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Portraits from War to Peace: Britain and Turkey (1914-1939)

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is threefold. One is to address an age-old foreign policy framework that shaped Anglo-Turkish relations prior to and in the aftermath of World War I (WWI). Namely, how the Eastern Question came to bear on the ideational level and in practice in Anglo-Ottoman/Turkish relations. Secondly, punitive peace conditions were imposed on the Central Powers under the unprecedented demand for unconditional surrender. Victors did not take into consideration the possibility of resistance, let alone armed resistance from the defunct Ottoman Empire whose core territories, including its capital were under Allied occupation. A state of war continued until a negotiated peace was concluded in 1924. Peace-making was formalized in 1920, but mainly in terms dictated by the Allies. Hence, a state of war continued until resistance prevailed in 1924. The third aspect of the saga was peacebuilding. European conjuncture of the 1930s forced London and Ankara, by then the capital of the Republic of Turkey, to mend fences albeit reluctantly for the former, but facilitated by diplomats. Consequently, inspired by the English poet Alexander Pope that “the proper study of mankind is man,”² this article analyses the politics of war, its aftermath, peace-making, and peacebuilding through portraits of public influencers, decision makers and diplomats who were practitioners of policy. Inherent during this timeframe is how assumptions about their political future resonated on their Turkish interlocutors.

Key Words: Edwin Pears, Nathaniel Curzon, Percy Loraine, peace-making, peacebuilding

Introduction

This article begins with exploring concepts embedded in imperialism and how they became instrumental in political/diplomatic platforms. Form a broad perspective; by 1870 two major national unifications were completed, of Germany and Italy as late comers into the world order. Great power competition became sharper on the world scale with rapid industrialization, urbanization, financial controls, and militarization.

At the same time, general staffs were established whose major function was to prepare war plans on geopolitical assumptions. Strategic interests based on geopolitics were professionalized. Colonialism had been a major aspect of building empires in the case of Britain and France. Colonies also enhanced the economic/financial status of kingdoms such as Belgium and Italy. Contiguous empires of the Habsburgs, Ottomans, and Romanovs on the other hand, represented ancient régimes with the oldest dynastic lines in Europe and the Near East even when they transformed into constitutional monarchies. The major reason for this is because all three

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² Alexander Pope (1688-1744) “An Essay on Man: Epistles I-VI”, Retrieved from <http://www.poetryfoundation.org>, May 15, 2021.



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remained autocratic, although domestically the dose of authoritarian impositions differed both spatially and temporally.

The concept that lurked behind the initial western approach to the Ottoman Empire was the Eastern Question. In the first place, the article discusses this concept and its development first into interference, then to clash. Secondly, it analyses the Great War and its immediate aftermath through peace-making. Thirdly, it discusses peacebuilding in the 1930s culminating in the 1939 Mutual Military Assistance Agreement between Britain, France, and Turkey. In Brock Millman's words, it was an ill-made alliance.³ The Conclusion points to how arduous a relationship the Anglo-Turkish encounters had been, given systemic changes in international relations and actors. Salient changes had been established with the 1648 Westphalia Agreements, then the Concert of Europe system in the post-Napoleonic age until the 1848 revolutions. With the new generation of actors, a different leadership profile emerged. Leaders now overtly projected imperial nationalisms in contrast to collective security. Rivalries toward becoming a "great nation" paved the road to total war. By the early 20th century, balance of power, the principle once dear to the Concert was abandoned and Europe succumbed to prolonged violence.

In the aftermath of war, the only policy tool left over from the old system was to partition territories of adversaries. All belligerents had expected the war to be of short duration, but not only did it last for four years. It played havoc on demography with unnecessary slaughter in trench warfare and British blockade of non-contraband (especially foodstuffs) which affected civilian populations. Civil wars and ethnic cleaning ensued as empires "shattered"⁴ maps were redrawn. And lastly, war did not end with the Armistice in November of 1918 for Eastern Europe, Russia, China, or the Ottomans, while socialist revolutionary attempts flourished in Germany and Italy. What followed was hardly a new world system, but a fragile truce until the next world war, perhaps because the League of Nations (LN) which was established to become an international body symbolizing supra governance, turned into the guardian of the old system of colonization, now politely termed "mandates". However, LN served as a platform where member states could at least seek and sometimes find solutions to ill-founded circumstances which were spill over effects of WWI.⁵

The Eastern Question, La Question D'Orient, La Questione Turca

³ Brock Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance, Anglo-Turkish Relations 1939-1940*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).

⁴ Michael A. Reynolds, *The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁵ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians, The League of Nations, and the Crisis of Empire*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).



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By the 19th century, the axis of the Eastern question shifted from how it was problematized in the previous century. Initially, French political writers had defined the problem case as Poland. Accordingly, two major threats emanated from Poland. One was indefensible borders, and the other was Prussia, Austria, and Russia's potential to resort to war with one another over Polish territory which would upset the balance of power in Europe, a major concept introduced by the Westphalian system. The solution to the problem came by partitioning Poland starting in 1792 between those three states whereby peace in Europe was maintained.

Although the system was flexible and at times inclusive of those who were not legally part of European public law as was the case with the Ottoman Empire. The Porte was included in alliances during the Napoleonic Wars, British concern for Ottoman security vis-à-vis Russia, as in the case of the Crimean War (1853-1856). Ottoman diplomats were constantly perturbed that their realm might be next in line for partition by the Great Powers and all efforts were directed towards preventing such outcome. They were not mistaken, because by mid-19th century political literature in Britain and France specifically began to discuss the Eastern Question with a focus on the Ottoman Empire.⁶

However late in coming, the Ottomans were legally admitted into the system to partake in European public law with the 1856 Paris Peace Agreement. "...Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, His Majesty the Emperor of the French, His Majesty the King of Sardinia, His Imperial Majesty the Sultan, on the one part, and His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russians on the other part, as well as between their heirs and successors..."⁷ sealed the agreement for peace and friendship as well as guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. There was a note added under the title of the treaty that stated, "treaty of peace unilaterally abrogated by the Sublime Porte, 13 November 1916." While this was a note for the record, the Paris Treaty had been rendered null and void with the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War. The times had changed and all the signatories to the Paris Peace Treaty watched while Russian armies decimated the Turks on the Balkan and Caucasian fronts. The toll was heavy not only because of territorial and human losses (Balkan provinces were lost in entirety save for Macedonia). It was also heavy in economic terms,

⁶ A. L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923*, (London and New York: Longman Ltd. [1989], 1996): 1-4; Edouard Drialut, *La Question D'Orient: Depuis Ses Origines Jusq'a Nos Jours*, (Paris: Ancienne Libraririe Germer Bailliere, 1898).

⁷ J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and Africa in World Politics, 1535-1914, A Documentary Record*, Vol. I (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975): 319-322.



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pushing the Empire to bankruptcy and foreign financial control by 1881.⁸ The burden of economic and judiciary capitulations was doubled with the establishment of Ottoman Public Debt Administration (Düyun-u Umumiye).

When the Eastern Question is divided into its constituent parts in ideational and operational terms, the outcome is apparent even with a rudimentary glance at war aims and matching changes in areas of occupation and re-drawn maps. In WWI, articulations by writers and statesmen were operationalized by practitioners. Issues in question involved partition of the Ottoman Empire, control of the Turkish Straits, the future of Constantinople,⁹ recovery of the Holy Lands and colonize the Near East between the Allies.

Sir Edwin Pears (1835-1919) was a lawyer and man of letters who had settled in Istanbul in 1873. He practiced in consular courts, was judge of the Admiralty and President of the European bar there as well as being a correspondent to *The Daily News*. His articles appeared in journals of high circulation such as *The Contemporary Review*. Pears authored several historical books about Turkey, the most renowned among which are *Forty Years in Constantinople: The Recollections of Sir Edwin Pears*, published in 1906 and *Turkey and Its People*, published in 1911. It is significant that these books are still available reproduced in digital format. Hence, his observations and political interpretations were highly relevant to war aims from the British perspective.

Pears initially had a favourable impression about the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government, especially about Talât Bey, Minister of the Interior (1874-1921). In an article entitled “Turkey and the War” he traces swings from neutrality to pro-war groups in the government during the fateful months from August to October 1914 and rushed to highlight a sharp division between the civilian and military sectors. Yet, he also discussed the growing number of German military and civilian (engineers and technicians) personnel. In reference to the German instigated jihad,¹⁰ followed by the German Embassy propaganda that all Muslims would follow the lead and rise against England, Pears wrote, “But the final blow came when the

⁸ Jeremy Salt, *The Last Ottoman Wars, the Human Cost, 1877-1923*, (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2019): 20-21.

⁹ “Constantinople” and “Istanbul” are used interchangeably in this article for the sake of convenience although the city was not formally named Istanbul until 1934. While the Ottoman statesmen also used the Turkified version of Constantinople, Konstantinniye, the Muslim populace frequently referred to the city as Der-i Saadet (Abode of Happiness), Dâr-ı Devlet (the Gate of State), Âsitane (the Treshold) or Dârü’l Islam (the Abode of Islam) among other endearments.

¹⁰ Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express, The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power*, (London: Penguin Books, 2010): 85-99.



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Committee of the Islamic League of All India urged all Moslem States not to be caught up in the whirlwind of the great war, and counselled Turkey to remain neutral.”¹¹

Pears`s hopes were dashed by the end of October when the Ottoman fleet, led by two German dreadnaughts Goeben and Breslau under Admiral Wilhelm Souchon`s orders, bombarded Russian port cities and Turkey was at war. All the pressure that the British Ambassador Sir Louis Mallet (1864-1936) exerted upon the CUP government to remain neutral was for naught.¹² Mallet was given credit for having gained time for the Allies to transport forces to Egypt`s borders and reinforce the division of Iran between England and Russia. The 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention not only had ended rivalry between the two in Central Asia. It also facilitated to outflank Germans who concentrated on building the Berlin-Baghdad railway which strategically aligned the Ottoman Empire with Germany, not to mention that Berlin had gained an upper hand on trade with the former as opposed to England. Moreover, Kaiser Wilhelm II`s (r. 1888-1918) policy of “peaceful penetration” was welcomed by Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) because Istanbul was isolated diplomatically as well as militarily by the European Great Powers, who made inroads to Ottoman territories by military force (Egypt) and/or gave overt support to seceding Balkan nationalities. Consequently, Abdülhamid`s nemesis, the CUP governments realized that they had little choice other than to follow in his footsteps.¹³

In December 1914, Emile Joseph Dillon (1854-1933), journalist, author, and linguist, was to write a scathing article which criticized Pears`s overly optimistic views expressed previously.¹⁴ Dillon blamed German intrigues and specifically Enver Pasha (1881-1922), the Minister of War, who accordingly was a person of “Polish extract” and a “puppet of Germans” for the Ottoman entry to war. He stated, “Only a miracle could save it now, and neither God nor Devil has any motive to work one for the Young Turks, whose main characteristics is invincible stupidity... The Young Turks have achieved an immortality of opprobrium and will be pilloried in history for all time.”¹⁵ Dillon was convinced that the CUP had betrayed its friends without taking into consideration Russian policies towards taking over Constantinople for total control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. In essence, it seemed that the Ottoman capital was no longer defensible from land and sea and as war progressed, it also became vulnerable to fledgling air

¹¹ Edwin Pears, “Turkey and the War”, *The Contemporary Review*, No. 587 (November 1914): 584-597, 590.

¹² Joseph Heller, “Sir Louis Mallet and the Ottoman Empire: The Road to War,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1976): 3-44.

¹³ İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu`nda Alman Nüfuzu*, (İstanbul: Kronik Kitap, 2018).

¹⁴ E. J. Dillon, “Turkish Neutrality”: Credo Quia. Impossible”, *The Contemporary Review*, No. 588 (December 1914): 48-66.

¹⁵ Dillon, “Turkish Neutrality”, 52.



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power.¹⁶ Towards the end of the 19th century, the Eastern Question specifically targeted Istanbul, and the threat it posed to European peace so long as it remained in Turkey's hands. The ideas put forth, by now in obscure journals and were almost realized on Istanbul's fate as well as the Russian factor in drawing the CUP into WWI have been side-lined perhaps because access to most archives was not possible until later in the 20th century. Yet, approaches towards foreign management of the imperial capital, by Russia alone signalled the end of empire which the Turks did not take lightly. In fact, the response was serious enough to participate in WWI. Another reason to do so and just as significant as the Russian threat was to abrogate the judicial and financial capitulations on the eve of war, albeit unilaterally. Payments on Ottoman debt to European powers were put under moratorium.

Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924¹⁷

The seat of the Greek Orthodox Church and Islam by virtue of the Ottoman sultan as caliph, protector, and servant of the Holy cities of Mecca and Medina, cosmopolitan and imperial by heritage at the same time, yet strategically inviting Great Power rivalries over itself, Mansel's book title is an apt depiction of the city. If only one looks at a timeline map of Ottoman Turkey and its capital, it can be observed that while the imperial capital was positioned in the middle of the Ottoman realm at the height of its power in the 16th century, the borders gradually receded in the following centuries. By the end of the 19th century, this recession came dangerously close to the borders of the city. So much so that in the Balkan Wars of 1912, Bulgarian army reached the suburbs of Istanbul, only to halt because of cholera and typhus which rendered its ranks immovable. Otherwise, the Bulgarians were ready to take the city which they called Tsargrad by storm.

The disastrous Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-1878 and ensuing Berlin Peace Treaty had already torn large tracts from the Ottoman Balkans. During the war, the Porte considered to move the capital to inner Anatolia as a transitory precaution. However, the idea of moving the capital also got hold of some political actors. Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz (1843-1916) who was employed by the Ottomans to reorganize and train the army between 1883 and 1895 was one of them. He was recalled from retirement in 1914 and in 1915 returned to Turkey as military aide to Sultan Mehmed Reşad (r. 1909-1918). But just like he had suggested in 1897 that the Ottoman capital should be moved to Konya or Kayseri in inner Anatolia, after the Balkan Wars he wrote

¹⁶ Emin Kurt ve Mesut Güvenbaş, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda İstanbul'a Yapılan Hava Saldırıları*, (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2018).

¹⁷ Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924*, (London: St. Martin's Press [1995] 1997).



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that the capital should be moved to Aleppo or Damascus. Having lost most of its territories in the Balkans, Goltz projected that the Ottoman Empire would become a Turkish-Arab Empire just like the Habsburg Empire which had become the Austria-Hungarian Empire in 1864.¹⁸ Strategically and culturally this arrangement was the most expedient solution. Goltz Pasha was discreet enough not to suggest who he had in mind to control Istanbul, hence the Straits.

To curb Russian influence among the Balkan peoples, European Great Powers had internationalized the Macedonian uprisings and endless internecine warfare through interference and imposition of reforms under their supervision and inspector/administrators as of 1902. The British Ambassador Nicholas O'Connor and Austrian Ambassador Baron Heinrich von Calice drew a working program that would make these provinces almost autonomous. Consequently, the six provinces (Vilâyât-ı Selâse), namely Edirne (Adrianopolis), Yanya (Jannina), İškodra (Scutari), Selânik (Salonica), Manastır (Monastir), and Kosova (Kosovo) were to be practically administered by Europeans while their salaries were to be paid by the Ottomans. The First Balkan War in 1912 severed all these territories from the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹ Edirne, the first Ottoman capital, was recovered during the Second Balkan War (1913) when the belligerents went to war with one another for the spoils, but its status was once again in question until after the Greco-Turkish proxy war of 1920-1922.

The Russian factor, though lurked behind, carried the old Eastern Question diplomatically to the north and practically to the east of Istanbul until WWI. In 1915-1916 Sir Edwin Pears was to put forward his final suggestions about applying law and order in European Turkey and the capital city. But before that, a discussion may be in order as to why the CUP government joined the belligerents by attacking Russian Black Sea ports as well as engaged Russians in the Caucasian front (Sarıkamış campaign) in winter conditions. Hence, although historiography both in England and Turkey emphasized, judged, and accused the CUP government in general, and Enver Pasha and Talât Pasha in particular, for blindly following German war policies, little attention was given to reasons of their own (*raison d'état*) to resort to war. That is, until a new generation of scholars began to reveal what the Young Turk war aims were, when

¹⁸ Bilâl N. Şimşir, "Ankara'nın Başkent Oluşu", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol. 7, 20, (1991): 189-222.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive background study of Macedonian issues, see İpek Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014).



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Russian/Ottoman archives became available.²⁰ Was there any public support? An incisive article by Mustafa Aksakal, “Not ‘by those old books of international law, but only by war’: Ottoman Intellectuals on the Eve of the Great War”²¹ shows that there was also support from the civilian side. In 1914, an American missionary reported that the Turks were discussing whether to join the war now would not be a good opportunity to end foreign controls.²²

The first step was unilateral abrogation of the capitulations in September which Talât Pasha announced to all foreign ambassadors after it was obvious from previous discussions that the powers would not negotiate on this matter. The second step would be to deal with the Russian threat through war. Sean McMeekin wrote that Russian concern for the Serbs against Austria was deceptive, plausibly to hide their major war aim, possession of Constantinople and expansion to the Near East. In October 1914, Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, Mikhail Nikolayevich Giers (Girs) wrote to Count Trubetskoi, Head of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Near Eastern Affairs Department, “We need a strong boss ruling over Constantinople, and since we cannot let any other power to assume this role, we must take her for ourselves. For us to do this without waging war on Turkey would, of course, be impossible.”²³ Three months prior to this correspondence, Russian Chief of the General Staff (CGS) General Nikolai Nikolaevich Yanushkevich (1868-1918) had mobilized troops on the Caucasian borders with Turkey in July 1914. On the diplomatic front, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov (1860-1927) had already made demands of allies on Constantinople.²⁴ It was surprising that his British and French counterparts were surprised. The CUP government was probably informed of Russian troop movements on the Caucasian border since that is where the Ottoman army attacked next to meet the Russian challenge.

It is remarkable in his consistency that as wars were raging in multiple fronts by 1916 that Sir Edwin Pears was still doggedly making plans for the future of Constantinople and sharing them with the public. While the Gallipoli Wars were ongoing between the Allies and Turks (March 18, 1915-January 9, 1916); while trench warfare was claiming extremely high numbers of German and French youth; and while civil unrest had begun in Russia because of insistence upon

²⁰ Mehmet Emin Elmacı, *İttihat Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar*, (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2005); Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press/Belknap, 2011): 98-140.

²¹ Mustafa Aksakal, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2004): 507-544.

²² George F. Herrick, “The Turkish Crisis and American Interests”, *American Review of Reviews*, 50 (October 1914): 475-476, quoted in Nur Bilge Criss, “İstanbul’da İşgal Günleri” in *100. Yılında İstanbul’un İşgal Günleri*, ed. Bülent Ulus, (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür AŞ, 2020): 19-101, 54.

²³ Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins*, 98.

²⁴ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins*, 101.



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continuing the war despite tremendous losses to Germany in terms of manpower and famine at home; while British blockade of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire, and eastern Mediterranean was playing havoc on civilian populations; and lastly, as the secret Sazonov-Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 16, 1916 partitioned Anatolia and the rest of the Near East, Pears gave an interview to New York Times on December 17, 1916. The newspaper headline read, “A Russian Constantinople will Mean More War.” Given the chronology, Pears might have had an inkling about the secret Constantinople Agreement (1915) and if this were the case, both Pears and London might have had second thoughts about the promise of Constantinople to Tsar Nicholas II just to keep him at war with Germany despite horrific loss. Or Pears, a master of English understatement, used such rhetoric to promote the idea of neutralized Constantinople for the sake of peace then and the future as he saw fit.

Accordingly, Pears drew four scenarios for Istanbul’s future. One, it may be left to the Turks under the strict control of Germans. Secondly, it may be occupied by Russia. Thirdly, it could become the capital of a small but internationalized state surrounding the Marmara Sea, Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits. Lastly, it may be left to the Turks as now. The crux of the issue, however, as Pears asked was whether Turks will be allowed to retain Constantinople. The longer version of this interview which appeared in *Contemporary Review* emphasized neutralization as the solution and recommended that Russia and Bulgaria should be convinced to keep their “hands off” Constantinople. The “peace loving” Tsar Nicholas II would surely acquiesce to governance of Constantinople and its environs by a European Commission.²⁵ He also advised Russians to channel their energies towards Central Asia and work on “civilizing those savages” instead of concentrating on the Balkans and Near East. Pears passed in 1919, but his idea, Istanbul neutralized, Istanbul a free state, Istanbul governed by commission plausibly had some impact on British Foreign Secretary Nathaniel Curzon (1859-1925) who served between 1919 and 1924 in that capacity.²⁶ Although Curzon had no problems about detaching Istanbul from Turkey, he did not accede to the idea of landing a Greek army in Smyrna (İzmir). Istanbul was another matter, but letting Greeks loose on the Anatolian heartlands would certainly bring about serious resistance on the part of the Turks and make peace impossible. Besides, the Greeks were too weak to control Asian Turkey. Partitioning the Ottoman Empire was a foregone conclusion. But partitioning Turkey’s heartland was not sustainable policy. However, Curzon

²⁵ Edwin Pears, “The Future of Constantinople”, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. XCI (1916): 374-379.

²⁶ David Gilmour, *Curzon, Imperial Statesman 1859-1925*, (London: John Murray, 1994).



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was not able to override Prime Minister Lloyd George (PM 1916-1922) who intensely disliked the Turks.²⁷

Armistice and Peace Making: On Whose Terms? (1918-1923)

“The Great War” said Margaret MacMillan, “was nobody’s fault or everybody’s.”²⁸ While it seemed too easy to go to war, and all belligerents had legitimate reasons one way or the other, the victors to be believed justified in rejecting US President Woodrow Wilson’s mediation efforts in 1917 to secure an armistice. Too much blood had been spilled to bring an end through mediation. Consequently, historiography of the war abounded with pointing fingers at the “guilty” parties until well into the 1960s until historians began to look at the catastrophe critically from the inside out instead of the outside in. Since then, this became a strong trend toward and during the war’s centenary.²⁹

Peace-making and peacebuilding at the end of WWI, however, had different connotations for the United Nations that was organized after WWII where peacekeeping and later conflict resolution were introduced as peace issues became a serious academic line of scholarship.³⁰ That said, during the timeframe under this study, peace-making meant direct peace enforcement and peacebuilding meant enhancing a culture of peace, left to preventive diplomacy. Though the latter approach remains with the UN, an added aspect to the terminology is that disagreements and tensions be resolved without resorting to pre-UN style violence – theoretically, but only manageable if there is political will.³¹

Be that as it may, peace enforcement came upon the Ottomans with the Mudros Armistice of October 31, 1918, when they sued for peace after the Bulgarians (the archenemy of Ottomans during the Balkan Wars, Bulgaria had become an ally in WWI) capitulated to the Allies.

²⁷ David Gilmour, *Curzon, Imperial Statesman*, 528-548.

²⁸ Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1919*, (New York: Random House, 2013): xxxv.

²⁹ Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, (New York and Ontario: The Macmillan Press, 1962); David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1989); Margaret MacMillan, *Six Months that Changed the World: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War*, (London: John Murray, 2001); Jeremy Salt, *The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2009); Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011); Laila Tarazi Fawaz, *A Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

³⁰ Nimet Beriker and D. Drucker, “Simulating the Lausanne Peace Negotiations, 1922-1923: Power Asymmetries in Bargaining”, *Simulation and Gaming*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (1996): 162-183.

³¹ See UN website on Peace and Security, <https://www.un.org>.



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Hostilities were supposedly to end as of that date and all military action was to stop. But it did not. The British and French contingents proceeded to occupy key cities in south-eastern Anatolia such as Antep and Maraş as well as Cilicia³² where they faced armed resistance from local militia. Second, but just as significant were terms of unconditional surrender, so much so that although it is difficult to determine precisely when empires fall, many scholars in Turkey point to the date Armistice was signed. Unconditional surrender is described as “a surrender in which no guarantees are given to the surrendering party...Announcing that only unconditional surrender is acceptable puts psychological pressure on a weaker adversary but may also prolong hostilities.”³³ The Ottoman Empire legally survived on paper until November 1, 1922, when the sultanate was abrogated by the National Assembly of Ankara.

Either way, the state of war continued until a peace agreement was signed, but the state of war continued although the dictated, non-negotiated Treaty of Sèvres was signed in 1920. I have written elsewhere why the state of war continued due to occupations, national resistance, and the proxy Greco-Turkish war (1920-1922). I also wrote about the subject from various perspectives previously.³⁴ An additional factor, however, should perhaps be taken into consideration. That is, a particular sabotage in Istanbul which may have served as a turning point in the tide of war between the British and Ottomans. In 1917, tons of ammunition, artillery, fresh troops, and train wagons to be sent to the Palestinian front were blown up while loading in Haydarpaşa train station. Whether it would have made a difference in the outcome of war if this force had reached Mesopotamia or not remains a matter of speculation. However, since war in the southern front has been clouded by the Lawrence of Arabia myth for so long that it may be high time to put issues in perspective.³⁵ No matter how destructive Lawrence’s recruited Arab tribesmen and his own skill at detonation of dynamite on railroads and bridges, including attacking hospital trains that carried convalescent Turkish soldiers home, this was not policy, but a demonstration of sheer sadism as he gleefully describes his feats/services rendered and made public many years later. He certainly did legwork, but there is no indication that he was taken seriously or respected by British authorities in the Middle East because he was unruly and undependable.

³² Yücel Güçlü, “The Struggle for Mastery in Cilicia: Turkey, France, and the Ankara Agreement of 1921” *The International History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (September 2001): 580-603.

³³ “Unconditional Surrender” <https://www.en.wikipedia.org>.

³⁴ Nur Bilge Criss, *Istanbul Under Allied Occupation, 1918-1923*, (Brill: Leiden, 1999); Criss, *100. Yılında İstanbul’un İşgal Günleri*.

³⁵ For a recent account on Lawrence, see Scott Anderson, *Lawrence In Arabia, War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (New York: Doubleday, 2013).



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Truer to life was the successful disruption by the British Military Intelligence, specifically the Eastern Mediterranean Special Intelligence Bureau, of German-Ottoman arms and men from reaching Mesopotamia in time to make any difference in that war theatre. Yigel Sheffy informs that “In September 1917 according to an account by the commander of the Royal Navy Aegean Squadron, a British controlled agent or agents, possibly from an EMSIB station in the Aegean, set fire to the central railway station at Haydar Pasha near Istanbul, destroying a major ammunition dump designed for Yıldırım (Thunderbolt) troops assembling in the Aleppo area in Syria for the counteroffensive in Mesopotamia.”³⁶ On September 10, 1917 Jerusalem was handed over to General Allenby to prevent a potential destruction of the city. Holy Land to all belligerents, the fall of Jerusalem was celebrated in Vienna, church bells rang, members of the Parliament and ordinary people recited prayers of gratitude now that the city was taken from the Muslims.³⁷ Religious devotion and Christianity against Islam weighed stronger than the Habsburg alliance with the Ottomans. This was yet another dimension of the Eastern Question which had been articulated by Edouard Drialut in 1898 where La Question d’Orient was defined as the struggle between the Cross and Crescent.

Following the Allied occupation of the Capital city, the religious dimension once again became an issue when the future of Constantinople was in question. Philip Mansel, in the chapter entitled “Death of a Capital City”³⁸ referred to the British Foreign Secretary Curzon who said in a speech at the Paris Peace Conference that the Turks deserved a worse punishment than Germans. Referring to the Turks as the “plague” of Europe, the Foreign Secretary argued that, lest the sins of the East prove contagious, the Turks should not be allowed to rule Istanbul. He proposed an outmoded solution, that of a free city-state whereby the sultan/caliph would be moved to Konya or Bursa. The city would be run by an International Commission. The “plague” metaphor, according to Mansel, had directed Curzon to militant Christianity. During a speech he gave on behalf of Hellenism and Christianity, he stated that the 900 years-old church, St. Sophia should revert from a mosque to its origins. Greeks were jubilant. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Phanar stated that the Eastern Question would never be solved unless Constantinople became Greek. But then the Italians, part of Allied occupiers, argued that since St. Sophia had been built by a Roman Emperor, the church should become Catholic. Curzon did not resort to religiously

³⁶ Yigel Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914-1918*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998): 155-156.

³⁷ Emre Saral and İsmail Tosun Saral, *Türklerle Beraber, Osmanlı Cepheleindeki Avusturya-Macaristan Askeri Birlikleri, 1914-1918*, (İstanbul: Kronik Yayınları, 2020): 31-32.

³⁸ Philip Mansel, *Constantinople, City of the World’s Desire*, 380-384, Quoted in Nur Bilge Criss, *Constantinople 1918 Konstantiniyye*, ed. Ali Serim (İstanbul: Denizler Kitabevi, 2015) English Preface, np.



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coloured parlance again. He wanted to dismantle the city's image as the seat of Islam, but arguments from Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India (1917-1922), lest this policy should jeopardize British security in India due the Khilafat movement became a factor in Curzon's plans to tread cautiously.³⁹

In the end, peace-making would ironically be imposed by Mustafa Kemal Pasha (1881-1938) and the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1923, in the aftermath of the Greek-Turkish wars. The 1923-1924 Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, alias the Lausanne Conference called by Curzon led to a negotiated peace. This situation was "extraordinary" even for the Foreign Secretary who supported peace, but a dictated one not a negotiated peace. Upholding British prestige to the extreme was no longer possible given that France and Italy had already abandoned the alliance, and their "associated ally" the USA's main concern was normalization so that trade could be resuscitated in accordance with Open Door policy.

Peace-making had proven as arduous as military confrontations, but peacebuilding would not be easy either. A sovereign and independent Republic of Turkey was recognized by the signatories, Great Powers of years past. However, reciprocity in diplomatic relations came slowly and reluctantly as it also involved moving embassies to the new capital Ankara. Mending fences politically became of utmost importance by the 1930s with radically changing conditions in Europe.

Peacebuilding between Britain and Turkey (1924-1939)

Perhaps the most important component of British representation in the Near East (in the Far East as well) next to military and civilian High Commissioners had been that of Dragomans. Fluent in foreign languages, dragomans managed affairs of the British communities in line with both judicial and financial capitulatory rights. A dragoman was also a highly skilled translator as well as provider of intelligence of relevance who counselled diplomats. Now that the capitulations were formally abrogated with the Lausanne Treaty, that office had to be closed.⁴⁰ The second matter of significance was the status of the representative of His Majesty's Government and abode.

"It had also long been assumed by some in London that the lower-ranking legation, headed by a mere minister, would be the proper vehicle for British representation in the shrunken and

³⁹ Hazal Papuççular, "For the Defense of the British Empire: Edwin Montagu and the Turkish Peace Settlement in a Transnational Context", *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (June 2020): 30-42.

⁴⁰ Andrew Ryan, *The Last of the Dragomans*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1951).



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hostile Turkey which had emerged from the war.”⁴¹ However, in 1925 when the French and Italians announced that they were going to appoint ambassadors to Turkey, London joined them with the caveat that ambassadors reside in Constantinople. Barring physical inconveniences, Russia, Poland, and Afghanistan had already set up embassies in Ankara. And, although some Allies thought that the caveat might compel the Turkish Government to move back to Istanbul, this was not going to happen. It was the Mosul issue which had to be negotiated directly with the Ankara Government and not through representatives that Ankara sent to Istanbul in the process, is when the first British Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, Ronald Lindsay (1925-1926) decided to take up a part-time resident embassy in Ankara.⁴² In 1926, the League of Nations decided that the previous Ottoman province of Mosul remain as part of Iraq-under-British mandate. Turkey complied in return for a sum to be received from the petroleum income.⁴³ In short, the next to the last territorial dispute between London and Ankara was resolved peacefully. The last one, disarmament and control of the Straits by an international commission (albeit with a Turkish Director) was to be solved in 1936 with the Montreux Convention.

Nevertheless, a double centred British embassy continued, but with the next two Ambassadors George Clerk (1929-1934) and Percy Loraine (1934-1939) spending more time in Ankara with an increasing charm offensive, especially from Loraine towards President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Building peace had to be accelerated through cultivating warm personal relations. At first, Percy Loraine had accepted his new appointment to Turkey with sheer disappointment and reluctance. He felt that he was practically removed from Cairo, was not even consulted by the Foreign Ministry about his next destination (he would have preferred Paris or Rome). He wrote in his diary “In fact, it just broke my official heart...Transfer-before my time was up: unconsulted!”⁴⁴

By the time Loraine came to Turkey in 1934, it was becoming obvious (at least to Atatürk) that yet another European war threatened. Almost all eastern European and Balkan countries, not to mention Stalin’s Soviet Union, had civilian, military, or monarchial dictators as leaders. Direct threats to Turkey emanated from fascist Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union. In 1933, Mustafa Kemal shared his concerns about security with visiting American General Douglas MacArthur;

⁴¹ Geoffrey R. Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey, 1583 to the present: A study in the evolution of the resident embassy*, (Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009): 142-144.

⁴² Geoffrey Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 146-151.

⁴³ Hikmet Uluğbay, *İmparatorluktan Cumhuriyete Petrolpolitik*, (Ankara: Turkish Daily News Yayınları, 1995).

⁴⁴ Gordon Waterfield, *Professional Diplomat, Sir Percy Loraine, 1880-1961*, (London: John Murray, 1973): 201.



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he told the general that Germany would no longer remain confined by the Treaty of Versailles, Berlin would start another war and plausibly draw in the Soviets and the United States. Atatürk was the only leader who had read Hitler's infamous book *Mein Kampf* and understood the potential danger seriously. Mussolini's fiery oration about Italy's historic rights to lands of the Roman Empire covered most of Turkey's land mass as well as the Mediterranean Sea, "mare nostrum" in Mussolini's parlance.⁴⁵

Last, but not least Stalin made a *démarche* which breached hitherto cordial relations with Turkey. In 1932, Falih Rıfki (Atay, 1894-1971) a journalist and man of letters was attending a Writers' Conference in Moscow when three of Stalin's agents visited him in his hotel room. Falih Rıfki was a confidante of President Atatürk and Prime Minister İsmet (İnönü, 1884-1973). The agents who spoke fluent Turkish said that Stalin was concerned that Turkey may become a springboard for other parties who might attack the Soviet Union. He asked for a regime change which only then would prove Ankara's loyalty. The message was intended to find its way to Turkey's top leaders. It did, but the leaders advised the journalist to keep on writing complimentary editorials about the Soviets.⁴⁶ Ankara's witch hunt among Turkey's leftist literati accelerated, while the following year Stalin sent a large delegation led by his Politburo confidante Kliment Voroshilov (later Marshal and Soviet President, 1881-1969) to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Turkey's republic.

In the course of peacebuilding, Ambassador Loraine established a warm relationship with Atatürk; since he held his drink well, Loraine frequently wine and dined, played poker through the night with the President; mutual love for horses and horse races had Loraine, a horse breeder in his English estate, bring over a thoroughbred stallion and mare as a contribution to the Ankara Riding Club. Behind these niceties, however, lay serious concerns about security and defense. Loraine was also active in forging ties between Ankara and London by facilitating an informal visit to Atatürk by King Edward VIII who was vacationing on Greek islands with his friend Wallis Simpson. Mustafa Kemal enjoyed the visit not only because the King came but took an instant liking to him because Edward was an unconventional person, challenging the British dynasty with his intention to marry a twice divorced American woman. Loraine also encouraged some English businesses to trade with Turkey. Yet his most notable and lasting contribution to

⁴⁵ Brock Millman, "Turkish Foreign and Strategic Policy, 1934-1942", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 31, No. 3 (1995): 483-508; Nur Bilge Criss, "Turkey's Foreign Policies During the Interwar Years (1923-1939)" in *Turkish Foreign Policy, International Relations, Legality and Global Reach*, ed. Pinar Gözen Ercan (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017): 17-38; Criss, "Shades of Diplomatic Recognition: American Encounters with Turkey, 1923-1937" in *Studies in Atatürk's Turkey*, eds. George S. Harris and Nur Bilge Criss (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 97-144, 131.

⁴⁶ Falih Rıfki Atay, *Çankaya*, (İstanbul: Doğan Kardeş Yayınları, 1969): 578.



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Turkey was the role he played in convening a conference with all signatories to the Straits Convention (annexed to the Lausanne Treaty) of 1924. It was imminent; Turkey argued on all platforms, that Ankara should re-militarize the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits and assume full control of ingress, egress, and regress to the Black Sea in times of war and peace. Loraine managed to convince London that regulations, satisfactory to all concerned would also ensure the security of all riparian states and beyond.⁴⁷ The result was the 1936 Montreux Convention, still in force to this day.

Loraine's last gesture in building good will was to organize British presence in Atatürk's funeral who passed on November 10, 1938. A 200 men contingency, the largest among all other state representatives, attended in full uniform as well as with the presence, in full regalia of retired Major General Sir Edmund Guy Tulloch Brainbridge (1867-1943) who had fought in the Gallipoli wars. Loraine left Turkey in 1939, but also left behind many positive memories. That same year, Turkey, the United Kingdom and France signed a Mutual Military Assistance Agreement. Ankara was still neighbours with both in Iraq and Syria, respectively. Once again, under conditions of WWII and the early surrender of France to Germany in 1940, exhaustive and exhausting negotiations began between London and Ankara for military assistance under dire financial circumstances. This topic alone merited a 500+ pages long book by Brock Millman (fn. 3). In the end, Turkey managed to remain outside the war which was one of Europe's own making but contributed to its allies' struggle by other means than war.

Conclusions

Arduous relations between Britain and the last Ottomans as well as the new Turkey ended with a negotiated peace. There were certainly other states involved at Lausanne, but definitive loss of war was determined by British arms. Consequently, Britain's representatives took the lead and primacy during the Armistice period. However, London received half of its desiderata in establishing the international commission in controlling the Turkish Straits between 1924 and 1936. Istanbul returned to Turkish rule as a legacy of empires past.

Secondly, the Nationalists prevented partition of the Anatolian heartland. As a result, the antiquated Eastern Question was expelled beyond its borders. Third, capitulations were formally abrogated. Its judicial component, the right of foreign peoples to be subject to the laws of their home countries when living and working in a majority Muslim country ended with secularization and adaptation of European laws in Turkey. Since religious law was no longer valid, political Islamists see this as a matter of rejecting religion, but never consider the salient tie between

⁴⁷ Tevfik Rüştü Aras, *Görüşlerim*, (İstanbul: Semih Lütüf Kitabevi, n.d): 121-127.



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secularization and independence. Besides, Islamic jurisprudence varies on a sectarian basis, the only common denominator being its patriarchal and misogynistic applications. Western democracies have yet to be convinced that this has nothing to do with “religious freedom” because it is difficult enough to struggle against this frame of mind domestically. Secularization is in essence about human security. Politicization of the Eastern Question did not yield any benefit to anyone in the past, and identity politics, currently in vogue between hegemony and resistance do not look promising for the future either.

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