grey minutes.

⁷³⁹ Goschen to Hardinge, Private, Tel., 14 Dec. 1909 FO 371/765/45560, Hardinge and Grey minutes.

sought an arrangement.⁷⁴⁰ In part, this reluctance was because, as Charles Marling, *chargé* in Constantinople reported, the Germans were struggling to get their views on the matter across to the Turks. He speculated that Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein, the German Ambassador, feared British competition – if the proposed line from the Mediterranean to Baghdad were constructed, then this, along with the Lynch concession on the Euphrates and Tigris would make the chances of the German line being finished unlikely. This report was greeted with pleasure in Whitehall. Herman Norman found it ‘satisfactory to learn that the Germans [were] having difficulty in regaining their influence at Constantinople’. Mallet thought that it was ‘quite unnecessary to accept the first terms offered’, but that he was quite content to cooperate with Germany, if Britain could secure the construction and control of the Gulf sectors.⁷⁴¹ Despite the optimism, the sticking point remained the percentages. Hardinge maintained that 50% would be insufficient, as it would not give Britain full control. He also expressed opposition to the use of kilometric guarantees in the funding of the new section, although he thought that the political value of the line meant that this question could be put aside, for the present.⁷⁴² At this point, Grey thought it wise to take stock and get the views of France and Russia, Britain’s *entente* partners, along with those of the Board of Trade and the India Office.⁷⁴³ Although Alexander Isvolsky, the Russian Foreign Minister, had been angry upon learning of the plan, he had since come into a more sanguine frame of mind, and his opposition was much reduced by a British assurance that nothing would be agreed without the approval of Russia and France.⁷⁴⁴ It also contributed to the Russian’s own talks with Germany at Potsdam.⁷⁴⁵ The French, too,

⁷⁴⁰ Mallet minute, Goschen to Hardinge, 15 Dec. 1909, 15 Dec. 1909, FO 371/765/46381.

⁷⁴¹ Marling to Grey, No. 966, 13 Dec. 1909, FO 371/765/46060; Norman and Mallet minutes.

⁷⁴² For more on Kilometric Guarantee, see Feis, *Europe, the World’s Banker*, pp. 342-3.

⁷⁴³ Cassell memorandum, 20 Dec. 1909, FO 371/765/46237, Hardinge and Grey minutes; India Office to Foreign Office, 1 Jan. 1910, FO 371/991/287.

⁷⁴⁴ Nicolson to Grey, No. 497, Tel. 27 Nov. 1909, FO 371/765/43445; Hardinge memorandum, 18 Dec. 1909, FO 371/765/4635; Hardinge memorandum 21 Dec. 1909, FO 371/765/47012; Grey minute.

⁷⁴⁵ The Potsdam accord of 1910 (ratified in 1911) saw Russia, worried that Britain might come to her own terms on the railway with Germany, make an agreement of her own on Persia with Germany. See Sweet and

were not delighted, and hoped that they would be able to gain concessions in Syria.⁷⁴⁶ Before the views of the Board of Trade or India Office could be ascertained, Mallet heard that Cassel had indicated British acceptance to Gwinner, on the condition that Britain had 60% control of the line. Grey and Hardinge both thought that this went beyond what Cassel had been told, Hardinge emphasising that he had remained non-committal in recent meetings. This also implied British acceptance of the Kilometric Guarantee system. Mallet thought it impossible to finance the undertaking without them, but British policy was officially against their use.⁷⁴⁷ Indeed, senior policymakers remained critical. Hardinge referred to such guarantees, whereby a certain sum per completed kilometre was guaranteed to the company building the line by the Turkish Government, as a 'vortex', which, were they to be used on the same terms as they had been in 1903, when the current concession had been finalised, would be 'indefensible' in front of both press and Parliament. He added that the system incentivised corruption and poor administration, as the best course of action, financially speaking, was often to run as few trains as possible.⁷⁴⁸ Mallet suggested that the best course of action would be to draw up a memorandum of suitable conditions which could then be communicated to Cassel, who could then informally let Gwinner know the limits within which they could negotiate. Grey agreed. Once the views of the Board of Trade and India Office had been received, this would be drawn up.⁷⁴⁹

Langhorne, 'Great Britain and Russia', p. 249; Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, pp. 313-9. Sir George Buchanan, Ambassador at St Petersburg during this period, remembered the Potsdam Agreement as a moment which 'threatened to shipwreck' the Anglo-Russian understanding. *id.*, *My Mission to Russia*, p. ix.

⁷⁴⁶ Grey to Bertie, No. 38, 22 Jan 1910, FO 371/991/2075.

⁷⁴⁷ Mallet Memorandum, 29 Dec. 1909, FO 371/991/100, Hardinge and Grey minutes.

⁷⁴⁸ Grey Memorandum for Churchill, 10 Jan. 1910, FO 371/991/1355. Although printed as a Grey memorandum for Winston Churchill, the work was drafted by Hardinge. Its conclusions can be taken as being subject of general agreement in the higher echelons of the Foreign Office.

⁷⁴⁹ Mallet memorandum, 31 Dec. 1909, FO 371/991/747, Grey minute.

In the new year, the views of the other departments became clear. The India Office was strongly against the plan. It failed to see the advantage to helping Germany to threaten British political supremacy in the Gulf when it appeared that she was financially unable to do so alone.⁷⁵⁰ The Board of Trade was similarly unenthusiastic, albeit for differing reasons. Its view was that 50% was insufficient, and that 60% or at the very least 55% would be needed. Furthermore, it was hoped that if kilometric guarantees were used, they could be adjusted to in a way that would avoid the appearance of either demanding excessive funds from Turkey or directly funding German enterprise. On this point, Lindsay agreed. While Gwinner and Cassel, the financiers, thought it best to 'exhort' the full guarantees from the Porte, it did not follow that Britain should have to do so, especially as she had already expressed her opposition.⁷⁵¹ Hardinge accepted that momentum was ebbing out of the project, and reluctantly concluded that perhaps, for the Turkish Government, the time was not right to make this agreement.⁷⁵² Given his belief that the German offer had been made out of weakness, he thought that Britain should encourage other projects and irrigation, both of which would minimise the importance of the Railway in any case.⁷⁵³ From a German perspective too, the proposals were difficult. As Parker remarked, the railway was a political project in Germany – he warned that whatever the difficulties, it would eventually be completed. With all this in mind, Hardinge doubled down on his idea of developing British interests in order to put further pressure on the Railway. Resurrecting the idea of a line following the Tigris valley, he suggested that Lowther officially request the concession as soon as he saw the moment being suitable.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵⁰ India Office to Foreign Office, 1 Jan. 1910, FO 371/991/287.

⁷⁵¹ Board of Trade to Foreign Office, 7 Jan. 1910, FO 371/991/815, Lindsay minute 10 Jan.

⁷⁵² There had much controversy over the renewal of the Lynch concession which had almost brought the Government down. For an overview of the Lynch Concession, see Platt, *Finance, Trade and Politics*, pp. 216-7.

⁷⁵³ Hardinge to Babington Smith, Feb. 1910, FO 371/991/5227, Hardinge minute.

⁷⁵⁴ Board of Trade Memorandum, 4 Mar. 1910, FO 371/991/7681, Parker and Hardinge minutes.

The prospects of another railway project were unclear. The Foreign Office took serious steps to organise it, seeking information from various engineering companies as to what terms on which they might be willing to build such a line.⁷⁵⁵ The news that the Turkish Government was ‘on the point’ of awarding significant sums to Germany to build the line as far as Baghdad added impetus to discussion of the Tigris line. Lowther was instructed to communicate British frustration to the Porte, informing the Turks that they had embarked upon a course that Britain had tried to ‘protect them’ from, and reminding them that without British satisfaction in the Tigris and Baghdad Railway questions, assent to the 4% increase was ‘unlikely’.⁷⁵⁶ Parker complained that all Britain said was that she could not ‘be a party to the increase of the customs if it is to be used, directly or indirectly, for damaging British interests by facilitating a railway which [would] deal a serious blow’ to her interests in Mesopotamia. If they wished, the Turks could easily render the railway ‘harmless’ to Britain by granting a Tigris concession.⁷⁵⁷ He believed that this concession was the best way forward for the British Government, as it seemed unlikely that Britain would now get into the Baghdad Railway, and the Tigris scheme would safeguard British interests.⁷⁵⁸ Reports from Germany continued to suggest that she was unwilling, after all, to work with the British on the line. Goschen reported that the German Government would find making concessions to Britain ‘very difficult’, on account of ‘public opinion’. Mallet considered that this put on ‘public record’ that Germany was ‘unable or unwilling’ to grant any participation in the southern part of the line. Personally, he thought this marked the moment where Britain should abandon the idea of coming to terms with Germany. Hardinge and Grey were in agreement that the Tigris concession was now the

⁷⁵⁵ Parker Memo, 14 Mar. 1910, FO 371/991/9030, minutes; Ogilvie, Gillander and Co. to Foreign Office, 5 Apr. 1910, FO 371/991/11933.

⁷⁵⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 50, Tel., 28 Mar. 1910, FO 371/991/10397.

⁷⁵⁷ Parker minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 51, Tel., 2 Apr. 1910, FO 371/991/11372.

⁷⁵⁸ Parker minute, Ogilvie, Gillander and Co, 5 Apr. 1910, FO 371/991/11933.

best way forward, and appreciated that if Germany opposed such a concession, Britain could now point to a German ‘monopoly’ in Mesopotamia.⁷⁵⁹ Sir Eyre Crowe, often suspicious of German motives, warned that a ‘bargain’ made with Germany would not see better relations with the two countries as Germany would be in a better position but ‘as hostile as before’. Unless the advantages of an agreement, on its own terms, were ‘very substantial’, Britain would probably fare better without one. Amidst general agreement, Hardinge and Lowther plotted the way forward: Britain must pursue the Tigris valley concession.⁷⁶⁰ By 11 April, Parker was writing that ‘Since [sic] the intimation of Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg that Germany would only admit our participation in the Baghdad Railway provided she received in turn compensation from some other quarter, the question of the cooperation of this country in the undertaking has been ruled out for the present’. He remarked that Babington Smith, then on his way back to London, would be irritated to hear that the ‘enterprise is at an end for the moment.’⁷⁶¹ With this in mind, Lowther was given another strongly worded despatch to communicate to the Porte. This was to be read to both Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Grand Vizier, asking for a swift reply to the concession, and reminding them that the 4% relied largely upon this. The despatch concluded:

In the face of these considerations, His Majesty’s Government are reluctantly constrained to believe that the Ottoman Government, oblivious of the services rendered by Great Britain during the Near Eastern crisis of 1908-1909, are deliberately promoting at all costs the progress of the Baghdad Railway on its present basis and thereby undermining the commercial position of this country in Mesopotamia which has been firmly established for the last 200 years: they can only conclude that the Ottoman Government have allowed themselves to be influenced by prejudiced and unworthy suspicions in regard to British designs in that region.

⁷⁵⁹ Goschen to Grey, No. 99, Very Confidential, 9 Apr. 1910, FO 371/991/12136, Mallet, Hardinge and Grey minutes.

⁷⁶⁰ Crowe, Mallet, Hardinge and Grey minutes, Goschen to Grey, No. 25, Tel., 10 Apr. 1910, FO 371/991/12218.

⁷⁶¹ Parker minute, Babington Smith to Hardinge, 11 Apr. 1910, FO 371/991/13250.

Britain was interested, it went on, only in the preservation of the *status quo* in Mesopotamia, and the Government was prepared to ‘furnish’ the Porte with ‘the most binding assurances to this effect’.⁷⁶² This communication provoked little movement. At the end of April, Mallet found the Turkish response ‘disappointing’, given that she had not shown the ‘slightest indication’ that she might try to meet British wishes or even to suggest that she was perturbed by the British attitude.⁷⁶³ Lowther was again called into service to remind Turkey that she was ‘ignoring’ the wishes of His Majesty’s Government.⁷⁶⁴ Some clerks gave way to cynicism about German aims. Parker was ‘sure that the anti-British nature of the Baghdad Rly enterprise [would] be emphasised wherever possible.’⁷⁶⁵

Further bad news was to come, as Rifat communicated that the Turks did not intend to give Britain a railway concession, largely, it seemed, due to fear of Germany.⁷⁶⁶ In mitigation, Rifat suggested that the final part of the Railway, to the Gulf, could be built by Britain. Although Grey and Hardinge thought it unlikely that such a concession would be made by Germany, this idea became a part of British thinking in terms of the strategic situation as a whole.⁷⁶⁷ In the summer of 1910, Parker committed his views on the situation to paper, producing what Grey called a ‘most timely and useful memorandum’. In it, he clearly expressed the British position: that in return for consent to the customs increase, Britain should aim to get the removal of the veto on Egyptian borrowing powers and either the Tigris Valley concession or participation in the southern part of the Baghdad Railway on acceptable terms. This should include the terminus being at Kuwait and that a port built to serve it should be constructed by Britain. He concluded that: ‘we have every ground for refusing to allow British trade to be burdened by further customs

⁷⁶² Grey to Lowther, No. 107, Secret, 20 Apr. 1910, FO 371/991/11933.

⁷⁶³ Mallet minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 276, Secret, 3 May 1910, FO 371/992/15938.

⁷⁶⁴ Grey to Lowther, No. 103, Tel., 9 May 1910, FO 371/992/15938.

⁷⁶⁵ Parker minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 316, 17 May 1910, FO 371/992/18149.

⁷⁶⁶ Rifat, verbal, 23 May 1910, FO 371/992/18625.

⁷⁶⁷ Grey to Lowther, 19 May 1910, FO 371/992/18636.

duties, when the yield of the additional duties is to be employed, not in developing trade, but in lining the pockets of foreign financiers for constructing a railway which will be a drain upon the resources of the country.’⁷⁶⁸ Grey and Hardinge again emphasised to Rifat that they could not consent to the 4% increase without some movement on the part of Turkey.⁷⁶⁹ As negotiations went quiet for a period, Officials began to feel more relaxed about the situation. In December 1910, Parker thought that the 4% would be ‘likely to prove a powerful lever’, and that Britain was now able to wait for a ‘reasonable’ proposal to be made. The official position remained that if a detailed scheme was put before Britain, which Rifat hoped to do so soon, she would be happy to consider it.⁷⁷⁰

5.1.d. The German Surrender from Baghdad Onward

In the first months of 1911, the British position was further weakened by the Potsdam Agreement between Russia and Germany, by which Russia made her own arrangements on railways in Persia.⁷⁷¹ To make matters worse still, the Turks finally signed an agreement with Germany to build the railway as far as Baghdad in March. This agreement did, however, provide a ray of light. Germany had given up her rights to build the line beyond Baghdad, including the right to build ports, but reserved the right to match the holdings of any other power.⁷⁷² This represented a good chance for Britain to safeguard her interests in the Persian Gulf.

In the meantime, Parker stated the position as he understood it. He thought that the line would be built eventually, with or without British involvement, and so Britain should be involved. If she was not, then she would likely lose her position with the Sheik of

⁷⁶⁸ Parker Memorandum, 21 Jul. 1910, FO 371/992/26453, Grey minute.

⁷⁶⁹ Grey to Lowther, No. 215, Secret, 26 Jul. 1910, FO 371/992/27274.

⁷⁷⁰ Parker and Mallet minutes, Marling to Grey, No. 920, Confidential, 20 Dec. 1910, FO 371/992/46569; Grey to Marling, No. 14, Tel., 17 Jan. 1911, FO 371/1232/1958.

⁷⁷¹ See Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 48-50.

⁷⁷² Lowther to Grey, No. 63, Tel., 21 Mar. 1911, FO 371/1233/10460.

Kuwait, as she would be unable to defend him from Turkish aggression.⁷⁷³ Crowe took a strong anti-German view, but thought that negotiations with Turkey were the most important aspect of the situation:

It seems to me important steadily to keep in mind the main object we have in view, namely, the safeguarding of British interests in the Persian Gulf and, subsidiarily, in Mesopotamia. It was because we considered those interests threatened by the German monopolistic railway scheme that we have declined to assist Turkey, or German financiers, in carrying out that scheme. Our attitude has resulted in impressing Turkey with the necessity of obtaining from Germany a freer hand in regard to the Baghdad-Gulf section of the railway, so that Turkey now has something to offer us in return for which we are expected to consent to increase of customs and to allow British money to be made available for the railway. It is the customs, and our hold over Kowait, which have been the lever by which we are beginning to secure some success. This lever is available as against Turkey, and it is from Turkey that we want a satisfactory agreement respecting the position at Kowait and generally on the littoral of the Gulf. Therefore we should do well to continue negotiating with Turkey... This presupposes that, as a preliminary, we have made it quite clear to our own minds what British requirements are, and I would strongly deprecate entering into any further discussion with Germany, unless we have reached that state of clearness.⁷⁷⁴

Crowe's call for conditions to be agreed was answered, and a meeting was held at the Foreign Office where Britain's conditions for the 4% increase was agreed. This marked a significant step forward, on the British side, in being clear about what was being asked for. Britain would ask that a Railway Company be formed to manage the line south of Baghdad, when built, which would be funded by 50% British capital, and would have British participation on the Board safeguarded. As an addendum, the whole railway would be protected from discriminatory rates, guaranteeing equality of treatment for the goods of all countries. The terminus of the line should be at Kuwait, and the harbour there should be built by British contractors on land leased by Britain. The Sheik of Kuwait would be recognised as the administrator of his lands, but Turkish suzerainty would be recognised by

⁷⁷³ Parker minute, India Office to Foreign Office, 24 Mar. 1911, FO 371/1233/10801. For further discussion of British policy towards Kuwait see Busch, Briton Cooper, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (Berkeley, 1967).

⁷⁷⁴ Crowe minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 183, Confidential, 22 Mar 1911, FO 371/1233/11080.

Britain. Finally, the restrictions on Egyptian borrowing power would be removed.⁷⁷⁵ Of these conditions, the one which officials were least wedded to was the requirement for the terminus to be at Kuwait. The Committee of Imperial Defence concluded on the 22 July 1911 that it might in fact be easier for the railway to terminate at Basra, assuming that the Tigris and Euphrates confluence, called the Shatt al-Arab, could be adequately controlled and made navigable. The committee did find that Kuwait should remain as the planned terminus should the Railway ever be extended all the way to the Persian Gulf.⁷⁷⁶

Memoranda were prepared for the French and Russian Governments, informing them of the situation as it stood. It confirmed that a recent Turkish proposal for Britain to have 40% of the shares, with other Powers having 20% was insufficient, and that Britain needed at least 50%, including protection from differential rates.⁷⁷⁷

In March 1912, the Turks proposed a division of 50%, to be shared between herself and Germany, and 50% to be split between other interested parties. The Foreign Office was more keen on 20% for Germany, Turkey, France, Russia and Britain, therefore guaranteeing 60% being in the hands of the *entente* Powers. For Parker though, the percentage question was a distraction. He had 'never believed that the question of what percentage we get in the fag end of the railway – i.e. from Baghdad to the Gulf, is nearly so important as it would be to secure a satisfactory preliminary Convention relating to all railways in Asiatic Turkey and definitely excluding preferential treatment.'⁷⁷⁸ British officials were confident that they would be able to negotiate themselves into the position they wanted by taking advantage of Turkey's involvement in the war with Italy. Mallet thought that Britain could 'afford to be stiff, because Turkey must be anxious to come to terms with H.M.G. at this critical juncture in her foreign relations', and that Britain would

⁷⁷⁵ Parker Memorandum, 31 Mar 1911, FO 371/1233/12280.

⁷⁷⁶ CID Report, 22 Jul. 1911, FO 371/1234/29868.

⁷⁷⁷ FO Memorandum, 31 Jul. 1911, FO 371/1234/30356.

⁷⁷⁸ Buchanan to Grey, No. 121, Tel., Confidential, 27 Mar. 1912, FO 371/1484/13119, Parker minute.

‘never have a better opportunity for negotiation’.⁷⁷⁹ A difficult aspect of the situation remained the German position. Although she had given up her rights to the line south of Baghdad, she maintained the right to an equal share of any line eventually built. For Britain, there were two ways out. Firstly, Turkey could build the line – which would be not be an acceptable outcome, Parker concluded – or preferably, Turkey could buy Germany out. If Germany tried to negotiate with Britain for concessions in return for standing aside, then Britain would tell her it was a matter to discuss with Turkey.⁷⁸⁰

In considering the percentages of lesser importance, the Foreign Office faced opposition from within Britain. The India Office continued to insist on Britain having at least 50% of the shares. Parker felt that their attitude had been unhelpful, recounting that Sir Arthur Hirtzel, the Secretary of the India Office’s Political and Secret Department and with whom he had been working closely during the negotiations, had joked that he should put Turkish proposals in the fire without reading them. ‘If the questions is to be approached in this spirit all negotiation is futile’, he complained. In a ‘prodigiously long’ minute, he pointed out that the India Office had previously been willing to entertain the 20% proposal. Nevertheless, Mallet thought that to wind the clock back an ask again for 50 or 60% would be a foolish mistake, given that Britain had been working on the 20% proposal. Grey, on the other hand, seemed willing to entertain the prospect. After all, he said ‘France and Russia have really no claim to be included if we do not want them, especially France whose interests lie elsewhere.’⁷⁸¹ In India itself, the Viceroy, Hardinge, expressed support for his former colleagues, personally backing the 20% proposal.⁷⁸² India, however, remained difficult. Parker bemoaned the apparent failure to see the facts and accept the situation as it stood. It was ‘perfectly easy (though rather inconsistent) of the

⁷⁷⁹ Mallet minute, Turkish Embassy Communication, 15 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1484/16000.

⁷⁸⁰ Parker Memorandum, 11 May 1912, FO 371/1484/20715.

⁷⁸¹ India Office to Foreign Office, 21 May 1912, FO 371/1484/21766, Parker, Mallet and Grey minutes.

⁷⁸² India Office to Foreign Office, 10 Jun. 1912, FO 371/1485/24955.

Govt. of India to express FORMALLY [*sic*] views in favour of British participation of 50%’ he wrote, but ‘no amount of expression of views’ could ‘overcome the terms of existing conventions.’⁷⁸³ Even Germany seemed more reasonable. The German Ambassador in London, Marschall, reassured Grey that Germany did not dispute much of the British position, and said that Germany had accepted that British consent would be required for the extension of the Railway into the Gulf region.⁷⁸⁴ By July 1912, however, the prevailing mood had changed. It now seemed as though Britain might not seek direct involvement in the Baghdad to Basra section, although she was still interested in protection for her traffic.⁷⁸⁵ By now, the question had become subordinated into wider negotiations on Britain’s strategic position in Mesopotamia and the Gulf, and negotiations with Turkey would in any case soon be put on ice as the Balkan Wars consumed her attention and resources.

5.1.e. The British Position Renegotiated

From the point of view of negotiations with Turkey, British officials saw the Balkan Wars as an opportunity. Alwyn Parker, who was by now recognised as the Foreign Office authority on the negotiations, remarked that they would have to wait until after the war. He thought that the war would improve the British position. Having incurred significant financial losses through the war, Turkey would be even more desperate for further funds in the shape of the customs increase, increasing the value yet further of the 4% lever to Britain. To make use of the break, he decided to put various memoranda and similar together, in to ‘carry out negotiations more expediently when they [were] reopened’.⁷⁸⁶ Mallet was optimistic. There were ‘indications that another opportunity’ might be given to Britain to improve her position in Turkey, unless the war caused a ‘general conflagration’,

⁷⁸³ Parker minute, India Office to Foreign Office, 18 Jun. 1912, FO 371/1485/26183.

⁷⁸⁴ Grey to Goschen, No. 154, 25 Jun. 1912, FO 371/1485/27486.

⁷⁸⁵ Grey to Marling, No. 333, 18 Jul. 1912, FO 371/1485/31253.

⁷⁸⁶ Parker minute, India Office to Foreign Office, 23 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1494/50189.

and much would depend ‘upon the handling of the situation.’⁷⁸⁷ Although Turkish financial weakness was seen as cause for optimism in Whitehall, this was overstated, and it seemed this had gone too far. Struggling badly for cash in the face of Balkan conflict, the Turks contemplated asking for an emergency customs increase. By October 1912, they had secured the agreement of Austria, Germany and Italy. Vansittart was philosophical. The Turks were badly off, he thought, and after the war it would be very hard for Britain to ‘stand out’ for the 4% if the other Powers had given consent. Parker, the expert, was less concerned. He thought that the Russia would refuse to agree in any case, as such a move would represent favouring Turkey against her protégé Balkan states. He was concerned that the 4% represented ‘our only lever for obtaining a settlement of our negotiations with Turkey’, but thought that Britain might seize the initiative. As the Turks needed the money for ‘immediate war expenses’, Britain might consent, in return for a Turkish acceptance in principle of British demands.⁷⁸⁸ When it transpired that the raise was being considered in Turkey as permanent, any such scheme was quickly abandoned in Britain. In any case, Parker knew that without the 4% the ‘last lever would be gone’. Grey noted that Russia had declined consent. This constituted both an excuse and a reason for Britain to do likewise.⁷⁸⁹ When the request came from Turkey, Grey was ready to refuse it; Britain pleaded neutrality, despite Parker’s research suggesting that to agree would not, strictly speaking, constitute a breach of neutrality.⁷⁹⁰

As predicted, the war saw a break in negotiations. In the spring of 1913, the Railway returned to prominence. Germany now proposed to build the Gulf section herself,

⁷⁸⁷ Mallet minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 533, 24 Jun. 1912, FO 371/1496/27721.

⁷⁸⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 529, Tel., 25 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1519/45729, Vansittart and Parker minutes.

⁷⁸⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 537, Tel., 28 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1519/45612, Parker and Grey minutes.

⁷⁹⁰ Grey minute, Turkish Ambassador, Verbal, 30 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1519/40425; Lowther to Grey, No. 537, Tel., 28 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1519/45612, Parker minute.

but under certain conditions. Parker met Richard von Kühlmann, Counsellor at the German Embassy in London, who told him that if Britain agreed to Germany building the line, she would be willing to delay this ‘indefinitely’. The terminus would be Basra, with British involvement in the building of the port there, and Britain would be offered the chance to manage the line once built, assuming reasonable safeguards for equality of traffic. Parker was delighted, eyeing the ‘elements of a bargain’. The British lost no time in striking a deal on these lines, initialling an agreement *ad referendum* on the 21 May 1913.⁷⁹¹ The line would not extend beyond Basra, and although Britain would not be involved in the construction of it, she would have significant representation on the board of directors.

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With the Railway now some way towards a settlement, at least from an Anglo-German perspective, attention turned towards the navigation of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. At the end of May 1913, the Cabinet was told that the ‘main object’ of British policy was to ‘secure effective competition between river-borne traffic and the Railway’. Originally, it had been intended that this would be done by adding three more ships to the concession already held by H.F.B. Lynch. However, British policy had evolved and it was now proposed that another concession would be applied for, with the two interests amalgamated, and holding exclusive rights to transport on the river. Lynch would not be in control, but he would be permitted to keep his flag flying as a part of the new concern. Instead, the ‘head’ concessionaire would be Lord Inchcape, who was considered more sympathetic to the desires of the Government.⁷⁹³ Unsurprisingly, Germany was not likely to let this go, especially given the openness she had recently displayed over the railway

⁷⁹¹ Grey to Bertie, No. 211, Tel, 21 May 1913, FO 371/1791/23545.

⁷⁹² Parker Memorandum, 7 May. 1913, FO 371/1790/21191, Parker minute.

⁷⁹³ FO Minute, 28 May 1913, FO 371/1791/24522.

question. Having first suggested 10% of the new company and one director being German, she suggested 20% and two directors in July 1913, although 10% remained the most that Britain was willing to offer.⁷⁹⁴ In the meantime, Lynch, angry at the diminution of his business, had been trying to derail the negotiations, claiming at the Turkish Embassy that his right to navigation was being damaged. Seeing as Lynch held his concession from the British Government, rather than directly from the Turks, Grey and Parker were uninterested in his protestations. Hakki Pasha had been sent to London to work for the Turks on the conclusion of the Balkan Wars and had remained there afterwards to work on settling the commercial question between Britain and Turkey. He was told not to see Lynch or any of his associates, and Grey added that British support for the new concession was given to Inchcape, and would not be given to Lynch.⁷⁹⁵ Lynch remained unwilling to take this calmly. Parker heard from von Kühlmann that confidential information had been leaked to the press in Germany, which was stirring up feeling against the concession (even though Germany was now involved in it). Grey was extremely angry. If such an accusation was true, then ‘all support’ would have to be withdrawn from Lynch, and nothing confidential could be communicated to him again.⁷⁹⁶ For his part, Lynch claimed that the information had been distributed by a sometime associate of his – an excuse that left Parker not entirely convinced. He concluded that the best way to ‘draw the claws’ of Lynch would be to conclude the agreements with Inchcape as soon as possible.⁷⁹⁷ This was done on 1 September, and the necessary agreements with the Turks had already been initialled in mid-August.⁷⁹⁸ Parker thought that the agreements represented ‘from the point of view of British interests, a very advantageous settlement of a question which [had]

⁷⁹⁴ Von Kühlmann to Parker, 11 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1791/32195, Parker minute.

⁷⁹⁵ Note passed by Hakki Pasha, 6 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1791/32655, Parker and Grey minutes.

⁷⁹⁶ Parker Memorandum, 20 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1792/38611, Grey minute.

⁷⁹⁷ Parker Memorandum, 29 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1792/39925.

⁷⁹⁸ Inchcape to Parker, 1 Sep. 1913, FO 371/1792/46548.

been a frequent source of trouble for over seventy years.’ His colleagues were grateful to him for his long period of work on Anglo-Turkish questions. Herman Norman wanted to congratulate him on his ‘for his strenuous and prolonged labours’ which had come to a ‘satisfactory termination’. Amidst the agreement of other colleagues, Grey ‘entirely and cordially’ endorsed these views.⁷⁹⁹ The negotiations had by now more or less come a satisfactory conclusion. Grey had expressed consent for the 4% rise at the end of July, subject to various negotiations being completed, and the river and railway agreements now existed substantively.⁸⁰⁰

Unfortunately for Britain, Lynch was not ready to accept a *fait accompli*. Delays to the concession mounted, and Parker saw his hand behind the problems. He believed that Lynch was still committed to ‘wrecking’ it.⁸⁰¹ Crowe remarked that Lynch suffered from an ‘incapacity for straight dealing’.⁸⁰² Lynch decided, in mid-November, to make his way to Constantinople, against the advice of his solicitor, who later claimed to be unaware that he had travelled.⁸⁰³ Grey was angry about this, while Hakki turned to the wisdom of the orient. Parker took up the story: ‘Hakki Pasha said to me today that there is a Turkish Proverb: “do not tie yourself up in a sack with a dog”, and that Mr Lynch would block the working of the new company at every turn, even if his own interests suffered; it was therefore far better to exclude Mr Lynch from the new company now’.⁸⁰⁴ As negotiations continued, the Turks remained unhappy at the prospect of German influence on the river. Parker was unconcerned. This was not a problem for the Foreign Office to deal with, he said, as Britain was compelled only not to oppose German participation, and this was now

⁷⁹⁹ Parker Minute, 12 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1792/37322, Norman, Mallet and Grey minutes.

⁸⁰⁰ Grey to Tewfik, 29 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1817/34680

⁸⁰¹ Inchcape to Crowe, 29 Oct. 1913, FO 371/1793/49370, Parker minute.

⁸⁰² Parker Memorandum, 14 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1793/51821, Crowe minute.

⁸⁰³ Mallet to Crowe, Tel., 18 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1793/52587; Slaughter to Parker, 19 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1793/52622.

⁸⁰⁴ Mallet to Grey, No. 581, Tel., 19 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1793/52610, Parker minute.

a matter for the Germans.⁸⁰⁵ The difficulties would soon disappear. In a rather ‘dramatic denouement’, Lynch contracted pneumonia on his return journey, and died at Calais.⁸⁰⁶ In his absence, his successors ran the firm in a way that the Foreign Office found more ‘reasonable’.⁸⁰⁷ In the meantime, the Turks had accepted the principle of German participation, which looked to be fixed at 20%.⁸⁰⁸

By the end of 1913, Britain had therefore gone some way towards securing her position in Mesopotamia and the Gulf. She had significantly reduced the danger posed by the Railway in gaining a measure of control of the Gulf section, and in making agreements over the terminus and the construction of the port. She had, in increasing and confirming her presence on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, further secured her position by providing competition for the Railway. All this had been achieved for very little cost to Britain.⁸⁰⁹ Matters would finally be tied up in 1914, when an agreement was made with the German Government on the matter too.⁸¹⁰ During the same period, Britain had also gone some way towards guaranteeing herself access to the Mesopotamian Oilfields. These negotiations form the contents of the next section.

5.2. Mesopotamian Oil

The early 1900s were a time of technological change. For a naval power such as Britain, the rapid development of battleship technology was of particular importance. Vessels of the future, both military and civilian, would be powered by oil-based fuels, rather than coal. At the same time, oil-based fuels were increasingly being used on land.

⁸⁰⁵ Mallet to Grey, No. 588, Tel., 22 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1793/53053, Parker minute.

⁸⁰⁶ Thurston to Clerk, Private, Tel., 24 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1793/53326, Crowe minute.

⁸⁰⁷ Parker Memo, 28 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1793/53917.

⁸⁰⁸ Mallet to Grey, No. 595, Tel., 27 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1793/53773.

⁸⁰⁹ Kent, *Constantinople and Asiatic Turkey*, pp. 153-4.

⁸¹⁰ For more on this see Earle, Edward Mead, ‘The Secret Anglo-German convention of 1914 Regarding Asiatic Turkey’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 38(1), 1923, pp. 24-44; German British Convention, 15 Jun. 1914, *BD X/2*, no. 249 encl.

Consequently, the extraction of oil was a matter of increasing importance to British Officials.⁸¹¹ The fact that large amounts of it were believed to lie beneath Mesopotamia, therefore, was significant. Furthermore, as Britain was interested in increasing her trade in the region, ideally at the cost of Germany, it was axiomatic that she would be keen on capturing at least some of the oil.⁸¹² British policy in this regard focused around the person of William Knox D’Arcy, a colourful businessman who had grown up in Australia, following the bankruptcy of his British father. He had already been successful in finding oil and gaining concessions in Persia in the early 1900s. He also had a strong claim to a concession to search for and to work oil wells in Mesopotamia, although his rights to it were debated, and there was competition with a German concern. Nevertheless, he was the favoured candidate of the Foreign Office, in a large part thanks to having been there first.

The situation after the revolution left the D’Arcy claim on rather weaker ground. He faced competition from several quarters, including America. Ronald Lindsay thought it ‘natural’ that a new regime would hope to reconsider concessions generally, especially given the ‘lavish’ manner in which some, such as the Baghdad Railway concession, had been handed out. However, he remained confident that D’Arcy’s group would succeed in gaining the concession eventually, given patience and strong advocacy from Lowther.⁸¹³ The cause received a boost in June 1909, when the Ottoman Council of Ministers formally took the decision that the concession would go to D’Arcy.⁸¹⁴ D’Arcy himself was soon examining gift horses. Having heard that the Turkish Government would maintain its own access to certain specified wells, he complained that if this was for any reason other than to

⁸¹¹ Fiona Venn pointed out that prior to the First World War, oil served diplomatic interests, rather than it providing its own impetus to diplomacy, in many cases: *id.*, *Oil Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, (New York, 1986).

⁸¹² Parkes Memorandum, 6 May 1913, FO 371/1819/21249, provides details of negotiations up to this point. See also Kent, *Oil and Empire*.

⁸¹³ Lowther to Grey, No. 674, 17 Aug. 1909, FO 371/777/31632, Lindsay minute.

⁸¹⁴ Lowther to Grey, No. 212, Tel., 21 June 1909, FO 371/777/23256.

facilitate their handover, he would not be able to accept it, as his group could not tolerate others working in their area.⁸¹⁵ British minds were soon turned to more important issues, as the Shell company expressed its interest in applying for a concession in the Baghdad and Mosul area.⁸¹⁶ Being pledged to D'Arcy, this put the Foreign Office in a difficult position. Shell stated that as there was now American competition, D'Arcy's chances had meaningfully diminished. The Foreign Office was non-committal, and suggested that D'Arcy might communicate with Shell himself, if so inclined. Mallet warned that if Britain was to support any concern, it would have to be majority British.⁸¹⁷ This presented D'Arcy with an opportunity to defend his position. He informed Mallet that he did not want to assimilate with Shell, and that the company was in any case not majority British. He added that he was taking steps (although he didn't detail them) to deal with the increased competition, and expressed the hope that he would still be able to rely on the support of the Foreign Office. To drive his point home, he enclosed a memorandum, listing his competitors, their countries of origin, and the details of their applications.⁸¹⁸

This was by no means the only problem faced by the Foreign Office in securing the oil concession. Germany was also hopeful of securing for herself a slice of the Mesopotamian pie. The Deutsche Bank were preparing to arrange a '*regie*' for petroleum, which would centralise the production, creating a monopoly, the proceeds of which would go towards service of the Ottoman Debt. They noted that a previous Sultan had granted them certain mineral rights. Hardinge was unconcerned. 'The Turks' could not 'establish a petroleum *regie*' without British consent, and he saw no reason to agree to a monopoly which would form an 'inconvenient precedent.'⁸¹⁹ The suggestion faded into nothing. By

⁸¹⁵ D'Arcy to Mallet, 1 Jul. 1909, FO 371/777/24868.

⁸¹⁶ Sir Marcus Samuel to Grey, 28 Jul. 1909, FO 371/777/28640.

⁸¹⁷ Mallet – D'Arcy, 30 Aug. 1909, FO 371/777/32838.

⁸¹⁸ D'Arcy to Mallet, 8 Sep. 1909, FO 371/777/33985.

⁸¹⁹ Lane to Grey, 6 Nov. 1909, FO 371/777/41111, Hardinge minute.

1912, the British position was that D'Arcy had Foreign Office backing. Parker remarked that Britain 'did not want to encourage another competition, as against Mr D'Arcy, for the Mesopotamian oil concessions'.⁸²⁰ Britain was tied to the D'Arcy group, but this was not an outcome welcomed by junior officials. In August 1912, Sir Henry Babington Smith had proposed the involvement of his National Bank of Turkey in Oil extraction. Oliphant noted that he hoped for British support, but to Norman's regret, 'obligations towards Mr D'Arcy ... [could not] be overlooked.'. Norman 'wish[ed]' that Britain could 'support this scheme' which was both 'grandiose and very largely British', but before anything could be done, the group would have to bring D'Arcy into the project.⁸²¹ It was clear that British support for D'Arcy was rooted firmly in strategic rather than commercial factors.⁸²² However, D'Arcy seemed amenable to the National Bank's overtures. His group informed Grey that they would be willing to join with the National Bank, assuming they got at the least a half share, but that they remained willing and able to work alone too. Oliphant thought that fusion now seemed 'most improbable', and reminded his colleagues that their obligations to the D'Arcy group meant that support could not be offered to Babington Smith. Norman thought that the time had come to inform Babington Smith of the truth of the matter.⁸²³

Seeing as a primary motivation for the Foreign Office in trying to secure the concession for a British firm was to secure fuel for the Navy, Officials had to cooperate with the Admiralty in formulating British policy. The Admiralty was concerned that, should foreign interests gain a level of influence in oil extraction, they might be able to use this against Britain in a time of war. As a consequence, control of the oilfields should

⁸²⁰ Parker minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 859, 13 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1487/44663.

⁸²¹ Babington-Smith to Maxwell, 29 Aug. 1912, FO 371/1485/36674, Oliphant and Norman minutes.

⁸²² Kent in Kent, 181-3

⁸²³ Greenway to Grey, 2 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1486/3718.

remain in British hands as much as possible.⁸²⁴ This finally made up the Foreign Office mind. Babington Smith was informed that he could not be supported, a decision reached in part because his National Bank led project would include finance from the Deutsche Bank, among others.⁸²⁵ The fuel question now became the focus of discussions. On 19 November 1912, Charles Greenway, a representative of D'Arcy's group and later Managing Director of his the Anglo Persian Oil Company, attended a meeting with Foreign Office and Admiralty staff, which discussed how, and on what terms, fuel would be provided to the Navy in the event of the concession being finally gained.⁸²⁶ Methods of keeping the company British and safeguarding the Navy's fuel supply were discussed – conversations getting so far as to formulate a rough plan whereby an annual payment from the British Government and help in securing the concession would be considered a *quid pro quo* for the company remaining fully British, although the Admiralty opposed a payment of this kind.⁸²⁷ British officials remained focused on finding a way to secure the concession and keep the resulting company British. In January 1913, Parker concluded that despite German claims, the 'Validity' of her rights were 'far from being incontestable.' In addition, one of the competing companies for the concession, Shell, was 'predominantly foreign'. In the face of all this competition, and to help secure the concession, Parker concluded, D'Arcy should send an agent to Constantinople. Not for the first time in the pre-war period, Mallet felt that Lowther had not done enough. Despite the ongoing Balkan Wars, he complained that it looked as though 'the Embassy were too much occupied to give attention to this matter, but it [was] a very important one for British interests'. He thought that Lowther should increase his efforts to secure the concession for D'Arcy.⁸²⁸ Efforts

⁸²⁴ Admiralty to Foreign Office, Confidential, 26 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1486/40516.

⁸²⁵ Grey to Marling, No. 672, Tel., Confidential, 28 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1486/40516.; Mallet minute, Babington-Smith to Maxwell, 29 Aug. 1912, FO 371/1485/36674.

⁸²⁶ Parker Memorandum, 19 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1486/49500.

⁸²⁷ Nicolson Minute, 20 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1486/50815.

⁸²⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 8, Tel., 6 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1760/810, Parker and Mallet minutes.

were also redoubled in London. Officials took the line with Hakki (who was in London dealing with both the Balkan Wars and commercial questions with Britain) that the concession had been promised to D’Arcy in 1909, but that this had been interrupted by the counter-coup. Although the Turkish Government now claimed that it would be ‘illegal’ to award the concession, Hakki was told that legal avenues did exist, and that in the light of this, the concession should be awarded as soon as possible.⁸²⁹ Hearing that the Germans were simultaneously straining to get the concession, Grey instructed Lowther to ‘urge [the] Grand Vizier in the strongest manner to fulfil assurances given in the past, and support Stork [D’Arcy’s agent] in every way’ that he could.⁸³⁰

5.2.a. Amalgamation

The Turkish Government found itself in something of a bind. It faced two rivals, both desperate to secure the Mesopotamian concession. Both had a reasonable, but by no means watertight, claim to be awarded it. Consequently, Mahmud Shevket Pasha, the Grand Vizier, sought to encourage the two competing interests to amalgamate and work the claim together. By way of argument, he told Lowther that the ‘most valuable districts’ already fell under the Baghdad Railway concession, and were under German control.⁸³¹ Amalgamation had, Maxwell pointed out, already been turned down by D’Arcy, and was not a favoured outcome for the British Government; Mallet said that it was the ‘very thing we wish to avoid’.⁸³² As time went on, however, Foreign Office opinion began to soften towards amalgamation. Shevket proved evasive on what basis, precisely, the German claims rested, but repeatedly pressed the idea. In April 1913, he promised that if amalgamation was effected, he would ensure that British interests were preponderant.

⁸²⁹ Memorandum Communicated to Hakki Pasha, 18 Mar. 1913, FO 371/1760/11393.

⁸³⁰ Grey to Lowther, No. 151, Tel., 25 Mar. 1913, FO 371/1760/13851.

⁸³¹ This claim was doubted by Maxwell. He thought that in any case, D’Arcy would be aware of the limitations imposed by the Railway concession and therefore unconcerned.

⁸³² Lowther to Grey, No. 165, Tel., 26 Mar. 1913, FO 371/1760/13902, Maxwell and Mallet minutes.

Mallet, so critical a month previously, now thought that amalgamation with British control 'would suit' Britain.⁸³³ Lowther's worries that Shevket was increasingly erring towards the view that Germany was more entitled to the concession seemed to focus minds in London. 'As the question develops', wrote Herman Norman, 'amalgamation if it can be secured with British control seems more and more indicated as the proper solution'.⁸³⁴ The D'Arcy group was also willing to contemplate amalgamation, so long as they retained control, however, having been in communication with Babington Smith, whose National Bank backed group remained interested, they feared it might prove impossible.⁸³⁵ In Constantinople, Lowther thought that the best strategy would be to put more pressure on Hakki in London. Parker considered that this could be incorporated into the negotiations then ongoing around the 4% customs increase. Hakki could be told that the British Government relied upon the Ottoman Government giving them control over the oil wells.

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In the meantime, the National Bank had continued its efforts to secure involvement in Mesopotamia for itself, much to Parker's frustration. He thought that in making an arrangement difficult, they had been 'most unpatriotic'.⁸³⁷ The National Bank even complained that they had not been treated fairly by the British Government, an accusation which Parker denied with vehemence. As soon as the Foreign Office became aware that the National Bank was interested, Babington Smith was told in a letter of 30 June, they informed them that Government support was pledged elsewhere. The letter, signed by Mallet but written by Parker, went on to say that 'for naval and political reasons, H.M.G. attach great importance to an arrangement [amalgamation]... they earnestly trust that the

⁸³³ Lowther to Grey, No. 336, 21 Apr. 1913, FO 371/1760/19321, Mallet minute.

⁸³⁴ Lowther to Grey, No. 349., 25 Apr. 1913, FO 371/1760/19792, Norman minute.

⁸³⁵ Greenway to Foreign Office, 29 Apr. 1913, FO 371/1760/20063.

⁸³⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 238., Tel., 21 May 1913, FO 371/1760/23347.

⁸³⁷ Greenaway to Foreign Office, 23 Jun. 1913, FO 371/1761/18805, Parker minute.

National Bank will, from patriotic motives, assist in reaching such an arrangement'. Both the National Bank and D'Arcy's Anglo-Persian Oil company should, it went on, follow the instructions of the British Government when matters affecting British interests were involved. At this time, the proposed distribution of shares would see the Anglo Persian group taking 35%, with the National Bank and Deutsche Bank having 25% each. The final 15% would be held by Shell.⁸³⁸ While the National Bank was seen as obstructive, relations with Germany were improving. Reflecting a more general trend of thawing relations between the two Powers, von Kühlmann told Parker that his Government was willing to see the Anglo-Persian Company take a 50% share of the eventual amalgamated concern.⁸³⁹ Indeed, obstruction came more readily from within the British state. In July, Parker complained that it was the Admiralty holding up progress. Although the time was right to negotiate with Germany and Turkey, he was being prevented from doing so meaningfully because the Admiralty 'would not say what they wanted in the light of what it was possible to get. The F.O. was thus placed in an impossible position, and that solely owing to the lack of clear thinking and to indecisions at the Adm[iral]ty.' At Parker's request, Grey spoke to Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, directly, who assured him that his department would have no objection to an agreement that saw Germany having access to some of the supplied fuel oil.⁸⁴⁰ With this, matters became clearer. They became clearer yet in September, when Babington Smith's National Bank group decided to drop out of the negotiations, criticising the methods of the D'Arcy group – criticism that was not, according to Parker, entirely unwarranted.⁸⁴¹

The oil question had therefore been stabilised. Although satisfactory agreement was never reached, with negotiations being overtaken by the outbreak of war, Britain had

⁸³⁸ Mallet to Babington-Smith, 30 Jun. 1913, FO 371/1761/29070, Parker memorandum.

⁸³⁹ Parker Memorandum, Secret, 16 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1761/32788.

⁸⁴⁰ Parker and Grey minutes, MacLeod to Grey, 30 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1761/35263.

⁸⁴¹ Parker Memo, 10 Sep. 1913, FO 371/1761/41919.

manoeuvred herself into a fairly strong position. While cooperation with Germany was perhaps not ideal, the signs augured well for British control of any eventual enterprise. On a less positive note, however, it confirmed to British observers that any period in which Britain was a favoured power at Constantinople had now gone, and Britain had had to use strong arm tactics and negotiation with other actors to force herself into a reasonable position.

5.3. Shipbuilding

Shipbuilding was another commercial area where Britain had hoped to make strides in the aftermath of the revolution. On his arrival, Lowther had speculated that the Turks would 'surely want to buy ships'.⁸⁴² A primary motivation of the Young Turks in overthrowing the Hamidian regime had been to 'save' their moribund Empire. For the Young Turks, steeped in Social Darwinism, their Navy was a source of embarrassment, and a priority for development, demonstrated by the despatch of Admiral Douglas Gamble as naval advisor.⁸⁴³

Initially, it was assumed by most observers that the Turkish fleet would be strengthened by the purchase of existing ships from more established naval powers. For instance, 'most improbable' rumours suggested in 1909 that the Turks contemplated the purchase of two dreadnought class battleships being built in Britain for Brazil.⁸⁴⁴ Although the Brazilian Foreign Minister dismissed the rumours as 'ridiculous', Lowther reported that there was in fact substance to the reports.⁸⁴⁵ Although the ships would be expensive and not in

⁸⁴² Lowther to Grey, Private, 11 Aug. 08, Kunalp et al, *Private Correspondence*, no. 3

⁸⁴³ The naval balance in the Mediterranean was complicated by Britain's eventual agreement with France that the two Powers would divide their navies into different areas, to cover each other. Thus, the British fleet largely withdrew from the Mediterranean. Complicating the matter further was the intense rivalry of Greece and Turkey, both trying to increase the strength of their fleets. Italy, too, was increasing in strength. See Miller, *The Millstone*; Halpern, Paul G., *The Mediterranean Naval Situation 1908-1914*, (Cambridge, Ma, 1971).

⁸⁴⁴ O'Beirne to Grey, No. 430, Confidential, Tel., 2 Sep. 1909, FO 371/780/33080, Mallet minute.

⁸⁴⁵ Haggard to Grey, No. 16, Tel., 5 Sep. 1909, FO 371/780/33331.

Gamble's planned programme, he apparently contemplated inspecting them, especially as it appeared that they were for sale. The possibility of a drastic increase in the firepower available to Turkey promoted some concern in Louis Mallet, who thought that the 'possibility of Naval expansion on the part of Turkey [was] a serious outlook' for Britain.⁸⁴⁶ The shift in the balance of power in the region provided by two dreadnoughts would indeed be dramatic, especially as the revolutionary warship herself, *HMS Dreadnought*, had only been launched in 1906, and the navies of the world (including, it must be said, that of Great Britain) were scrambling to update their fleets to reflect the new standard in seagoing firepower and speed. Such vessels could control the Straits, menace Greece or threaten British seagoing dominance of the Persian Gulf. In this case, however, the danger receded. The Brazilians were not disposed to sell after all, and question subsided.⁸⁴⁷

Such fears for the strategic balance receded when, in 1910, the Turks reached an arrangement with Armstrong and Vickers to purchase two ships. Reflecting the lack of professional expertise in Turkey, the Turks asked that Britain would arrange an expert to oversee that the ships were of reasonable quality and that the prices being charged were fair. Hardinge was keen that this request be accommodated. He could 'imagine the alacrity with which these demands would be met by Admiral von Tirpitz if the order were given to German firms.'⁸⁴⁸ His urgency was increased by the news that Germany had offered a battleship to the Turks. This made it all the more urgent, Maxwell argued, that the request be acceded to.⁸⁴⁹

The situation became more complicated over the summer of 1910, as other British companies asked for British support in getting a contract to build the Turkish ships. One firm for instance, the Fairfields Shipbuilding Company, requested that the Government

⁸⁴⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 311, Tel, 6 Sep. 1909, FO 371/780/33625, Mallet minute.

⁸⁴⁷ Admiralty to FO, 22 Oct. 1909, FO 371/780/39104.

⁸⁴⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 152, 15 Mar. 1910, FO 371/1005/9636, Hardinge minute.

⁸⁴⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 53, Secret, Tel., 4 Apr. 1910, FO 371/1005/11487, Maxwell minute.

would treat them on an equal footing with Armstrong with regard to assurances of specification and similar. Parker worried that this was a difficult request to refuse, but that it might open the door to German competition. Grey, for his part, informed the company that the Armstrong contract was too far along, and that Britain could not take action that might ruin it.⁸⁵⁰ This development reflected wider problems at Constantinople. Lowther reported that the negotiations with Armstrong had run into problems, and that Fairfields and another British firm, Palmers, were now pushing for the ships to be put to tender. A German firm, Vulkan, was apparently encouraging this, as they thought that they would have a good chance of winning.⁸⁵¹ Officials were perhaps not surprised to learn that the applications of other firms had been encouraged by the Porte, which hoped to bring down the price of Armstrong's offer. Mallet took this news to mean that Britain should now consider the original request for support from Fairfields, but Hardinge overruled him. He thought Armstrong still the strongest British bidder, and that without Government support, the order would likely go to a foreign power.⁸⁵² The difference of opinion in the Foreign Office continued when Fairfields submitted plans for warships at a lower price than that asked by Armstrong. Norman thought that a combination of the firms would be best, whilst Mallet again pressed his view that Britain should give Fairfields approval. Hardinge, however, stayed firm to his original argument that Armstrong and Vickers represented the best chance of success.⁸⁵³ His stance was justified by news from the Admiralty that Fairfields had made 'improper use' of Admiralty plans, whilst the other competing British firm, Palmers, would be unable to build guns themselves, and would have to work in partnership with an American firm. This meant that Armstrong was the only firm eligible

⁸⁵⁰ Fairfield Shipbuilding Co. to Grey, 16 Jun. 1910, FO 371/1005/21585, Parker and Grey minutes.

⁸⁵¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 253, Confidential, 24 Apr. 1910, FO 371/1005/14921.

⁸⁵² Lowther to grey, No. 115, Tel., 19 Jun. 1910, FO 371/1005/21875, Mallet and Hardinge minutes.

⁸⁵³ Lowther to Grey, No. 116, Tel., 22 Jun. 1910, FO 371/1005/22459, Norman, Mallet and Hardinge minutes.

to receive an ‘Admiralty certificate’.⁸⁵⁴ British policy was now clear – Armstrong should get the order. More important than this, however, was that the order ‘should not be placed abroad’.⁸⁵⁵

At this juncture, the Foreign Office discovered that the Turks had agreed to purchase two existing battleships from Germany. This was widely believed to mark the conclusion of the negotiations with Armstrong. Norman believed that Armstrong would have got it, if they had been ‘left alone in the field’, and complained that the Turks had been playing a ‘double game’. In a final broadside, he pointed out that the Germans would be unlikely to sell anything that would be ‘worth their while’ to keep. Grey was more philosophical. He thought that recent acquisitions by the Greeks had probably encouraged the Turks to think more about speed of delivery than utility, and added that he was ‘not sure that the Turks would ever have made up their minds to give any order’.⁸⁵⁶ Admiral Hugh Pigot Williams, who had replaced Gamble, suggested that the situation might be rescued by the offer of two British vessels to the Turks. He noted that the German vessels were slow, and that Britain might be able to offer faster vessels which would be more suited to Turkish requirements. Grey thought there could be no objection. If Britain did not sell, then the Germans would.⁸⁵⁷ The Admiralty was rather less flexible, and suggested ships older than those that had been mentioned to the Turks, although they claimed that these remained superior to those offered by Germany.⁸⁵⁸ The Turks were not keen on this offer, but expressed an interest in ‘*Warrior Class*’ fast armoured cruisers.⁸⁵⁹ ‘As expected’, the Admiralty decided that it was unable to spare any vessels of that nature. Mallet speculated

⁸⁵⁴ Grey to Lowther, No. 156, Confidential, Tel., 30 Jun. 1910, FO 371/1005/23567, based on information privately communicated to Tyrrell, Grey’s private secretary, embodied in a note at FO 371/1005/23525.

⁸⁵⁵ Grey to Lowther, No. 179., Tel., 20 Jul. 1910, FO 371/1005/26382.

⁸⁵⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 140, Tel., 29 Jul. 1910, FO 371/1005/27528, Norman and Grey minutes.

⁸⁵⁷ Lowther to Grey, No. 114, Tel., 1 Aug. 1910, FO 371/1005/27658, Grey minute.

⁸⁵⁸ Admiralty to Grey, 4 Aug. 1910, FO 371/1005/28304.

⁸⁵⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 148, Tel., 7 Aug. 1910, FO 371/1005/28523.

that this was perhaps not a bad outcome, as it might restrain warlike posturing towards Greece.⁸⁶⁰

Despite this, the negotiations to buy new vessels continued. Tevfik, at that time Turkish Ambassador to London, had asked for information on the reasonableness of Armstrong's prices in August, after many had assumed that negotiations were at an end.⁸⁶¹ In January 1911, as discussions continued, the British position was much the same. The Admiralty still favoured Armstrong over Palmers, as they had more knowledge, which would entail less supervision and a lower price, and because their bid saw the guns for the ship manufactured in Britain rather than America.⁸⁶² This time, the armament of the ships proved a sticking point. Lowther warned the Turks against using Krupp guns to equip the vessels, pointing out that in a majority of cases, Powers using 'customer' guns, rather than building them themselves, used British. He worried that the recent purchase of German ships meant that German guns were now favoured in Turkish Naval circles.⁸⁶³ Although Tevfik had promised that the guns would be bought in Britain, the Turkish Government remained undecided.⁸⁶⁴ Maxwell thundered that Tevfik had 'mised' the British, whilst Grey concluded that 'what the Turkish ambassador says does not appear to be reliable'. The question of guns, although appearing minor, threatened quite serious consequences. As Mallet pointed out, 'German guns' meant 'German officers', threatening the British domination of the Ottoman Navy. Furthermore, if the hulls of the ships were built in Britain, with the guns added in Germany, this would mean British plans falling into the hands of the Germans.⁸⁶⁵ Armstrong were concerned that this might form an

⁸⁶⁰ Admiralty to Grey, 20 Aug. 1910, FO 371/1005/30567, Norman and Grey minutes; Lindsay had assumed that the answer would be in the negative: Lindsay minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 148, Tel., 7 Aug. 1910, FO 371/1005/28523.

⁸⁶¹ Tevfik Memorandum, 2 Aug. 1910, FO 371/1005/28195.

⁸⁶² Admiralty to Foreign Office, 28 Jan. 1911, FO 371/1238/3363.

⁸⁶³ Lowther to Grey, No. 75, 31 Jan. 1911, FO 371/1238/4284.

⁸⁶⁴ Grey to Lowther, No. 45, 10 Feb. 1911, FO 371/1238/4606; Lowther to Grey, No.32, 11 Feb. 1911, FO 371/1238/5146.

⁸⁶⁵ Maxwell, Grey and Mallet minutes, Lowther to Grey, No.32, 11 Feb. 1911, FO 371/1238/5146.

unwelcome precedent, and Maxwell was informed that, in deference to the political circumstances, they would be willing to lower their price for the work.⁸⁶⁶ Lowther was now instructed to support Armstrong so far as he could, although to remain open to other British offers of complete vessels, and to complain strongly about the Turkish Government's creating of a commission to decide upon the armament of the new ships.⁸⁶⁷ Maxwell was in no doubt where the delay over armament had come from, certain that it represented the work of Palmers, the competing firm. Mallet called them 'unscrupulous', and hoped that the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty would 'take notice of it', preventing them from receiving British orders in future.⁸⁶⁸

The Turkish Government was also struggling with the demands of the process. In the face of strong criticism from their Parliament, a vote of confidence was called and won.⁸⁶⁹ Emboldened by this, a provisional agreement for hulls was concluded with Armstrong in May 1911, and although the question of guns awaited the report of the commission, it eventually reported in favour of the complete ships being built in Britain.⁸⁷⁰ Although there was some delay, owing to Turkish financial problems, a firm order was made for a single complete battleship in June 1911.⁸⁷¹

As a coda to the saga of the ships ordering, in February 1912, the Turks requested British inspectors to confirm that ongoing work was to specification, and of equivalent standard to that carried out for Britain. The Admiralty initially refused to do so without being given detailed technical specifications; the Turks argued (justifiably, according to

⁸⁶⁶ Armstrong Vickers and Son Maxim to Maxwell, Private and Confidential, 16 Feb. 1911, FO 371/1238/5082.

⁸⁶⁷ Grey to Lowther, No. 43, Tel., 20 Feb. 1911, FO 371/1238/6348. He was instructed to say that its creation constituted an 'evasion' of promises made to HMG.

⁸⁶⁸ Maxwell and Mallet minutes, Lowther to Grey, No. 204, 29 Mar. 1911, FO 371/1239/12034.

⁸⁶⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 84, Tel., 9 Apr. 1911, FO 371/1239/13061.

⁸⁷⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 87, Tel., 10 Apr. 1911, FO 371/1239/13139; Grey to Lowther, No. 121, 2 May 1911, FO 371/1239/16546.

⁸⁷¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 128, Tel., 5 Jun. 1911, FO 371/1239/21644; Lowther to Grey, No. 129, tel., FO 371/1239/22155; Marling to Grey, No. 135, Tel., 15 Jun. 1911, FO 371/1239/23399; Marling to Grey, No. 141, Tel., 17 Jun 1911, FO 371/1239/23745.

Parker) that they did not have such information, hence their request for it to be done for them. A frustrated Foreign Office requested the Admiralty to change their mind, as no work would be forthcoming in the future if such a state of affairs were allowed to continue.⁸⁷² Grudgingly, the Admiralty accepted, but fired a parting shot: they would not afford the Turkish Government facilities for testing the armour plating on the new ship. This, Herman Norman noted, did not matter very much, as the Turks had not asked for this in any case.⁸⁷³

The Turks therefore had their dreadnought, while the British had Turkish business. However, the negotiations had been lengthy and convoluted, and there was a palpable sense of frustration in the Foreign Office at both the tactics of the Turks and the unhelpfulness of the Admiralty in helping them to secure Turkish orders for British firms. Although Britain had beaten the Germans to the order, the Germans had sold some ships to the Turks. Indeed, the purchase of ships from Britain is perhaps not reflexive of any great favour. As the preeminent naval power, and the innovators of the new class of fast, all big gun battleships, it was perhaps inevitable that any power looking to improve her naval strength would look towards Britain. The question of ships would once more prove an issue in Anglo-Turkish relations, as well as complicating relations with Russia, when, at the outbreak of war, this vessel and another, originally being built for Brazil but destined for Turkey, were seized by the British navy, leaving the Ottoman delegation sent to receive them empty-handed.

5.4. Finance, Railways and Oil

⁸⁷² Parker minute, Admiralty to Foreign Office, 22 Feb. 1912, FO 371/1486/7877.

⁸⁷³ Admiralty to Foreign Office, 2 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1486/14320, Norman minute.

Britain's position by the end of 1913 was a strong one.⁸⁷⁴ She had secured herself a much improved position regarding the Baghdad Railway, significantly reducing the threat it posed to her position in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. She had manoeuvred herself into a strong position with regard to the Mesopotamian Oilfields. In addition, the first Turkish dreadnought was being constructed in a British yard.

Although British policy had managed to secure all of this, it had come at a cost. Although the obvious expenses, such as loosening of various capitulatory rights and consent to the 4% were slight, Britain had appeared obstructionist to Turkish observers, and had driven a hard bargain. Indeed, the British position became increasingly hard-line as time went on, and she seemed less and less willing to take Turkish wishes into account. This reflected a growing feeling that Turkey was not a British priority. Relations with other Powers were more important than securing Turkish favour (see the 1910 loan, for instance), and Turkey increasingly seemed an unreliable and unstable country. When British strategy and global interests were the price of improved relations with the Turks, Britain was unwilling to pay it. In the final analysis, British commercial aims in Turkey were fundamentally strategic, rather than commercial, and her commercial victories came at the cost, rather than benefit, of the Turks.

⁸⁷⁴ Kent, *Oil and Empire* p. 11. Briton Cooper Busch considered the British position in the Gulf to be even stronger in 1914 than it had been in the 1890s – he considered the challenges faced in this period had helped to strengthen the British position. *Id.*, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, p. 388.

6. Wars before the War: Tripoli and the Balkans ⁸⁷⁵

6.a. A period of conflict

The final years before the outbreak of the First World War were tumultuous ones for Turkey. From September 1911 to August 1913, she was involved in an almost constant series of wars which saw her lose large chunks of her African holdings, along with the vast majority of the European provinces of the Empire. Moreover, the wars proved a significant mental shock to Turkey, and suggested to her that she would be unable to rely on the Great Powers any further. ⁸⁷⁶ The Powers, for their part, had come very close to war over the Balkans, and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire seemed to suggest that further upheavals were likely. ⁸⁷⁷

By 1911, Italy had long coveted colonial possessions with which to underpin her fragile claims to Great Power status. Following the Agadir crisis in April 1911, Ottoman North Africa was the last part of the continent untouched by the Colonial Powers. Furthermore, Italian influence was already strong, as a result of the ‘peaceful penetration’ of Libya, and the Italian Government saw a ‘relatively cheap’ colonial war as likely to prove politically useful. ⁸⁷⁸ Consequently, various complaints about Ottoman treatment of Italian subjects and businesses were made. Following the delivery of a forcible ultimatum, war was declared on 29 September. The Powers, keen to avoid falling out amongst themselves and largely disinterested in the conflict, allowed the Italians to get on with the war. In this, the Italians were helped by the slightly odd position they occupied in

⁸⁷⁵ See Geppert *et al*, *Wars before the War*.

⁸⁷⁶ Hock, Stefan, “‘Waking us from this Endless Slumber’: The Ottoman-Italian War and North Africa in the Ottoman Twentieth Century”, *War in History*, 26(2), 2019, pp 204-226; Mustafa Aksakal, ‘Not “by those old books of international law, but only by war”: Ottoman Intellectuals on the Eve of the Great War’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 15 (2004).

⁸⁷⁷ Christopher Clark went further and suggested that the Balkans were the key to the outbreak of the First World War – the ‘Balkan Inception Scenario’: *id.*, *Sleepwalkers*.

⁸⁷⁸ Hock, ‘Endless Slumber’, p. 212-3.

international politics, being a member of the Triple Alliance but largely on friendly terms with the Triple *Entente* Powers. By late autumn, the war had already reached a state of stalemate. Italian troops had landed in several locations, but had found themselves unable to move far inland. Embarrassingly for the Italian Army, they suffered heavy losses in asymmetric fighting with local irregulars.

Frustrated by the inability of the Army to progress, Italian strategy moved further afield, threatening the Straits and attacking the Turkish held islands in the Aegean, resulting in a panicked Ottoman Government closing the Straits to all traffic by the setting of minefields. This provoked Great Power action. Most of the Powers suffered from the restrictions on trade that this step caused – the British Foreign Office received numerous communications from irate merchants, concerned about their perishable cargoes – and the Russians were naturally anxious at any movement in the delicate diplomatic situation at the Straits. Eventually, following Great Power pressure, the Straits were reopened, and the war continued, coming to a close only on the outbreak of the First Balkan War in Autumn 1912, as the Turks realised that they faced an existential threat to their European lands.⁸⁷⁹

The islands question proved longer lasting. Britain was unwilling to allow Italy to maintain possession of the Dodecanese, some of which presented excellent naval bases and might be used to significantly alter the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean. Although British diplomacy aimed to remove the Italians from the islands, the Italians

⁸⁷⁹ For the events of the Italo-Turkish war, see Hock, 'Endless Slumber'; Caccamo, Francesco, 'Italy, Libya and the Balkans', Geppert, *Wars before the War*, pp. 21-40; Askew, William, *Europe and Italy's Acquisition of Libya* (Durham, NC, 1942); Lowe, C.J., 'Grey and the Tripoli War, 1911-12', Hinsley, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 315-323. For Italian Policy of the period more generally, see Bosworth, Richard, *Italy, Least of the Great Powers* (Cambridge, 1979).

remained in possession of them at the outbreak of the First World War, holding them as a guarantee of the treaty of Ouchy, which ended the war.⁸⁸⁰

Meanwhile, in the Balkans, the newly minted Balkan League prepared to attack Turkey and secure the territories historically considered theirs. This grouping, which consisted of Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece, had been established at first with the encouragement of Russia, who saw it as a bulwark against Hapsburg incursion into the Balkans.⁸⁸¹ In the Spring and Summer of 1912, the Ottoman State suffered a number of setbacks. Significant unrest in Albania, the war with Italy and the fall of the CUP in a coup, all weakened Turkey, and suggested to the Balkan League that the time was ripe to put their plans into action. The explosion of a bomb in the Macedonian town of Kochana, and the heavy handed Turkish reprisals which followed it, provided an ideal pretext to launch the war. The conflict presented significant risks to the Powers, in particular Russia and Austria-Hungary, which both had significant ambitions of expansion in the region. That these two Powers might come to blows was an eventuality never far from the minds of European policymakers.⁸⁸²

The Balkan states, in particular Bulgaria, proved remarkably successful, and advanced rapidly towards Constantinople, eventually being held at the Çatalca lines outside the city.⁸⁸³ With winter setting in and cholera wreaking havoc amongst the troops, Grey was hopeful of giving Europe a ‘christmas [*sic*] present of peace’.⁸⁸⁴ To this end, and to avoid the problems inherent in communication via telegraph and despatch, he proposed

⁸⁸⁰ For a discussion of the islands issue, see Bosworth, Richard, ‘Britain and Italy’s acquisition of the Dodecanese, 1912-1915’, *The Historical Journal*, 13(4), 1970, pp 683-705. Bosworth suggested that the history of this dispute proved the truth of the maxim that ‘possession is 9/10ths of the law’.

⁸⁸¹ Buchanan: Russia had ‘imagined that this confederation would dance to her tune, whereas it disobeyed her express injunctions and declared war on Turkey’, *id.*, *My Mission to Russia*, p. 136.

⁸⁸² Buchanan, for instance, thought that general war was ‘more than once in sight’ during the conflict, *ibid.*

⁸⁸³ For the Balkan Wars, see Hall, Richard C., *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: 2000).

⁸⁸⁴ Grey to Cartwright, No. 95, 6 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1517/52550.

the assembly of a 'conference of Ambassadors', who would be able to talk freely about the situation and come up with a solution acceptable to all. As a starting point, it was agreed that Adrianople (today Edirne) would have to be given up by Turkey. This city, a former capital of the Empire and the site of the tombs of several former Sultans, held significant sentimental and religious value to the Turks, in addition to its status as an important aspect of the defences of Constantinople. The Turks were extremely reluctant to hand it over to Bulgaria, especially as the Bulgarian Army was yet to take the city, which still held out as 1913 dawned. Finally, after significant pressure from the revived concert of Europe, the Ottoman Government seemed ready to surrender the city. However, in a dramatic development on 23 January, CUP figures burst in on the Cabinet, engaged in drafting the submission to the Powers, and forced them to resign, shooting and killing Nazim Pasha, the general blamed for Ottoman defeats. The new Government soon discovered that the problems constraining their predecessors did not magically disappear simply by replacing them, and restarted the war with Bulgaria. Given the exhausted and disorganised nature of the Ottoman Forces, this could not but go badly, and this came to pass, with Adrianople itself falling in March.

This seemed to clear the way for the Powers to impose a solution and end the crisis. Negotiations soon centred around the borders of the new independent Albania that was to be created, specifically the town of Scutari (today Shkodër), which remained for some time in Ottoman possession, until being surrendered to the Montenegrins by its commander, in return for a large bribe. The Montenegrins, too, refused to leave for some time, making the work of the Powers difficult and again threatening a general war. Eventually, they were persuaded, and peace seemed guaranteed.

At this juncture, in the summer of 1913, the Balkan League broke up amidst tensions between the members, and fighting broke out once again amongst them, soon

joined by Romania, which had remained neutral during the first war. The Turks, too, seeing an opportunity to regain some of their lost territories, joined the conflict, advancing into Thrace and regaining Adrianople. When peace was made, Bulgaria had lost much of her gains from the wars. Turkey, although having lost much of her European provinces, now had a defensible toehold in Europe. In terms of the Great Powers, Russia and Austria in particular had been raised to a high pitch over their Balkan interests. Russia had been handed a diplomatic defeat, forced to act to defend its ally Serbia from Austria, thus alienating Bulgaria and causing her influence in the Balkans significant damage.⁸⁸⁵ The simmering resentments and unsolved questions in the region stored up trouble for the future.⁸⁸⁶

In terms of Anglo-Turkish relations, the period demonstrated that the cooling of the relationship that had begun in 1908 had continued. British policy in this period was focused on internationalisation, and on keeping in touch with other Powers – for instance Grey’s invocation of the Concert in 1912. This left little room for Turkey, where it was felt that the British had rather let her down, leaving her to the mercy of her enemies. Turkish behaviour, for instance over Adrianople, and the enactment of yet another *coup* in 1913, was not calculated to gain the favour of Britain, and direct approaches for an alliance during this period were rebuffed by Britain.⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁵ Buchanan, perhaps inevitably given his position, disagreed. Grey’s policy had allowed ‘Russia to withdraw without losing too much prestige’, *id.*, *My Mission to Russia*, p. 136-7.

⁸⁸⁶ Eyal Ginio’s work on the ‘culture of defeat’ suggested that the Balkan wars were experienced as a traumatic event by many Ottomans, and prompted a period of soul searching. This lay the groundwork for the more assertive foreign policy of the war years, but also the Turkish state which emerged in the aftermath of the First World War. *Id.*, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat: The Balkan Wars and Their Aftermath* (Oxford, 2016).

⁸⁸⁷ Discussions of this period are numerous. Classic accounts include Crampton, R.J. *The Hollow Détente: Anglo-German relations in the Balkans, 1911-1914* (London, 1980); Helmreich, Ernst, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913* (Cambridge, MA, 1938); Thaden, Edward, *Russia and the Balkan Alliance of 1912* (University Park, PA, 1965). More recently, see Hall, *Balkan Wars*; Ahmad, Feroz, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London, 1993); Jelavich, Barbara, *Russia’s Balkan Entanglements 1806-1914* (Cambridge, 1991); Macmillan, Margaret, *The War That Ended Peace: How Europe Abandoned Peace for the First World War* (London, 2014); McMeekin, Sean, *The Ottoman Endgame* (London, 2016). The Balkan Wars also produced a profusion of literature describing the horrors of the conflict, proving influential on a young Leon Trotsky. See Durham, Mary Edith, *The Struggle for*

6.1. Tripoli

6.1.a. Tensions and Discussion of Mediation

British Officials were aware of Italian frustrations and tensions in Tripoli for some time before the outbreak of war.⁸⁸⁸ In July 1911, Grey expressed sympathy to the Italian representative in London. If his complaints were true, he said, then it was very difficult for the Italian Government to obtain satisfaction in a place so far from Rome. In a move that would have been unimaginable two years earlier, he informed him that should the hand of 'Italy be forced, [he] would, if need be, express to the Turks the opinion that, in face of the unfair treatment meted out to Italians, the Turkish Government could not expect anything else.'⁸⁸⁹ Crowe was less sanguine. If other Powers gained 'special advantages' in Morocco, then Italy might feel 'compelled... to seek compensation in Tripoli – a dangerous policy.'⁸⁹⁰ Robert Vansittart, then in the early years of his long career at the Foreign Office, thought that Italian complaints were perhaps not as serious as suggested.⁸⁹¹ For instance, once such complaint suggested that an Italian girl had been influenced by the Vali of Adana to convert to Islam. Under Italian law, being younger than sixteen, she was not permitted to change religion. As a result of Italian protest, she was to be shipped to Constantinople for a full examination for the case, but she had gone missing on the way. Unsurprisingly, in the main, British officials considered such complaints as insufficient cause to provoke a war.⁸⁹² Rifat Pasha, still Foreign Minister, complained to Lowther that

Scutari (London, 1914); Trotsky, Leon, *The War Correspondence of Leon Trotsky: The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913* (London, 1980). The war even produced an International Commission to report on what had happened: *Report of the International Commission to Enquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*, (Washington, D.C., 1914). On British policy, see especially Otte, 'Entente Diplomacy vs Détente'.

⁸⁸⁸ 'Tripoli' was the term generally used by contemporary British observers to refer to the region in question, which is today largely represented by Libya. More properly, at the time, this was the Ottoman Vilayet of Tripolitania. The name Tripolitania was retained by the Italians after conquest.

⁸⁸⁹ Grey to Rodd, No. 119, 28 Jul. 1911, FO 371/1250/29707.

⁸⁹⁰ Crowe minute, Rodd to Grey, No. 117, Confidential, 31 Jul. 1911, FO 371/1251/30691.

⁸⁹¹ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 569, 11 Aug. 1911, FO 371/1251/32816.

⁸⁹² Lowther to Grey, No. 569, 11 Aug. 1911, FO 371/1251/32816.

the Italian press was 'most violent' in reaction to every incident, and Sir Rennell Rodd, British Ambassador at Rome, confirmed that both Government and Opposition leaning organs were strongly in favour of a forward policy in North Africa.⁸⁹³ Nor was this limited to Italy. Norman noted in early September that the press on both sides were taking up 'aggressive' lines on the issue.⁸⁹⁴

Despite this fevered atmosphere, matters moved slowly. Rome had taken up its 'usual deserted summer aspect', reported Rodd, as ministers assembled for monthly Cabinet meetings, before dispersing back to the 'baths and mountain stations' as quickly as possible. Although taking their time, the Italian Government was aware, he said, that it was 'almost impossible', in the face of the press campaign and public opinion, for any administration to allow French gains in Morocco without making some efforts in the direction of Tripoli. Rodd warned that the attitude of the Powers would be important: 'Should the Tripoli question become a material one, there is no doubt that the crucial moment will have arrived in which the definite orientation of Italy will be settled, and that it will depend on the attitude assumed by the Powers towards which group she will permanently gravitate in the future.' Norman was concerned that this meant that the goodwill of Italy could be bought only by acquiescence in her 'designs on Tripoli', an action which would 'alienate the sympathy of Turkey and throw her more and more into the arms of Germany'. Nevertheless, the decision was largely made. Mallet pointed out that France, Britain and Germany had already 'disinterested' themselves in Tripoli.⁸⁹⁵ The signs from Rome remained disquieting. When invited to by the Turkish Embassy, the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Marchese di San Giuliano, refused to disassociate the Italian Government from the press campaign.⁸⁹⁶ His Secretary General, meanwhile,

⁸⁹³ Rodd to Grey, No. 53, Tel, 5 Sep. 1911, FO 271/1251/35040.

⁸⁹⁴ Norman minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 625, 6 Sep 1911, FO 371/1251/35594.

⁸⁹⁵ Rodd to Grey, No. 138, Confidential, 4 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/33685; Norman and Mallet minutes.

⁸⁹⁶ Rodd to Grey, No. 57, Tel, 14 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/36166.

thought that it would be difficult for Italy to resist the calls of the Press, and suggested to Rodd that should a pretext for action present itself, there would be no warning.⁸⁹⁷ The Turks were starting to be concerned. A week before the outbreak of war, Nicolson was asked to issue a warning to Italy against 'dangerous' actions. In a sign of the limited sympathy cherished for Turkey, Nicolson replied that there was little that Britain could do, as she had not spoken for Italy at Constantinople, and thus could not speak at Rome for Turkey. Although true, this diplomatic excuse clearly demonstrated the ways in which British policy towards Turkey had changed since the Bosnian crisis of 1908, when Britain would not have sidestepped so mild a step.⁸⁹⁸ Later on, Mallet would muse that the Italian 'case' for war was so weak that it would have been better had it not been made public at all, further underlining the extent to which British policy took an indulgent attitude towards the Italians.⁸⁹⁹ Lowther reported growing nervousness in Turkish Government circles, and that many worried that any small event might be used as a pretext for action by Italy.⁹⁰⁰ Privately, he remarked that such 'nervousness' was not extreme. He found Hakki Pasha, then the Grand Vizier, to be 'much perturbed about the possibility of Italy's action in Tripoli, so much so that he thought he might lose his holiday!'⁹⁰¹

On 22 September, the Foreign Office heard from Genoa that Italian warships were being prepared to transport troops to Northern Africa.⁹⁰² The next day, the semi-official press in Rome carried a non-denial of this development.⁹⁰³ By the 26th, Britain was asked by Italy to express her moral approval of Italian action in Tripoli. Grey thought that moral support was perhaps going too far, and that Britain could not support an annexation by force without Turkish provocation, but that should Italy feel compelled to take

⁸⁹⁷ Rodd to Grey, No. 58, Confidential, Tel., 16 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/36448.

⁸⁹⁸ Grey to Lowther, No. 262, 22 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/37968.

⁸⁹⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 685, 5 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1253/39717.

⁹⁰⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 637, 18 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/37335.

⁹⁰¹ Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 20 Sep. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 256.

⁹⁰² Ricardo to Grey, Tel., 22 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/37207.

⁹⁰³ Rodd to Grey, No. 60, Tel., 23 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/37324.

‘proportionate action’ to redress wrongs, Britain would be neutral. Italy could consider this ‘benevolent’, if she so chose.⁹⁰⁴ Days later, Italy would deliver an ultimatum to Turkey, the ‘brutality’ of which came as ‘rather a shock’ to Lowther and the rest of the diplomatic establishment at Constantinople.⁹⁰⁵ Although the Turks proposed transferring Tripoli to Italian possession, maintaining Turkish suzerainty, the Italians rejected this proposal and to the ‘panic’ of the local population, Italian warships were soon visible off the coast of Tripoli.⁹⁰⁶ Grey warned Guglielmo Marchese Imperiali, the Italian Ambassador to London, that although Britain was friendly to Italy, and would allow her to defend her interests in line with an agreement made with her in 1902, the contemplated annexation was an ‘extreme step’ which could cause other Powers (particularly Britain with her large Muslim population, he might have added) significant ‘embarrassment’. He hoped that Italy would refrain, so far as possible, from action likely to provoke such embarrassment.⁹⁰⁷ Lowther thought that this was unlikely. He did not think that the war would ‘cause [Britain] any trouble’ and that it would likely be ‘confined within reasonable limits’, an eventuality that the Turks hoped for too.⁹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the Turks approached the Foreign Office, and asked that a ‘friendly word’ be said to Italy to this end, but to no avail. Nicolson repeated the line used earlier that Britain could not act at Rome having not acted at Constantinople.⁹⁰⁹ The British position was clear. Although policymakers hoped that the Italian leadership would keep their war localised, they were not willing to intercede on Turkey’s behalf. British policy at this time aimed at managing the position of Italy within the international state system. While hoping to maintain reasonable relations with the

⁹⁰⁴ Nicolson and Grey minutes, 26 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/38072.

⁹⁰⁵ Rodd to Grey, No. 66, Tel., 28 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/37995; Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 27 Sep. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 258.

⁹⁰⁶ Dickson to Grey, Tel, Decode, 29 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/37999.

⁹⁰⁷ Grey minute, Rodd to Grey, No. 178, Tel., 29 Sep. 1911. FO 371/1251/38157; Grey to Rodd, No. 153, 29 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1252/38350.

⁹⁰⁸ Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 4 Oct. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 260.

⁹⁰⁹ Grey to Bertie, No. 246, Tel, 30 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/38300

Italians, Grey also thought it best that Italy remained a part of the Triple Alliance, in order to avoid the risk of a realignment of the Powers, and a resurrection of the *Dreikaiserbund*.⁹¹⁰ At this juncture, it is clear that Grey's wider conception of foreign policy did not leave room for Turkish sensibilities, and that he was not keen to seek her favour in the way he had done in the past.

With war underway, Grey looked to another core tenet of his strategy: the *ententes* with France and Russia. He informed them that Britain would declare neutrality in the conflict, and both confirmed that they would follow suit.⁹¹¹ In terms of British neutrality, the position in Egypt was an anomaly. Although formally an Ottoman Province, it was a *de facto* British possession, and this meant that the Italian Government declared that they intended to treat the waters of Egypt as neutral, and hoped that the British Government would make a similar undertaking. As Vansittart noted, the Turkish fleet was 'discouraged' from using Egyptian ports, even in peacetime, and consequently it was declared that the use of Egypt as a naval base would not be consistent with neutrality.⁹¹² Another issue was that of the British subjects employed by the Ottoman Navy. Lowther hoped that they would be able to remain in Turkey during the war, as should they leave, 'we [should] never get them back again', and furthermore, Germans employed in the Army were to remain.⁹¹³ Grey was happy for them to stay, so long as they took no part in hostilities, but the issue would again rear its head at the end of October.⁹¹⁴ Nicolson privately admitted to Lowther that strictly speaking, British officers in the Turkish Navy could not be considered neutral, as any advice they offered would naturally be used to improve

⁹¹⁰ On this see Otte, 'Entente Diplomacy vs Détente'.

⁹¹¹ Grey to Bertie, No. 246, Tel, 30 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/38300; also sent to O'Beirne, *mutatis mutandis*; Bertie to Grey, No. 161, Tel., R., 30 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/38302; O'Beirne to Grey, No. 230, Tel, 1 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1251/38323.

⁹¹² Rodd to Grey, No. 72, Tel., 30 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/38303; Vansittart minute; Grey to Rodd, No. 184, Tel., 2 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1251/38303.

⁹¹³ Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 4 Oct. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 260; Lowther to Grey, No. 221, Tel, 30 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/38316.

⁹¹⁴ Grey to Lowther, No. 357, Tel., 3 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1251/38316;

Ottoman performance. Indeed, the Italians had complained, but seeing as German officers still remained, and the Italian complaint was specifically against British officers being afloat, it was again decided that British subjects could remain in the employ of the Navy.

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As soon as hostilities commenced, the Turks sought help in bringing the war to a negotiated close. On 30 September, they asked the British Government if they would be willing to intervene, in order to produce a peace settlement. Lowther thought there seemed little point at the present time, as the Turks still desired a settlement in which the territorial integrity of the Empire would not suffer, whilst the Italians were clear that they were not prepared to give up Tripoli.⁹¹⁶ Vansittart complained that the British Government had already made its 'feelings clear' on intervention in the war.⁹¹⁷ While the Italians remained willing to limit the war to Tripoli, and apparently did not plan to launch a full attack on the Ottoman Navy, British policymakers were happy to allow the war to play out for the time being.⁹¹⁸ Although Turkey would offer armed resistance to the Italian attack, matters drifted. The Grand Vizier, Hakki Pasha, had resigned in the wake of the Italian declaration, and the formation of a replacement cabinet took some time, as few Turkish statesmen were willing to take on the poisoned chalice of government at this difficult time for the Empire.⁹¹⁹ Kâmil, an incumbent of the Sublime Porte on several occasions, refused to consider becoming Grand Vizier again without assurances that he could govern with freedom of action from the CUP.⁹²⁰ It would not be until the 5th that a new cabinet was

⁹¹⁵ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 30 Oct. 1913, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 265.

⁹¹⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 353, Tel., 30 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/38344.

⁹¹⁷ Vansittart minute on instructions to Tefvik, communicated by him to FO, 30 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1252/38346.

⁹¹⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 224, Tel, 1 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1251/38318.

⁹¹⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 220, Tel, 30 Sep. 1911, FO 371/1251/38315; Lowther to Grey, No. 224, Tel, 1 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1251/38318.

⁹²⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 230., Tel, 2 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1252/38667.

formed, under the tutelage of Said Pasha, taking the reins for the eighth and final time.

Even this was considered to be a placeholding '*Cabinet d'Affaires*' by Lowther.⁹²¹

Meanwhile, the Turks continued to ask for mediation, suggesting intervention by Britain once the Italian occupation had been effected, on the basis that Italy had not declared that permanent occupation was the aim of the war. This was a naïve proposal. Vansittart remarked that mediation would be 'difficult' for a third party such as Britain, so 'long as the ideas of the principals [were] so far apart', whilst his colleague Maxwell was in agreement that there was 'no basis' for mediation at that moment.⁹²² The Turks were again told that intervention would be considered a hostile act by Italy, and could not be attempted.⁹²³ Across the Channel, the French were more keen to act, concerned that inaction would allow Germany to make capital by assuming the role of 'honest broker'.

While Grey agreed with the sentiment, and that promoting an arrangement was desirable, he warned that any action would involve asking Turkey to abandon Tripoli, a move that could only anger the Porte. Grey was unwilling to risk irritating the Ottomans for the benefit of the French, and counselled patience, with the full agreement of Mallet, who remarked that it was 'clearly too soon' for mediation to have any hope of success.⁹²⁴

Lowther thought that the time when any mediation might be attempted was still some way off. The Turks would wait and see what resistance they could offer, in conjunction with local Arab irregulars, before deciding on the next steps to take.⁹²⁵ As the French feared, German diplomats made efforts at Rome in the direction of mediation, attempting to encourage their ally to come to terms and pointing out the risk that the conflict could spread to the Balkans if it went on for too long. Mallet, however, was unmoved, and

⁹²¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 239, Tel., 5 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1252/39063.

⁹²² Lowther to Grey, No. 229, Tel., 2 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1252/38772, Vansittart minute, Maxwell minute.

⁹²³ Minutes on note handed to FO, 4 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1252/38768.

⁹²⁴ Grey to Lowther, No. 362, Tel., Secret, 5 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1252/38930; Lowther to Grey, No. 236, Tel., 4 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1252/39009.

⁹²⁵ Lowther to Grey, No. 243, Tel., 6 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1253/39263.

expressed himself against joining in such actions, worried that it was not sufficiently clear what precisely was planned.⁹²⁶ Policymakers remained cautious, but the official position remained that Britain was keen on mediation ‘in principle’, but that for this happen, there would need to be more clarity on Turkish desires, to form a basis for negotiation.⁹²⁷

Nicolson, never an optimist, complained to Lowther that he had ‘rarely seen such exceedingly vague proposals’ as those put forward by the Turks, and he was unclear as to what it was she wanted.⁹²⁸ Grey was ‘anxious to make no proposals’ he informed Rodd, as they were ‘sure to be futile and unacceptable.’ He wished ‘merely to ascertain facts’.⁹²⁹ In mid-October, Vansittart took stock of the situation:

The position, then, is that Turkey will not make a tangible proposal, while Italy wants the whole of Tripoli without restriction, probably, in the opinion of the Russian M.F.A., without the suzerainty of the Sultan which seems to be the plan of the Austrian M.F.A. meanwhile the Germans seem to be dropping the idea of an armistice, which Sir R. Rodd considers disadvantageous to Italy and which the Russian M.F.A. considers w[oul]d be resented at Constantinople.⁹³⁰

Mallet and Grey agreed that there was ‘nothing to be done for the present’, and Britain would have to ‘wait for the development of the situation at Constantinople’.⁹³¹ Grey was happy that Britain ‘sit still’ for the moment, as was Mallet, who thought that there was ‘no advantage’ to be gained through mediating. He would rather, he said, leave it to Germany to ‘try her hand first’.⁹³² Even the much feared Muslim backlash did not appear at this juncture. Maxwell noted that petitions from Muslim subjects in India had been very few.

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⁹²⁶ Lord Granville to Grey, No. 85, Tel., R., 10 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1253/39885; Mallet minute.

⁹²⁷ Grey to Lowther, No. 368, Tel., R., 11 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1253/40135. This telegram was also copied to British representatives at Paris, Berlin, Saint Petersburg, Rome, Vienna and Cairo.

⁹²⁸ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 16 Oct. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 262.

⁹²⁹ Grey to Rodd, No. 209, Tel., 11 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1253/40136.

⁹³⁰ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 263, Tel., R., 12 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1253/40189.

⁹³¹ Mallet and Grey minutes, Lowther to Grey, No. 263, Tel., R., 12 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1253/40189.

⁹³² Grey minute, Rodd to Grey, No. 109, Tel., 15 Oct 1911, FO 371/1254/40517; Mallet minute, Granville to Grey, No. 323, 15 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1254/40973.

⁹³³ Maxwell minute, India Office to Foreign Office, 12 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1253/40278.

Opinion in Britain was critical of the Italian action in instigating the war. Rodd complained that critical press made his job in Rome much harder. He argued that Britain must look to the future. With territory in North Africa, Italy would have a stronger presence on the Mediterranean, meaning that her 'friendship' would be more important. It made sense, he concluded, that Britain should try to improve her relationship with Italy. His arguments did not find much favour in Whitehall. Nicolson agreed that the press was 'one sided' and Vansittart argued that those responsible for translating the British press into Italian should put more emphasis on the more 'sober' articles, rather than the more 'violent' examples which, he conceded, made 'better copy'. Mallet disagreed with Rodd's final analysis. Although he thought Germany might make short term gains from being the first to make mediation proposals, he believed that Italy would not 'commit herself, when the European Conflict [came], until she [saw] which side [was] winning.'⁹³⁴ Having determined that waiting would be the order of the day, British officials turned their focus towards pressuring the Turks to relight the Red Sea lights used for night time navigation, which they had extinguished for military reasons.⁹³⁵

Grey did, however, continue to assure the Italians that Britain would not intervene in the war, and that she would not oppose annexation. He informed Imperiali that mediation had not been discussed on any basis other than annexation, 'pure and simple'.⁹³⁶ The Turks continued to appeal to Britain for mediation or intervention, going so far as making an appeal for an alliance, which was turned down. Nicolson thought the proposals 'childish and naïve'. He could 'not imagine' a 'more absurd proposal' than one in

⁹³⁴ Rodd to Grey, No. 189. Very Confidential, 10 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1254/40359; Nicolson minute, Vansittart minute.

⁹³⁵ Lowther to Grey, No. 293, Tel., 26 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1255/42288; Rodd to Grey, No. 134, Tel., 30 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1255/42901.

⁹³⁶ Grey to Rodd, No. 175, 30 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1256/43183.

particular, that Tripoli would be put under the control of Egypt, with Britain allying herself with Turkey and fighting Italy to achieve this.⁹³⁷ Others, such as Count Alois Aehrenthal, the Austrian Foreign Minister, continued to make proposals for intervention and a mediated end to the conflict.⁹³⁸ Grey stood firm. ‘At present, mediation seems to have little chance of success’, he informed Lowther, but instructed him, in the light of the Austrian proposal, to keep in touch with his colleagues at Constantinople, with a view to finding a suitable moment for a solution.⁹³⁹ The Italians, meanwhile, grew frustrated with the slow progress their armed forces were making, and complained to Britain that Turkish officers and troops were crossing Egypt to get to Tripoli and fight. Naturally, they hoped that Britain would take steps to stop it, but the Foreign Office was unimpressed. It was hard to police the border, especially considering that much of it was in large areas of unoccupied desert, and Maxwell believed that ‘everything possible [was] being done’ to prevent Turks using this land route.⁹⁴⁰ Having made this complaint, the Italian Government thought the time right to declare sovereignty over Tripoli, despite the fact that their armed forces had achieved minimal penetration. Vansittart remarked that this was ‘rather a case of “first catch your hare”.’⁹⁴¹

6.1.b. Tension over the Straits

With the war settling into stalemate, it was clear to all observers that the Italians’ best chance of a breakthrough would be to expand the scope of the war. Vansittart remarked that the Italian Government was in ‘something of a quandary’, as bringing pressure to bear on Turkey would mean either ‘giving offence to other Powers’ or attacking

⁹³⁷ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 16 Oct. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 262.

⁹³⁸ Grey to Cartwright, No. 126, 24 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1255/42141.

⁹³⁹ Grey to Lowther, No. 403, Tel., 30 Oct. 1911, FO 371/1256/43180.

⁹⁴⁰ Italian Embassy Communication, 3 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1256/43602; Maxwell minute.

⁹⁴¹ Rodd to Grey, No. 140, Tel, 5 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1256/43663; Vansittart minute.

somewhere where they could ‘strike without offence but without effect’.⁹⁴² The logical place to attempt such a stroke, despite the risks it posed, was the Straits. Rumours that this was contemplated reached London as early as November, much to Nicolson’s concern. He could not see how Britain could ‘prevent’ Italy from attacking the Straits, if she were ‘so foolish as to attempt to do so’, as ‘no Power would use force against her’.⁹⁴³ That the Straits were an obvious target had occurred to the Turks too, and they saw that this presented an opportunity to call for help from the Powers. Consequently, they appealed to Britain, pointing out that if the war were to spread, Turkey might be compelled to take measures that would impact upon the commerce of all Powers – by this, they meant closure of the Straits. With this in mind, they requested the Powers to prevail upon Italy not to act. Policymakers were, at this time, agreed that Turkey should be allowed to take defensive measures, if required.⁹⁴⁴ Amidst nervousness in commercial circles, however, both sides declared that fighting at the Straits was not on the agenda for the present. Vansittart noted with relief at the end of November that if ‘the Italian Govt. [did] not contemplate attacking [the] Dardanelles, and Turkish Govt. do not contemplate closing them, no action is... necessary’.⁹⁴⁵

In February 1913, the question was again opened. Lloyds of London, the insurance underwriting exchange which specialised in marine insurance, had heard that a closure of the Straits was contemplated.⁹⁴⁶ They hoped to reassure financiers that this was not the case, and asked for information.⁹⁴⁷ This prompted another round of international hand-wringing over the issue. To protect trade, Grey contemplated action at Rome, in

⁹⁴² Vansittart minute, Rodd to Grey, No. 240, 13 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1257/45913.

⁹⁴³ Lowther to Grey, No. 305, Tel., 7 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1256/44140; Nicolson minute.

⁹⁴⁴ Turkish Embassy Memorandum, 18 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1258/46049; Vansittart, Norman, Mallet and Grey minutes.

⁹⁴⁵ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 327, Tel., 29 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1258/47841.

⁹⁴⁶ For the development of financial institutions in London particularly, see Kynaston, David, *The City of London: Volume II, 1890-1914* (Pimlico, 1996).

⁹⁴⁷ Lloyd of London to Grey, 26 Feb. 1912, FO 371/1531/8565.

conjunction with the other Powers, asking for assurances that they would not take any action which might cause the Straits to be closed.⁹⁴⁸ Grey's proposal was met with a lukewarm response. In early March, Maxwell laid out the situation for his colleagues: 'The position is now that Russia refuses to agree, Austria will probably refuse. Germany has not answered; the French have agreed but want to include Syria.' Nicolson, ever the Russophile, admitted that the Russian attitude was 'not easy to explain'.⁹⁴⁹ The German reluctance was perhaps easier to understand: she was unwilling to act against her ally. Austria, meanwhile, was believed to be involved in what Mallet called a 'childish' plot with Italy to compel Turkey to make peace.⁹⁵⁰ Emboldened by the eventual refusal of all the Powers, other than France, to work with Grey's proposal, Italy now declared that she would be unable to give assurances, claiming that she had to keep a potentially war ending option open. Vansittart concluded that the 'idea [was] at an end'.⁹⁵¹

In April, in the light of Italian operations against the Dodecanese islands, the Ottoman Government completely closed the Straits. Russia stood to lose the most from this, as all her so-called warm water ports were on the Black Sea. The Straits were therefore her only thoroughfare to the outside world, at least in winter.⁹⁵² She requested that the Straits be reopened as soon as possible, and threatened to claim an indemnity from Turkey if this were not done so.⁹⁵³ Despite the damage to British commerce, the Italian action (in conjunction with the seizure of the islands) saw a change in the British attitude. Nicolson refused to go further at Constantinople than asking that a way for

⁹⁴⁸ Grey to Bertie, No. 78., Tel., 28 Feb. 1912, FO 371/1531/8842. Also sent to representatives at the other capitals of the Powers.

⁹⁴⁹ Maxwell minute, Nicolson minute, Buchanan to Grey, No. 89, 2 Mar. 1912, FO 371/1531/9278.

⁹⁵⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 47, Tel., Confidential, 4 Mar. 1912, FO 371/1531/9576; Mallet minute.

⁹⁵¹ Goschen to Grey, no. 26, Tel., 4 Mar. 1912, FO 371/1531/9578, Vansittart minute; Rodd to Grey, No. 35, Tel., 5 Mar. 1912, FO 371/1531/9770, Vansittart minute.

⁹⁵² The closure caused a noticeable drop in Russian exports. See McMeekin, Sean, *Ottoman Endgame*, p 65.

⁹⁵³ Lowther to Grey, No. 118, Tel., 22 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1532/17055; Grey to Buchanan, No. 134, 22 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1532/17391.

commerce to pass be found, despite a request from Imperiali.⁹⁵⁴ The British attitude had hardened towards Italy, and Whitehall was not inclined to go in to bat for Italy on the Bosphorus. Nevertheless, a solution still needed to be found for the problem of the merchant ships now congregating on both sides of the closed waterway. The German Foreign Ministry was in favour of a brief armistice being declared by Italy and Turkey to allow ships waiting to pass through. This proposal maintained Turkish security whilst also allowing vessels carrying perishable cargoes to continue on their voyages. Vansittart was pleased to note that the German attitude was ‘much more satisfactory’ than the Russian.⁹⁵⁵ Nicolson found it ‘a great bore’ that the Turks did not ‘feel disposed to open a passage through the Straits as the closure [was] causing great losses to shipping companies’, and rather more to the point, he feared that Russia might ‘take strong measures towards Turkey’, complicating the situation.⁹⁵⁶ For their part, the Russians were not keen to be involved in a *démarche* at Rome, as it was feared at Choristers’ Bridge that it would irritate Italy.⁹⁵⁷ Vansittart complained that the Russian attitude had been neither ‘fair’ to Turkey, nor ‘solidaire’ with Britain. It transpired that this was the result of a misunderstanding – Grey had not meant to ask for Russian support, rather he had intended only to keep Sergey Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, aware of this latest development.⁹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the pressure told. The Straits would be opened to merchant vessels, who would have to take on board a pilot to get them through the defences. Although Lowther had reported that the first ships would pass on 6 May, this date came and went.⁹⁵⁹ By the 13th, with no sign of movement, Parker found the situation ‘unsatisfactory... [and] uncertain’, especially as Whitehall would be ‘pestered by shipping companies still more’.

⁹⁵⁴ Grey to Rodd, No. 79, 22 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1532/17247.

⁹⁵⁵ Goschen to Grey, No. 39, Tel., 30 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1532/18321, Vansittart minute.

⁹⁵⁶ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 29 Apr. 1912, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 306.

⁹⁵⁷ For the importance of the Straits to Russian policymakers, see Bobroff, Ronald Park, *Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish State* (New York, 2006).

⁹⁵⁸ Buchanan to Grey, No. 172, Tel., 1 May 1912, FO 371/1532/18485, Vansittart, Grey minutes.

⁹⁵⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 143, Tel., 2 May 1912, FO 371/1532/18723.

Lowther was instructed to do all he could to 'expedite' matters.⁹⁶⁰ By the 20th, shipping was finally moving smoothly. For the time being, the question was closed.

6.1.c. The Italian Proclamation of Annexation and Further Mediation Proposals

From a military perspective, the Italian declaration of annexation had been made prematurely. Unsurprisingly, the Turks made an official protest. This presented Britain with a dilemma, as acting on the basis of either could suggest a commitment. In the end, it was agreed to take formal note, but to do nothing else in both cases, thus ensuring equality of treatment.⁹⁶¹ Turkey continued to act with indignation, declaring that if the Powers recognised the Italian annexation, she would consider herself lifted from treaty commitments (by this she meant the capitulations) and she would demand a conference to be held, to decide on compensation. Vansittart thought this premature, as the Powers had not recognised the annexation. Furthermore, he added, Turkey was almost certainly bluffing: 'She w[oul]d not possibly be so foolish as to quarrel with all the Powers because they had recognised a *fait accompli*.' Maxwell noted that in any case, nothing could be done in this vein until the war came to an end.⁹⁶² This did not seem likely to come about soon. Lowther wrote to Nicolson that the war had reached a state of 'status quo', and that he could think of 'nothing' that would make the Turks 'throw in the sponge' until they ran out of ammunition.⁹⁶³ Indeed, what Vansittart called 'big talk' seemed the 'prevailing tone at Constantinople': the Turkish Government claimed that nothing would induce them to accept Italian demands, even if the Straits were forced and Constantinople itself were

⁹⁶⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 159, tel., 13 May 1912, FO 371/1533/20629, Parker minute.

⁹⁶¹ Turkish Embassy to Grey, 8 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1257/44375. Vansittart, Maxwell, Nicolson and Grey minutes.

⁹⁶² Lowther to Grey, No. 310, Tel, 11 Nov. 1911, FO 371/1257/44618, Vansittart, Maxwell minutes.

⁹⁶³ Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 29 Nov. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 271.

reduced to ‘ashes’.⁹⁶⁴ In early December, 1911, Lowther met Hilmi Pasha, a former Grand Vizier, whom he believed to represent ‘moderate’ thought in Turkey. Hilmi considered the Italian declaration of annexation to have hardened resolves in Turkey. Many of those engaged in the war were fighting out of choice, he said, rather than for money or by coercion. Bringing these elements under control would be difficult. To make matters worse, the current administration was being criticised for being ‘too Ottoman’, making the prospect of giving up an Arab province unappealing.⁹⁶⁵

At this inauspicious moment, Sir Alan Johnstone reported from The Hague that the Dutch Government wanted to know when they might be able to open mediation, proposing that they might approach Italy and Turkey with the ‘moral support’ of the Powers. Vansittart was unimpressed. ‘War spirit’ was in the increase both in Turkey and Italy, and Turkey had ‘nothing to lose’ by continuing the fight. Proposing mediation would be likely to irritate, at the least, one or both parties, and it would not be to the British advantage to take the lead on such proposals. Norman agreed that the proposal was ‘doomed to failure’. Nevertheless, there was a widespread agreement in London that the opinions of ambassadors should be sought.⁹⁶⁶ Grey thought that the most important aspect of any pressure exerted at Constantinople would be to ensure that the Powers acted collectively, or at least simultaneously, in making proposals. If not, the ‘three [*entente*] Powers’ might run the risk of their overtures being rejected, allowing Austria and Germany to take advantage and offer a slightly better deal.⁹⁶⁷ The Turks, for their part, let it be known that any negotiations would have to be initiated by Italy, and that they expected her

⁹⁶⁴ Vansittart minute; Lowther to Grey, No. 335, Tel., 7 Dec. 1911, FO 371/1259/48963.

⁹⁶⁵ Lowther to Grey, No. 893, Confidential, 4 Dec. 1911, FO 371/1259/49376.

⁹⁶⁶ Johnstone to Grey, No. 21, Tel, Secret, 13 Dec. 1911, FO 371/1259/50078, Vansittart, Norman, Mallet, Nicolson and Grey minutes.

⁹⁶⁷ Grey to Buchanan, No. 866, Tel, 29 Dec. 1911, FO 371/1260/51479.

to make the greater sacrifices in the interests of peace. Vansittart thought that the moment for mediation had not arrived, and thought that it was unlikely to do so until after the upcoming elections.⁹⁶⁸ Parker ‘agree[d]’ that it was better to wait for the elections before ‘encouraging the idea of mediation’.⁹⁶⁹ A general gloom settled. Grey thought that if anything were to be proposed, it had better be that ‘Turkey should put her case in the hands of the five Powers... but... this is premature.’⁹⁷⁰ Parker remarked that Britain should not encourage mediation when ‘all efforts seem[ed] foredoomed to failure.’ With no end in sight, Mallet agreed that any attempt to mediate would be unsuccessful.⁹⁷¹ To make matters worse, Grey learned from Tevfik that the Turkish elections were not to be held before April.⁹⁷²

At the end of January, Alexander von Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador to London, suggested that the Powers could come to an agreement on the principle of mediation, to be ready when the combatants were willing to accept it. Vansittart thought that the question rested on how Turkey could be persuaded to leave the area. The more experienced Maxwell, however, poured cold water on his junior colleague’s enthusiasm. Germany would be unlikely to cooperate in applying pressure on the Turks, and given the risks involved, it would ‘not be desirable’ to commit Britain to such a policy.⁹⁷³ Speaking to Benckendorff in early February, Grey returned to his theme of the turn of the year. The Powers would have to act together, he stressed, to avoid the risk of a non-participant Power taking advantage of a rejection.⁹⁷⁴ Nicolson thought that this policy meant that ‘any proposal as to mediation’ could not lead to ‘any satisfactory result’, ‘unanimity of the

⁹⁶⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 956, 27 Dec. 1911, FO 371/1524/50, Vansittart minute, 2 Jan. 1912.

⁹⁶⁹ Parker minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 1, Tel., 3 Jan. 1912, FO 371/1524/475.

⁹⁷⁰ Grey minute, Russel to Grey, No. 1, Tel., 3 Jan. 1912, FO 371/1524/483.

⁹⁷¹ Rodd to Grey, No. 1, Tel., 3 Jan. 1912, FO 371/1524/488, Parker and Mallet minutes.

⁹⁷² Grey minute, Rodd to Grey, No. 9, Tel., 6 Jan. 1912, FO 371/1524/1058.

⁹⁷³ Benckendorff Note, 30 Jan. 1912, FO 371/1524/4373, Vansittart and Maxwell minutes.

⁹⁷⁴ Grey to Buchanan, No. 42, 8 Feb. 1912, FO 371/1524/6206.

Powers' having been laid down as an 'indispensable condition'.⁹⁷⁵ That is not to say that Britain was unwilling to take action. Nicolson remained 'quite happy to join in any step which [held] out hope of a successful issue, provided that all the other Powers concur[red].'⁹⁷⁶ Grey tried to get some movement out of the Italians, informing Imperiali that they had 'closed the door' by proclaiming annexation, and that if they were willing to accept Turkish suzerainty and give the Powers a 'free hand' in mediation, then it might be possible for something to be done.⁹⁷⁷ He kept up the pressure, telling Imperiali in mid-April that 'there seemed to be deadlock and not much light', and assured him that Britain had not discussed the ongoing Baghdad Railway negotiations in conjunction with the war.⁹⁷⁸ Although happy to keep up the pressure on Rome, Grey was not keen to press the Italians for the benefit of the Russians and take a leading role in negotiations for a joint action of the Powers. He concluded that 'we can let Russia settle the details'.⁹⁷⁹ Although it had been planned that joint action would wait until after the elections, the communication, asking the Turks on what grounds they would end the war, was delivered at Constantinople on 16 April, the Russian Ambassador arguing that the Turks knew it was coming in any case.⁹⁸⁰ The Turkish reply, when it came, stressed that they could not give land away, they were the party attacked, and the Italians were not making headway in any case. Vansittart concluded that it was 'much as... expected, only a little more intransigent.'⁹⁸¹ This move had failed, but Britain maintained her conditions. Nicolson thought it important that mediation be the work of all five Powers, and was also concerned about exerting too much pressure on Turkey, as 'we must bear in mind that our Moslem

⁹⁷⁵ Nicolson to Lowther, 18 Feb. 1912, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 288.

⁹⁷⁶ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 4 Mar. 1912, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 293.

⁹⁷⁷ Grey to Rodd, No. 67, 29 Mar. 1912, FO 371/1524/13872.

⁹⁷⁸ Grey to Rodd, No. 74, 12 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1524/15810.

⁹⁷⁹ Grey minute on Nicolson Memo, 12 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1524/15809.

⁹⁸⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 313, 16 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1524/16800.

⁹⁸¹ Lowther to grey, No. 122, Tel., 23 Apr. 1912, FO 371/1524/17190, Vansittart minute.

subjects in India are watching our line of policy very carefully.’⁹⁸² He expanded on this point privately to Lowther, reminding him that although Britain was ‘always quite ready’ to participate in anything that would bring the war to a close, she must avoid taking the initiative, as this would result in Britain having to exert pressure on Turkey – which, for the benefit of the Indian Muslims, Nicolson was determined not to do.⁹⁸³

6.1.d. Direct Negotiations and the End of the War

In July 1913, with Balkan troubles on the horizon, negotiations began between the belligerents via ‘private agents’, meeting in Switzerland. Said Pasha, the Grand Vizier, had ‘let it be known’ that Turkey might allow Italy to retain land which she already occupied, a concession which broke the deadlock.⁹⁸⁴ After a false start, when discussions were briefly suspended (a development which Norman gloomily asserted to have expected), negotiations continued, at times giving rise to hopes that a breakthrough was only days away.⁹⁸⁵ As talks dragged on, the Italians hit out in frustration, accusing Britain of being the only Power to have failed to urge Turkey to come to terms. Vansittart retorted that no Power had done so, and Britain’s ‘Mohammedan interests’ meant that she could hardly be at the front of the queue.⁹⁸⁶ This anger was forgotten in the euphoria of peace being agreed, and Italy put on record her thanks to Britain for her help in achieving it.⁹⁸⁷ This was a subject of amusement in London. Vansittart wrote: ‘It is very satisfactory that the Italians are grateful to us – especially as we have done nothing at Constantinople to which

⁹⁸² Rodd to Grey, No. 16, 16 Jun. 1912, FO 371/1538/26224, Nicolson minute.

⁹⁸³ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 24 Jun. 1912, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 317.

This was an important consideration for British policymakers. See Gillon, Benjamin, *The triumph of pragmatic imperialism: Lord Minto and the defence of the Empire, 1898-1910*, University of Glasgow PhD Thesis, 2009.

⁹⁸⁴ Rodd to Grey, No. 80, Tel., 13 Jul. 1912, FO 371/1525/29796.

⁹⁸⁵ Rodd to Grey, No. 238, 14 Aug. 1912, FO 371/1525/35099, Norman minute; Marling to Grey, No. 370., Tel., 10 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1525/38180.

⁹⁸⁶ Dering to Grey, No. 116, Tel., 3 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1525/41532, Vanisttart minute.

⁹⁸⁷ Dering to Grey, No. 135 (12, Tel., Urgent, 15 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1526/34309; Rodd to Grey, No. 140, Tel., 18 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1526/43918.

objection could be taken.’⁹⁸⁸ British policymakers could take a certain pleasure in having emerged from this difficult situation without having had to do anything contrary to wider ideas of strategy.

With this, the war was at an end, the Turks having come to terms quickly, in the end, to avoid fighting two wars at once. British policy throughout the war had intended to be neutral. Although sympathy for Turkey, motivated in part by an eye on Muslim opinion, had increased, Britain had not, and would not, taken any action to help her in the way she might have done in 1908. Furthermore, the risk of a Power confrontation over the Straits had been managed and avoided. Although it had sometimes presented dangers, this episode in European politics had been largely contained and had not presented a significant risk in the eyes of British policymakers. The same could not be said about the next.

6.2. The Balkan Wars

Much as they had done before the Tripoli war, British policymakers saw the Balkan conflict approaching from some distance. In December 1911, Grey warned Sir George Buchanan, who had replaced Nicolson at St Petersburg, that he thought a Balkan outbreak in the spring was both possible and ‘most unwelcome’, recognising that Britain’s ability to deal with the fallout from any such collision was limited. Parker too thought that it looked ‘as if the time-honoured fear of trouble in the Balkans in the spring were likely to prove justified [in 1912].’⁹⁸⁹ London was also well aware of the nascent Balkan League. In July 1912, Nicolson communicated the outline of the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty to Lowther. He noted that Russia had been heavily involved in bringing them together, and warned that there were two versions of the treaty available. The version communicated to Britain by

⁹⁸⁸ Vansittart minute, Rodd to Grey, No. 140, Tel., 18 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1526/43918.

⁹⁸⁹ Parker minute, 1 Jan. 1912, Buchanan to Grey, No. 342, Tel., Very Confidential, 31 Dec. 1911, FO 371/524/4.

Benckendorff was apparently inaccurate, and the sections dealing with mutual action against the Powers in the Balkans had been watered down.⁹⁹⁰

6.2.a. Early Fighting and Fears for Constantinople

The explosion of a bomb at Kochana, a town in Macedonia, proved an early sign of tensions in the Balkans. Opinion on the meaning of this event, and massacres that followed, was divided amongst the British policymaking establishment. Both Sir Charles Marling, *chargé* at Constantinople, and Parker in London thought that the bomb had been set at the instigation of the CUP, whilst Norman suggested ‘another version’: that Bulgaria had created the incident to try and gain the sympathy of the Powers.⁹⁹¹ Following further investigation, it became clear to Mallet that the evidence suggested it had been the work of local committee men.⁹⁹² War was by no means preordained, however. Parker thought it might be ‘hoped that the peace party in Bulgaria [would] triumph, - at all events till the cold weather [began], when [Europe] should be safe until [the] next year.’ His colleague Norman agreed that war might well be avoided, and that the French might be able to restrain the Bulgarians financially.⁹⁹³ Unfortunately, further incidents did break out. In September, the Foreign Office received what Grey called ‘very bad news’ – two Bulgarian corporals had been ambushed on the Turkish border. Norman complained that this was ‘the sort of incident which [made] the task of the Powers impossible’.⁹⁹⁴ Buchanan, closer to the action at St Petersburg, could view the future more clearly. At some length he warned London that from the point of view of the League, there might never be a better time to fight a war: they were united, and the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph, was

⁹⁹⁰ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 11 Jun. 1912, Private Correspondence of Lowther, No. 314.

⁹⁹¹ Marling to Grey, No. 278, Tel., 10 Aug. 1912, FO 371/1498/33822, Parker and Norman minutes.

⁹⁹² Marling to Grey, No. 681, 10 Aug. 1912, FO 371/1498/34263, Mallet minute.

⁹⁹³ Parker and Norman minutes, Bertie to Grey, No. 111, Tel., 29 Aug. 1912, FO 371/1498/36483.

⁹⁹⁴ Barclay to Grey, No. 35, Tel., 9 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1498/38059, Grey and Norman minutes, 10 Sep. 1912.

believed to be unlikely to have a stomach for war at his advanced age. Furthermore, Austria would only be more powerful in the future, it was believed, and a war might now enjoy Russian support. Consequently, he thought conflict was likely. Privately, he told Maxwell of his belief that the Balkan states, now united, would not care about the consequences of their actions nor the risk of general war. He worried that the Powers would struggle to hold the Balkan states back, and that war in the winter was in fact possible.⁹⁹⁵ Buchanan's view that war was both possible and likely was shared in Austria, Germany, and Russia. Alfred von Kiderlin-Waechter, the German Foreign Minister, suggested that localisation of the war might be the answer: the Balkan States could be informed that were they to fight, then they would be left to do so alone, and they could take the consequences. Grey was pleased that thoughts were taking this direction in Berlin. He was 'certainly in favour of an agreement between the Powers that would prevent complications between them'.⁹⁹⁶ His views on this point would not change throughout the dispute.

Rumours of what exactly was contemplated continued to swirl. Barclay, at Sofia, reported that his Russian colleague believed that the Balkan States contemplated a 'decisive step', which perhaps might be a demand for Macedonian reform under guarantee of the Powers.⁹⁹⁷ Clearly, this was far from the mark, and suggested that this new development in the politics of the region had caught diplomats by surprise, and that they understood events through pre-existing frameworks, rather than considering them as novel. As time went on, however, it became increasingly clear that war was what was contemplated. The Russians warned Bulgaria and Serbia that should they use their new agreement to attack Turkey, Russia would consider herself 'guided by her own interests', a

⁹⁹⁵ Barclay to Grey, No. 92, Confidential, 9 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1498/38813; Buchanan to Maxwell, Private, annexed.

⁹⁹⁶ Granville to Grey, No. 114, Tel., 17 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1498/39170, Grey minute.

⁹⁹⁷ Barclay to Grey, No. 38, Tel., 22 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1498/39732.

clumsy warning which provoked ‘disgust’ in Sofia and Belgrade. Vansittart remarked that Russia had found herself in a tricky position, for ‘having made the marriage’, she now found herself ‘compelled to wage divorce for fear of its first fruits’.⁹⁹⁸ Attempts to divorce the newlyweds proved in vain. In view of the warlike noises emanating from ‘Sofia, Belgrade and Athens’, Vansittart thought that the Turks would be ‘well-advised... to call out all the troops they [could]’, and that they were probably doing so.⁹⁹⁹ As the march to war continued, Grey confirmed his belief that the only way to manage the oncoming crisis was to keep the Powers together. ‘There was ‘nothing to be done’ by Britain, ‘apart from what the other Powers [did]’.¹⁰⁰⁰ With the news from Greece that war was now considered ‘inevitable’, unless Turkey could be ‘induced to demobilise’, Grey believed that there was nothing that would ‘have any real effect’, but it would be best if Britain could ‘act with the other Powers so long as they [did not] propose anything unfair.’¹⁰⁰¹ For their part, the Turks made suggestions to Britain of reform to stave off war, but it was clear that they would fight. What they said about reforms was ‘very natural’, Grey wrote, but ‘with the years of... misgovernment for which the C.U.P. were responsible & with the author of the Kochana massacre unpunished’, there was nothing to be done to hold back the Balkan States.¹⁰⁰² The Turks, it seems, had little hope of averting war, but had, according to Lowther, been caught unawares by the mobilisations of their Balkan neighbours, having been on a peace footing. He believed war was likely, and that nothing could be done at Constantinople – it was ‘up to the Powers to put their foot down’.¹⁰⁰³ The introduction of reforms would be impossible, owing to the ‘bellicosity’ of public opinion, and the

⁹⁹⁸ Barclay to Grey, No. 37, Tel., 22 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1498/39778, Vansittart minute.

⁹⁹⁹ Vansittart minute, Marling to Grey, No. 414, Tel., 30 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1499/41020.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Grey minute, Barclay to Grey, No. 44, Tel., 30 Sep. 1912, FO 371/1499/41023.

¹⁰⁰¹ Beaumont to Grey, No. 47, Tel., 1 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1499/41190; Grey minute, Onslow memo, 1 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1499/41576.

¹⁰⁰² Grey to Lowther, No. 472, 2 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1499/41616, Grey minute.

¹⁰⁰³ Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 2 Oct. 1912, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 320.

opposition hoped to replace the CUP with a Kâmil administration which would try and avert conflict.¹⁰⁰⁴

The gloomy predictions proved correct. In early October, Sir Henry Bax-Ironside reported from Sofia that the Balkan states had prepared their ultimatum to Turkey. In it, they called for an autonomous Macedonia, governed by Christians, and overseen by the Powers. In Bax-Ironside's opinion, the wording of the ultimatum was such that the Powers could not accept it.¹⁰⁰⁵ Hostilities soon commenced, with Montenegro being the first of the Balkan Allies to declare war.¹⁰⁰⁶ It looked as though her allies would soon follow suit.

When the Turks asked Britain to warn Greece against touching the Turkish islands in the Aegean (many of which were still occupied in any case by Italy), Grey had another opportunity to outline his hopes for solidarity of the Powers. He refused to act, because, in the event of war: 'if one Great Power takes part on one side others will do so on another... but I cannot promise to do anything... that would break up the concert of the Powers.'¹⁰⁰⁷ To the German *chargé* at London he expanded that he was 'ready to agree to anything which would... [keep the Powers together]. It was most important that Austria and Russia should not fall apart.'¹⁰⁰⁸ Clearly, at this juncture, solidity of the Powers was more important to Grey than the *entente* connections.

In the meantime, Kâmil Pasha, who was soon to return to power in a coup which overthrew the CUP, had been busy trying to find a way to bring the war to a close as quickly as possible. He told Lowther that this could be achieved by the Powers stepping in after the first major engagement, from which, he confidently asserted, Turkey would

¹⁰⁰⁴ Lowther to Grey, No. 432, Tel, 6 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1499/41787.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Bax-Ironside to Grey, No. 562, Tel., Very Confidential, 8 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1500/42232.

¹⁰⁰⁶ De Salis to Grey, No. 33, Tel., 9 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1500/42392.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Grey to Lowther, No. 736, Tel., 7 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1500/42449.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Grey to Granville, No. 510, 14 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1501/43631.

emerge on top. As Vansittart noted, this was a ‘very big’ assumption to make. Nicolson was unenthusiastic, unwilling to engage in such speculation, and Kâmil was told that Britain would keep her eyes open for a suitable moment for intervention.¹⁰⁰⁹ Undeterred, Kâmil continued to look to Britain for aid, making a clumsy reference to the position of Egypt (the neutrality of which he had recently blamed for the Turkish defeat to Italy), and pointing out that she need not be neutral in a war with Greece. Vansittart considered this a ‘tentative allusion to the idea of getting Egyptian troops’, and Lowther’s refusal to countenance anything that might go against neutrality or risk breaking the unity of the Powers was approved by London.¹⁰¹⁰

With fighting underway, the Powers turned their thoughts to the post-war order. In discussion with Richard von Kühlmann, *chargé* at the German Embassy in London following the sudden death of Marschall (who had taken the post in London following his departure from Constantinople), Grey laid out his views. Given that it was ‘an axiom’ of European affairs that Turkey would not reoccupy Christian lands once vacated, he thought it would be easier to find a settlement if the Turks had the better of the fighting. On the other hand, he thought that it would be very difficult to turn the Balkan States out of territory which they had conquered. In terms of detail, he was less concerned. He thought that it was for Russia and Austria, the two most interested parties, to come to an arrangement which they could both tolerate.¹⁰¹¹ Developing these thoughts, Grey informed Bertie that British public opinion would ‘not join in turning Balkan states out of what they proved able to conquer unaided’, and should Turkey be defeated and ask for mediation, she would ‘have to do so on condition of placing settlement unreservedly in the

¹⁰⁰⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 503, Tel., 21 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1502/44456, Vansittart minute.

¹⁰¹⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 510, Tel., 22 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1502/44645, Vansittart minute.

¹⁰¹¹ Grey to Goschen, No. 266, 25 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1513/45603.

hands of the Powers'.¹⁰¹² Thus, the position as far as Britain stood, was clear. The status quo would largely be respected in the event of a Turkish victory, but should the Balkan Alliance prevail, there would be a redrawing of South-Eastern Europe.¹⁰¹³

A Balkan victory seemed the more likely outcome. By the end of October, Lowther had heard from Salonica that the situation was 'deplorable', with 'Turkish troops completely routed everywhere... [and] demoralisation complete'.¹⁰¹⁴ Vansittart was unsympathetic. He believed that the 'chief cause of the Turkish debacle' was the 'vast amount' of misspending of military funds under the CUP, which had left the Turkish 'materiel' a 'paper one'.¹⁰¹⁵ Bulgarian forces were soon advancing rapidly across Thrace, approaching the defensive lines outside Constantinople near the village of Çatalca. If the Bulgarians were successful in breaching the Çatalca lines, the way would be clear for them to march straight into the Ottoman capital. In the Turkish Embassy in London, there was little confidence that the Ottoman Troops would be able to hold the line.¹⁰¹⁶ In Constantinople, the diplomatic corps made preparations to protect themselves and their nationals, should the war reach the city. Lowther worried that another victory for the Bulgarians would lead to an 'invasion of Constantinople by hungry, fanatical and disorganised soldiers'.¹⁰¹⁷ This opinion was not unanimous, however. Some British military men at Constantinople believed, rightly as it turned out, that there was a reasonable chance that the Bulgarian Army, stretched by its enormous and unexpected advance, might be held on the Çatalca lines. Vansittart was dismissive, labelling one such figure an 'optimist'. 'One wished it were possible to believe he is right', he added, a view

¹⁰¹² Grey to Bertie, No. 631, Tel., 28 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1503/45534.

¹⁰¹³ This was the subject of agreement with Benckendorff, too. See Grey to Buchanan, No. 365, 1 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1513/46296.

¹⁰¹⁴ Lowther to Grey, No. 544, Tel., Urgent, 29 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1503/45840.

¹⁰¹⁵ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 944, Confidential, 28 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1504/4046.

¹⁰¹⁶ Bax Ironside to Grey, No. 111, Tel, 31 Oct. 1912, FO 371/1503/46175, Vansittart minute.

¹⁰¹⁷ Lowther to Grey, No. 561, tel., 1 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1503/46184.

shared by Nicolson, who also thought that the fall of Constantinople was inevitable.¹⁰¹⁸ The Russians shared the views of British policymakers in this regard, and demonstrated significant concern at the prospect of Constantinople, so long a cherished aim of Russian policy, falling into the hands of others.¹⁰¹⁹ Benckendorff ‘pressed [Grey] very earnestly’ to speak at Sofia, to try and prevent the Bulgarians from occupying the Ottoman capital – and more specifically, the Straits. Grey was not immediately sympathetic. He reminded Benckendorff that there might well be military considerations which compelled Bulgaria to push on, before the Turkish Army was able to reform and slow the advance. On Benckendorff’s continued insistence, Grey agreed to sound out the Bulgarian representative in London, who claimed that Bulgaria did not intend to hold Constantinople.¹⁰²⁰ Following Grey’s request, the Bulgarians informed Saint Petersburg that they had ‘no intention’ of ‘retaining Constantinople’.¹⁰²¹ Nevertheless, Grey still contemplated a post Turk Constantinople, assuming that it would be ‘overrun’. He suggested to Sazonov, on 5 November, that Constantinople could be made a ‘free port’, kept neutral by the Powers.¹⁰²² The Russians claimed to be against the permanent removal of the Turks from Constantinople, however, although they accepted that they might be ‘compelled’ to occupy it temporarily.¹⁰²³ Nicolson thought it likely that they were keen to maintain the Sultan at Constantinople.¹⁰²⁴ Certainly, this was the logical choice for Russia. It would be far better to maintain the Turks, propped up by the Powers, at the Straits than run the risk of the question being forced open. Although Bulgaria had been

¹⁰¹⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 564, Tel., 1 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1503/46317, Vansittart and Nicolson minutes.

¹⁰¹⁹ See for instance Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*.

¹⁰²⁰ Grey to Buchanan, No. 368, 2 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1513/46929; Grey to Bax-Ironside, No. 139, Tel., 2 Nv. 1912, FO 371/1513/46768.

¹⁰²¹ Grey to Bax-Ironside, No. 139, Tel., 2 Nv. 1912, FO 371/1513/46768; Bax Ironside to Grey, No. 120, Tel., 3 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1504/46537.

¹⁰²² Grey to Buchanan, draft (sent 5th Nov. 1912), FO 371/1504/47008.

¹⁰²³ Buchanan to Grey, No. 414, Tel., Secret, 6 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1505/47210.

¹⁰²⁴ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 30 Oct. 1913, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 326.

something of a Russian *protégé*, she would be difficult to remove, once installed at Constantinople, and the wider consequences of her occupation would be unpredictable.

By early November, the Turks themselves were not confident in their ability to hold the Çatalca lines. Tevfik met Nicolson on the 5th, and argued that something should be done to protect Constantinople in the way that the Powers had prevented Turkey from entering Athens in the wars of the 1890s. He admitted that the Turks were the ‘vanquished’, but still able to cause significant damage by holding out at Çatalca for longer. It was, he warned, ‘a mistake to drive a race to desperation’.¹⁰²⁵ The threat of chaos was used again in a communication to the Powers days later, which raised the spectre of religiously motivated war to suggest that any Bulgarian entry would be accompanied by violence and disorder, and that the Government was determined to ‘die at their posts’. Although Lowther believed that this contained an element of ‘bluff’, he thought the basic conclusions probably accurate, and that there was a good chance of Bulgaria breaching the defences. Grey was sufficiently worried to send additional ships to Constantinople, with the promise of more if required, for the protection of British subjects.¹⁰²⁶ British officials were also concerned with the Russian response. Vansittart noted that ‘serious steps’ were contemplated by her to keep the Bulgarians out. If they succeeded, he went on, then ‘so much the better’, but he thought there was little that could be done.¹⁰²⁷ The situation for Britain was now delicate, with several competing priorities, as Nicolson expressed privately to Lowther:

Our position is an exceedingly difficult and embarrassing one. We are anxious naturally to maintain the concert of Europe and especially to work as far as it is possible in conjunction with Russia... It is quite true that we are a great Mussulman Power and cannot well leave out of account the feelings of our

¹⁰²⁵ Grey to Lowther, No. 508, 5 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1505/47169.

¹⁰²⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 593, Tel., 7 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1505/47396; Grey to Lowther, No. 974, Tel., 8 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1505/47396.

¹⁰²⁷ Vansittart minute, Lowther to Grey, No. 593, Tel., 7 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1505/47396.

Mussulmans in India and elsewhere. At the same time it is of paramount importance to us to preserve unimpaired our understandings with Russia and with France, as were these understandings to be in any way weakened we should find ourselves in a most awkward and uncomfortable international position. Moreover, public opinion here, rightly or wrongly, is strongly in favour of the Balkan States, and no Government possibly could take up an attitude which was in any way contrary to the general feeling in this country. ¹⁰²⁸

Although his final comment was untrue, and indeed even Nicolson himself was unlikely to have really believed it, it did betray the levels to which sympathy for Turkey had fallen both within and without the Foreign Office. There was little desire to help the Turks for their own sake, and the Russophile Nicolson saw little advantage for Britain in doing so either. Indeed, Islamic opinion seemed the only reason he could find to do so.

Having made little headway in their quest for intervention, the Turks now asked for mediation of the Powers, who agreed to inform the Balkan allies and ask them on what terms they would accept it. ¹⁰²⁹ Ivan Geshov, now the Bulgarian Prime Minister, let it be known that Bulgaria was willing to listen, although he wanted Turkey, as the defeated power, to be seen to make the first approach. ¹⁰³⁰ Whilst the Powers considered this joint step, the Turks opened direct negotiations with the Bulgarians, expressing a desire to avoid further bloodshed. ¹⁰³¹ Despite this, the Powers did deliver a joint, but not collective, note, offering mediation, but were told that their good offices unlikely to be required, as direct negotiations were ongoing. ¹⁰³² Nicolson was pleased at this development. This was the ‘most practical and speediest way of reaching a settlement’. ¹⁰³³ It would also mean that Britain might avoid some of the more difficult questions raised by the war. The British

¹⁰²⁸ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 13 Nov. 1913, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 329.

¹⁰²⁹ Grey to Lowther, No. 510, 8 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1505/47733.

¹⁰³⁰ Grey to Bertie, No. 545, 11 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1513/47143.

¹⁰³¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 626, Tel., 13 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1414/48456.

¹⁰³² Paget to Grey, No. 59, Tel., 14 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1514/48587.

¹⁰³³ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 13 Nov. 1913, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 329.

Embassy had been involved in the promotion of direct talks, with Fitzmaurice, the dragoman, working closely with a Bulgarian dragoman who had remained in Constantinople, based at the Russian Embassy. Nicolson noted that London had been unaware of this development, and that Fitzmaurice had perhaps gone a little far in some of his comments. As the talks seemed likely to bring war to a close, Grey felt that this could be disregarded, and no more need be said.¹⁰³⁴ At much the same time the main Bulgarian assault on the Çatalca line was attempted, ending in failure. By the 20th, Lowther recognised a more positive outlook amongst experts, who now said that Turkey would be able to hold the position.¹⁰³⁵ This reverse slowed negotiations down, as Bulgaria tried to bring more troops up to the front, in order to be in a stronger negotiation position. Vansittart hoped for a more decisive result, to make negotiations easier: 'If the... lines could be counted on to hold, it w[oul]d be better that there sh[oul]d be another attempt on the part of the Bulgarians.'¹⁰³⁶ By early December, the battle had settled. Lowther reported a military attaché's view that the Turkish army was 'now comfortably settled into its defensive position, and... the chances of a successful attack on it appear[ed] to be small.'¹⁰³⁷ With this, the first phase of fighting was over, as was the period of intense anxiety over the fate of Constantinople and the Straits.

6.2.b. Adrianople and Balkan Annexations

Throughout the early phases of the fighting, Britain had acted cautiously. The threats had been mostly hypothetical. However, the successes of the Balkan armies, especially the Bulgarian, opened out a new phase of trouble. Grey had made it clear at the outbreak of the war that the Balkans allies would be able to keep the territories they had

¹⁰³⁴ Lowther to Grey, No. 1000, Confidential, 26 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1516/51112, Nicolson and Grey minutes.

¹⁰³⁵ Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 20 Nov. 1912, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 331.

¹⁰³⁶ Bax Ironside to Grey, No. 187, Tel., 26 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1507/50497, Vansittart minute.

¹⁰³⁷ Lowther to Grey, No. 1043, 7 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1508/52824.

gained. They had, however, been more successful in the conquering of new tracts than many observers had predicted, and now occupied large parts of the Ottoman European holdings. Grey, true to his word, did not contemplate trying to retain much of Europe for the Turks, but the Turkish Government was unwilling, naturally, to surrender more than it was compelled to. Much of the difficulty surrounded the city of Adrianople, (today Edirne), which, as a former capital of the Empire and the resting place of several Sultans, had spiritual and sentimental resonance for many Turks. Furthermore, it was a heavily fortified city, an important aspect, in a geographical area devoid of defensive features, of the defences of Constantinople itself. As Lowther remarked privately, to lose Adrianople would be a 'big gulp' for the Turks, and Bulgaria would be able to take Constantinople virtually whenever they chose, if they held it.¹⁰³⁸ Problematically for both Bulgaria and the European Powers, its Turkish garrison held out stubbornly.

The Russian Government, concerned about the military implications of Bulgaria possessing the fortifications, had initially proposed, at the end of October, that France and Britain join her in warning the Bulgarians against retaining Adrianople. Britain and France, however, were against making such a communication. The French were concerned that this could not be enforced, and would be serve to irritate the Bulgarians without much purpose. Grey was inclined to agree, and expressed the view that Bulgaria should be permitted to 'press home' her military advantage, while conflict continued. With this reverse, Vansittart noted, Russian opinion turned towards allowing retention.¹⁰³⁹ Grey recognised the importance of remaining on good terms with Bulgaria, 'speaking to him [the Bulgarian representative in London] as a friend confidentially, who desired to see

¹⁰³⁸ Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 28 Nov. 1912, Private Correspondence of Lowther, No. 333.

¹⁰³⁹ Bertie to Grey, No. 189, Tel., Confidential, 2 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1513/46557; Grey to Bertie, No. 658, Tel., 3 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1513/46557; Vansittart minute.

Bulgaria have as little difficulty as possible in securing a settlement after her victorious campaign.¹⁰⁴⁰

He also reassured the Serbs that they had little to fear from negotiation:

We ourselves had no reserves to make, but we wished to promote a settlement peaceably. The settlement of practically the whole of the European dominions of Turkey was a very large affair. The first step was to learn the views of all the parties who were most interested. We could then see what divergencies there were between all the parties interested and how these could be reconciled.¹⁰⁴¹

Grey had made it clear that he did not contemplate Turkey retaining much, if any, of the land she had lost, despite the greater than expected advances of the Balkan armies. The Turks soon realised that they could not expect support from Britain. Tevfik, having read a recent speech by H.H. Asquith, the prime minister, complained to Nicolson that he had made reference to the Balkan States retaining conquered lands, and this was not in 'in conformity with usage for such statements to be made while war was ongoing'. Tevfik 'seemed inclined to enquire what was meant by it. Sir A. Nicolson, however, turned the conversation from so delicate a subject.'¹⁰⁴² British policymakers were still content to skirt around the issue. They heard that the Porte contemplated making significant concessions hoping that a conference would be arranged to settle the details, at which they would get much of it back, as had happened after their concessions at San Stefano in 1878. Nicolson did not see how the situation could be managed without a conference, but Grey thought it too early for a decision on that score. If one did take place, he hoped that it would be 'a mere recording conference, and not a congress'.¹⁰⁴³ It seemed to many observers that there must necessarily be Great Power involvement in the final settlement of the war. The Triple Alliance Powers were agreed that the Powers should make a declaration, reserving

¹⁰⁴⁰ Grey to Bax-Ironside, No. 139, Tel., 2 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1513/46768.

¹⁰⁴¹ Grey to Paget, No. 27, 6 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1513/47559.

¹⁰⁴² Grey to Lowther, No. 522, 12 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1514/48633.

¹⁰⁴³ Bertie to Grey, No. 204, Tel., 19 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1514/49343, Nicolson and Grey minutes.

the right to adjust any peace terms arrived at. Vansittart thought it was dangerous to make such a declaration before peace terms were even known: 'It seems premature to begin to bark before we know that there will be any need to bite.'¹⁰⁴⁴ It was clear that Britain favoured a cautious policy towards the post-war settlement. She was not willing to help Turkey to regain territory lost, and generally thought that the Balkan States should be able to hold on to lands taken with the sword. However, policymakers recognised the need to keep a close eye on the situation, and to prevent disputes between the Powers.

6.2.c. Great Power Involvement

It was at this point that Grey made his famous 'conference of ambassadors' proposal.¹⁰⁴⁵ The 'quickest and most effective way' of the Powers coming to agreement on the issues raised by the war would 'be by a conference of delegates of the Powers; the Ambassadors at the capital chosen might be the delegates'.¹⁰⁴⁶ This would avoid the 'delay and confusion' caused by telegrams crossing each other across Europe.¹⁰⁴⁷ The proposal met with favour, and Benckendorff asked Grey to formally propose the idea.¹⁰⁴⁸ Key to the success of the proposal was the fact that Britain and Germany were in a similar position, given that neither had particular interests likely to be affected by any settlement, and both wished to avoid a war.¹⁰⁴⁹

The Turks initially seemed disposed to make a peace settlement difficult. Grey warned them, in early December, that their belief that they could settle on the basis of reforms and rectifications of borders in Macedonia was insufficient to gain peace, and that far greater sacrifices would be required. However, an armistice between Turkey and the

¹⁰⁴⁴ Cartwright to Grey, No. 153, Tel., 22 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1515/49805, Vansittart minute.

¹⁰⁴⁵ For an interesting recent discussion, see McKinney, Jared Morgan, 'Nothing Fails like Success: The London Ambassadors Conference and the coming of the First World War', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41(7), pp. 947-1000.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Grey to Bertie, No. 739, Tel., 22 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1515/49996.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Grey to Lowther, No. 550, 5 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1516/51425.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Buchanan to Grey, No. 483, Tel., 27 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1515/50679.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Grey to Goschen, No. 410, Tel., 28 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1516/51184.

Balkan States (apart from the Greeks, who hoped to make further gains) was agreed in early December. Discussions on a Peace settlement were planned for London, starting on the 13th.¹⁰⁵⁰ This allowed Grey to flesh out his plans for Great Power talks. He sketched out a plan for discussions. The aims of the talks would be threefold. Firstly, the Powers should recognise that the belligerents were 'entitled to settle their own terms of peace', but with the proviso that the Powers were entitled to make 'reserves' on some points. Secondly, the Powers would 'enumerate' these points. Thirdly, the six Powers would agree mutually acceptable proposals on these points. It did not need 'overly utopian', he added, that this might be completed in time to give 'Europe and ourselves a Christmas present of peace.'¹⁰⁵¹ To prepare the present, however, he would need the Turks to be reasonable. Lowther was concerned that the Central Powers were encouraging Turkey to be 'stiff', and that she was likely to make proposals that would be rejected, including the retention of Adrianople, terms which Vansittart labelled 'quite ridiculous & quite unacceptable'.¹⁰⁵² Lowther went on to say that according to his German and Austrian colleagues, the Turks considered Adrianople vital to the defence of Constantinople, so much so that they were prepared to restart the war if they lost it. Vansittart was concerned that this attitude was the product of Austro-German encouragement. Both the Marquis von Pallavicini, the Austrian Ambassador, and Baron Hans von Wangenheim, the German, had an attitude which was 'most unfortunate', he added.¹⁰⁵³ Although anxious for Turkey to make peace, the Turkish questions were not at the forefront of the British official mind. It was already decided that Turkey would have to give up Adrianople, and the only real problem was to get them to give it up. The 'main object' of the Conference, as Grey said, was to decide on

¹⁰⁵⁰ Cartwright to Grey, No. 182, Tel., 3 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1516/51690, Vansittart minute; Bax-Ironside to Grey, No. 213, Tel., 4 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1516/51816.

¹⁰⁵¹ Grey to Cartwright, No. 95, 6 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1517/52550.

¹⁰⁵² Lowther to Grey, No. 715, Tel., Confidential, 11 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1517/52674; Vansittart minute.

¹⁰⁵³ Lowther to Grey, No. 720, Tel., 14 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1517/53452, Vansittart minute.

borders for a new independent Albania, and to settle the question of Serbia's access to the sea.¹⁰⁵⁴ The Russian Government also tried to move the Turks to give up Adrianople in the interests of peace. Mikhail Nikolayevich von Giers, the Russian Ambassador to the Porte, warned the Turks that they risked reopening the war if they were not 'conciliatory'. It was impossible to keep Adrianople, he said, as the Bulgarians had reached Çatalca, further into Turkish territory, giving short shrift to the Turkish claim, (accurate as it turned out) that the surrender of Constantinople would mean the end of the Government. Grey appreciated this line of argument, and instructed Lowther to make similar remarks to the Turks, as the French and Germans had also done.¹⁰⁵⁵ In London, there was a palpable sense of frustration at the Turkish attitude. On 20 December, just five days before his optimistic deadline, Grey told the Bulgarians that should Turkey reopen the war, Britain would be neutral, and that Turkey would be acting 'entirely at her own risk'.¹⁰⁵⁶ To keep the pressure up, Lowther was instructed, in conjunction with Pallavicini, to 'advise' the Turks that if Adrianople was held, it would almost certainly mean another war with the Bulgarians. Grey thought that there might now be some movement, as he had heard from Sir Richard Crawford, employed in reforming the Ottoman customs system, that without peace, the financial situation of the Ottoman Government was such that it might collapse in the near future.¹⁰⁵⁷ Although desperate for peace, the Kâmil Government knew that to lose Adrianople would be a disaster for both the Ottoman State and themselves personally. Consequently, they tried to hold out. They also believed, Lowther reported, that the *entente* was in favour of the allies getting the fruits of their victories, whilst the Triple Alliance was less keen to see such a solution. They therefore thought that they might be able to split

¹⁰⁵⁴ Grey to Bertie, No. 615, 16 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1518/54055. Also sent to Berlin, Rome and Saint Petersburg.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Lowther to Grey, No. 727, Tel., 18 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1518/54096; Grey to Lowther, No. 1110, Tel., 19 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1518/54096.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Grey to Bax-Ironside, No. 46, 18 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1518/54361.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Grey to Lowther, No. 1127, Tel, 30 Dec. 1912, FO 371/1519/55901.

them, and get more from a settlement than they had thought. With this in mind, they considered offering to hand the matter over to the Powers to settle, even offering to give up Adrianople if the six Powers unanimously asked them to, relying on the belief that this was unlikely to happen.¹⁰⁵⁸ Despite this, both Lowther and G.E. Tyrrell, military attaché in the Embassy, thought, from discussion with Turkish Officers, that war was likely to break out again.¹⁰⁵⁹

In the new year, the Conference of Ambassadors discussed ways to break the deadlock, considering that a compromise over Adrianople might be possible, if the Turks would give it up first.¹⁰⁶⁰ Lowther thought this idea to be a good one. The Turks might now agree to lose Adrianople, he reported, assuming the fortifications were completely removed and the Powers requested unanimously that they did so.¹⁰⁶¹ Grey saw the elements of bargain. He believed that the Powers were willing to make ‘strong collective representation[s]’ at Constantinople, and so he launched another offensive with Tevfik. He informed him that so long as the Turks were unwilling to compromise on Adrianople, they would get nothing but pressure to give way, but if they were willing to discuss the matter, then the Powers might be willing to exercise influence on Bulgaria to ‘overcome difficulties’. In effect, having seen that the stick would be unsuccessful, Grey tried the carrot, asking the Turks to name their price, and suggesting that the Powers might then be able to get it for them.¹⁰⁶² Such a representation made sense too because it was time limited. Lowther reported on 7 January that although estimates varied, Adrianople could not hold out for much longer than a few weeks.¹⁰⁶³ The Turkish position was weakening,

¹⁰⁵⁸ Lowther to Grey, No. 744, Tel., 31 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1757/1/13.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Lowther to Grey, No. 1117, 28 Dec. 1912, FFO 371/1759/8.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Grey to Cartwright, No. 3, 4 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/974. This was also sent to Paris, Berlin, Italy and Saint Petersburg, as all the reports of the Conference of Ambassadors were. A despatch similar in substance was also sent to Constantinople.

¹⁰⁶¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 10, Tel., 7 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/997.

¹⁰⁶² Grey to Lowther, No. 11, Tel., 4 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/1103.

¹⁰⁶³ Lowther to Grey, No. 11, Tel., Confidential, 7 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/1133.

and Vansittart believed that Adrianople was ‘practically in extremis’.¹⁰⁶⁴ In the meantime, the Powers sent ships to Besika Bay near Constantinople, both for the protection of their nationals and in order that a demonstration might be made quickly if considered desirable. Grey informed Lowther that although this did not mean that a demonstration was committed to, if the presence of ships did anything to encourage the Turks to submit to the Powers, then ‘this impression should not be discouraged’.¹⁰⁶⁵ The Turks remained intransigent. They planned to refuse to submit to the Powers and stated that their attitude would not change after the fall of Adrianople. Vansittart hoped that the ‘fall of Adrianople [would] now take place quickly’, as it could not fail to change the view of the Turks, who he believed were still clinging to the idea that they could separate the Powers.¹⁰⁶⁶ Grey became further frustrated. Met by Tevfik and Resid, he told them that the Adrianople question was one of ‘facts’. If the war began again, would the Turks be able to save Adrianople? Would they not risk losing yet more than they had already lost?¹⁰⁶⁷ The Powers would not, Grey added to Tevfik a week later, ‘intervene to keep Adrianople for Turkey’.¹⁰⁶⁸ The Balkan States would not discuss peace without the surrender of Adrianople. Grey now thought that it would take the fall of Adrianople to break the deadlock. He instructed his Ambassadors that in the meantime, it was vital that the Powers presented a united front, to prevent the Turks from seeing a chance to divide them.¹⁰⁶⁹ Following delays, caused by German modifications, the collective note, asking the Turks to give up Adrianople, was presented on 17 Jan.¹⁰⁷⁰ Kâmil and his senior ministers were increasingly aware that they had little choice but to submit, but they worried that this

¹⁰⁶⁴ Bax-Ironside to Grey, No. 7, Tel., Confidential, 8 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/1163, Vansittart minute.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Grey to Lowther, No. 21, Tel., 7 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/1284

¹⁰⁶⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 16, Tel., 9 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/1304, Vansittart minute.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Grey to Lowther, No. 11, 8 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/1337.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Grey to Lowther, No. 14, 11 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/2055. (14th, 363)

¹⁰⁶⁹ Grey to Lowther, No. 25, Tel., 10 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/1818. Sent to Berlin, Saint Petersburg and Vienna. Also sent Sofia for information.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Lowther to Grey, No. 23, Tel., Confidential, 16 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/2417; Lowther to Grey, No. 27, Tel., 17 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/2573.

might result in a coup. Lowther was disposed to act with his Russian and French colleagues to support the Kâmil Cabinet. Nicolson and Grey, however, worried that this presented an opportunity to split the Powers, warned him against such a policy.¹⁰⁷¹ Once again, pragmatism and the need to keep in concert with the other Powers had come ahead of the Turks.

One area in which Turkey did receive British support was the question of a war indemnity being paid by them. Grey worried that if the Allies demanded a large indemnity they risked the financial collapse of the Ottoman Empire, an eventuality not in the interests of any Power. He suggested to the other Powers that the idea be 'discouraged'. As Maxwell remarked, the idea would 'hardly be fair' on Turkey, who would lose so much territory.¹⁰⁷² By 25 January, the idea had been largely dropped. The Powers were 'unanimous' against it.¹⁰⁷³

Tevfik requested clarification on the terms of the Powers' note from Grey, who was unwilling to discuss it with him, telling him to instead to put it in the Turkish reply. Again Grey, was keen to act together with the other Powers, through joint action. Nicolson used the meeting to 'again impress... upon the Turks the absolute necessity of replying to the note with as little delay as possible, and also in making up their minds to give up Adrianople'.¹⁰⁷⁴ Such entreaties hit the mark. On the 22nd, Lowther reported that the Turkish Government was in the process of writing up their reply to the *démarche*, willing to give up Adrianople and make peace with the Allies.¹⁰⁷⁵

6.2.d. A CUP Coup and Renewal of the War

¹⁰⁷¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 23, Tel., Confidential, 16 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1757/2417, Nicolson and Grey minutes.

¹⁰⁷² Grey to Bertie, No. 30, Tel., 21 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1758/3083. Also sent Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Saint Petersburg. Maxwell and Nicolson minutes, the substance of which were largely embodied in the telegram.

¹⁰⁷³ Maxwell minute, Bertie to Grey, No. 12, Tel., 25 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1758/3878.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Nicolson to Lowther, Private, 21 Jan. 1913, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 343.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Lowther to Grey, No. 33, Tel., 22 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1758/3392.

While the Kâmil Cabinet were in the process of drafting the reply, they were broken in on by a band of armed men, led by Enver Bey. They shot and killed Nazim Pasha, Minister for the Navy and a General blamed by some for the catastrophic performance of the Turkish Army, and invited Kâmil, at gunpoint, to resign. He did so, and was later replaced as Grand Vizier by Mahmud Shevket Pasha, a CUP member who had been in command of the 'Action Army' that put down the counter coup in 1909. It was soon clear to all that the main motivation for the coup was to prevent the Government from submitting to the Powers. Vansittart thought it 'deplorable', and that the CUP 'ought to have been adequately dealt with in advance'. Grey reminded Lowther that he was welcome to ask for ships to be sent, if he thought it necessary.¹⁰⁷⁶ The new Cabinet, Lowther reported, had a 'distinctly German colouring', and the new Grand Vizier had been seen calling at the German Embassy late in the evening on the day of the coup. The new Government did not, however, propose to resume war if Adrianople, minus fortification, could be secured for Turkey.¹⁰⁷⁷

Count Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, suggested that it would be best if negotiations could now be dragged out until the fall of Adrianople, when even the new Government would be unlikely to renew war. Seeing as Adrianople was not expected to hold out beyond the 'first week in February', this view was received with sympathy in Whitehall.¹⁰⁷⁸ Grey was keen not to give the Turks false encouragement: 'we must be careful not to construe neutrality so as to encourage the Turks to expect that, if they held out and continued the war, the Powers, or any of them, would intervene to help

¹⁰⁷⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 39, Tel., 23 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1788/3535, Vansittart minute; Grey to Lowther, No. 55, Tel., 24 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1788/3535.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Lowther to Grey, No. 42, Tel., 24 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1788/3678.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Cartwright to Grey, No. 17, Tel., 24 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1758/3686, Vansittart minute.

them.’¹⁰⁷⁹ He warned the Turkish delegates, engaged in peace negotiations at the Palace of St. James, that the Powers could do nothing to prevent a resumption of hostilities unless they answered the note, and soon.¹⁰⁸⁰ The new Government, having seized Power, found that the constraints which bound their predecessors remained in place. The general feeling at Constantinople was warlike. Tyrrell had the impression that the ‘resumption of hostilities seem[ed] to be accepted on all sides as an inevitable consequence of... [the coup], though it [was] accepted with resignation rather than enthusiasm.’¹⁰⁸¹ Indeed, by the 26th, Turkish troops had already begun operations against the Bulgarians. In the meantime, the new Cabinet made a temporising reply to the Powers, trying to distract from Adrianople by discussing the question of the islands. Lowther found some of the requests to be almost laughable: ‘the demand for the abolition of foreign post-offices and the Capitulations in judicial matters seems to be so preposterous in a country governed during the last few years martial law that they can scarcely be seriously meant, even allowing for customary elements of bluff.’ The Government was not in a strong position, and there was little public enthusiasm for the renewal of hostilities, he continued, and so they responded (as do struggling governments the world over) by trying to promote chauvinist feeling.¹⁰⁸² The Turkish Delegates in London, on the other hand, urged the Powers to help Turkey keep Adrianople, arguing that if it fell, the Allies would only push for more. Grey was unsympathetic, and told them that war would have to decide the fate of the city.¹⁰⁸³ Desperate for a way out, the Turks now requested arbitration, on the basis of minor economic advantages and an end to the capitulations. Grey, keen as ever to work through the concert of the Powers, informed them that it would be impossible unless they

¹⁰⁷⁹ Grey to Rodd, No. 38, Tel., 30 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1758/5142.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Grey to Lowther, No. 34, 30 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1758/5143.

¹⁰⁸¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 65, 26 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1788/4851.

¹⁰⁸² Lowther to Grey, No. 60, Tel., Confidential, 31 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1788/4804.

¹⁰⁸³ Grey to Lowther, No. 81, Tel., 7 Feb. 1913, FO 371/1758/5953.

accepted the note. As Norman remarked, the Allies would never have agreed to the war being brought to an end in this way in any case.¹⁰⁸⁴ The Turks were struggling for both financial and military reasons, which explained the more ‘pacific’ approach. For Alwyn Parker, the moral was that ‘Turkey should be given as little money as possible’ for the moment, to further encourage her to end the war and come to terms.¹⁰⁸⁵

In early March Lowther believed that the ‘public mind’ was being prepared for the idea of Adrianople being lost.¹⁰⁸⁶ It had already stood out for a month longer than expected, and would hold on for several weeks more, eventually falling on 26 March.¹⁰⁸⁷ Although this development suggested that an end to the fighting might be in sight, Grey was anxious that the Bulgarians might now push on, finally breaching the Çatalca lines and allowing Tsar Ferdinand the opportunity of ‘presenting himself before Constantinople.’¹⁰⁸⁸ Fed up with continued uncertainty and continued quibbling over minor points, Grey gathered the peace delegates together and informed them to sign the treaty or leave London. He promised support for those who did sign.¹⁰⁸⁹ After some delay, this took place, and the Treaty of London was signed on 30 May. It established that territory west of the Enos-Midia line would be ceded to the Balkan League, and established the existence (although not the boundaries) of an independent Albanian state.

In June 1913, the Turks again made a request to Britain for an alliance or at least to join the Triple *Entente*. Louis Mallet enumerated the objections to this. Although he thought that being involved in the regeneration of Turkey would be attractive and of strategic value, the risks were too high. It might prove irritating to other Powers. Were Turkey to join the Triple *Entente*, Germany might take this as a direct challenge. He

¹⁰⁸⁴ Lowther to Grey, No. 80, Tel., 10 Feb. 1913, FO 371/1789/6473, Norman minute.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Lowther to Grey, No. 87, Tel., 13 Feb. 1913, FO 371/1758/7024, Parker minute.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Lowther to Grey, No. 126, Tel., 5 Mar. 1913, FO 371/1758/10413.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Bax-Ironside to Grey, No. 110, Tel., *En Clair*, 26 Mar. 1913, FO 371/1759/13909.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Grey to Bertie, No. 213, 27 Mar. 1913, FO 371/1759/14357.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Grey to Cartwright, No. 116, 26 Mar. 1913, FO 371/1798/24518.

thought that a general declaration of neutrality over Turkey's Asiatic possessions would instead be the best course. Grey agreed, and once again wider strategic concerns overrode a specific Turkish policy.¹⁰⁹⁰

6.2.e. The Second Balkan War

As early as April 1913, before the first Balkan War had even come to a close, British policymakers were observing the signs of a second conflict. Vansittart observed that the 'signs of trouble' between Serbia and Greece on the one side, and Bulgaria on the other, were 'increasing'. In a sign of things to come, he remarked that the Powers should leave the Allies to settle their differences by themselves.¹⁰⁹¹ The reasons for this were not hard to find. Grey deprecated a proposal by the Russian Government that the Triple *Entente* might mediate between the Balkan Allies. He thought the likely result would be a Balkan state seeking the patronage of the Triple Alliance, dividing the Powers. Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador, agreed with his assessment.¹⁰⁹² Grey thought that non-interference was the only policy likely to meet with success. Austria and Russia would be the only Powers willing to intervene with the use of force, he wrote, and this was the only way that war could be prevented.¹⁰⁹³ The Powers, exhausted by constant crisis, were unwilling to act with vigour to prevent a war, when such an action promised such uncertain benefits. On 25 June, the Foreign Office learned that Bulgarian troops had attacked Serbia in 'strong force', and that fighting had begun.¹⁰⁹⁴ By the 30th, it was clear to Vansittart that war had 'broken out in earnest.' In early July, Said Halim Pasha, (who had become Grand Vizier on the assassination of Mahmud Shevket by relatives of the slain Nazim) suggested to Charles Marling (*Chargé d'Affaires* at the British Embassy in the

¹⁰⁹⁰ Mallet Memorandum, 18. Jun. 1913, FO 371/1826/28098, Grey minute.

¹⁰⁹¹ Paget to Grey, No. 82, 18 Apr. 1913, FO 371/1785/18255.

¹⁰⁹² Grey to Bertie, No. 352, 2 Jun. 1913, FO 371/1786/25844.

¹⁰⁹³ Grey to O'Beirne, No. 443, Tel., 9 Jun. 1913, FO 371/1786/26533.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Paget to Grey, No. 156, Tel., 25 Jun. 1913, FO 371/1787/29170.

interregnum between Lowther and Mallet) that Turkey would not take advantage of the war now raging between the erstwhile allies. Norman remarked that Turkey was likely 'too exhausted to take much advantage of anything'.¹⁰⁹⁵

Norman's prediction was wrong. Days later, the Turks were reported advancing slowly west, aiming to retake Adrianople. The Bulgarians hoped that Britain would advise the Turks to confine themselves to the borders delimited by the Treaty of London. Grey thought such a warning was reasonable, but as ever sought the views of the other Powers before acting.¹⁰⁹⁶ In due course, Marling urged the Turks not to go beyond the Enos-Midia line, but reported that 'chauvinists' had the upper hand, and they intended to do so. This prompted a rare breaking of ranks from Grey. He instructed Marling to urge the Turks not to advance beyond the line, without waiting for his colleagues to do likewise. Every new complication, Grey thought, increased the risk that a Great Power would intervene.¹⁰⁹⁷ Indeed, British policymakers were very keen to restrain the Turks. Marling, having been told, in response to his warning, that the Turks had not crossed the line, suggested that the negotiations on the 4% customs rise might be used as a lever. Hakki could be told that a 'policy of adventure' would threaten them. Parker, who had spent such an extended period immersed in the question, was horrified. He hoped that the negotiations would not be used in this way.¹⁰⁹⁸ With the news that the Turks were advancing, and the realisation that little other than force would restrain them, Marling raised the prospect again.¹⁰⁹⁹ Parker reacted decisively:

¹⁰⁹⁵ Marling to Grey, No. 323, Tel., 7 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1834/31281, Norman minute.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Bax-Ironside to Grey, No. 273, Tel., 13 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/32304, Grey to Bertie, No. 278, Tel., 15 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/32304. Also sent Berlin, Vienna, Saint Petersburg, Rome.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Marling to Grey, No. 340, Tel., 15 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1834/32627; Grey to Marling, No. 329, Tel., 16 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1834/32627.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Marling to Grey, No. 344, Tel., 17 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/33024, Parker minute.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Bax-Ironside to Grey, No. 283, Tel., 16 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1834/32799; Marling to Grey, No. 346, Tel., 18 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/33152; Marling to Grey, No. 348, Tel., 18 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/33163.

I cannot see any sufficient reason for our breaking off negotiations with Hakki in order to assist the Bulgarians, or why should we sacrifice our national interests because Bulgaria is reaping the just reward of a policy of adventure. At any rate other Powers have greater reason to restrain Turkey than we have, and it seems quite uncalled for us to take the lead in checking Turkey. ¹¹⁰⁰

The lever remained unused. Turkish forces soon recaptured Adrianople, and continued to advance, apparently intending to return to the former Bulgarian frontier. ¹¹⁰¹ The Bulgarian Army, fighting on several fronts and exhausted from bearing the brunt of the fighting in the first war, provided little resistance. The Turks ‘had an easy job’, as Norman put it, and Mallet thought their advance to be made in a ‘very businesslike’ manner. ¹¹⁰² Grey despaired. The Turkish advance represented a ‘risk’, he warned them, and although Britain was willing to help Turkey ‘consolidate her dominions’, she would not protect her from the consequences of her policy. ¹¹⁰³ Caught up in the euphoria of a successful advance, and filled with religious hatred stoked by the first war, Turkish troops committed various atrocities as they advanced. This, too, presented a problem to Britain. Marling was instructed to ‘bring this to the attention of the Grand Vizier’, inform him of the language used to the Bulgarian Government on similar occasions in the past, and note that it was with ‘regret’, that such language was now held to the Turks. ¹¹⁰⁴

British policymakers, having had little luck in persuading the Turks to restrain themselves, were now unwilling to contemplate further action. An Austrian proposal to offer peace to the belligerents, with distribution of territory settled afterwards, was rejected unless the Powers could agree what the settlement would look like beforehand. ¹¹⁰⁵ Similarly, when the Russians hoped that Britain might take the lead in a naval demonstration, Norman thought that such a demonstration would be ‘unlikely to succeed’.

¹¹⁰⁰ Parker minute, Marling to Grey, No. 348, Tel., 18 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/33163.

¹¹⁰¹ Marling to Grey, No. 359, Tel. 23 Jul. 1913, NO 371/1834/33983.

¹¹⁰² Norman and Mallet minutes, Marling to Grey, No. 664, 26 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1834/35300.

¹¹⁰³ Grey to Marling, No. 352, Tel., 26 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/34385.

¹¹⁰⁴ Grey to Marling, No. 387, Tel., 8 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1834/35871.

¹¹⁰⁵ Grey to Cartwright, No. 228, Tel., 17 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1835/33111.

¹¹⁰⁶ Grey now feared that Turkish action, both in advancing into Bulgaria and in taking ‘vengeance’ against civilian populations, was ‘beyond the pale’, and would result in Russia entering the war to defend Bulgaria. He suggested to the German Government that, with this in mind, they had better get in contact with the Russian Government, to minimise the impact of this step if it came. ¹¹⁰⁷

By the end of July, there were signs that the war was coming to a close. Although the Turks were not represented, preparations were being made for a conference between the other belligerents at Bucharest. ¹¹⁰⁸ Peace was agreed between them on 10 August. ¹¹⁰⁹ The Powers still clung to the idea that Turkey could not retain Adrianople. Coercion having failed, the Russian Government now contemplated offering the Turks ‘inducements’ to leave. ¹¹¹⁰ An identic communication of the Powers was made in this vein on 7 August. ¹¹¹¹ On the 10th, the Bulgarians unilaterally declared peace, and planned to demobilise as soon as possible. They called on the Powers to protect them from Turkish attack. ¹¹¹² Their chances did not appear promising, as the next day, the Turks replied to the identic communication in the negative, offering a ‘polite refusal to leave Adrianople.’ ¹¹¹³ The identic step had ‘proved a failure’. ¹¹¹⁴ Once again, Marling suggested that the 4% was the obvious way to bring the Turks to heel. Once again, Parker offered a spirited defence of the Turkish position:

I entirely disagree with Mr Marling’s suggestion... and I consider he has lost all sense of proportion in proposing it. I also think his summary of the Turkish attitude... is wrong. I do not think there is any evidence for the thesis he advances [that the Turks would take more land to seek more concessions], and I think the Embassy at Constantinople are altogether out of touch with the Turkish Government.

¹¹⁰⁶ Buchanan to Grey, No. 268, Tel., 18 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1835/33167.

¹¹⁰⁷ Grey to Granville, No. 281, Tel., 25 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1837/34488.

¹¹⁰⁸ Barclay to Grey, No. 140, Tel., 25 Jul. 1913, FO 371/1835/34375.

¹¹⁰⁹ Barclay to Grey, No. 170, Tel., 10 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1836/36916.

¹¹¹⁰ Buchanan to Grey, No. 285, Tel., 3 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1836/35840.

¹¹¹¹ Marling to Grey, No. 395, Tel., 7 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1837/36533.

¹¹¹² Bax-Ironside to Grey, 10 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1836/37807.

¹¹¹³ Marling to Grey, No. 399, Tel., *En Clair*, 11 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1837/37195, Norman minute.

¹¹¹⁴ Marling to Grey, No. 707, 8 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1838/38054, Norman minute.

As for Adrianople, in view of the fact a) that it is necessary to Turkey as a defence of Consple, b) that the Bulgarians have shown themselves guilty of the worst atrocities perpetrated in the whole war, and c) of the fact that the population is largely Greek, there is no reason for H.M.G. to take the initiative in devising measures for the procuring the Turkish withdrawal from Adrianople, especially as Herr von Jagow [German state secretary] seems to doubt whether any Russian action to that end is to be taken seriously.

We cannot oppose the ejection of the Turks, but I cannot see any reason why we should promote it.

Parker thought that Britain should not risk her own material interests to get the Turks out of Adrianople, and this opinion was shared by senior policymakers.¹¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, Grey continued to offer lukewarm support to proposals of the Powers to remove the Turks, remarking that it was of the 'utmost importance' to 'maintain the concert of the Powers.'¹¹¹⁶ At the end of August, 'Indirect pourparlers' commenced for a direct settlement of the Thracian questions, and a treaty was signed between Bulgaria and Turkey on 30 September.¹¹¹⁷ The Turks had defeated both Bulgaria and Europe in regaining Adrianople, and had managed to negotiate what amounted to their own capitulations for Muslim residents in Bulgaria. Marling thought that more trouble was to come. Many senior CUP men were from Salonica, he said, and were waiting for the dreadnought now building in Armstrong's yard to 'pick a quarrel' with Greece and regain their hometown.¹¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, the Balkan Wars had now come to an end.

6.3. The Balance Sheet

There was relatively little sympathy in British official circles for Turkey at the breakout of both the wars of 1911-13. In 1911, on the delivery of the Italian ultimatum,

¹¹¹⁵ Marling to Grey, No. 407, Tel., 15 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1837/37886, Nicolson minute.

¹¹¹⁶ Grey to Marling, No. 413, Tel., 20 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1838/38276; Grey to Buchanan, No. 294, 14 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1838/38400.

¹¹¹⁷ Marling to Grey, No. 434, Tel., 26 Aug. 1913, FO 371/1838/39490; Marling to Grey, No. 492, Tel., 30 Sep. 1913, FO 371/1838/44604.

¹¹¹⁸ Marling to Grey, No. 492, Tel., 30 Sep. 1913, FO 371/1838/44604; Marling to Grey, No. 836, 2 Oct. 1913, FO 371/1838/45737.

Lowther complained that although the Turks claimed to have always been friendly, they had never shown it.¹¹¹⁹ Even Grey, generally more level headed than Lowther, thought that negative press towards the Turks in 1912 was justified:

the effect upon public opinion of the long years of Abdul Hamid's iniquities was inevitable; then came a wave of... [optimism] with the hopes of the Young Turk revolution, followed by a reaction to disgust the C.U.P rule turned out badly; the flicker of hope that we felt when the C.U.P fell would hardly counteract this & no doubt the general feeling is that the Turks are reaping what they have sown.¹¹²⁰

The coup of 1913 went further towards poisoning any chance of improved relations between Britain and Turkey. Lowther saw Turkish politics as being divided between 'what is styled the Triple Alliance policy of the committee and the Triple *Entente* policy of its opponents.'¹¹²¹ The coup was therefore seen as being in favour of Germany, as well as bring irresponsible men to power. Lowther complained that:

A sort of delirium seems to possess the inside committee circles and the fiercer spirits among the military, and judging by appearances, they would seem to be bent on risking and perhaps destroying what is left of the Ottoman Empire, thus adding to the havoc wrought over the last four years. The capture of Adrianople may have a sobering effect, but, as the destinies of Turkey seem to be in the hands of men who have discarded the dictates of common sense, more decisive events may have to occur in the neighbourhood of the capital or the Dardanelles before they exhibit an accommodating or yielding mood.¹¹²²

It was clear that British officials were thoroughly fed up with the unstable and difficult Turkish state.

This growing alienation, important as it was, was not the deciding factor. The reasons for Britain's distant relations with Turkey in this period stemmed almost exclusively from wider strategic considerations. Grey repeatedly expressed the vital importance of keeping the Powers together. Nicolson, too, agreed with this policy. He wrote privately to Lowther, in October 1912:

¹¹¹⁹ Lowther to Nicolson, Private, 27 Sep. 1911, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 258.

¹¹²⁰ Grey minute, Grey to Lowther, No. 523, 15 Nov. 1912, FO 371/1506/48500.

¹¹²¹ Lowther to Grey, No. 69, 28 Jan. 1913, FO 371/1788/4854.

¹¹²² Lowther to Grey, No. 92, Confidential, 5 Feb. 1913, FO 371/1788/6200.

My personal idea is that we should take very great care, during the stormy period which is in front of us, to keep very closely in touch with Russia and endeavour to harmonise our action as far as possible with hers. If we do not do this, I very much fear that the outcome will be a serious weakening, if indeed not the breakup, of the Triple Entente, and this would leave Germany the absolute arbiter of the whole situation.¹¹²³

This was clearly the main influence on British policy at the time. British officials were frightened of the consequences of the established Great Power system breaking up, and were loath to do anything which might cause a general war between the Powers. In this context, it is no surprise that the relationship with a capricious and oftentimes unhelpful smaller state suffered.

¹¹²³ Nicolson to Lowther, 14 Oct. 1912, *Private Correspondence of Lowther*, No. 322.

7. Final Months: the Liman Mission and the War

7.a. The Advent of War

The wars in Northern Africa and the Balkans had left Turkey much reduced in territory. Brief successes against the exhausted Bulgarians aside, the large Ottoman Army had been humiliated. Not for the first time, it appeared to many observers that the Ottomans had failed to keep pace with modernity. Nevertheless, there were signs of recovery. At the close of the Balkan Wars, Charles Marling, then *chargé*, had reflected that Turkish regeneration was not far away.¹¹²⁴ The wars, and particularly the loss of Christian territory, had moulded Turkey into a more nationalist, populist state. The new dominance of Islam meant, more than before, that a sense of nationalism could now emerge, a consideration which would cause British policymakers some concern in 1914.¹¹²⁵ Geographically, the Turkish state had begun the shrinkage that would reach its conclusion in the 1920s, when Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk) forced into being an ethnically homogenous and geographically defensible Turkish state centred in Asia Minor, marking a historical and titular break with the Ottoman Empire. The beginning of this process meant that, however, that it was already more viable as a going concern. One scholar, although

¹¹²⁴ Marling to Grey, No. 492, Tel., 30 Sep. 1913, FO 371/1838/44604; Marling to Grey, No. 836, 2 Oct. 1913, FO 371/1838/45737.

¹¹²⁵ Hasan Kayali wrote that 'Secular Ottomanism failed to live up to the expectations of Young Turks. Its weakness was revealed and its relevance diminished as an ideology as separatist movements and dismemberment in Europe continued. In view of the fact that Arabs and Turks constituted the large majority of the Empire in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars and that religion continued to be the primary focus of allegiance for the Muslim masses, Ottomanism underwent a final redefinition to stress Islam as its main underpinning', Kayali, Hasan, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley, CA, 1997) p. 211. Eyal Ginio emphasised that the Balkan Wars confirmed this process, suggesting to Ottoman leaders that a secular 'Ottoman' identity was fragile, and taught them that they could not trust non-Muslim soldiers, leading to the development of a more explicitly Islamic Ottoman identity. *Id.*, 'Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream' *War in History*, 12(2), 2005, pp. 156-177.

Michael Reynolds wrote that the period from 1912-1922 is sometimes considered a 'ten years war' in Turkey, and that this can be a useful way of approaching the period, which saw the eventual emergence of a defensible, modern Turkey. *Id.*, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908-1918* (Cambridge, 2011) p. 263.

he accepted that the wars had been a disaster for the Turks in general, has argued that the Turkish success in reclaiming Adrianople had sounded the starting gun for a new sense of national awakening in Turkey.¹¹²⁶ Perhaps the greatest success, if it can be called that, of the Young Turk movement, lay in the way in which populism became an ‘essential element’ of Turkish public life, as demonstrated by the large public subscriptions for battleships – and the intense public anger when they were requisitioned by the Admiralty in August 1914.¹¹²⁷ The development of a new nationalistic state coincided with the rise of men such as Enver Pasha (who led the *coup d’etat* in 1913, described by Mallet as a ‘fatuous young idiot’ in October 1914¹¹²⁸), Talaat Pasha and Djemal Pasha, the so called ‘three Pashas’ who served as a de facto military dictatorship during the First World War. These men, especially Enver, were to a large part pro-German, owing to their military training.¹¹²⁹ By late 1913, as one scholar remarked, anglophile tendencies in Turkey had become ‘unimportant’, and most senior men now looked towards Germany for the future.¹¹³⁰

For Britain, the international outlook seemed on the brink of change. Policymakers appreciated that the Balkan wars had left significant tensions in their wake. Furthermore, a central pillar of Grey’s foreign policy, the convention with Russia, seemed less certain than it had been. The convention was due to be renegotiated in 1915, and there seemed to be an increasing sense in senior policymaking circles that the alignment was nearing its end.

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¹¹²⁶ McMeekin, *Ottoman Endgame*, pp. 83; 84-5.

¹¹²⁷ Ahmad, *Young Turks*, p. 162 Ahmad discussed how these demonstrated that populism was an essential element of CUP Turkey.

¹¹²⁸ Mallet to Tyrell, Private, 16 Oct. 1914, FO 800/80.

¹¹²⁹ In the Ottoman Empire during this period, most levels of military training almost invariably meant a period of time spent studying in Germany, or at the very least under German instructors in Turkey.

¹¹³⁰ Anderson, *Eastern Question*, p. 302-3 – this was partially because of the way in which international rules and the Powers were seen in Turkey to have let them down over Tripoli and the Balkans – see: Aksakal, ‘Ottoman Intellectuals on the Eve of the Great War’.

¹¹³¹ See Ekstein, Michael, ‘Great Britain and the Triple Entente on the eve of the Sarajevo Crisis, Hinsley, *Foreign Policy under Grey*, pp 342-350; Otte, ‘Entente Diplomacy vs Détente’, Geppert *et al*, *Wars before the Wars*, pp. 264-282, Sweet and Langhorne, ‘Great Britain and Russia, 1907-1914’, Hinsley, *Foreign Policy under Grey*, pp. 236-255.

The difficulties of diverging policy priorities were laid bare by the so called Liman von Sanders incident.¹¹³² The appointment of a German military advisor, who would have, the Russians contended, command of Constantinople and therefore the Straits, caused significant concern for Russian policymakers, who insisted that Britain and France join them in objecting to Liman, despite the fact that his mission appeared to be less of a threat than it had at first appeared. Grey, nevertheless, worked to convince the Germans to find a solution, and Liman was eventually promoted, making him too senior to command the Constantinople corps.

Although the Turks increasingly looked towards Germany, they still had two dreadnoughts building in Britain – the ship first ordered in 1910, *Reşadiye*, and the *Sultan Osman I*, the former *Rio de Janeiro*, which had been purchased from the Brazilian Government whilst still in Armstrong’s yard. On the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, the Admiralty, at that time under the direction of Winston Churchill, decided that although Turkey remained neutral, the ships, almost complete, would have to be requisitioned by the British Government. Their Ottoman crews had already arrived to take delivery. Despite the outrage that this caused, both were commissioned into the British Navy as *HMS Agincourt* and *HMS Erin*. Turkey, nevertheless, had already signed, in secret, an alliance with Germany, which was solidified by the donation of two warships, the battlecruiser *Goeben* and her escort *Breslau*, which were notionally ‘bought’ by Turkey in order to maintain the appearance of neutrality.¹¹³³ Both in London and Constantinople, British diplomatists were unaware that Turkey’s future was now committed to Germany. Nevertheless, there was an understanding that the best that could be hoped for was that

¹¹³² For an early discussion see Kerner, Robert J., ‘The Mission of Liman von Sanders. 1. Its Origin’, *The Slavonic Review*, 6(16), 1927, pp. 12-27, and the three sequels, in the same journal. For a more recent account, see Mulligan, William, “‘We can’t be more Russian than the Russians’: British Policy during the Liman von Sanders Crisis, 1913-1914’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17, 2006, pp. 261-282.

¹¹³³ Geoffrey Miller alleged a ‘conspiracy’ on the part of British officials in Athens to allow the *Goeben* to reach Turkey, in order to prevent Russia from attempting to take possession of the Straits. *Id*, *Superior Force*.

Turkey might remain neutral in the war. Mallet fought a lengthy and energetic, but ultimately futile, battle to support what he believed were the more moderate elements in the Turkish Government, although London remained unconvinced that his mission would succeed. Finally, war broke out between Britain and Turkey at the end of October, following a Turkish naval attack on Russian ports in the Black Sea.

Thus ended the period that had begun with such optimism in 1908, with Britain and Turkey at war. The reasons for this did not lie in 1914, however. Relations had already soured, and British efforts, certainly in London, focused on safeguarding British interests and massaging appearances for the benefit of the Muslims under British control.

7.1. German Mission to Constantinople

Although a new German Military Mission had been in the works since the Balkan Wars, London only learned at the end of October 1913 that it was contemplated.¹¹³⁴ Mallet reported on the 30th that a fresh mission was to be sent, with ‘extended Powers’ compared to those which had gone before. He noted that it would likely be commanded by Otto Liman von Sanders, a Prussian career officer later described by Mallet as a ‘mad German General’.¹¹³⁵ In itself, this was not a matter for much concern. It was well accepted that foreign missions would work with the Ottomans to develop the institutions of the state – hence the positions of Crawford and Laurent in the financial machinery and Willcocks’ work on Mesopotamian irrigation. As the Turks sought materiel and expertise from Britain for their navy, given the view that Britain was the foremost naval power, so they naturally gravitated towards Germany for the needs of their army, the German Army

¹¹³⁴ McMeekin, *Ottoman Endgame*, p. 88.

¹¹³⁵ Mallet to Grey, No. 530, Tel., 30 Oct. 1913, FO 371/1847/49385; Mallet to Tyrell, Private, 16 Oct. 1914, FO 800/80. Liman had added the sobriquet ‘von Sanders’ to his name on being ennobled, as a tribute to his deceased British wife, whose maiden name had been Sanders: Lord Acton to Grey, No. 9, 26 Feb. 1914, FO 371/2111/9159.

(in particular the Prussian elements) being widely regarded as the best in the world.¹¹³⁶ Russia, however, distinctly jumpy after her bruising in the Balkans and always anxious about the future of the Straits, expressed disquiet once further details of the mission emerged. Sergey Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, told Hugh O'Beirne, *chargé* at Saint Petersburg, that he was concerned about Liman's proposed appointment as the commander of the First Army Corps, which was based at Constantinople. Furthermore, he suggested that Liman would be accompanied by forty-two other German officers, and thought that other Powers should make 'compensating demands'. Claud Russell, an Eastern Department clerk, was unimpressed with Sazonov's paranoia. He thought a policy of 'compensating demands' not something which Britain wanted to 'embark on in Turkey.' His colleague G.R. Clerk was cynical about 'Russia's indignation', considering it to have 'calculated uses', giving a 'good excuse for Russian Officers in Armenia'. He added that Liman might not prove himself a Goltz – by which he meant powerful enough that he was able to influence Ottoman policy without formal command, as Colmar von der Goltz, a predecessor of Liman, had been able to do.¹¹³⁷ Nicolson, deeply pessimistic and a dedicated Russophile, was more inclined to take the Russian claims at face value. Russia had a 'just cause for complaint', he argued, and it was not desirable that Britain should appear to be 'indifferent, still less sympathetic' to the German action, which he thought a 'most unusual [and] undesirable step'. Grey was more relaxed, although he conceded that it was a 'surprising' development. He was unable to see how compensating advantages could be given to other Powers in a manner consistent with Turkish independence. He needed more time to consider this 'very difficult' situation.¹¹³⁸ Indeed, Vansittart rather

¹¹³⁶ On Prussia, see Clark, Christopher, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (London, 2006): 'Prussia is bound up in the public awareness with the memory of military success', p. xxv. Craig, Gordon, *The Politics of the Prussian Army: 1640-1945* (Oxford, 1967).

¹¹³⁷ On von der Goltz, see Yasamee, F.A.K., 'Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz and the Rebirth of the Ottoman Empire', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9, 1998, pp. 91-128.

¹¹³⁸ O'Beirne to Grey, No. 393, Tel., 25 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1847/53521, Russell, Clerk, Nicolson, Grey minutes.

summed up the prevailing views when he complained that Sazonov was ‘very upset [and] rather flustered’ – most thought that the Russians took a rather exaggerated view. As Vansittart added, suggestions as to how other Powers might ‘get... quits with the Germans... [had been] rather futile’ and there had been little suggested that would suit Britain. He was unsure whether there was in fact anything that Britain could ask for.¹¹³⁹ The Russian reaction seemed to have caught the Germans by surprise, but they were unable to change course – they explained to London that to ask for a change in the appointment at this juncture would entail a significant loss of German prestige.¹¹⁴⁰ Faced with a general sense of inertia, Sazonov complained to O’Beirne about Britain’s lackadaisical response. He floated the idea of Liman’s command being moved to Adrianople, instead of the capital, and continued to talk of British and Russian officials being given roles in Turkey as compensation. Vansittart was unimpressed with such a solution. From the ‘practical point of view a German command at Adrianople w[oul]d not be much better than Constantinople’, asking ‘What’s in a name’? As to officials being appointed elsewhere, he thought there would be ‘no advantage’ to Britain in having a ‘British governor general [*sic*] to play second fiddle to his Russian colleague in Armenia.’¹¹⁴¹ Sazonov spoke ‘seriously’ to O’Beirne about the lack of British support for Russia, warning that it was a test of the triple *entente*. He added that, in his opinion, Germany would ignore action taken unless it was backed by the threat of the British fleet. Vansittart remarked that the Russian idea was apparently to ‘bluff the Germans out’ with the assistance of France and Great Britain. Clerk added that the possibilities suggested were ‘dangerous’.¹¹⁴² British officials were unimpressed with the Russian reaction, and hoped to minimise the incident. Grey instructed O’Beirne that there was no need to be ‘more

¹¹³⁹ Vansittart minute, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 367, 26 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1847/54114.

¹¹⁴⁰ Grey to O’Beirne, No. 402, Confidential, 1 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/53646.

¹¹⁴¹ O’Beirne to Grey, No. 395, 29 Nov. 1913, FO 371/1847/54081; Vansittart minute.

¹¹⁴² O’Beirne to Grey, No. 398, Tel., 1 Dec. 1913, FO 371.1847/54365, Vansittart and Clerk minutes.

Russian than the Russians’, and remarked that fear of Russia was likely to be a far stronger inducement on Germany to act than the British fleet.¹¹⁴³ Lieutenant-Colonel G.E. Tyrell, a military attaché at the Constantinople Embassy, reported on the specifics of the mission. He noted that Liman could have a significant influence, especially as his proposed chief of staff had been in Turkey for six years, and was apparently on good terms with Enver. He added that the mission was likely to be of commercial value to Germany. His conclusions, however, echoed by Mallet, were that it was fairly likely that Liman would end up having a particularly strong position in Turkey.¹¹⁴⁴

Grey’s chief concern, as it had been throughout the crises in the east over the past year, was that the unity of the Powers might be broken up.¹¹⁴⁵ That this unity formed the ‘guarantee of the existence of Turkey’ added a further frisson. With this in mind, he accepted that some action was needed. Mallet was instructed to ascertain full details of the appointment from the Porte, in tandem with his French and Russian colleagues – although he was to use similar language, he was to avoid making the communication identic.¹¹⁴⁶ This seemed a wise policy, as it transpired that Russia were engaged in their own *démarche* at Berlin, and that the command of the First Army Corps in Constantinople did not include responsibility for either the Dardanelles or the Bosphorus.¹¹⁴⁷ On the spot, Mallet remarked that the ‘Advantages of a friendly settlement appear[ed] to be very great.’ The command was not, he said, as large a responsibility as had been suggested by Russia. He added that influence was as much a matter of getting on with the Turks as it was formal positions in any case, citing the success of Crawford, the customs official. Unless the Powers were willing to ‘see the matter through’, it would be best to avoid anything but a

¹¹⁴³ Grey to O’Beirne, No. 780, Tel., 2 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/54365.

¹¹⁴⁴ Mallet to Grey, No. 982, 2 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/55197

¹¹⁴⁵ Kent in Hinsley, 159 – Kent identified this as Grey’s foremost concern.

¹¹⁴⁶ Grey to Mallet, No. 557, Tel., 2 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/54365.

¹¹⁴⁷ Mallet to Grey, No. 602, Tel., 4 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/54823.

verbal enquiry for the present, arguments which Crowe declared ‘forcible’. ¹¹⁴⁸ Mallet also pointed out the difficult position that Britain were in with regard to Admiral Arthur Limpus, the British naval advisor who served as commander of the Turkish fleet. His position meant that Britain would struggle to avoid accusations of hypocrisy were she to object too strongly to the appointment of Liman. This was news to both Nicolson and Grey, neither of whom had realised that Limpus officially commanded the fleet. Although Limpus was contractually prevented from serving in a time of war, and Nicolson thought that commanding the ‘inefficient Navy’ was not the same as being Commander in Chief of the capital, he admitted that Britain was ‘not on perfectly unassailable ground’. ¹¹⁴⁹

As the mood in Britain shifted ever further away from taking serious action, Sazonov found himself more disturbed. He had decided to tell the German Government that he assumed the appointment of Liman had been made without their concurrence. If this step failed, (of which there was no doubt) then he argued that the time would come for identical action at Constantinople. He considered it ‘impossible for the three Powers to allow themselves to be defeated in this question’, and argued that occupation of Turkish ports and even a ‘rupture’ of diplomatic relations would be suitable action in the future. Surprisingly, he added that Germany would not treat such a course as hostile to her – a view seen through the rosier of tinted glasses. Sazonov’s forward policy was greeted with dismay in London. Vansittart did not see how Britain could go so far as suggested without being put ‘completely in the wrong’. Crowe agreed that the measures proposed were not such as Britain could ‘assent to without entirely upsetting their general line of policy in Turkey.’ ¹¹⁵⁰ With British Officials already unwilling to object, Tyrell made another report. He noted that von der Goltz had held a position on the ‘superior military council’ without

¹¹⁴⁸ Mallet to Grey, No. 603, Tel., 5 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/54955; Crowe minute 6th.

¹¹⁴⁹ Mallet to Grey, No. 603, Tel., 5 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/54955, Nicolson and Grey minutes.

¹¹⁵⁰ O’Beirne to Grey, No. 401, Tel., 7 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/55115, Vansittart minute, Crowe minute 8th.

objection, and that Britain could not well object to this now. He echoed the opinion that Liman's influence would depend on his ability to ingratiate himself with his hosts. Britain had 'already decided that... [she could not] well object to an appointment similar to that held by Marshal von der Goltz', Vansittart remarked, and this despatch confirmed the 'wisdom of that decision'.¹¹⁵¹ For the French part, Bertie reported an opinion held in Paris that the Turks would give Russia a 'satisfactory' explanation which they would reject, and then come to private arrangement with Germany. Vansittart mused that if this were to come to pass, then it was so much the better that Britain had done little.¹¹⁵² Mallet confirmed that Maurice Bompard, his French colleague, thought the French Government not particularly concerned by the appointment, although they had a list of concessions to ask for if required. Not only were the French generally unimpressed, but it was increasingly clear that the proposal was not damaging to British interests. Furthermore, as Mallet noted, Limpus was able to 'do anything except break the law or exceed the budget'. Mallet hoped that Britain would not ask for compensation, as he thought it likely to be dangerous. Vansittart took stock. He thought there were three reasons that Britain should limit herself to making verbal enquiries on Russia's behalf. Firstly, it now seemed clear, the appointment was 'innocuous'; secondly, Limpus remained in a similar position, and thirdly, it was likely that France and Russia would receive compensating advantages in any case. Although Crowe, suspicious of Germany, noted that Limpus remained ultimately responsible to the Ottoman Minister of Marine, and that it was unclear who would command Liman, Vansittart's views represented the current of policy.¹¹⁵³ Grey embodied this to Benckendorff on 11 December. He told him that a stronger wording of the joint communication would not suit Britain, as he doubted that the matter was as important as

¹¹⁵¹ Mallet to Grey, No. 987, 4 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/55415, Vansittart minute.

¹¹⁵² Bertie to Grey, No. 165, Tel., 10 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/55765, Vansittart minute.

¹¹⁵³ Mallet to Grey, No. 609, Tel., 10 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/55766, Vansittart and Crowe (11th) minute.

suggested by Russia, and he was hampered in any case by the role of Limpus. A day later, 'on reflection' Grey told Benckendorff that this represented a 'define opinion' and that Britain would do no more until the precise details of the contract came to light.¹¹⁵⁴

While Grey had poured cold water on Russian dreams of a robust triple *entente* response, both he and Mallet still worked towards finding a solution to the impasse. The principal difference between the British and German commands, Mallet pointed out, was that in times of war, Germans had 'become Ottoman' and taken an active part in fighting. Although the Turks were in the process of asking for retired British officers to fulfil a similar role, this was still in the planning phase. This meant that German officers were perhaps of more use to the Turks. The position remained, however, that any discussion of Liman's role would require willingness on the part of Britain to consider the nature of Limpus' command.¹¹⁵⁵ Limpus himself was unwilling to give up his title as commander of the Turkish Navy, except *in extremis*. The Turks wanted a good fleet, Mallet warned, and if they didn't get it from Britain would not hesitate to look elsewhere. Vansittart was cautious. The fact that at present British officers couldn't take an active part in war, combined with Limpus' being demoted (however much this would be in name only), might well lead the Turks to the conclusion that Britain was not serious, and encourage them to look to Germany for their naval needs. On the other hand, Clerk argued, not changing the title would mean gridlock with Germany, and that influence depended on any case on the man: 'Admiral Gamble could have done anything, Admiral Williams nothing.' Grey was anxious to avoid a trap. Britain must wait, he said, for a clear indication that Liman's position would be modified if that of Limpus was.¹¹⁵⁶

¹¹⁵⁴ Grey to O'Beirne, No. 789, Tel., 11 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/55771; Grey to O'Beirne, No. 789, Tel., 12 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/55771.

¹¹⁵⁵ Mallet to Grey, No. 613, Tel., 11 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1857/55920, Vansittart minute.

¹¹⁵⁶ Mallet to Grey, No. 623, Tel., Confidential, 14 Dec. 1913, FO 371/56310, Vansittart, Clerk and Grey minutes.

Unsurprisingly, this was not an attitude which pleased Russia. Sazonov, ‘as wobbly as ever’, complained that the action of Britain marked the failure of three power action in this matter, and that Britain had failed a ‘test’, which threatened the future of the *entente*.¹¹⁵⁷ Vansittart complained about what he saw as Sazonov’s self-deception. It was ‘ridiculous’, he blasted, to believe that Germany would not take umbrage at strong Triple *Entente* pressure at Constantinople. Sazonov was very difficult to deal with, he added. Crowe agreed, remarking that his opinions were ‘almost incredibly jejune’.¹¹⁵⁸ Although frustrated, it was clear that further action to placate Russia would be required. Grey decided to speak to Germany directly.¹¹⁵⁹ He informed Prince Karl Max Lichnowsky, the German Ambassador to London, that Russia was more upset about Liman than he had known her to be over anything else throughout his time at the Foreign Office. Trying to convince Germany to help him, Grey told Lichnowsky that he had struggled to hold the Russians back from aggressive action at the Porte. At Lichnowsky’s request, he agreed to make no communication at Constantinople without informing the Germans.¹¹⁶⁰ As he had done a year previously, Grey now worked directly with Germany to seek a solution to a European problem. As he told O’Beirne, any further steps in the direction of protest would provoke the question into becoming a ‘German and European question’. To avoid this, he was willing to modify Limpus’ contract, if this would encourage the Germans to do likewise.¹¹⁶¹ Once again, Grey was seeking external solutions to his *entente* problems. He was not willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of Russia.

¹¹⁵⁷ Vansittart minute, 15th, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 375 9 Dec 1913, FO 371/1847/56341; O’Beirne to Grey, No. 411, Tel., 13 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/56323; O’Beirne to Grey, No. 413, Tel., 14 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/56325.

¹¹⁵⁸ Vansittart and Crowe minutes, 15th, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 375 9 Dec 1913, FO 371/1847/56341.

¹¹⁵⁹ Crowe minute, 15th, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 411, Tel., 13 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/56323.

¹¹⁶⁰ Grey to Goschen, No. 419, Tel., 16 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/56796; Grey to Goschen, No. 366, 15 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/56873.

¹¹⁶¹ Grey to O’Beirne, No. 803, Tel., 16 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/56796.

This stance was further vindicated when the full details of the contract were provided by the Porte. Liman's command would not include either the Bosphorus or the Dardanelles. Furthermore, he would not be in command in the event of a siege. This seemed to confirm, although not to the cautious Nicolson, that there was little to fear from Liman's mission.¹¹⁶² Having failed to get a commitment to action from the Triple *Entente*, and as had been predicted in Paris, Russia now considered a direct settlement with Germany. For their part, the Germans were hoped to avoid a rupture over Liman, and were willing to come to the table. This news was met with delight in London. Crowe and Grey hoped that the press could be 'kept quiet', in order to allow a compromise to be found.¹¹⁶³ Grey was still willing to accommodate a solution by reducing Liman's powers, but he made it clear to his colleagues that he would not do so merely to put Britain in a better position to support the Russians. He would not dance to the Russian tune.¹¹⁶⁴ Frustrated and still 'jumpy', Sazonov now proposed joint action at Berlin, much to the irritation of officials in London, where it was worried that it would appear threatening. Grey thought that the Germans hoped for a way out, but that a joint communication would only stiffen their resolve, and make the question one between two alliance systems. He thought that the question could not be allowed to assume this form unless Russia was willing to make it a *casus belli*. Speaking personally, he did not believe it to be worth war, and that 'patient pressure' would be sufficient to achieve a modification. Consequently, Goschen was asked to make another effort with the Germans, emphasising that Russia was extremely concerned.¹¹⁶⁵

¹¹⁶² Mallet to Grey, No. 628, Tel., 15 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/56616, Nicolson minute.

¹¹⁶³ Buchanan to Grey, No. 419, Tel., 21 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/57356. Minutes Vansittart, Clerk, Crowe, Grey.

¹¹⁶⁴ Grey minute, Graham Greene to Crowe, 24 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/57988.

¹¹⁶⁵ Grey to Goschen, No. 440, Tel., 31 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/58808, Grey minute.

As the new year dawned, Sir Edward Goschen, in Berlin, reflected on the future. He saw 'some nasty rocks ahead', including the German mission. Meeting Jagow, the German State Secretary, whom he found 'very friendly and nice', he discussed the matter 'amicably'.¹¹⁶⁶ Goschen believed him willing to settle the question in a 'friendly way', but Jagow warned that it was impossible if the *entente* Powers tried to exert pressure, or if the press in Russia and France inflated the importance of the matter.¹¹⁶⁷ He made similar points in his telegram to Grey, and added that Jagow had hinted at a possible solution: promoting Liman, so that he would be too senior to command the 1st Army Corps. Jagow had also reassured Goschen that German officers would travel to Turkey with instructions to avoid interference in Turkish politics. This accommodating attitude was met with enthusiasm by Clerk, who thought that a solution could not be far away, if such a spirit was maintained.¹¹⁶⁸

Sazonov had not passed such a relaxing new year. He complained to Buchanan that the Russians could not wait longer than a month for a solution. Vansittart was frustrated, warning that unless the Russian Government was willing to 'show patience' and 'refrain from their inclination to rush matters', they would lose any chance of a 'peaceful [and] amicable settlement'. Clerk thought that this indignation was perhaps intended to reach Lichnowsky.¹¹⁶⁹ If movement from Germany was not forthcoming, Sazonov intended to return to the idea of joint action at Constantinople, much to the frustration of Crowe, who wished that Tsar Nicholas would settle the matter in direct correspondence with his cousin Kaiser Wilhelm.¹¹⁷⁰ Days later, Sazonov, by now 'bowling rather wild', suggested that Britain and France might use the financial negotiations with Turkey as a

¹¹⁶⁶ This reflected a growing sense of *détente*, and subtle moves were being made towards unofficial Anglo-German conversations. See Otte, 'Détente 1914'.

¹¹⁶⁷ Howard, Christopher (ed.), *The Diary of Edward Goschen, 1900-1914*, (London, 1980), p. 281, entry for 1st Jan 1914.

¹¹⁶⁸ Goschen to Grey, No. 1, Tel., 1 Jan 1914, FO 371/2111/109, Clerk minute, 2nd.

¹¹⁶⁹ Buchanan to Grey, No. 3, Tel., 5 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2111/603, Vansittart and Clerk minutes, 6th.

¹¹⁷⁰ Buchanan to Grey, No. 4, tel., 6 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2111/760, Crowe minute, 7th.

lever, in particular delaying consent to the 4% customs rise.¹¹⁷¹ This was too far even for Nicolson, who complained of Sazonov taking for granted Anglo-French cooperation, especially as ‘we are quite ready to use our good offices with Germany towards a satisfactory answer’. Furthermore, the customs question required unanimous assent of the Powers. If Russia felt strongly enough, there was nothing to stop her from refusing her consent. Grey expressed his agreement with this view, and emphasised that it was too late to change the conditions of the financial agreements.¹¹⁷²

Despite the sense of chaos in Russian policy, her negotiation with Germany had borne fruit, and London learned on the 11th that Liman was to be promoted, so as to be unable to command the 1st Army Corps at Constantinople. If a direct command were to become necessary, he would take it at Adrianople and not the capital. The Russian Ambassador, Mikhail von Giers, who had been on the point of leaving Constantinople in protest, was hastily ordered to remain for the moment.¹¹⁷³ British policymakers might have thought that this permitted a moment of calm, but Russia now requested that Limpus relinquish his command. The Foreign Office thought that this was completely unnecessary. Grey complained that, as he had already stated, he was willing to change Limpus’ position only to facilitate a solution, and not to put Russia in a stronger negotiating position. If Germany were to ask him to do it, he would agree, but she had not.¹¹⁷⁴ Buchanan was nevertheless hopeful of an end to the spat within a fortnight, on the basis indicated. Tsar Nicholas, he added, had taken to talking as if the matter was already settled.¹¹⁷⁵ On the 14th, to British relief, the German press carried news of Liman’s promotion, and reported

¹¹⁷¹ Buchanan to Grey, No. 6, Tel., 8 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2111/1070, Vansittart minute, 9th.

¹¹⁷² Buchanan to Grey, No. 6, Tel., 8 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2111/1070, Nicolson and Grey minutes.

¹¹⁷³ Buchanan to Grey, No. 11, Tel., 12 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2111/1667; Mallet to Grey, No. 22, Tel., Confidential, 11 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2111/1375.

¹¹⁷⁴ Buchanan to Grey, No. 12, Tel., 13 Jan. 1914 FO 371/2111/1796. Vansittart, Clerk, Crowe (all 14th) and Grey minutes.

¹¹⁷⁵ Buchanan to Grey, No. 14, Tel., 14 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2111/1936.

that he had been offered the role of ‘Inspector General’ of the Turkish Army.¹¹⁷⁶ This ‘ingenious way out’ was soon confirmed by the German Embassy.¹¹⁷⁷ Grey might have thought he was safe from Russian complaints for a time, but in February, a similar incident threatened, when the Russians voiced their displeasure at the news that a German would command Scutari, the town which had caused so much trouble for negotiators during the Balkan Wars. This time, however, Britain was not to be drawn. Vansittart noted that the Foreign Office was ‘rather in the dark’, a state of affairs which Crowe welcomed: ‘The less we hear of it, the better’. Nicolson agreed.¹¹⁷⁸

So ended what was, in the end, a minor spat in the annals of Great Power relations. Keith Neilson and Zara Steiner argued that it had been difficult for Grey, as he tried to keep both Turkey and Russia onside.¹¹⁷⁹ It seems that this perhaps overstates the case. Although Grey did try to find a balance, it was between the Russian *entente*, which seemed as though it might well be coming towards an end, and British policy more generally, which included avoidance of active hostility towards Turkey but also the growing possibility of developing the sense of *détente* which had been emerging between Britain and Germany.¹¹⁸⁰ Grey’s communications to Germany were almost apologetic, in the nature of asking a friend to indulge the eccentricities and overreactions of a relative, and the unwillingness of British officials to associate themselves with joint action at Constantinople

¹¹⁷⁶ Mallet to Grey, No. 30, Tel., FO 371/2111/2090.

¹¹⁷⁷ Russell minute, Mallet to Grey, No. 30, Tel., FO 371/2111/2090; Note from German Embassy 15 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2111/2739.

¹¹⁷⁸ Buchanan to Grey, No. 37, Tel., 4 Feb 1914, FO 371/2111/5185, Vansittart, Crowe (both 5th) and Nicolson minutes.

¹¹⁷⁹ Steiner and Neilson, *Britain and the Outbreak of War*, p. 128.

¹¹⁸⁰ See Otte, ‘Détente 1914’. William Mulligan wrote that the incident demonstrated that Britain was not a ‘docile partner in the *Entente*’ with Russia, and that Britain took the lead in finding a solution, in part because she saw Russian demands as excessive and likely to promote the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. He concludes that the crisis demonstrated the international system working effectively, months before the murder of Franz Ferdinand. The fallout from the Balkans wars had been managed by a combination of Anglo-German communication and cooperation, along with British restraint of her *entente* partners. This formula was successful again. See *id.*, “‘We can’t be more Russian than the Russians” pp. 267-8; 278.

owed more to the feelings of Germany than those of the Turks.¹¹⁸¹ Indeed, the fact that the Liman mission was not in reality particularly threatening, having been long in the planning, demonstrated that Britain was not especially concerned with Turkey.¹¹⁸² In the early years after the revolution, Britain was more active in opposition to German influence in Turkey. The incident suggested, indeed, that Britain had largely lost interest in trying to improve her position in Turkey, especially after having secured a number of commercial and strategic concessions following the Hakki negotiations. The outbreak of the European war would change this comfortable position.

7.2. War

The killing of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, along with his wife Sophie, by Serbian terrorists in Sarajevo has been considered, with the benefit of hindsight, as an epoch-shattering event, sending shockwaves throughout Europe. At the time, however, many British policymakers did not consider it more than a tragic incident which might provoke some trouble. Louis Mallet was among these. Following the news of the Archduke's death he was compelled to cancel a ball and dinner he had been planning to give, but he did not consider further implications likely. Indeed, he departed for a planned period of leave soon afterwards.¹¹⁸³ Nevertheless, the murders set in motion a chain of events leading to the outbreak of what would become known as the First World War, a conflict then unparalleled in its industrial levels of slaughter.¹¹⁸⁴ Turkey initially remained

¹¹⁸¹ Buchanan remembered Sazonov treating the incident specifically as a 'test' of the *entente*, a widespread impression at the time in some circles. If this is taken as read, then Grey's preference for German feelings over Turkish or Russian was very revealing.

¹¹⁸² Trumpener, Ulrich. "Liman Von Sanders and the German-Ottoman Alliance." *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1(4), 1966, pp. 179-92(180). Trumpener notes that Liman did not look to work politically, and he saw himself as being a military adviser – which was the subject of some disagreement with Wangenheim, the German Ambassador. The mission had been in the planning since defeat in the first Balkan war: McMeekin, *Ottoman Endgame*, p. 88. McMeekin also argued that the significance of the incident lay in the manner in which it had laid bare Russian ambitions on Turkey, *ibid*, p. 89.

¹¹⁸³ Mallet to Grey, Private, 1 Jul. 1914, FO 800/80.

¹¹⁸⁴ The breakout of the First World War has produced an enormous amount of literature. For the Turkish experience, see Aksakal, Mustafa, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914* (Cambridge, 2006). For more general

neutral in the conflict. Having seized the Turkish ships, British policymakers were aware that their credit would need significant rebuilding with the Porte. In London, there was no significant appetite to do so, and many policymakers thought that Turkey was already a lost cause. Mallet, on the other hand, was determined not to leave his first ambassadorial posting without a fight. Although he accepted that bringing Turkey into the war on the *entente* side was unlikely, he worked to the last minute to keep her neutral, unaware that she had already signed an understanding with Germany.

7.2.a. Sultan Osman I to Agincourt

Britain's Russian partner was unhappy about the Turkish naval situation in 1914. The Russian Black Sea Fleet (isolated from the rest of the world by the Straits, which remained stubbornly closed to warships) did not possess any ships of the dreadnought class, and would not for at least two years, whereas Turkey was scheduled to possess two by mid-1914. On delivery, they could significantly affect the balance of power in the Black Sea. As early as May 1914, Sazonov had suggested to Britain that she might seize the Turkish ships building in Armstrong's yards.¹¹⁸⁵ British officials had been aware of his unease even earlier. In January, Buchanan had noted Sazonov's irritation at the fact that French banks had loaned Turkey the funds to purchase the dreadnought *Rio de Janeiro*, being built by Armstrong for the Brazilians, who had, reflecting economic trouble and improving relations with their neighbours, been willing to sell it on. Clerk recognised the Russian concern that Turkey would have two dreadnoughts to their none, and were further worried that, under the command of a British admiral, the Turkish Navy would likely develop into an effective fighting force.¹¹⁸⁶

work, a classical starting point is Albertini, Luigi; Massey, Isabella [trans.], *Origins of the War of 1914* (Oxford, 3 Vols 1953). More recently, see Mulligan, *Origins of the First World War*; Otte, T.G., *July Crisis: The World's Descent into War, Summer 1914* (Cambridge, 2015); Clark, *Sleepwalkers*.

¹¹⁸⁵ McMeekin, *Ottoman Endgame*, pp. 100-101; 98.

¹¹⁸⁶ Buchanan to Grey, No. 2, Tel., 2 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2114/206, Clerk minute, 3rd.

The Turkish crew intended to man the ships arrived in Britain in March. There was some debate whether these men should be ‘feted’, and afforded hospitality. The Foreign Office, however, was unanimous that they should not be celebrated, as this would set an unhelpful precedent.¹¹⁸⁷ By the end of July, with war threatening, the Turks decided to take control of the situation. The delivery date had already been deferred by Armstrong, and so the Turks planned to coal the ships and sail them to Constantinople as soon as possible, despite the fact that they were formally unfinished.¹¹⁸⁸ By now, the Admiralty had already decided to seize the ships. Crowe was philosophical. Reflecting the strong ‘separation of powers’ prevalent in Whitehall, he thought the Admiralty should be left to act as they thought best, and that the Foreign Office should focus on defending their action to Turkey as well as possible in the aftermath.¹¹⁸⁹ On the third of August, with Britain’s entry into the war now inevitable, the Admiralty officially informed the Foreign Office that the Turkish ships were to be seized, and requested the Ottoman Government be informed. Unsurprisingly, the reaction in Turkey was outraged. The Grand Vizier, Said Halim Pasha, said that both he and his Government were deeply unhappy at what had happened, and considered it an ‘unfriendly act’, especially in the light of the ‘heavy’ financial sacrifices which had been made to pay for the vessels.¹¹⁹⁰ Grey could only temporise. He was ‘sure’ that the Turkish Government could ‘understand the necessity’, and pledged to ensure that they did not lose out financially.¹¹⁹¹ The financial question remained open. Clerk pointed out that the Admiralty was ‘in no hurry to pay for the ship’, but the question of policy – ‘whether immediate payment [would] mollify the Turks and keep them quiet’ was yet to be decided.¹¹⁹²

¹¹⁸⁷ Bennet to Grey, 20 Mar. 1914, FO 371/2132/12640, Clerk (24th), Crowe (25th), Nicolson and Grey minutes.

¹¹⁸⁸ Stephenson Kent to FO (verbal), 29 Jul. 1914, FO 371/2114/34614.

¹¹⁸⁹ Crowe minute, 30 Jul. 1914, Hurst memorandum, 30 Jul. 1914, FO 371/2137/39072.

¹¹⁹⁰ Beaumont to Grey, No. 476, Tel., 3 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/35440.

¹¹⁹¹ Grey to Beaumont, No. 337, Undated, FO 371/2137/35440.

¹¹⁹² Clerk minute, 8 Aug. 1914, National Bank of Turkey to Grey, 5 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/36347.

Henry Beaumont, *chargé* in the absence of Mallet, was not entirely sympathetic. The Minister of Marine, he said, had been ‘acting like spoiled child’, threatening that the Turks would never again order from Armstrong, and even questioning the future of the contract, recently signed, that would see British firms building the dreadnought docks in Constantinople. ¹¹⁹³ Part of the Minister’s rage stemmed, he said, from his belief that in drawing up the contract, Britain had produced a legal opinion making it clear that the ships could not be requisitioned. Beaumont said that although he maintained an ‘unreasonable attitude’, this was only ‘partially shared by his colleagues. Winston Churchill, the First Lord, was uncompromising: ‘The Turks should have back whatever they have paid – no more. And there is no hurry about this. They may join the Germans, in which case, we shall save our money. Negotiate and temporise.’ ¹¹⁹⁴

Nevertheless, there was some sympathy. Beaumont noted that some of the funds for the ship had been raised by public subscription. The loss was ‘very deeply felt and widely resented’. ¹¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, despite Churchill’s attitude, it appeared, based on the legal opinions given at the time of the purchase, that there was ‘some formation for the Turkish grievance’. This did not mean that Britain should compromise herself, however. Clerk added that it would be best to wait and see how events developed before making any decisions. ¹¹⁹⁶ Personally, he thought that Turkey might be induced to stay out of the war if she received payment for the ships immediately, with a promise for their delivery at the conclusion of hostilities. If this, combined with an undertaking to protect her from Greece, would keep Turkey neutral and ‘soothe’ her feelings, then they should be granted. Crowe was unconvinced. If Turkey was ‘bent on war’, he said, she would not ‘be induced to desist

¹¹⁹³ Beaumont to Grey, No. 489, Tel., 6 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/36815.

¹¹⁹⁴ Beaumont to Grey, No. 493, Tel., 7 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/36904, Churchill minute, 8th.

¹¹⁹⁵ Beaumont to Grey, No. 510, Tel., 10 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/37843.

¹¹⁹⁶ Armstrong Whitworth to Foreign Office, 11 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/38132, Clerk minute, 11th.

by the mere renewal of the offer to pay for the seized dreadnoughts.’¹¹⁹⁷ Mallet, who had since returned to his post, thought that public opinion might improve in Turkey if the ships were to be returned as soon as possible – he suggested that the Government would find it ‘worth their while’ to comply as far as possible. The Foreign Office saw an opportunity to use this as a lever, and a communication was made to Turkey, in conjunction with the Admiralty, that the ships would be returned after the war, along with payment for inconvenience, and having been repaired at British expense. The catch was that this agreement would come into force the day the last German officer belonging to the *Goeben* and *Breslau* had departed, and would remain in force so long as Turkey remained neutral.¹¹⁹⁸ The Turks already being committed to Germany, this achieved little traction, and they would try to wriggle out of their difficulty by offering to sell the ships to Britain in September.¹¹⁹⁹ There was little interest in Britain for such a procedure, as well there might not be, and the enquiry was not replied to.¹²⁰⁰

The seizure of the ships, although a ‘gift to hawks in Turkey’, did not have a particularly significant effect on Anglo-Turkish relations.¹²⁰¹ The Turks had already signed an understanding with Germany, and war did not break out for some time in any case.

7.2.b. *Goeben* and *Breslau*

The Turkish Government, shipless and angry, presented an ideal opportunity for the Germans to build on their understanding. To encourage the Turks to join the war, they arranged for the *Goeben*, a post-*Dreadnought* battlecruiser (and therefore a rung beneath

¹¹⁹⁷ FO Minutes, Clerk, 13th, Crowe 11th, 11 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/39189

¹¹⁹⁸ Mallet to Grey, No. 559, Tel., 18 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/40635; Grey to Mallet, No. 398, Tel., 19 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2137/40635.

¹¹⁹⁹ Mallet to Grey, No. 733, Tel., 9 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2137/47927.

¹²⁰⁰ Admiralty to Foreign Office, Confidential, 15 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2137/49805, Oliphant minute 16th.

¹²⁰¹ McMeekin, *Ottoman Endgame*, p. 98.

a full battleship, such as the *Sultan Osman I*) along with her consort, *Breslau*, to travel to Constantinople, for the use of the Turks. Although meeting British ships on several occasions, they managed to outwit them.¹²⁰² The Foreign Office had been aware of rumours that *Goeben* might be sold to Turkey as early as 1913, and so there was little doubt in London as to the intentions of Admiral Wilhelm Souchon, who commanded the *Goeben*.¹²⁰³ Oliphant found it a ‘scandal’ that the ships were still flying a German flag, despite being within the supposedly neutral environs of Constantinople.¹²⁰⁴ The Turkish Government, to get around the stipulations of neutrality, declared that the ships had been bought from the German Government, despite the fact that no money had changed hands. By early September, Mallet was fully aware of the false nature of this transaction, and declared to the Turks that the sale would not be recognised.¹²⁰⁵

In itself, this was not a particularly important incident, and did not contribute significantly to the outbreak of war between Britain and Turkey, although it has often been considered to have been so.¹²⁰⁶ However, it did demonstrate clearly to British officials, who remained ignorant that Turkey had already ‘picked a side’, that they faced an uphill battle against German influence in the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, Souchon and his vessels were used to attack Russian Black Sea ports at the end of October, bringing Turkey into the war.

7.2.c. Attempts to keep Turkey neutral

The Turks had signed an agreement with Germany before Britain had even entered the war herself. Many scholars have shown that this reflected Turkish panic at

¹²⁰² Miller, *Straits*, ch. 14.

¹²⁰³ Mallet to Grey, No. 300, 4 May 1914, FO 371/2134/20762.

¹²⁰⁴ Oliphant minute, 14th, Beaumont to Grey, No. 536, Tel., Very Confidential, 13 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/39180.

¹²⁰⁵ Mallet to Grey, No. 717, Tel., 7 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2141/47216; McMeekin related the story of the German crews donning Fezzes, and then continuing to go about their work. McMeekin, *Ottoman Endgame*, p. 115.

¹²⁰⁶ See for instance Miller, *Straits*, ch. 17.

having failed to secure an alliance with another Power, and so she pursued an agreement with Germany, signed on 28 July.¹²⁰⁷ Due in part to the fact that this would have been unpopular with the Ottoman Public, the agreement was kept secret for some time.¹²⁰⁸ Certainly, British observers were unaware of the agreement being signed. The Turks declared to Britain, on 13 August, that they intended to remain neutral in the war.¹²⁰⁹ It was clear, however, that Turkey remained suspicious of Britain. Limpus' naval mission was withdrawn from active service, and ordered to work at the Ministry of Marine. Beaumont noted that the Turks seemed afraid, above else, of Russia, and that a declaration that France and Britain would protect her integrity would go some way to calm her. This prompted Crowe to write that the Turks were 'playing with us'. Although he did not think it would have any effect, he still suggested that a communication of the sort be prepared.¹²¹⁰ Grey instructed Mallet to reassure the Turks, along with his *entente* colleagues, that Britain, France and Russia would uphold her integrity and independence against any Power seeking to take advantage of the conflict, so long as the Turks remained scrupulously neutral.¹²¹¹ The Turks continued to offer Beaumont 'solemn promises' of neutrality. Beaumont thought it a positive sign that *Goeben* and *Breslau* now flew Ottoman flags, and although some 'allowance' needed to be made for feeling in Turkey about the seizure of her ships, he thought that events were moving in a more neutral direction.¹²¹² Crowe was already thinking of war, considering the question of Admiral Limpus' position. He produced a memorandum which noted that he would be unable to leave in the event of war, and advocated his removal, arguing that his contract had already been breached by being limited to land work. This would mean that Germans would take his place, but

¹²⁰⁷ Miller, Straits, ch. 14, Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire, vol 2*, pp. 31-2, Ahmad, *Young Turks and Britain*, pp. 324-5.

¹²⁰⁸ Ahmad, *Young Turks and Britain*, pp. 324-5.

¹²⁰⁹ Tevfik to Grey, 13 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/38756.

¹²¹⁰ Beaumont to Grey, No. 545, Tel., Urgent, 15 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/39783, Crowe minute, 16th.

¹²¹¹ Grey to Beaumont, No. 377, Tel., 16 Aug. 1914. (Also sent to St Petersburg, Cairo and Paris.)

¹²¹² Beaumont to Grey, No. 574, Tel., 16 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/39808.

Crowe thought that this was inevitable in any case. If Limpus was restrained, however, then Crowe saw the advantages – it would be useful ‘war cry’ in India.¹²¹³ Indeed, India and Islam were at the forefront of many minds in London. Grey, by now committed firmly to Russia and France as a result of war, discussed British policy with regard to Turkey with their ambassadors. It would, he said, be ‘very embarrassing’ in India and Egypt for Turkey to fight against Britain, although if she chose Germany it could not be helped. If Germany was to lose the first big rendezvous of the war in Belgium, then the task of keeping Turkey out would become far simpler. The ‘proper course’, he said, was to convince Turkey that her possessions were protected, so long as she remained neutral.¹²¹⁴ This summed up his policy throughout this period. Although he wanted to avoid fighting Turkey, he accepted that it might well be inevitable. In itself, this confirmed that Grey did not see war with Turkey as a particular threat, worried more about Muslim reaction than conflict itself. It also demonstrated that, at this early juncture, Grey had accepted that Turkey joining the British side in the war was impossible.

British attempts at inducement did not hit the mark. Tefvik, still Ottoman Ambassador in London, complained to Grey of a sense of ‘uneasiness’ about British intentions. Grey retorted that if Turkey wanted to set her mind at rest, she should send away the German ships’ crews, and preserve ‘real neutrality’.¹²¹⁵ Although Said continued to complain about the seizure of Turkey’s ships, he seemed ‘relieved’, in Mallet’s words, to learn of the declaration made by the three Powers that Turkey would be protected if she stayed neutral. Eager to make a good go of his ambassadorship, Mallet reported his belief in Said’s ‘absolute personal sincerity’. Although he admitted that the situation was ‘delicate’, he was convinced that it might yet be saved by ‘patience’ and the avoidance of

¹²¹³ Crowe memorandum, 16 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/40391.

¹²¹⁴ Grey to Bertie, No. 533, 15 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/40433. (also sent to St Petersburg)

¹²¹⁵ Grey to Mallet, No. 395, Tel., 18 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/40611.

‘precipitate action’.¹²¹⁶ Although optimistic, and of course unaware that the Ottoman path had already been agreed to some extent, Mallet was not otherwise naïve in his view. He was aware that the impetus for war and the German connection came largely from Enver, and reported that the forces in favour of neutrality seemed to gain whilst he was absent from the scene with illness.¹²¹⁷ Similarly, he did not want to suggest that matters were not ‘serious’, and he suggested that the British fleet should remain close to Constantinople, to guard against the possibility of a German led coup.

Towards the end of August, an attempt was made by Turkey, whose continued non-participation in hostilities caused some frustration in Germany, to extract a better deal from Britain. Mallet reported a lengthy list of conditions for neutrality, including agreements on the Aegean Islands and capitulations, restoration of the two dreadnoughts, and possession of Western Thrace in the event of Bulgaria joining the war against Britain. He conceded that these ‘strange’ demands were more like those imposed by a victorious power after a successful war, but thought that a guarantee against Russian incursion remained the key, and that a peaceful solution was still possible.¹²¹⁸ The Foreign Office had still not given up on keeping Turkey out of the war, and worked on this assumption. The Russians were willing to declare that they would not touch Turkish territory, and Buchanan considered Turkish suspicions ‘groundless’.¹²¹⁹ Sazonov expressed himself willing to work towards a solution on the basis of the Turkish proposals. He warned that Germany was making fresh offers to Turkey every day, and that to secure neutrality, Britain and Russia would have to go ‘as far as possible’.¹²²⁰ In keeping with this narrative, which it of course did no harm to Turkey to disseminate, Said told Mallet that a ‘battle’ for

¹²¹⁶ Mallet to Grey, No. 557, Tel., 18 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/40628.

¹²¹⁷ Mallet to Grey, No. 560, tel., 19 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/40642.

¹²¹⁸ Mallet to Grey, No. 572, Tel., 20 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/41431.

¹²¹⁹ Buchanan to Grey, No. 309., Tel., 20 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/41432.

¹²²⁰ Buchanan to Grey, No. 310, Tel., 21 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/41796.

neutrality was being waged at Constantinople between those in favour of peace and the more pro-German elements, who favoured joining the war. He warned that a coup, backed by Germany, might put Enver in power and seal the victory of the German elements in Turkey. Mallet, although worried about this, thought that decisive action was unlikely whilst *Goeben* was undergoing repairs. Crowe concluded that this meant a period of grace: 'If the *Goeben*'s boilers will not be ready before Sept 2, we may expect that the Turkish Govt. will continue their game with us up to then.' ¹²²¹

Time had dampened Sazonov's ardour for a settlement. If conversations were to go ahead, he suggested, the only guarantee of neutrality would be for Turkey to expel the crews of *Goeben* and *Breslau*, along with significant numbers of the German officers employed in the Ottoman Army. Crowe, unsurprisingly, agreed that their continuous presence was incompatible with neutrality. ¹²²² For different reasons, Mallet was not keen on the idea of joint representations. He thought that attitudes in Constantinople were softening, and he remained 'fairly confident' of keeping Turkey out of the war, despite the situation remaining 'delicate'. With this in mind, he was willing to 'gloss over' incidents that would normally not be ignored. With this, joint conversations with Russia were shelved, although Mallet remained convinced that Britain must commit to discussions on the capitulations if they were to keep Turkey out. ¹²²³ He continued his efforts to urge Turkey to expel German sailors, and reassured the Foreign Office that the forces in favour of strict neutrality were 'slowly gaining'. Oliphant hoped that he was 'right', but the news that ninety German sailors had passed through Sofia, on their way to Constantinople,

¹²²¹ Mallet to Grey, No. 491, Tel., 21 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/42003, Crowe minute, 22nd.

¹²²² Buchanan to Grey, No. 319, Tel., 23 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/42338, Crowe minute, 24th.

¹²²³ Mallet to Grey, No. 599, Tel., 23 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/42326, Crowe (24th) and Nicolson minutes; Mallet to Grey, No. 602, Tel., 23 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/42527.

punctured his optimism.¹²²⁴ His comment was brief and to the point: ‘Instructive!’. Mallet was charged to complain about this latest evidence of bad faith.¹²²⁵

Mallet still thought that he needed more to offer the moderates in Turkey if he was to have a chance of keeping her neutral. He suggested that protection of Turkish territory, economic freedom and an end to the capitulations should be offered. For the time being, he was given permission to assure the Turkish Government, in writing, that the three Powers would protect the integrity of Turkey from any power seeking to ‘profit’ by the war.¹²²⁶ The question of the capitulations and commercial treaties was more involved. As Clerk remarked, this was not a question that could be solved in a day. Nevertheless, a commercial agreement with a fifteen year term was contemplated, granting commercial freedom to Turkey in return for most favoured nation status.¹²²⁷ Although British policymakers were willing to consider possible concessions towards the Turks, most thought that war was by far the most likely outcome. Preparations were made for communications to ‘prepare Indian opinion’ for war with Turkey, a Muslim country, quoting various wrongs committed against Britain by Turkey, such as British merchant ships being detained at the Straits.¹²²⁸ Clerk even contemplated desperate measures, such as ‘rushing’ the Straits, in response to what he called the ‘demonstrably non-existent’ nature of Turkish neutrality. Crowe remarked that the Turks now sought only to gain time in discussions with Britain.¹²²⁹ In Russia, too, thoughts had turned from ‘if’ to ‘when’. Giers warned his Government that it should avoid attacking *Goeben* and precipitating war, even if she moved into the Black Sea. It would be better to wait for a suitable moment. Mallet agreed, and demonstrating how close London thought war to be, was given the

¹²²⁴ Mallet to Grey, No. 607, Tel., 24 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/42747, Oliphant minute, 25th.

¹²²⁵ Bax Ironside to Grey, No. 66, Tel., 25 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/43125, Oliphant minute, 26th.

¹²²⁶ Mallet to Grey, No. 617, Tel., 25 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/43155.

¹²²⁷ Clerk minute, Mallet to Grey, No. 620, Tel., 26 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/53531; Foreign Office to Board of Trade, 28 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/53531.

¹²²⁸ Foreign Office drafts, 27 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/43829.

¹²²⁹ Mallet to Grey, No. 635, Tel., FO 371/2139/43860, Clerk (28th) and Crowe minutes.

power to decide when to ask for his passports from the Turkish Government and make preparations for departure. Crowe was already thinking about how the breakout of war could be best made to appear:

It is of course important from the point of view of the British position before the Mahometan world that the war with Turkey should be made clearly to be what it will: an attack by Turkey on great [*sic*] Britain, France, and Russia. Turkey, under German advice, will on her part, take great care to provoke the war if possible in some way, giving a different impression. ¹²³⁰

Mallet, although alive to the possibilities of war, was ‘reluctant to relinquish the struggle until the last possible moment.’ ¹²³¹ He did not ‘wish it to be understood’ from his reports that he had ‘abandoned [the] last hope of Turkey maintaining neutrality to extent of not actually attacking Russian in Black Sea, or of making some other movement.’ ¹²³²

Although this was hardly a ringing endorsement of the Turkish attitude, Grey gave him permission to take part in the joint declaration that Turkey would be protected from any power seeking to profit from the war on 29 August. ¹²³³

Mallet, though at pains to stress that the situation was not ‘hopeless’, was aware of the direction of the wind, and suggested that plans be laid for war. ¹²³⁴ Clerk also believed war a matter of time. Commenting on the military preparations carried out at the Dardanelles, he wrote that: ‘By the time Turkey comes out into the open, the Dardanelles will be a tough nut’. ¹²³⁵ It was decided that the American Ambassador, Henry Morgenthau, would be in charge of British interests when war broke out, and Mallet was

¹²³⁰ Mallet to Grey, No. 636, Tel., 27 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/43881; Grey to Mallet, No. 451, Tel., 28 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/43881; Crowe minute, 28th, same file.

¹²³¹ Mallet accepted that position of Naval Advisors might soon become ‘very embarrassing’, and that there were ‘many reasons for withdrawing them at once’, as the ‘Administration is now so completely in German control’. Mallet to Grey, 28 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/44204.

¹²³² Mallet to Grey, No. 640, Tel., 28 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/44212. He noted that most Germans at Constantinople thought that war would not be long delayed.

¹²³³ Grey to Mallet, No. 461, Tel., 29 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/44231.

¹²³⁴ Mallet to Grey, No. 653, Tel., 30 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/44947.

¹²³⁵ Mallet to Grey, No. 661, Tel., 1 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/45380, Clerk minute, 2nd.

compelled to leave.¹²³⁶ Minds turned to the best means of attacking Turkey. Given established British interests and her position of influence over much of the Islamic world, much discussion centred around focussing Arab discontent on the Turks. It was agreed that the India Office would give an assurance that Britain would respect Islamic holy places, such as Mecca, during the war. On its outbreak, Arabs would be encouraged to take the Holy Places for themselves, striking a blow at the pretensions of Turkey to the Caliphate.¹²³⁷ Mallet considered this a wise decision, and preferred the idea to any attempt to force the Dardanelles. The details of any such movement were left to the India Office, in part owing to the difficulties presented by the Foreign Office still being notionally at peace with Turkey.¹²³⁸

7.2.d. Capitulatory Complications

Whilst the British Government was deciding how best to dismember the Ottoman Empire, the Turks contemplated the future. Frustrated at the lack of progress made in forcing concessions from the Powers, they unilaterally declared an end to the capitulations. This provoked a rare moment of unity between combatants, a joint note being presented from the all of the Great Powers, declaring that as treaties, the capitulations could not be unilaterally ended. For a final time, old Europe came together to protect her ancient privileges.¹²³⁹ Mallet and his *entente* colleagues were agreed that this development precluded the use of the capitulations as a lever to force neutrality, as it would now suggest

¹²³⁶ Morgenthau became known for writing a book about the Armenian Genocide, among other matters, detailing his time at Constantinople: Morgenthau, Henry, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City, NY, 1998); FO Drafts, 31 Aug. 1914, FO 371/2138/44984.

¹²³⁷ Jihad was declared by the Germans too - see McMeekin, *Berlin Railway*; Foreign Office to India Office, Secret, 1 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2139/44923; Clerk, Nicolson and Grey minutes, 31st Aug. Nicolson was particularly keen on the idea, minuting that once war broke out, the assurance 'should not be delayed'. Grey too thought that no time should be lost, once war began.

¹²³⁸ Foreign Office to India Office, Secret, 1 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2139/44923; Mallet to Grey, No. 692, Tel., 4 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2139/46520, Clerk minute, 5th.

¹²³⁹ Mallet to Grey, No. 736, Tel., 9 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/48059; Mallet to Grey, No. 741, Tel., 10 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/48251.

that Britain, France and Russia were 'afraid', and trying to 'buy' the Turks.¹²⁴⁰ Attitudes in London were hardening still further. Mallet reported rumours of a German coup, and advocated further concessions on the capitulations to strengthen moderate elements. Oliphant expressed his 'doubt' 'whether the "moderate" party [could] save the situation'. Clerk, already suspicious of the Turks, thought that a moment of decision was approaching. If the Turks were 'blind' and 'in the German pocket', there was no point in Britain continuing to make adjustments for Turkey. He thought that Britain was 'very near the limit of possible concessions.'¹²⁴¹ The official attitude hardened. Grey thought that concessions would in fact be taken as a sign of weakness by 'extremists'. Turkey was told that all that had been suggested would hold good, but that any further concession was out of the question owing to the position of the Germans. If Turkey chose to fight, then this would be her concern.¹²⁴² The attitude of those in Whitehall was firmer than that of Mallet, who remained in favour of making a compromise with the Turks over the capitulations. Frustrated, Clerk retorted that the terms of any agreement did not matter. What was important was whether it would buy neutrality.¹²⁴³ By mid-October, even Mallet, upon reflection, had recognised the futility of his attitude. The ending of the capitulations could not have been stopped, he said, as the war offered the 'opportunity of the young Turks' life'.¹²⁴⁴

In early September, it had been decided that Limpus' mission would be withdrawn, and he was given the command of a naval squadron in the Mediterranean.¹²⁴⁵ As he left

¹²⁴⁰ Mallet to Grey, No. 770, Tel., 14 Sep. 1914, FO 371.2138/49417.

¹²⁴¹ Mallet to Grey, No. 785, Tel., Very Confidential, 15 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/49871, Oliphant and Clerk (16th) minutes.

¹²⁴² Grey to Mallet, No. 562, Tel., 16 Sep. 1914, FO 371//2138/49871.

¹²⁴³ Mallet to Grey, No. 802, Tel., 17 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/50450, Clerk minute.

¹²⁴⁴ Mallet to Tyrell, Private, 16 Oct. 1914, FO 800/80.

¹²⁴⁵ Admiralty to Foreign Office, 9 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2141/47909. This decision was reached much to Mallet's distress, who thought that this would go against his hard work. See Mallet to Grey, No. 765, Tel, 12 Sep. 1914, FO 371//2141/48948; Mallet to Grey, Private Telegram, 11 Sep. 1914, FO 800/80: he regarded it as a 'grave mistake' and thought that Limpus taking command of British ships in the area would give rise to further suspicions that Britain aimed to force the Straits. He thought it would arouse the 'bitter'

on 18 September, more and more German officers poured into Turkey. Mallet did not hold the situation to be 'hopeless', but he warned that the chances of the 'Neutrality party' holding back the group around Enver were now low. Oliphant feared that the outlook was 'exceedingly black'.¹²⁴⁶ Grey tried another stark warning to the Turks. Britain did not want to precipitate conflict with Turkey, but her attitude could not be regarded as 'neutral'. No Germans had left, and more had been allowed in. Grey warned the Turks that Germany was in control at Constantinople, and that the inevitable result of this would be war unless the Said acted to bring matters under his control.¹²⁴⁷ Mallet, becoming frustrated, accepted that there was nothing to gain from further concession, and informed Said so.¹²⁴⁸ He identified several schemes in place around the Empire aimed at provoking a war, many with German support. He counselled turning a blind eye to much that was going on in Turkey, trying to keep Turkey neutral. His former colleagues in London did not share his views. Clerk thought that the time was fast approaching when Britain would be forced to 'open her eyes', whilst Nicolson labelled the outlook 'by no means promising'.¹²⁴⁹ Mallet also proposed that the British fleet stationed at the mouth of the Dardanelles might move further out to sea, in order to calm fears in Turkey of an amphibious attack. This suggestion met with little initial sympathy in the Foreign Office. Grey pointed out that the Turks had closed the Straits 'unnecessarily' and that the British would not move until the Germans had left Constantinople.¹²⁵⁰ On reflection, however, he changed his mind on account of his 'much confidence in Sir L. Mallet, who is on the spot.' The outlook nevertheless remained bleak. Negotiations over the capitulations had broken down by

indignation which accompanied the seizure of the ships. He added, very confidentially, that Limpus himself was of the view that it would make the situation worse. Clerk thought that in giving the news to the Grand Vizier, Mallet put the position across badly: Clerk Minute, 14th Sep, Mallet to Grey, No. 766, Tel., 13 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2141/49050.

¹²⁴⁶ Mallet to Grey, No. 809, Tel., 19 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/51064, Oliphant minute.

¹²⁴⁷ Grey to Mallet, No. 581, Tel., 23 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/52335.

¹²⁴⁸ Mallet to Grey, No. 850, Tel., 25 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/53051, Clerk minute, 26th.

¹²⁴⁹ Mallet to Grey, No. 875, Tel., 27 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2138/53560, Clerk and Nicolson minutes, 28th.

¹²⁵⁰ Grey to Mallet, No. 615, Tel., 30 Sep. 1914, FO 371/2142/54604.

October over the refusal of the Powers to accept a 'time limit for negotiation of a system to take place of judicial capitulations', and the question had become 'more or less academic'.

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Although Mallet believed that the Turkish Government was now 'in effect a military dictatorship inspired and supported by Germany', he still aimed to keep her out of the war as long as possible. He argued that he had been met with success for nine weeks already, and that every week that went by increased the chances of ultimate success.¹²⁵² He still believed that he had a reasonable chance of keeping Turkey out of the war.¹²⁵³ The evidence suggested otherwise to officials in London. Oliphant thought that Turkish military preparations could not be 'in any way regarded as merely defensive', and it was a 'matter of days' before war would break out.¹²⁵⁴ A few days later, learning that German gold was being sent to Turkey, he thought it 'more than probable' that Turkey would join the war when it arrived.¹²⁵⁵ In general, he remained convinced that Turkey would fight, either to gain from a German success or to distract from a German failure.¹²⁵⁶ During this time, Clerk contemplated a scheme whereby reconciliation between Serbia and Bulgaria would be used to increase the sense of risk for Turkey, making her more likely to remain peaceable. Grey thought it too complicated to be practical, likely to cause further problems with Romania and 'perhaps Greece'.¹²⁵⁷ Mallet still contemplated another angle. Having learned that all his *en clair* telegrams were read by government ministers in Constantinople, he requested short, clear messages be sent to him, suggesting that Britain was popular amongst Arabs and in Egypt. He would not necessarily publish them, he said, but he

¹²⁵¹ Mallet to Grey, No. 957, Tel., 11 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2139/58306.

¹²⁵² Mallet to Grey, No. 957, Tel., 11 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2139/58306.

¹²⁵³ Mallet to Tyrell, Private, 16 Oct. 1914, FO 800/80.

¹²⁵⁴ Oliphant minute, 16th, Mallet to Grey, No. 986, Tel., 15 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2140/59881.

¹²⁵⁵ Buchanan to Grey, no. 538, Tel., 20 Oct. 1914, FO 371.2139/61563, Oliphant minute, 21st.

¹²⁵⁶ Mallet to Grey, No. 1024, Tel., Confidential, 22 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2139/62314, Oliphant minute, 23rd.

¹²⁵⁷ Clerk Memorandum, 21 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2139/62440.

hoped that the content would ‘sink into Ministers for whose consumption they must be simple and striking.’¹²⁵⁸ By 27 October, Mallet and his *entente* colleagues were frustrated enough to warn Said that an attack on one would mean war with all. Mallet believed that the message had pressed home.¹²⁵⁹

7.2.e. Final Stages and the Black Sea

Whether this message had been heard or not made little difference. On 29 October, Mallet reported that Turkish ships had raided ports on the Black Sea and sunk some Russian vessels.¹²⁶⁰ Although war was now inevitable, according to Mallet’s warning to the Porte, he still tried to stave it off, proposing that Turkey be asked to choose between war with Britain, France and Russia or removal of all Germans. Demonstrating the severity of the situation, this telegram was sent to London via the American Embassy, as the Turks had cut off communication to the British.¹²⁶¹ Although Mallet still believed in avoiding war at all costs, this was too much for Giers and the Russians. He asked for his passports, starting the ceremonial process of withdrawing from Turkey. In keeping with their wartime alliance, and according to his pre-existing instructions, Mallet, along with his French colleague Maurice Bompard, also asked for theirs.¹²⁶² Mallet was keen to point out that asking for his passport did not constitute a declaration of war, but his opinion was not shared by Henry Morgenthau, who advised him to leave as soon as possible, nor by Oliphant, who was convinced that withdrawal would do nothing to stem the tide.¹²⁶³ Said,

¹²⁵⁸ Mallet to Grey, No. 1033, Tel., 23 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2139/62679. This was not the first time that Mallet had been involved in trying to craft a narrative to British ends at Constantinople. In September, he had been privately sent a Reuters telegram, suggesting that Germany contemplated calling the war a ‘draw’, and asked to disseminate it by Grey. A few days later, he had asked Grey for examples of Germans making disparaging comments about Indian troops, which he could spread. Grey to Mallet, Private Telegram, 19 Sep. 1914, FO 800/80; Mallet to Grey, Private Telegram, 24 Sep. 1914, FO 800/80.

¹²⁵⁹ Mallet to Grey, No. 1073, Tel., 27 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2139/64022.

¹²⁶⁰ Mallet to Grey, No. 1088, Tel., 29 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2145/64924.

¹²⁶¹ Mallet to Grey, No. 1089, Urgent, 29 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2145/64925.

¹²⁶² Mallet to Grey, No. 1096, Tel., Urgent, 30 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2145/65368; Mallet to Grey, No. 1090, Tel, Confidential, 30 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2145/65502.

¹²⁶³ Mallet to Grey, No. 1097, Tel., 31 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2145/65842, Oliphant minute, 2nd.

who had always been keen to conciliate Mallet, claimed to not want war, and that it could still be avoided. Oliphant complained that from the day Said had made assurances about the position of *Goeben* and *Breslau*, ‘no effect’ had been given to ‘his words’. Nicolson labelled his utterances ‘words in the air’.¹²⁶⁴ In the meantime, orders had already been given to the British fleet to commence hostilities against the Turks.¹²⁶⁵ All that was left was for Grey to communicate his thanks to Mallet, and express the view that the war would have come sooner if not for his efforts.¹²⁶⁶

7.3. The First World War

More recent scholarship has been sympathetic to Mallet’s performance in the final months before war. Joseph Heller, for instance, could not see how any Ambassador could have prevented war, given the strength of Enver Pasha.¹²⁶⁷ Indeed, the fact that Mallet seemed to gain some ground when Enver was unwell adds weight to this conclusion. Sean McMeekin argued that the die had been cast some time before, and that the Turks had in general decided on war with Germany.¹²⁶⁸ Certainly, given the commitments given to Germany by the Turks, Mallet cannot be blamed. Indeed, his energy and optimism cannot

¹²⁶⁴ Mallet to Grey, No. 1100, Tel., Very Confidential, 31 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2145/65843, Oliphant and Nicolson minutes, 2nd.

¹²⁶⁵ Admiralty to Foreign Office, Secret and Pressing, 31 Oct. 1914, FO 371/2145/65727.

¹²⁶⁶ Grey to Mallet, 4 Dec. 1914, FO 371/2147/75908.

¹²⁶⁷ Heller, *Britain and the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 154-7. Mallet, Heller argued, was more sympathetic to the Young Turks than his predecessor, or indeed any of the other candidates for the Bosphorus, which is why he was chosen. He was hamstrung, Heller, went on, by the hostility of London towards the Young Turks. However, he concluded that no Ambassador could have been successful in the circumstances of 1914, given the mastery of the situation held by Germany and the Young Turks. See *Id.*, ‘Sir Louis Mallet and the Ottoman Empire: The Road to War’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 12(2), 1976, pp. 3-44(3-4; 38) Y.T. Kurat agreed that Enver had ‘achieved his end’ in bringing Turkey into the war. See *id.*, ‘How Turkey Drifted into World War One’, Bourne, K; Watt, D.C. (eds.), *Studies in International History: Essays presented to W. Norton Medlicott* (London, 1967) pp. 291-315; H.S.W. Corrigan, thought that the Turks were attracted to the German side by the prospect of military success, although the Germans were less keen; they hoped to deliver a *coup de grace* to the Ottoman Empire: *Id.*, ‘German Turkish relations and the outbreak of the First World War: A Reassessment’, *Past and Present* 38, 1967, pp. 144-152; F.A.K. Yasamee held that the *entente* Powers could not be blamed for the decision of the Turks to join the war, and that the representatives of those Powers in fact showed significant restraint in the face of significant provocation. He concluded that it was far from clear that even greater concessions would have persuaded the Turks to change course. *Id.*, ‘The Ottoman Empire’, Wilson, Keith (ed.), *Decisions for War, 1914* (Abingdon, 1995), pp. 229-268(258-9).

¹²⁶⁸ McMeekin, *Ottoman Endgame*, p. 132.

be faulted. What the final period before the war, including the Liman incident, did show, was the extent to which Britain had not only lost any position of strength she might have had at Constantinople, but that she was not particularly concerned by this. The British attitude was clear as early as January 1914, when the question of sending further officers to the Turkish Navy was raised. Mallet worried that this entailed the risk of raising the Turkish Navy to too high a pitch of efficiency, and that it might be used against British interests such as Egypt in the future. However, he went on, to leave meant abandoning the role to Germans, who would raise the navy to a similar level of effectiveness, and Britain would have lost her restraining influence. Crowe thought that continuing to provide the Turks with naval services was the only possible option, as everything else was open to greater objection. Grey agreed that Britain must continue to lend officers.¹²⁶⁹ This demonstrated that, although worried about an openly hostile Turkey, British policymakers were not particularly interested in improving relations with her. The bare minimum needed to be done to keep her on side.

The question of the Straits, which threatened, like a distant dark cloud, international relations of this period, also demonstrated British views of Turkey. The 1908 promise that Britain would support the opening of the Straits, but not at the price of Turkish coercion, remained valid, but policymakers hoped to keep the question on ice for the time being, as to discuss the question could only lead to difficulties with the Turks.¹²⁷⁰ However, there was a sense that this fragile equilibrium could not be preserved forever.

¹²⁶⁹ Mallet to Grey, No. 35, 21 Jan. 1914, FO 371/2123/3545, Crowe (28th) and Grey minutes.

¹²⁷⁰ Mallet to Grey, No. 400, 2 Jun. 1914, FO 371/2135/25458, Crowe minute, 11th. Y.T. Kurat argued that the Straits question was, indirectly, responsible for the Turkish entry to the war – if the *entente* Powers had offered Turkey a guarantee of her territory against Greece and Russia, then the Straits would have been treated as a neutral highway, he said, and the Turks would have remained out of the war. However, as such a commitment was not forthcoming, the only option remained Germany. See *id.*, ‘How Turkey drifted into World War One’, p. 315.

Mallet privately told Tyrrell that it would be ‘impossible to allow this gate on a great highway to be in the hands of a set of epileptic lunatics forever.’¹²⁷¹

In general, it was clear that by 1914, British officials had lost interest in Turkey. They had secured their commercial and strategic interests via the 1914 agreement with Germany and the Hakki negotiations, and there was a sense that Turkey was perhaps ‘done’, especially as the CUP had proved to be a disappointment. Little demonstrated this more than the question of the Turkish battleships. If Grey and the rest of the Foreign Office had really wanted to work with Turkey and prevent her from fighting in the war, they could have argued more forcibly with Churchill and the Admiralty about the requisition, rather than leaving the details to them. It was obvious that the ships, so tied up in Turkish *amour propre* and CUP populism, were a sensitive issue, and that their non-delivery would cause significant anger. That the Foreign Office were willing to let this happen demonstrated clearly that the Anglo-Turkish relationship had become a distant one, and that British policymakers were not particularly worried about earning Turkey’s animosity.

The final, fevered attempts to keep Turkey out of the war also betrayed this weariness. Mallet and the Foreign Office alike never seriously considered the possibility of Turkey joining the war on the British side.¹²⁷² Despite the fact that they were unaware of the Turkish agreement with Germany, they recognised enough of the signs not to try.

Thus, a period which had begun with so much hope in 1908 with the revolution, ended in estranged silence. Although Mallet gamely struggled against the tide for three

¹²⁷¹ Mallet to Tyrrell, Private, 16 Oct. 1914, FO 800/80.

¹²⁷² Despite the claims of Geoffrey Miller, who wrote that: ‘The British Foreign Office was fatally misled on the political situation in Constantinople by the over-optimistic reports of Mallet who believed, on the basis of his own powers of personal persuasion if little else, that at best he could swing Turkey over to the allied side and, at worst, he could guarantee neutrality’ see *id.*, *Superior Force*, ch. 15.

exhausting months, in London, Turkey had been given up. In the final analysis, this proved more damaging to the Ottoman Empire than it did to Great Britain.

8. Conclusions

This work has broken new ground by re-examining the role of Ottoman decline and revolution in British foreign policy, and the impact of this both in the region and more widely in Europe. The Ottoman Empire was an increasingly important element in Great Powers politics in the years before the First World War. This was not, however, a function of the Ottoman state. The revolution in 1908 had been provoked by a justified sense of weakness and decline, which the chronic political instability of post-revolutionary politics only exacerbated. Rather than being a formidable factor in both international politics and balance of power calculation as a result of her strength, as she had been long before, the weakness of the Ottoman state now provided sleepless nights for European policymakers. This was a cause of several of the crises which punctuated the final years before war. These, in turn seemed to signal to many observers that the oft-prophesied collapse of the ‘Sick Man of Europe’ was now at hand, with all the associated fears of Great Power collision. From 1911, the crises which would most concern the Great Powers, including that which resulted in war, all sprang from Ottoman weakness and its legacy in the troubled hinterlands of the Empire.¹²⁷³

The retreat of Ottoman power was particularly important because of the way in which the Great Power’s interests in the region conflicted with the system of alignments which had emerged in Europe since the 1904 signing of an *entente* between France and Britain, erstwhile near combatants at Fashoda. Russia, whose designs on the Straits had been acquiesced in only with reservation by her convention partner Great Britain, had an

¹²⁷³ William Mulligan argues convincingly that the international system acted to make war less, rather than more, likely in the early 20th century, however, he argues that war became increasingly likely from 1911 onward, as a result of greater instability, increased expenditure on armaments and radical nationalism. This would emphasise the importance of the Ottoman Empire to power relations of this period, as the more dangerous of the crises of the early 1900s all involved that power in some way. Indeed, Mulligan noted that this was because Ottoman issues cut across the established groupings of the Powers. See *id.*, *Origins of the First World War*, pp 86-7; 232-4.

interest in the Empire's complete collapse, especially once her pro-Slavic policy in the Balkans had been developed. Britain, on the other hand, preferred to maintain the Ottomans as a going concern for as long as possible, in the early part of the period because she hoped to be able to secure concessions with the new men in power on the Bosphorus, and later because she was in the process of securing her interests in the Persian Gulf with both the Germans, via negotiations on the Berlin to Baghdad Railway project, and with the Turks themselves. For instance, when the possibility of using these negotiations as leverage was floated in 1913, most senior policymakers were aghast at the idea of sacrificing British interests for the benefit of Russia's greater Slavic ambitions. Britain and France also found themselves in competition in Turkey, with British officials concerned about French economic penetration. To cite one example, the Foreign Office was less than impressed by French estimates of Bulgaria's ability to pay compensation to the Turks during the Bosnian crisis; Sir Louis Mallet complained that French financial interests, which were heavily interested in Bulgaria, had 'prevailed' in the discussions.¹²⁷⁴ In keeping with general trends, Britain and Germany, despite supposedly being arranged on different sides of the 'blocs' which divided Europe, found a cautious *modus vivendi* in Turkey. They had come to terms on the complex railway questions by 1914, and British policymakers were generally unconcerned about the Liman mission in 1913-14, pointing out quite rightly that British naval advisors had (and did) occupied similar positions as that proposed for Liman.

In general, Turkey was an important element of the diplomatic environment before the war. As both the location and a cause of many of the diplomatic wrangles which characterised international relations during this period, she was at the forefront of many minds. As a region of the world where the interests of *entente* and alliance partners clashed,

¹²⁷⁴ Mallet minute on Bertie to Grey, no. 6, tel., *en clair*, by post, 12 Jan 09, FO 371/747/1642.

she was an element of chaos in a world where the existing system seemed as though it might be on the brink of change.

In terms of British policy, this period of Turkish history seemed to offer opportunities. Indeed, it has been argued that the events of 1908 presented a golden opportunity for Britain to improve her standing in the Empire, and to further her interests in the Persian Gulf. The Young Turk Revolution was a shock to many observers, and its unexpected nature has perhaps contributed to the misconceptions which surround it. A rising of young, educated men from the European provinces of the Empire seized the reins of power from the Sultan and declared that a new age of liberty had dawned in Turkey. Aware that professions of liberalism and constitutionalism would be welcomed by European Powers, especially those seemingly hostile to Germany, which was associated with the hated Hamidian regime, such sentiments were played up. Given the way in which a majority of British diplomatists and officials saw the world, associating 'revolution' with the principles of the revolution in France, such a presentation did not have to do much to take root. British officials, saw, in part because they wanted to, a new regime which would be run on more efficient, modern lines, resulting in a more equitable society and a more Anglophile line in foreign policy. This was a misreading of the revolution and the revolutionaries. Far from being gentle idealists, to be found in Parisian cafés, they were hard-nosed state servants and soldiers, acting to save the Empire within the context of the Social Darwinist thinking which was then so in vogue, rather than fundamentally change the nature of the state. Unaware that they had failed to get the measure of the Young Turks, British officials met the revolution with cautious optimism, believing that the future of Anglo-Turkish relations, led by coincidence by a new ambassador, was bright.

This attitude was carried into the Bosnian Crisis, which erupted in part as a consequence of the CUP's seizure of power. In the early stages, Sir Edward Grey was keen to try and follow a policy towards Turkey which was at the least sympathetic, even at the cost of full-throated support for Russia, the latest power with which Britain was continuing her careful descent from a position of formal diplomatic isolation. However, as the crisis went on, Grey found himself increasingly frustrated by the Turkish attitude. Turkey's insistence, for instance, on prioritising the Eastern Rumelian question, seemingly unable to accept a *fait accompli*, and suggestions from Turkish officials that she might reject the Russian proposal to fund the Bulgarian indemnity also provoked disquiet. For Grey, Turkey was overly concerned with 'shadow' rather than substance.¹²⁷⁵ Turkey's attitude only made the British attempt to conduct a dual-track policy more difficult, making Grey's frustration more intense.

The counter-revolution of 1909 demonstrated further to Britain that the future of Anglo-Turkish relations was not as rosy as had been imagined. Although Grey professed his admiration for the strength of the CUP in taking back power so quickly, efficiently and decisively, he had learnt that Turkey was unstable and unlikely to be reliable, and he had also learnt a salutary lesson on the location from which the CUP drew its power: the barrel of a gun. Grey was certainly not helped by the notably anti-CUP attitude of the British embassy. Decisive evidence will probably never emerge on the question of whether British officials took an active part in the fomenting of the initial coup, although the evidence which does exist suggests that they were not. What is without a doubt is that the Embassy took active steps to try and keep the 'old Turks' *in situ*, once the CUP had been temporarily deposed. This diversion in policy between London and the Embassy was embarrassing for

¹²⁷⁵ Grey minute, Grey to Lowther, no. 17, 16 Jan 09, FO 371/748/2057.

Britain, and earned Lowther a rebuke from Grey, but was not of particular import in the longer term.

Indeed, it was at this point, it having become clear to Britain that a policy of closeness with Turkey was not likely to be a success, that the focus gradually shifted towards a more cynical method of guaranteeing the British position. This saw the launching of wide ranging and eventually fruitful negotiations with the Turks and the Germans on matters so diverse as the Berlin to Baghdad Railway, navigation on the Euphrates river, spheres of influence in the Persian Gulf and oil rights in Mesopotamia. Having succeeded in achieving for herself a position of some strength in these commercial and strategic matters, in part owing to rather strong-arm tactics, Britain lost interest in improving her political position in Turkey.

This was laid bare in 1911, when Britain gave Italy what amounted to permission to launch her attack on Tripoli. Although the British had lost interest in Turkey, aside from their commercial negotiations, this period also coincided with a gradual and gentle sense of détente with Germany. With Germany having been the dominant power in Turkey, and fast becoming so again, it seemed that wider European developments were again having their influence on matters within Turkey. The effective end of the naval race in 1912, and the growing sense of cooperation which was fostered by Anglo-German cooperation in maintaining peace between the Great Powers during the Balkan Wars, all suggested a thawing of relations with Germany which meant that Britain, who had for her own reasons become tired of Turkey, was presented with even less of a reason to prioritise action to supplant Germany in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Grey's comments at the time of the Liman incident, that Germany was far more likely to be frightened by Russian

threats than British, seem to suggest a reorientation of British policy, and that he understood Germany's position to be weakening.¹²⁷⁶

This is not to say, as might be inferred, that Britain ever became hostile to the Turks in this period. Indeed, it could certainly be argued that she was fairer than she had a cause to be with Turkey during the disastrous years of 1912-13. Indifference, and not hostility, was the order of the day. Relations did not break down, as such, and although Mallet strove to hold the Turks out of the war in 1914, it came as no surprise that he was working to prevent Turkey from joining the Germans in war, rather than trying to convince the Turks to fight alongside the newly minted triple alliance.

Thus, it is clear that the so-called 'golden opportunity' was an illusion, dreamt into being by those who misread the Turkish Revolution and who willed such an idea into being. In any meaningful sense, it would not have been possible for Britain and Turkey to cooperate. Their methods, their aims, and the worldviews held by their governments and senior officials were in many ways fundamentally incompatible.

A victim of this notion has been the reputation of Sir Gerard Lowther, who was British ambassador for all but a few months of the revolutionary period. This work does not vindicate Lowther completely. It is without doubt that he proved inefficient and ineffective as an ambassador, and Grey and Hardinge had come to regret their choice within months of his arrival on the Golden Horn. He found the Young Turks not to his taste, and he relied heavily on the sometimes unhelpful advice of his dragoman, Gerald Fitzmaurice. But to blame Lowther for failing to grasp firmly at what was no more than

¹²⁷⁶ Grey to O'Beirne, No. 780, Tel., 2 Dec. 1913, FO 371/1847/54365.

illusion is unfair. This work posits that there is little in the way of blame to be apportioned for the fact that Britain and Turkey found themselves at war at the end of 1914, but that the reasons for this state of affairs lay firstly in Whitehall, and perhaps to a greater extent, in Constantinople.

This work has also suggested conclusions of wider significance. The role of Foreign Office staff in the formulation of British Policy has emerged clearly from the analysis. Throughout this period in his dealings with Turkish matters, Grey was clear-sighted in his pursuit of his Foreign Policy aims. He was unafraid to overrule his staff when he felt the occasion demanded it, just as he was willing to allow talented specialist officials their head, so to speak. The latitude afforded to Alwyn Parker during the Hakkı negotiations, for instance, was striking. Having been encouraged to develop specific expertise, Parker was given the opportunity to work in an independent fashion, with what amounted to minimal oversight. More generally, the archival record of the period indicates, as others have argued, that the post 1906 Foreign Office was an organisation which sought the views of its more junior employees.¹²⁷⁷ Men at the beginning of their careers were afforded ample opportunity to display their talents and their views were often considered seriously. Grey was supported by a skilled group of professionals. Indeed, the Foreign Office emerges as a more equitable organisation than might be expected by the casual observer of early twentieth century British governance, and one which brought a professional influence to bear on decisions of state.

¹²⁷⁷ See, Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*; Steiner, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*; Jones, *Nineteenth Century Foreign Office*; Otte and Neilson, *Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs*; Steiner and Neilson, *Origins of the First World War*; Steiner, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*.

The work also reveals the lack of interest that British policymakers had in many of the issues of Eastern European international politics. The significance of the Straits, for instance, for so long a central concern of British policymakers, can be seen to have receded by the early 1900s. Grey was willing to reassure Isvolsky, as early as 1908, that Britain would not stand in the way of a change in their status – although the Admiralty was keen to avoid the Straits falling under Russian control. Grey’s ‘honest broker’ act in 1913, too, betrayed the extent to which Britain was uninterested in the detail of Balkan politics. As ever, the bigger picture of wider great power politics was of far greater significance, suggesting too that British interest in the Macedonian question before 1908 had its roots in the potential for great power collisions and agreement rather than interest or engagement in the issues at hand. What Britain was interested in, this work has made clear, was economic spheres of influence in the Persian Gulf, and particularly protecting India. This was prioritised over almost any other Ottoman adjacent issue, and suggested that policymakers were beginning to grapple with the idea of Indian policy in a post-Russian convention world.

Since the 1980s, Grey has been criticised for an apparently slavish devotion to his policy of *ententes*. Keith Wilson argued that British policy in this period came from a sense of weakness, and that Grey’s repeated insistence that he had maintained a ‘free hand’ was a myth.¹²⁷⁸ To Grey, the *entente*, in particular with France, was tantamount to an alliance. This was not entirely Grey’s choice. Britain’s interests, Wilson added, compelled her to act as though she were allied to Russia and France, and to join in any war. Britain had put herself in such a position, he argued, owing to the fears of senior officials that a hostile

¹²⁷⁸ Keith Neilson contended that Britain remained, in 1914, the greatest of the Powers, if not a superpower in the modern sense. See *id.*, ‘Greatly Exaggerated’: The Myth of the Decline of Great Britain before 1914’, *The International History Review*, 13(4), 1991, pp. 695-725.

France and Russia was a greater threat than a hostile Germany.¹²⁷⁹ John Charmley, no friend of Grey, argued that his fear of isolation stemmed from his formative experiences in the 1890s, that he failed to appreciate that Germany was weakening, and that *Weltpolitik* was a failure. Much as he had argued about Neville Chamberlain and 1939, Charmley suggested that Britain had had no need to go to war in 1914, and could have remained aloof. Much as Wilson had done, he suggested that Anglo-French staff talks meant that Britain was allied to France in all but name.¹²⁸⁰ Niall Ferguson was also critical of Grey's 'inflexible mind', labelling him a chronic underachiever and 'complete angler', who had needlessly and obsessively considered Germany as a threat even when there was little evidence to suggest that this was the case. Again, Ferguson suggested that Grey had allowed the Anglo-French *entente* to become a 'defacto defensive alliance'.¹²⁸¹ More recent scholarship has worked on this basis too. Christopher Clark argued that the First World War broke out in part due to what he called a 'Balkan inception scenario', arguing that the alignments of the Powers and their interests in the Balkans had created a 'geopolitical trigger', which, once set off, resulted in war.¹²⁸² Other scholarship has suggested that this is a misreading of the situation. T.G. Otte, for instance, has suggested that there was a 'palpable sense of détente' between Britain and Germany by 1914, and that British officials were beginning to doubt the ongoing utility of the relationship with Russia.¹²⁸³ William Mulligan also noted that the period before the war saw a relaxation of tension between Britain and Germany.¹²⁸⁴

This work would suggest that arguments that Britain was tied to Russia and France, unblinkingly devoting herself to a policy of *ententes*, are wide of the mark. As early as 1908,

¹²⁷⁹ Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente*.

¹²⁸⁰ Charmley, *Splendid Isolation?*.

¹²⁸¹ Ferguson, *The Pity of War*.

¹²⁸² Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*.

¹²⁸³ Otte, 'Entente Diplomacy vs Détente'; Otte, 'Détente 1914'.

¹²⁸⁴ Mulligan, *Origins of the First World War*.

Britain was keen to try and work for the benefit of Turkey, even if this meant that she compromised the closeness of her relationship with Russia. Indeed, this was axiomatic; Russian policy was hostile to Turkey, and thus British attempts to support the Turks during the Bosnian crisis could not have been anything but unwelcome. British acquiescence in the Italian attack on Tripoli too, cannot but be seen as an anti-*ententist* act. The Anglo-German railway agreement of 1914, albeit never ratified, and the way in which Grey worked closely with the Germans to reconstruct the concert and prevent war in 1913, too, clearly demonstrated that Grey was willing and able to think outside the *ententist* box. It is hard to reconcile the ‘complete angler’ of Ferguson, Charmley and Wilson with the Grey who dismissed almost out of hand Russian complaints over the role of Liman.

In conclusion, any suggestion of a ‘golden opportunity’ for Britain to get herself on good terms with the Young Turk regime was an illusion. Little blame should be attached to either side for this, and indeed it is hard to see how such a connection could have been practical. Misunderstandings of the nature of the Young Turk regime on the part of British officials contributed to a sense of disillusion when the regime turned out to be unstable, unwilling to treat Britain as she would have liked to have been treated, and in many ways as repressive as the regime of Abdülhamid. It was no surprise that a period which had begun with such (superficial) optimism in 1908 ended with Britain and the Ottoman Empire entering the cataclysm of war on opposing sides. In the final analysis, and although the British emerged from the conflict in a better position than the regime of the Three Pashas, Turkey was merely another problem for the British imperial state to ponder. The significance of the question lay in its interaction with Britain’s other areas of interest.

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