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Count Agenor Gołuchowski's Plan to Occupy the Straits (1895)[1]

Kont Agenor Gołuchowski'nin Boğazları İşgal Planı (1895)

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Abstract

When Count Agenor Gołuchowski became Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister in May 1895, he adopted a cautious foreign policy aimed at preserving the status quo in the Near East and preventing Russian expansion towards the Straits and the Balkans. However, the Armenian events in Istanbul created considerable public pressure on the European Powers and revived fears about the Eastern Question. Faced with the risk of Russian intervention and growing instability, Gołuchowski sought to reaffirm the importance the Concert of Europe by proposing a naval demonstration and a plan for the occupation of the Straits in November, 1895. Although he expected strong support from Britain, his ally in the Mediterranean Treaty, the British Cabinet ultimately opposed the plan. The British Admiralty, led by Goschen and Richards, raised serious objections to the plan, arguing that Sultan Abdülhamid II's recent fortification of the Dardanelles made sea passage impossible without significant land support. Moreover, Russia's firm opposition to any military intervention further isolated Gołuchowski's proposal and ultimately forced its withdrawal. As a result, the plan collapsed, revealing the fragility of European collective action on the Eastern Question. Drawing mainly on British and Ottoman archival documents, this study argues that the failure of Gołuchowski's initiative not only exposed the limits of European collective diplomacy, but also accelerated the decline of Austro-Hungarian influence in the Balkans. It also highlights how the collapse of the plan signalled a wider weakening of the Council of Europe in the management of the Ottoman crisis, drawing attention to the growing divergence among the Great Powers over the Eastern Question. By analysing diplomatic correspondence, naval assessments and parliamentary debates of the period, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how strategic miscalculations, divisions within the British Cabinet and assertive Russian diplomacy frustrated Gołuchowski's ambitions and reshaped regional alignments. This case study reveals the limits of naval diplomacy and the fragility of European unity in managing the Eastern Question at a critical juncture.

Keywords: Great Powers, Gołuchowski, Salisbury, Naval Demonstration, Straits.

Öz

Kont Agenor Gołuchowski Mayıs 1895'te Avusturya-Macaristan Dışişleri Bakanı olduğunda, Yakın Doğu'daki statükoyu korumayı ve Rusya'nın Boğazlara ve Balkanlara doğru genişlemesini önlemeyi amaçlayan ihtiyatlı bir dış politika benimsedi. Ancak İstanbul'daki Ermeni olayları Avrupalı Güçler üzerinde önemli bir kamuoyu baskısı yaratarak Doğu Sorunu'na ilişkin korkuları canlandırdı. Rus müdahalesi ve artan istikrarsızlık riskiyle karşı karşıya kalan Gołuchowski, Kasım 1895'te bir deniz gösterisi ve Boğazların işgali için bir plan önererek Avrupa Uyumu'nun önemini yeniden teyit etmeye çalıştı. Akdeniz Anlaşması'ndaki müttefiki İngiltere'den güçlü bir destek beklemesine rağmen İngiliz Kabinesi nihayetinde plana karşı çıktı. Goschen ve Richards'ın başını çektiği İngiliz Amiralliği, Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in Çanakkale Boğazı'nda yakın zamanda güçlendirdiği tahkimatın, önemli bir kara desteği olmadan denizden geçişi imkânsız hale getirdiğini ileri sürerek plana ciddi itirazlarda bulundu. Dahası, Rusya'nın herhangi bir askeri müdahaleye kesin bir şekilde karşı çıkması Gołuchowski'nin önerisini daha da izole etti ve nihayetinde geri çekilmeye zorladı. Sonuç olarak plan çöktü ve Doğu Sorunu konusunda Avrupa'nın kolektif eyleminin kırılganlığını ortaya koydu. Temel olarak İngiliz ve Osmanlı arşiv belgelerine dayanan bu çalışma, Gołuchowski'nin girişiminin başarısız olmasının yalnızca Avrupa kolektif diplomasisinin sınırlarını ortaya koymakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda Avusturya-Macaristan'ın Balkanlar'daki etkisinin azalmasını da hızlandırdığını savunmaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışma, planın çöküşünün Osmanlı krizinin yönetiminde Avrupa Konseyi'nin nasıl daha geniş çaplı bir zayıflamaya işaret ettiğini vurgulayarak, Doğu Sorunu konusunda Büyük Güçler arasında artan ayrışmaya dikkat çekmektedir. Çalışma, dönemin diplomatik yazışmalarını, bahri değerlendirmelerini ve parlamento tartışmalarını inceleyerek, stratejik yanlış hesaplamaların, İngiliz Kabinesi içindeki bölünmelerin ve Rusya'nın iddialı diplomasisinin Gołuchowski'nin emellerini nasıl boşa çıkardığına ve bölgesel hizalanmaları nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğine dair kapsamlı bir anlayış sunmaktadır. Bu vaka çalışması, kritik bir dönemeçte Doğu Sorunu'nun yönetiminde deniz diplomasisinin sınırlarını ve Avrupa birliğinin kırılganlığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Büyük Devletler, Gołuchowski, Salisbury, Deniz Gösterisi, Boğazlar.

Extended Abstract

The Armenian incidents in Anatolia in 1894 once again brought the Eastern Question to the forefront of European diplomacy. Allegations of massacres against Armenians and Christians created public outrage, especially in Britain, where a strong Armenian lobby exerted pressure on the government to act. In response, the Liberal Government, together with France and Russia, presented a reform plan to Sultan Abdülhamid II in May 1895. The Sultan resisted the plan for months, viewing it as a threat to his sovereign authority. However, the renewed violence in Istanbul in September 1895 heightened international tensions and shifted the geopolitical focus to the Ottoman capital.

This study argues that the failure of Count Gołuchowski's plan to occupy the Straits in November 1895 was not solely due to Russian opposition as has often been claimed but was equally shaped by the British Admiralty's strategic objections, Ottoman military fortifications, and diplomatic disunity among the Great Powers. Gołuchowski's aim was to localize the Armenian crisis and restrain Russian influence over the Sultan through a joint naval demonstration. While British Prime Minister Salisbury initially appeared sympathetic, his Cabinet ultimately rejected the plan due to fears of military escalation and technical limitations.

Methodologically, the study adopts a multi-source archival approach, combining British diplomatic dispatches (TNA, FO series), Ottoman documents (BOA), and period press accounts to provide a comprehensive analysis. The analysis also benefits from close scrutiny of reports by Sir Edmund Monson, the British Ambassador in Vienna, whose correspondence offers insight into both Austro-Hungarian motives and British reactions. Parliamentary debates and press commentary further illuminate public sentiment and the domestic political constraints facing decision-makers in London and Vienna.

The findings reveal that Gołuchowski's initiative was diplomatically bold but strategically misaligned with on-the-ground realities. The Ottoman Empire's rapid military reinforcement of the Dardanelles, the cautious stance of the British Cabinet especially the Admiralty and Germany's reluctance to jeopardize its relationship with the Sultan undermined any chance of a coordinated action. The disclosure of the plan through the Rome Telegraph Agency also allowed Russia to torpedo the initiative diplomatically before it materialized. As a result, the plan collapsed, and Gołuchowski's credibility suffered both domestically and internationally.

In conclusion, this study provides a fresh and integrated interpretation of Count Gołuchowski's 1895 Straits plan, moving beyond simplistic accounts that attribute its failure solely to Russian opposition. By juxtaposing British naval assessments, Ottoman military preparedness, internal Cabinet debates in London, and the responses of other European powers, it reveals the deeper structural limits of coercive diplomacy in the late nineteenth-century Eastern Question. The analysis demonstrates that Gołuchowski's initiative, though diplomatically imaginative, was strategically flawed and politically untenable. This research thus fills a critical gap in the historiography by re-evaluating the episode not merely as a failed naval manoeuvre, but as a turning point in Austro-Hungarian diplomacy and a reflection of the declining coherence of European collective action in managing the Ottoman crisis.

Introduction

In May 1895, Count Agenor Maria Adam Gołuchowski (1895-1906) succeeded Count Gustav Kalnoky as the Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs. When he was called to steer foreign policy, he was only forty-six years old. Gołuchowski belonged to the land-rich group that was the backbone of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and owned large estates in Galicia. Despite being Polish, he considered himself primarily a servant of the Empire (The Speaker, 25.05.1895, p. 563). Gołuchowski's diplomatic experience was quite limited; he served in Berlin, Paris, and Bucharest, and only held the position of mission chief in the latter. Sir Edmund Monson, the British Ambassador in Vienna, considered Gołuchowski to be amiable and courteous but completely insignificant (Grenville, 1958, p. 342).

Contrary to the criticisms directed at him, Gołuchowski was not incompetent; he was hardworking, but he could not be considered one of the first-class statesmen. In response to a celebratory speech made for his appointment, Count Gołuchowski declared in his first official speech his intention to support the emperor's efforts for European peace and, at the same time, to protect Austria's interests abroad with energy and determination (Windsor Magazine, December 1897, p. 596-597). However, while doing this, he also tried to take utmost care in maintaining the Concert of Europe[2]. Following a cautious policy, Gołuchowski was in favor of maintaining the status quo in the Near East. Gołuchowski's fundamental principle in foreign policy, like his predecessors Kaunitz, Metternich, Andrassy, and Kalnoky, was to prevent Russia from seizing control of Istanbul and the Straits (Walters, 1950, p. 220). When Gołuchowski took office, he believed that England, within the framework of the Mediterranean Agreements in 1887[3], would do everything in its power to prevent Russia from expanding towards the Balkans and the Straits. In this regard, Gołuchowski was initially determined to follow and enhance his predecessor's policy of maintaining close ties with Britain. However, Austria-Hungary's inability to realistically assess its international position, its lack of finesse, and its failure to understand British policy ultimately led it to make a fateful and serious mistake in foreign policy. (Walters, 1950, p. 268).

Gołuchowski desired the continuation of the 1887 Mediterranean Agreement with England to maintain the status quo in the Near East and worked intensively to achieve this desire during the first two years of his tenure. The change in power in England in the summer of 1895, and the re-emergence of the Eastern Question due to the Armenian events in Anatolia and Istanbul in 1894-1895, caused the priorities of England and Austria-Hungary to change during this period (Grenville, 1958, p. 343). His ability to succeed where Bismarck had failed and to sign an agreement allowing Austria to cooperate with Russia in the Near East while

[2] Gołuchowski had even agreed with the Russian Foreign Minister Prince Lobanov in Vienna in August 1895 that it was possible to maintain the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire for the next few years (MacColl, 1896, p. 207-208). Indeed, this agreement of 1895 ended on May 5, 1897, with a treaty between the two sides concerning the Balkans. According to this treaty, Austria-Hungary and Russia agreed to abandon any thoughts of conquest in the Balkan Peninsula if maintaining the current status quo became impossible. They also agreed to ensure that all other Powers with potential ambitions on these territories respect this principle. It was likewise acknowledged that the issue of Istanbul and the adjacent lands, along with the Straits (Dardanelles and Bosphorus), due to its highly European character, could not be the subject of a separate agreement between Austria-Hungary and Russia (Anderson, 1970, p. 130-131).

[3] The 1887 Mediterranean Agreement was signed between England, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. The main aim of the treaty was to maintain the status quo in the Near East. While securing Austria's and England's support for Italy against France in the Mediterranean, it also ensured England's support for Austria against the Russian threat in Istanbul, the Straits, and the Balkans. Thus, England also secured the support of Austria and Italy against French and Russian expansion in the Straits and the Mediterranean. For details of the agreement, see (Medlicott, 1926, pp. 66-68; Hinsley, 1958, pp. 76-81; Pribram, 1920, p. 94-104). However, the 1887 Mediterranean Agreement did not in any way place an obligation on England to go to war against France and Russia (Gooch-Temperley, 1932, p. 1-12).

maintaining its commitment to the Triple Alliance, instead of a secret agreement made without the knowledge of Austria's allies, was a significant achievement for him (Windsor Magazine, December 1897, p. 596-597).

In the last twelve months of the Liberal Government's rule in England (1892-1895), foreign policy issues had increasingly compounded. The Armenian uprisings in Anatolia, which were harshly suppressed by the Ottoman Empire according to the Great Powers, triggered calls in public opinion for action against the Sultan. This public pressure in England brought the entire Eastern Question back to the forefront. Unlike England, the other Great Powers viewed the stability of the Ottoman Empire and the preservation of the status quo as a much higher priority than the fate of the Armenians (Kennedy, 1981, p. 104).

When the Conservative Party Leader, Marquess of Salisbury (1895-1902), returned to power in England in June, one of the most important issues he inherited from his predecessors was the Armenian question. Throughout the summer, Salisbury, in a pessimistic mood, believed that unless Sultan Abdülhamid II's powers were restricted, he would continue to *"massacre"* Armenians and Christians as he pleased, in his own words. However, the other Great Powers outside of England did not share Salisbury's view of forcibly imposing Armenian reforms on the Sultan (Grenville, 1964, p. 29). In particular, Russia and France were not ready to force the reforms down the Sultan's throat (Crewe, 1931, p. 516-519).

After taking power, Salisbury realized that he had inherited an unfeasible reform program formulated by England, Russia, and France in the spring of 1895. His predecessors had led British policy into an impasse due to the Armenian events that occurred between 1894 and 1895. Given the public pressure in England, Salisbury had no choice but to continue the Liberal Government's policy. The Armenian question and Sultan Abdülhamid II's disregard for the Great Powers' calls for reform led Salisbury during the summer to consider using naval power to force the Sultan and to contemplate the possibility of resolving the centuries-old Eastern Question by dividing the Ottoman Empire (BOA. Y.PRK.ZB., 16/31, 9 S 1313). It was not entirely clear how serious Salisbury was about this last idea and under what conditions he considered it could be realized. However, the reaction of the other powers was clear, and they were not welcoming any changes to the status quo. Because such a division could not only revive old rivalries but also spread the problem to the Balkans and other regions (Kennedy, 1981, p. 106).

On August 15th, at the opening of Parliament, Salisbury publicly reprimanded the Sultan. He declared that while England wished to protect the Ottoman Empire, Europe would not indefinitely remain a spectator to the Sultan's abuse of power. Salisbury's forceful speech did not have much effect on the Sultan, but it certainly alarmed European governments who mistakenly assumed that Salisbury intended to abandon England's traditional policy of maintaining the Ottoman Empire (HL Deb, 15.08.1895, cc.19-58). Salisbury's eloquent condemnation of the Sultan's rule and his gloomy premonitions about the collapse of the empire resonated greatly in Vienna, Berlin, and St. Petersburg (Grenville, 1958, p. 347). According to French Ambassador Geoffrey de Courcel, Salisbury tended to see the world as full of *"sick men"* and the Ottoman Empire was the sickest of them all (Charmley, 1999, p. 232). Therefore, in 1895, although Salisbury believed that the death of the Ottoman Empire was imminent, he still wanted to postpone its collapse for as long as possible. Indeed, Salisbury wrote to his Ambassador in Istanbul, Layard, in 1880: *"Delaying Turkey's fall until the revolution in Russia takes place would be a great success because there is everything to gain by postponing the disaster"* (Grenville, 1964, p. 27).

Count Gołuchowski approached the British Government immediately after Prime Minister Salisbury, the architect of the Mediterranean Agreement of 1887, delivered his speech in Parliament. Expressing his desire to maintain the status quo in the East, Gołuchowski offered Salisbury a proposal for mutual agreement and cooperation on issues related to the Ottoman Empire. Salisbury tried to demonstrate his commitment to the alliance by clearly stating to the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador Franz Deym (1888-1903) that England's policy was still aimed at preserving the Ottoman Empire, and that keeping Russia out of Istanbul was still in England's interest. In fact, Salisbury's explanations to Ambassador Deym were in line with his general ideas about the conduct of foreign policy. The time to test the sincerity of Salisbury's assurances to Deym came in late 1895, following the Armenian events at the Sublime Porte, which led to the spread of anarchy throughout the Ottoman Empire (Jefferson, 1960, p. 50).

Existing literature generally treats Count Agenor Gołuchowski's plan to invade the Straits in 1895 as a brief episode within the broader Eastern Question narrative, or focuses narrowly on British or Russian perspectives without sufficiently integrating Austro-Hungarian motivations and concerns. Within this framework, existing studies have predominantly analysed Ottoman-Russian-British rivalry during the period in question. For example, Grenville (1958) and Walters (1950) emphasised Gołuchowski's efforts to maintain the status quo and his commitment to the Mediterranean Treaties, while Kennedy (1981) analysed Britain's realist approach to Ottoman policy. However, the existing literature does not examine in sufficient depth how Sultan Abdülhamid II's defensive fortifications (gun batteries, mine lines) at Gallipoli made the implementation of Gołuchowski's plan impossible. For example, while Marder (1940) focussed mainly on the technical inadequacies of the British navy, the role of Russia has been largely ignored in this and similar studies. Although Russian Foreign Minister Lobanov's firm opposition to the plan was directly linked to Russia's historical claims to the Straits, studies such as Anderson (1970) have failed to adequately analyse how Russian diplomatic pressure weakened the Gołuchowski-Salisbury alliance. On the other hand, Salisbury's internal cabinet struggles (opposition from Balfour, Goschen and Richards) and the pressure of British public opinion against Armenian reform demands were also decisive factors in the failure of the plan. While Otte (2000) has addressed these internal conflicts, Şaşmaz (2000) has analysed the impact of the Armenian issue on the diplomatic process from the Ottoman perspective. This study, on the other hand, analyses the reasons for the failure of Gołuchowski's plan in a more holistic framework by comparing British (TNA) and Ottoman (BOA) archival documents. The Admiralty's technical objections (the Chermside report) and Russia's diplomatic manoeuvres (Lobanov's intervention) are evaluated together to show why the idea of a *"naval demonstration"* was practically unfeasible. Moreover, the long-term effects of the failure of the plan, such as Gołuchowski's approach to Russia, the invalidation of the Mediterranean Treaties, and the loss of confidence in the Vienna-Berlin-St. Petersburg line, are also discussed, emphasising the weakening process in these alliances, in contrast to Grenville's (1964) assessment. In conclusion, this study comprehensively examines Gołuchowski's strategic calculations, the reactions of the other Great Powers and their impact on the foreign policies of Austria-Hungary and Britain, and aims to fill an important gap in the literature by systematically analysing British archival materials, parliamentary debates and press sources of the period.

1. Public Pressure and the Gołuchowski–Salisbury Diplomatic Alignment

The Liberal Government in England, which was subjected to great public pressure as a result of the Armenian incidents that started in Sason in 1894 and then spread to different parts of Anatolia, prepared a reform

plan in May 1895 for the Ottoman Empire to accept, with the support of Russia and France (Anderson, 1970, p. 264-265). The Sultan saw the reform plan presented to him as an attack on his sovereign rights and resisted its implementation for a long time, which led to intense pressure from England (Şaşmaz, 2000, p. 139). On June 27, the British Military Attaché in Istanbul, Colonel Chermside, informed the Foreign Office that the Turks feared nothing and had made almost no war preparations in the capital to resist any pressure applied by one or more powers regarding the Armenian issue. According to the attaché, the general feeling in military and official circles was that Russia and France would not resort to extreme measures, and Britain would not act alone and seriously threaten Dardanelles or Istanbul. Because there was a widespread belief that such an action would lead to a conflict with Russia. (Marder, 1940, p. 242). Moreover, the commission of inquiry established by the Ottoman Empire, Britain, France and Russia to investigate the Armenian incidents in Sason had completed its investigation in the summer of 1895 and submitted its report to the relevant states. The report clearly revealed that the massacres allegedly committed against Armenians in Sason for months by the European public opinion were unfounded and that the incidents were the result of the provocations of foreign agents (Gülmez, 2006, s. 726-733). The Commission of Inquiry, which admitted that good relations had existed between the Muslims and the Armenians in the district of Talori until the arrival there of Hampartsoum Boyadjian (Murad) in the spring of 1894. Even the British consular delegate H. S. Shipley, in a memorandum of 12 October 1895, observed that the estimates of Armenian casualties published in the British and continental press, ranging from 5,000 to 10,000, were completely unrealistic (Sonyel, 1987, p. 170-171). However, in September 1895, the Armenian incidents in Istanbul drew the attention of the great powers to Istanbul and, consequently, to the Sultan's sovereignty. Even at this time, there were many allegations in the European press that the British navy would bombard Istanbul and Thessaloniki would be annexed by Austria. (BOA. HR.SYS., 189/42; BOA. HR.SYS., 1366/15). At one point, the British prime minister even considered invading Jeddah, the most important Ottoman port on the Red Sea (Anderson, 1970, p. 266). The turmoil in Istanbul brought an old issue into a new and sharper focus for England. British interests required the preservation of the Ottoman Empire and the support of the Sultan's Government against a potential Russian attack. However, even lacking moral concerns, it was quite difficult for any British Cabinet to protect the Sultan from his enemies when the strong public opinion in the country demanded his punishment (Grenville, 1964, p. 28).

Salisbury had gained a reputation as a pragmatic man whose policies were based on the principles of Realpolitik (Roberts, 1999, p. 41). He feared that the recent Armenian events would trigger a public campaign similar to the one Gladstone launched against the Bulgarian events[4]. Salisbury's fears were further heightened by the removal of Kâmil Pasha, who was known to be pro-British, from the position of Grand Vizier, and the appointment of individuals whom he referred to as *"the Sultan's fanatical puppets"* to the government[5]. Indeed, by October, the situation of the Armenians in Anatolia and Istanbul had enraged the British public, and this surge of excitement had resulted in the Foreign Office being flooded with petitions. Indeed, Salisbury's prophecy had come true, and the Sublime Porte demonstrations had even prompted the eighty-year-old Gladstone to intervene in politics one last time, condemn the Turks, and demand vague action from the government (Otte, 2000, p. 7).

[4] For detailed information on the subject, see (Yıldızeli, 2023).

[5] Since Kâmil Pasha, who had been dismissed from the Grand Vizier's office, had attempted to defect to the British and Austrian Embassies and a few days later the Great Powers had decided to send their navies to Dardanelles, the Ottoman Government contacted Russia (BOA. Y.EE., 86/3, 5 C 1313).

Salisbury recognised that he had to deal with two separate but related problems in the Turkish crisis. The first issue the Prime Minister had to resolve was to prevent the alleged massacres of Armenians and to exert pressure on the Ottoman Empire to obtain certain rights in favour of Armenians. Because Salisbury was subjected to intense criticism from the public and the opposition over this issue. Secondly, Salisbury had to deal with protecting British interests in the Near East in case Russia chose to take advantage of the growing chaos in the Ottoman Empire to seize Istanbul and the Straits. In this regard, as in 1878, he was ready to use the fleet to prevent any Russian coup. Unlike 1878, however, Salisbury wanted to force the Sultan to accept reforms and preferably depose him, with the cooperation of Russia and other Great Powers (Grenville, 1964, p. 47). However, the other Great Powers did not share Salisbury's view.

Following the demonstrations in Istanbul, Salisbury called a special Cabinet meeting to counter any hostile Russian actions. If it appeared that Russia, seeking to exploit the panic in Istanbul, was attempting to move towards the Bosphorus, he proposed that the British Ambassador in Istanbul be given the authority, as had been given to Ambassador John Ponsonby in 1834, to call the fleet from the Dardanelles in such a situation (Lowe, 1965, p. 104). Objections were raised by the First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the House of Commons, Arthur Balfour, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, the First Lord of the Admiralty, George Joachim Goschen, and the First Sea Lord, Frederick Richards, and when these objections were upheld in the Cabinet, Salisbury had to reluctantly accept the decision (Jefferson, 1960, p. 50-51).

Another person who was at least as concerned as Salisbury about the decisions Russia might take following the events in Istanbul was Gołuchowski. As a result of the Armenian events, England thought that the consensus reached between England, France, and Russia was an important agreement to eliminate the existing dangers and to get the Sultan to accept the reform plan. There were multiple reasons for Gołuchowski's active role against the Ottoman Empire during this process. The first was his understanding of foreign policy, and the second was Russia's recent influence over the Ottoman Empire. Because the recent events were enough to show that the Russian Tsar was the Sultan's best friend. On the other hand, the news published in the European public opinion about England's complete withdrawal from the Mediterranean, and the speculations that Salisbury's cabinet did not support him, had greatly unsettled Austria, the other member of the Mediterranean Alliance. Thus, due to his discomfort with both the foreign policy pursued by Salisbury and the rapprochement between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, Gołuchowski began initiatives with England (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 116).

Gołuchowski was concerned that if Sultan Abdülhamid II remained stubborn in meeting England's reform demands, the entire Eastern Question would come back to the forefront. Another of Gołuchowski's concerns was that there might be significant changes in the views of the Triple Alliance members regarding the Eastern Question. He believed that Italy and Germany were no longer willing to protect the Ottoman Empire[6]. However, unlike his allies, it was impossible for Gołuchowski to support such a change in opinion, because as long as Austria's interests in the Balkans were not secured, the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire needed to be maintained for as long as possible. Because in the event of a possible collapse, it would be impossible for him to tolerate Russia's presence in the Straits and the Balkans (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 116).

[6] Because in the recent past, German Emperor Wilhelm II had proposed to British Prime Minister Salisbury the idea of partitioning Ottoman territories (Grenville, 1964, p. 41).

Gołuchowski was quite pleased with Salisbury's assurances that no policy changes were being considered in the Near East. However, it was essential for the Sultan to take steps to improve the situation in Macedonia[7]. Because he considered it likely that some troubles would arise in this province in the spring of 1896 (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 181). Therefore, with the support of England's Ottoman policy, Gołuchowski believed that Austria should act in full agreement with England on matters related to the Ottoman Empire (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 169). Salisbury agreed with Gołuchowski and told Deym, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in London, on October 17 that British policy was definitely to support the Ottoman Empire, as its collapse would harm British interests. In fact, contrary to public claims, Salisbury assured Ambassador Deym that there had been no change in policy regarding the preservation of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire (Lowe, 1967, p. 199).

The British public opinion and the opposition, which had been aroused after the demonstration in Istanbul, had put great pressure on the government to take action in favour of the Armenians and the Christians in Istanbul. The British public opinion was keen to corner Sultan Abdülhamid II by processing the biased and anti-Ottoman reports sent from the region with great enthusiasm. As a matter of fact, Russia, which argued that the Armenian incidents in Anatolia and Istanbul were caused by British provocations and support, ignored the claims of the British public opinion and pursued a pro-Ottoman policy. Because Russia did not want a new Bulgaria to be created in Eastern Anatolia (Neilson, 1995, p. 164; Marriot, 1944, p. 148). British Prime Minister Salisbury had also ordered the Mediterranean fleet to anchor off Dardanelles in order to break Russia's influence over the Ottoman Empire and to put pressure on the Sultan. (HC Deb, 11.02.1896, cc. 73-164). Admiring the way British diplomacy saved the day despite overt and covert obstacles, Gołuchowski saw the presence of the British fleet on Lemnos Island as highly valuable for Austria's interests in the region (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 166). Concerned about a possible military operation by Russia on Istanbul at any moment, Gołuchowski wanted the presence of the British fleet in the Mediterranean to continue for a while longer (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 168). Taking the initiative on October 25, Gołuchowski communicated with England.

He stated that the British battleships near Lemnos were of great significance for his country and expressed his desire for matters in the Near East to be handled within the framework of the Mediterranean Alliance and mutual agreement between the two states. Gołuchowski clearly wanted England's future policies towards the Near East to be as suitable for Austria as their past policies had been (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 169).

Following Gołuchowski's communication, the British Prime Minister ordered the fleet to remain off Lemnos for a while longer to exert stronger pressure on the Sultan (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 270). The presence of the British navy off the coast of Izmir provided the ambassadors in Istanbul with the necessary opportunity to make representations to the Sultan. At the call of Austro-Hungarian Ambassador Calice, the representatives of the Great Powers in Istanbul also gathered on November 5, 1895. Following the meeting, the ambassadors made representations to the Ottoman Government regarding the Armenian issue and the state of anarchy in Istanbul, demanding that the state of anarchy be brought to an end as soon as possible. On November 6, Gołuchowski met the Ottoman ambassador in Vienna, alleging that some events in Anatolia and Istanbul were carried out under the orders of government officials and that they had a large amount of evidence related to this. He warned that if the Sublime Porte did not take effective steps without delay to protect Christians and punish

[7] One of the most prominent issues that Gołuchowski focused on during his tenure was the Macedonia question (Steed, 1924, p. 198-201).

those who mistreated them, public opinion in every European country would move against the Sultan (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 348).

Sultan Abdülhamid II was already under significant pressure from European public opinion due to the Armenian events that occurred last winter. Now, with the excitement of the events in Istanbul, the Sultan's reign was openly beginning to be threatened. Indeed, Gołuchowski believed that the only chance to appease the public opinion of the Great Powers and restore calm in the Ottoman Empire was the removal of the Sultan from the throne. Therefore, the current order had to be changed without allowing any outbreak of Muslim fanaticism (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 402, Secret). Otherwise, Christians living in Istanbul would be put in great danger. Unlike Gołuchowski, Salisbury believed that the danger of revolution in Istanbul had passed and that the Sultan had taken control, but that it would likely recur in the coming days. Therefore, European intervention on the Sultan should not be limited. Salisbury was of the opinion that no positive changes would occur in the Ottoman Empire during the Sultan's reign (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 403).

Due to the Sublime Port demonstrations of 1895, the situation of Christians in Istanbul was of great importance to the Great Powers. A naval demonstration in the Straits was the easiest way to intimidate the Sultan and prevent the alleged massacres. However, Russia's potential opposition and the rejection by the British Admiralty were significant obstacles to such an action. Nevertheless, the British fleet was moved from the Syrian coast to Thessaloniki in the hope of influencing the Sultan. At one point, Salisbury even asked the ambassador in Istanbul whether the warships in the Tigris would intimidate the Sultan, to which the ambassador replied that Turkish resistance would be too strong for the warships to overcome (Grenville, 1964, p. 29).

2. Salisbury's Guildhall Speech: Strategic Signalling and Its Diplomatic Repercussions

In early November, Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to Istanbul Heinrich von Calice had sent several warning telegrams to Vienna, stating that revolution and anarchy could be possible outcomes of the turmoil in Istanbul. Gołuchowski cared more about Austria's vital interests than the fate of the Armenians during a crisis in Istanbul. He feared that the anarchy in Istanbul would either encourage Russia to strike against Istanbul or drive British policy into a desperate solo action in favour of the Armenians. Both possibilities would seriously bring the Eastern Question to the forefront. On the other hand, according to the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, as long as the Armenian question retained its local character and did not bring the Eastern Question back to the agenda, there was no problem. Gołuchowski saw no harm in leaving the matter in the hands of England, France, and Russia, as was the case with the Armenian incidents of 1894. However, the moment it seemed likely that the Armenian issue would merge with the general issue of the Eastern Question, he wanted the three powers among the six signatories of the Berlin Treaty (1878) to have the right to participate in the negotiations. In early November, with the major downturn in the stock market, a sense of crisis prevailed in Vienna. Therefore, Gołuchowski decided to abandon his passive stance (Grenville, 1958, p. 351).

Gołuchowski found the opportunity he was looking for when Salisbury gave a similar speech at Guildhall on November 9, 1895, as he had in Parliament on August 15. In his speech, Salisbury called for international cooperation and once again repeated his warnings that the Sultan was ruining his empire. Salisbury announced that the Great Powers had decided and desired to act together to protect the Ottoman Empire for the sake of peace (Grenville, 1964, p. 47). In his Guildhall speech, the Prime Minister threatened the Sultan in the name of Concert of European but was careful to keep the details of the threat vague (Neilson, 1995, p. 168). In

short, Salisbury emphasized in his speech the futility of expecting a split between the Great Powers. (HC Deb, 11.02.1896, cc. 73-164; The Advertiser, 11.11.1895, p. 293).

Salisbury's speech had an unexpected benefit because Austrian Foreign Minister Gołuchowski interpreted its meaning differently. He felt encouraged to take the initiative and propose to the signatories of the Berlin Treaty of 1878 that they should gather a German, Austrian, and Italian fleet in the Levant to support reform demands in Istanbul (Grenville, 1964, p. 47). Citing the panic in Istanbul as a reason, Gołuchowski brought to the government's agenda the proposal to send a fleet consisting of Kaiserin Elisabeth, Tegetthoff, Donau, and Meteor under the command of Rear Admiral Seeman von Trauenwart to the Mediterranean, in addition to the Austrian warship Sebenico cruising off the coast of Izmir (BOA. Y.A.HUS., 339/54, 23 CA 1313; BOA. HR.SYS., 177/1, 21 CA 1313; TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 433).

Salisbury's speech on November 9 also had a great impact on the Sultan. Immediately following the speech, the ambassadors in Istanbul gathered at the residence of the Austrian Ambassador to discuss what measures should be taken in case of unrest in Istanbul (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 355, Very Secret). Perceiving the words at Guildhall as a threat rather than a warning, the Sultan, with the excitement of the recent events in Istanbul, was aware that the Great Powers would undertake certain actions against the Ottoman Empire. The source and nature of the pressure were unclear, but it was known to almost everyone in Istanbul that England would lead it. Therefore, in the evening of November 10, the Sultan sent a letter to the British embassy through First Secretary Tahsin Bey to be forwarded to Salisbury (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 409). In his letter, the Sultan stated the following;

> "*How is it that, in spite of all my messages of friendship and expressions of good will, I have received no reply from Lord Salisbury? I hope for help from England, and I repeat that England must be convinced of my sincere desire to fulfil my promises. The reforms have been approved; there is no reason to suppose that they will not be faithfully carried out. It is in my interest and in the interest of this country that the reforms are introduced, and we naturally have our own interests in mind. But the implementation of the reforms depends on the restoration of order, and they can be put into effect only when quiet is restored. The Armenians have delayed and continue to delay the reforms by their intrigues, provocations and disturbances. As soon as Shakir Pasha arrived in Erzurum, he began to enrol Christian gendarmes. This is proof that I wanted to get down to business immediately. I have had to call up a large number of troops at great sacrifice (60,000) with the ultimate aim of implementing reforms as soon as possible in order to put an end to the disorder, and I think I can complete them directly if order is restored in less than two months. Let England help me by giving good advice to the Armenians, or even by threatening them that they will gain nothing by their present behaviour, and, on the contrary, by telling them that reforms cannot be carried out as long as they continue to agitate and create disorder. Why won't England help me? I cannot understand, does Lord Salisbury not want to help me? In spite of all my sincere endeavours, I still find the English newspapers insulting me. Do they not see that I am sincerely endeavouring to set things right? Can't something be done to stop them? I expect England to be of great help to me.*" (TNA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 409).

Sultan Abdülhamid II was aware of these efforts to dethrone him and believed that Salisbury was behind this movement. On November 14, the Sultan sent another letter to the embassy, stating that he had

never hesitated to accept England's advice and was ready to comply with any suggestions proposed. He also stated that the claims in the British public opinion that Grand Vizier Said Pasha opposed the reform proposals were not true; instead, it was the Sublime Porte that was at fault for refusing to carry out his orders (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 418). The reason the Sultan sent letters to Salisbury a few days apart was the intelligence he received indicating that the Great Powers were in absolute unanimity regarding matters related to the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the Sultan's move here was quite appropriate (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 423, Secret). It was clear from the recent events that England would lead or direct the process with its support in decisions taken against him. Russia and France were already acting together due to their alliance and their stance against the Ottoman Empire was softer compared to England. Italy, on the other hand, was not in a position to lead such pressure among the Powers. Only England, Austria-Hungary, and Germany remained. What disrupted the Sultan's plans was Germany, because unlike England, the strongest reaction after the events in Istanbul came from Germany.

3. Goluchowski's Naval Initiative and the Diverging Responses of the Great Powers

During the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was one of the states most exposed to the coercive diplomacy of the European Great Powers in order to protect their political, economic and military interests in the face of certain developments. Despite the increasing imperialist rivalry since the end of this century, it is observed that the Great Powers largely respected the continuation of harmony among themselves for the sake of the maintenance of European peace, especially in matters concerning the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire, which was in a difficult situation due to the European harmony, tried to prevent greater sanctions by showing a determined stance on the one hand, and on the other hand, it tried to attract one of them to its side in order to disrupt the harmony among the great powers (Ünver, 2020, s. 351). In this framework, the Great Powers, especially Britain, frequently resorted to sea power in order to exert political pressure on the Ottoman Empire and to impose their own interests. Especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, sea power diplomacy occupied an important place among the methods of international intervention against the Ottoman Empire[8].

According to Gołuchowski, there were three important points that needed to be agreed upon. The first was the immediate measures to be taken to protect the foreign embassies and citizens in Istanbul in order to safeguard foreign interests. The most urgent of these measures was to increase the authority of the ambassadors so they could act quickly in case of anarchy. In case the Ottoman Government failed to maintain order, the ambassadors had to act together to call ships to Istanbul to protect European interests. Seeing that the Powers were acting jointly, the Sultan would have no choice but to allow the passage of the ships through the Dardanelles. The second point was to clearly demonstrate Concert of Europe, and finally, the third was that in the event of a serious revolution in Istanbul, the Great Powers should establish a fleet outside the Dardanelles and use force if the Sultan continued to refuse to listen to reason. The key point here was that if the use of foreign warships became necessary, individual interests had to be set aside, and each state should be represented by a certain number of ships. Otherwise, the superiority of British ships in the Mediterranean could prompt Russia to engage in an even more significant show of force in the Black Sea (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 470; BOA. HR.SYS., 216/36, 26 CA 1313; BOA. Y.PRK.EŞA., 23/45, 26 C 1313). In short,

[8] For detailed information on the use of Naval Power as a means of pressure in international relations and its place in diplomacy, see (Cable, 1971; Bull, 1976). For two examples of the pressure exerted by the Great Powers on the Ottoman Empire through their warships, see (Yavuz, 2020).

Goluschowski's plan is a classic example of gunboat diplomacy, which Cable (1971) defines as 'obtaining political concessions through limited naval power'.

According to the London Treaty of 1841 and the Paris Treaty of 1856, the straits were closed to the passage of warships during peacetime. However, Gołuchowski argued that when Europe's interests were threatened, the provisions of the existing treaties should be suspended for the sake of peace to allow passage through the Dardanelles. Indeed, as was the case with important ports like Izmir or Beirut, during uprisings anywhere along the Ottoman coast of the Mediterranean, foreign states could send warships to these areas to protect their citizens. Therefore, it was utterly nonsensical that Istanbul was not accessible to foreign fleets. In similar states of emergency, there should be an exception for Istanbul as well. Additionally, in a situation where the events necessitated the gathering of a united naval force in the waters of the Straits, the ambassadors in Istanbul should be authorized to call these ships. It was the ambassadors' responsibility to make on-the-spot decisions about the necessity and appropriateness of such an action, and they should not waste time seeking instructions from their governments (BOA. Y.A.HUS., 340/35, 2 C 1313). Additionally, Gołuchowski argued that warships should only be sent by the states that signed the Berlin Treaty of 1878, and smaller states like Greece should not send any ships (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 500). Indeed, Italy advised the Athens Government that Greece should not take any action to participate in a naval show of force (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 447).

The presence of a united force representing Europe's major navies could provoke sensitivities among Muslims and hasten the disaster they were trying to prevent. According to Gołuchowski, to eliminate this risk, foreign fleets should not gather at a single anchorage; instead, they should be stationed separately at suitable points that could be reached by telegraph from Istanbul. Another problem here was the order of precedence among the officers in supreme command of the ships specially assigned to protect Istanbul. Indeed, to maintain Concert of European, mutual jealousies and rivalries should not lead to friction among the commanders (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 467).

Following Gołuchowski's call, the Powers began to discuss the feasibility of the plan. German Ambassador Baron Saurma, noting that the situation had worsened since Kâmil Pasha's dismissal from the Grand Vizierate, sent a telegram to his government proposing the gathering of a united fleet at the entrance of the Dardanelles, fearing a possible epidemic in Istanbul (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 359). German Foreign Minister Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein believed that sending such a large naval force to the Mediterranean would have a beneficial effect in suppressing the panic atmosphere in Istanbul and preventing its spread locally (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 354, Secret). Therefore, he was ready to accept Gołuchowski's proposal for joint action by the fleets in principle. The German warship Moltke off the coast of Izmir could be used for this action, but it would take three to four weeks for a second ship to be ready in Kiel (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 449; NA, FO, 424/184, No. 503). However, according to Marschall, it was inevitable that this proposal would fail in practice due to opposition from Russia, as usual supported by France (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 573).

In fact, just a few months ago, German Emperor Wilhelm II had told British Military Attaché Colonel Leopold Swaine in Berlin that the events in Istanbul were heading towards a crisis, and that Salisbury and the signatories of the Berlin Treaty needed to decide what they would do in the event of a palace revolution. The Kaizer later advised Salisbury to use force against the Sultan. According to the Kaiser, when the news of the British fleet entering the Dardanelles reached Istanbul, the Sultan would be on his knees and would accept the terms without objection (Grenville, 1964, p. 41). Friedrich von Holstein, the most influential figure in the

German Foreign Ministry, doubted whether Russia's entry into the Mediterranean would be a disaster for Germany. Therefore, throughout November, Marschall advised exerting pressure on Vienna to stay away from Salisbury's plans to force the Straits. Because unless Salisbury was absolutely determined, there was a serious danger that England would start a war in the Near East and then decide to withdraw, leaving Austria to face Russia alone. As the Kaiser told Colonel Swaine, what Germany wanted was for England to take the initiative and force the Straits on its own (Lowe, 1965, p. 105).

Salisbury welcomed Gołuchowski's initiative. He hoped that such a proposal, which would be met with great skepticism if made by him, would be more easily accepted if it came from Vienna, and thus he accepted it sincerely. The threat he left vague in his speech at Guildhall was precisely this. However, Salisbury was ready to approve the plan on the condition that each state be represented by an equal number of ships in front of the Dardanelles, that the fleets not be grouped according to alliances between countries, and that Concert of Europe be taken into account (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 526, Confidential).

In fact, Germany accepted Gołuchowski's plan to avoid offending its ally Austria-Hungary. According to Germany, since no improvement was observed in any region of the Ottoman Empire, resorting to this measure might also be insufficient (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 468). Indeed, Marschall warned the Ottoman envoy in Berlin that the Great Powers were losing patience due to the situation in Anatolia and Istanbul, and that the Turkish Government should be prepared for a joint naval demonstration. However, considering the friendship between the Sultan and Wilhelm II, Germany would not participate in this demonstration but advised taking energetic and urgent steps to restore calm both in the provinces and the capital before it was too late (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 430, Secret). Immediately following Marschall's warnings, the Ottoman Government reached out to Austria, which had recently taken a negative stance towards it. The Ottoman Ambassador at Vienna, Galib Bey, met with Count Gołuchowski and inquired about the reason behind the naval mobilization in the Mediterranean. Gołuchowski stated that the recent developments in Anatolia caused such a mobilisation and that the great powers resorted to this measure to protect their subjects living in various parts of the Ottoman Empire, especially in Istanbul (BOA. HR.SYS., 219/18, 26 CA 1313; BOA. HR.SYS. 219/19, 27 CA 1313). After this discussion, the Ottoman Government continued its efforts before Austria, but failed to achieve any results (BOA. Y.PRK.TKM., 36/48, 19 C 1313).

Aware of the contents of Baron von Marschall's meeting with the Turkish envoy, England did not believe that Marschall could have used such language with Ottoman Charge d'Affaires Rıfat Bey (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 575 Confidential). In response, it secretly communicated the intelligence it had gathered regarding Germany's stance on the naval demonstration to Count Gołuchowski (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 480, Secret). Indeed, shortly thereafter, Germany informed Vienna that they could not participate in the plan to force the Straits, citing the lack of suitable ships for the task. Deeply disappointed by Germany's response, Gołuchowski saw the reason given by Germany as an excuse to avoid participating in international action against the Sultan (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 495, Secret).

Italy responded positively to Gołuchowski's proposal and sent a fleet of six ships off the coast of Izmir under the command of Admiral Accinni (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 483). Italian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi and Foreign Minister Alberto Blanc had been urging Gołuchowski for months to support the British view on Armenian issues, thereby distancing him from Russia and France. Crispi was ready to

support any action that England deemed necessary. He didn't care about the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and for Italy, the important thing was that England did not cooperate with Russia and France at that critical moment. Otherwise, Russia's capture of Istanbul could prevent Italy from even getting Tripoli (Lowe, 1965, p. 102). However, the Minister of Marine, Admiral Morin, informed England that the movement of part of the Italian fleet to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Dardanelles had no political significance beyond the natural desire of the Italian Government to act with other powers to protect its subjects, given the chaotic situation in Istanbul (TNA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 483).

France's stance on this matter was to be determined by Russia's attitude towards the plan. However, the clause granting ambassadors in Istanbul the authority to call fleets from the Dardanelles without consulting their governments required mature consideration (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 523). Therefore, it was more appropriate for this clause to remain suspended for a while. France, desiring the continuation of joint actions by the ambassadors in Istanbul, argued that the only important point was to maintain concert among the ambassadors and avoid any situation that would cause excitement (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 522).

The unrest in Syria caused France to prioritize this region over the Dardanelles. Consequently, to protect its political and economic interests in Syria, France decided to send warships to the Eastern Mediterranean. Following the French Government's decision to send a warship to the Syrian coast, Salisbury asked the British Chargé d'Affaires, Herbert, to contact the Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet and request that one of his ships be sent to Alexandria. Meanwhile, the British Treasury informed Salisbury that Russia had authorized a significant additional credit to expedite the mobilization of its Mediterranean and Black Sea fleets. During this time, the two Russian ships Rurik and Dimitri Donskoi had already left Kronstadt and set sail for the Mediterranean (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 450). The United States also sent the cruiser San Francisco to the Syrian coast, while the Commander of the British Mediterranean Fleet, Seymour, dispatched the Arethusa to the coast of Alexandria (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 470).

4. The British Admiralty's Strategic Rejection: Operational Constraints and Internal Dissent

The First Lord of the Admiralty, Goschen, was an anti-Russian politician with considerable knowledge and political experience in European affairs. Having previously been at the helm of the Admiralty, Goschen had first-hand experience with the complexities of the Eastern Question, having been sent to Istanbul as an extraordinary envoy on a special mission between 1880-1881. During this second term at the Admiralty, he was largely preoccupied with controlling the rapid growth of the French and Russian navies and their potential consolidation in the Mediterranean. According to Goschen, any possible operation by England on the Straits would certainly ensure this consolidation. Therefore, he did not share Salisbury's optimistic assessment of the Navy's ability to advance through the Dardanelles. Because in a report presented to Salisbury on March 18, 1892, regarding a similar plan, the Admiralty stated that the Mediterranean fleet had to destroy the French fleet stationed in Toulon before attempting to force the Straits, and even if this was achieved, British warships could only enter the Straits if the coastal Turkish batteries were in the hands of the British or their allies (Grenville, 1964, p. 26). Because to destroy the new cannons that the Sultan placed in the Dardanelles to prevent a possible attack from the Mediterranean, a simultaneous attack by an army of at least 10,000 men was required. The Admiralty saw the destruction of these cannons as a fundamental prerequisite for any attempt to force the Straits (Marder, 1940, p. 159). This meant that, as Salisbury envisioned, England would not be able to act in time to prevent the Russians from capturing Istanbul. For these reasons, the danger of any force dispatched to Istanbul encountering a Russian fleet in front and a French

fleet behind was clouding Goschen's mind. Additionally, while the Sultan was strengthening the defences of the Dardanelles, he neglected those around the Bosphorus, making it much more dangerous to steam through the Dardanelles[9]. Moreover, since the Sultan had strengthened the defences of the Dardanelles while neglecting those around the Bosphorus, it was now much more dangerous to steam through the Dardanelles. Because with this measure, the Sultan was clearly seeing the English as a threat rather than the Russians (Kennedy, 1981, p. 106).

On November 12, 1895, the Naval Intelligence Directorate (DNI) instructed Colonel Chermside, the British Military Attaché in Istanbul, to prepare an urgent report on the situation of the straits. Colonel Chermside submitted his strictly confidential report to the Admiralty on November 21, regarding the number of soldiers the Ottoman Empire could send to reinforce the Dardanelles within one to six weeks (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 558, Very Confidential).

According to the report, these garrisons normally consisted of three fortress artillery regiments of four, four and two battalions respectively, and a battalion or half battalion of infantry at Gallipoli. Four battalion regiments were stationed in the forts and batteries of the European and Asiatic coastal defences respectively, and two battalion regiments in the Boulair lines. The regiments had recently been reinforced with a total of 500 to 600 artillery pieces. The following estimates were based on rather complex data, but represent a reasonable average probability of Turkish reinforcements by different routes. Chermside's report assumes that the garrison of the Yıldız Palace and its environs would remain untouched. The armies considered ready to provide reinforcements were the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th armies.

Table 1: If unrestricted sea communication outside the Dardanelles remains available for Turkey, she could in one week concentrate in the Straits

	Battalions	**Number of Men**	**Squadrons**	**Field Guns**
One week	38	20.000	20	180

Reference: TNA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 558, Strictly Confidential.

Table 2: If sea communication outside the Dardanelles was not available, Turkey could concentrate on the shores of the Straits and in the Gallipoli Peninsula

Weeks	**Battalions**	**Number of Infantry**	**Squadrons**	**Field Guns**	**Total in round Numbers**
1	18	9.000 to 10.000	20	84	15.000
2	62	37.200	30	180	45.000
3	145	87.000	35	240	97.000
6	228	160.000 to 200.000	40	360	175.000 to 215.000

Reference: TNA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 558, Strictly Confidential.

[9] For a detailed evaluation on the subject, see (Yıldız, 2019).

According to Chermside's report, this concentration would consist of 48 battalions of Regulars, 180 battalions of Reserve, 8 cavalry regiments of Regulars, and 60 field, mountain, and horse batteries. It was assumed that no Reserve battalion would be mobilized within seven days; during this period, Reserve battalions were indeed mobilized on various occasions from 1885 to 1895. If the Turkish forces in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Armies were held due to the planned actions of Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Russia, the numbers of these concentrations would be significantly affected. Therefore, it is very clear that the Ottomans could mobilize very large field forces on both sides of the Straits in a short time and that these forces would not be affected by the lack of transportation and supply services as in concentrations away from the sea (TNA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 558, Strictly Confidential).

In his report, Chermside noted that an attempt by Russia to capture the Straits could not be prevented by British efforts alone. The ongoing unrest in the Ottoman Empire carried the risk of creating an uprising that might lead Russia to decide to act unilaterally against the Ottomans.

Following this report, Goschen and several other members of the cabinet avoided taking the risk of forcing the Straits alone; this saved Salisbury and his Navy from a 19th century version of a Dardanelles Operation (Wilson, 1987, p. 16-17). Under these circumstances, the likelihood of action in the Straits seemed impossible. Salisbury's solution to this problem was an interesting bluff, such as landing troops in Jeddah and creating trouble in Arabia. This initiative had the dual advantage of not alarming the Russians but likely influencing the Sultan (Lowe, 1965, p. 101).

There was no Turkish military establishment that ships could approach and no Turkish town close enough to anchor at, except for a small village. Therefore, Goschen doubted whether Gołuchowski's naval demonstration and the demand to force the Straits would have the desired effect. Lord Goschen proposed to Salisbury that the largest ship available be sent to the Persian Gulf, but this bluff was unlikely to scare the Sultan (Bray, 2015, p. 63).

Salisbury strongly opposed the Admiralty's views. In the cabinet, he argued forcefully that England should defend Istanbul and stand behind its traditional diplomacy. He reminded the cabinet members, *"The protection of Istanbul from Russian occupation has been the cornerstone of this country's policy for at least forty years and, to some extent, for the forty years before that"*. However, in the cabinet meeting, Salisbury faced strong opposition from Chamberlain, Balfour, the Secretary of State for India Lord George Hamilton, and even the Chancellor of the Exchequer Hicks Beach. In fact, the First Sea Lord Frederick Richards categorically rejected any plan to force the Straits during the meeting and then left the room. Against this powerful combination, Salisbury had to yield to his colleagues. In short, the cabinet was not prepared to go to war with Russia for Istanbul. As a result, the cabinet advised Salisbury to remain practically inactive and to pursue a bluff policy against the Sultan (Grenville, 1964, p. 50-53). Salisbury's demand for a Dardanelles operation was his first real defeat on foreign policy in the cabinet, and after this event, his authority within the cabinet gradually weakened (Otte, 2000, p. 8).

Salisbury then consulted Arthur James Balfour, the First Lord of the Treasury and leader of the House of Commons, whose knowledge of public sentiment was superior to his own. After his meeting with Balfour, Salisbury concluded that it would be impossible to find a parliamentary majority to support a war policy to defend the Ottoman Empire. If Russia invaded Armenia, Britain alone could not prevent it. Balfour's speech, in which he warned the Turks that neither Britain nor any other nation would make great sacrifices

for a cause they did not fervently believe in, expressed the sentiments of his cabinet colleagues (Grenville, 1958, p. 360).

Salisbury ignored the warning of his private secretary, Schomberg McDonnell, who visited Istanbul in 1894 and reported that the fortifications at the Dardanelles were *"strong enough to stop anything that might come in the future"* (Steele, 2006, p. 70). Salisbury went ahead and presented the plan to the Cabinet. The Fleet was not sent, and years later, Admiral Custance looked back and remarked that Richards had prevented Salisbury from making a fool of himself, considering it one of his most important actions. It was a great fortune that Richards stopped this dangerous operation because Seymour and May (the chief of staff), if they had received the order to advance, planned to attack the forts in the Dardanelles and proceed slowly (the mistake made during the World War) instead of advancing straight ahead, which was the only plan that had a chance of success according to the best naval opinion (Marder, 1940, p. 245). Indeed, the fact that Salisbury had to accept objections from the Admiralty confirms Bull's (1976) thesis of *"the political limits of naval power"*.

Sultan Abdülhamid II, who pursued a delicate balancing policy between the Great Powers from the moment he ascended to the throne[10], experienced on this occasion what a strategic step it was to strengthen the Dardanelles with German Krupp cannons instead of fortifying the Black Sea entrance of the Bosphorus. Because the Sultan was aware that the main danger would come from the Mediterranean and especially from England. Accordingly, he attached special importance to the fortification of the Dardanelles by utilising the technical and military support of Germany.

5. Russian Resistance and the Collapse of the Joint Naval Demonstration

The naval demonstration off the Dardanelles and the plan to force the Straits were kept secret by Gołuchowski. Gołuchowski was considering presenting the plan to the Russian Government after securing the full support of Italy, France, England, and Germany. He believed that after securing the support of the said powers, any objections from Russia could be precluded. However, the disclosure of this secret draft to the Rome Telegraph Agency disrupted Gołuchowski's entire plan. Ultimately, the most significant objection came from the Russian Foreign Minister, Prince Aleksey Lobanov, after the plan was revealed. For Lobanov, mentioning a European fleet in the Straits was utterly cursed, and there was no situation in the Near East that would justify the Great Powers resorting to such a measure (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 496, Secret). As a matter of fact, Lobanov had assured the Ottoman Empire that Russia would in no way participate in the naval demonstration (BOA. Y.A.HUS., 340/120, 11 C 1313).

Lobanov, who found Gołuchowski's plan meaningless, had no objection to the fleets of the great powers cruising in the Mediterranean, but he considered a demonstration near the Dardanelles extremely objectionable. Such an initiative would serve no purpose other than to cause unnecessary anxiety in Istanbul and weaken the Sultan's authority, thereby encouraging the Armenians further (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 497). Moreover, forcing the Dardanelles would also be a violation of international treaties, so Lobanov was absolutely opposed to this idea. The British Ambassador to Vienna, Monson, reported to Salisbury in a secret telegram on November 18 that Russia opposed all ideas regarding the passage of foreign warships through the Dardanelles (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 477). The Russian Government even instructed Ambassador

[10] For detailed information on the subject, see (Yasamee, 2018).

Nelidov to no longer participate in discussions with ambassadors in Istanbul. Gołuchowski openly expressed his disappointment to Monson about Russia's rejection of the proposal for the passage of warships through the Dardanelles (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 496).

Prince Lobanov found Gołuchowski's plan to end the disturbances in Anatolia and pressure the Sultan pointless. Because in such an environment where the Sultan had begun to restore peace and order in his own territories, a joint naval demonstration by the powers would only exacerbate the crisis. Instead of such a measure, time should be given to the Sultan so that his moral authority is not undermined. Threats of intervention would only undermine this authority, thereby thwarting the intended purpose of the Powers. Ultimately, the Sultan accepted all the demands of the great powers, and it was necessary to give sufficient time to allow the excitement throughout the country to subside and to patiently await the results of the Sultan's efforts to pacify the troubled regions. In addition, Prince Lobanov clearly stated to the British Chargé d'Affaires William Edward Goschen that the disturbances in the Ottoman Empire were caused by the instigation of an external power for its own political interests, and that this power was Britain, and blamed Whitehall for what happened (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 570, Confidential).

Lobanov's stance had disrupted not only Gołuchowski's but also Salisbury's plans. Unable to secure the cabinet's support for the occupation of the Straits, Salisbury hoped to gain Russia's support to appease British public opinion and at least exert pressure on the Sultan. Following Lobanov's strong opposition, Ambassador Goschen in St. Petersburg held a private meeting with Lobanov as per Salisbury's instructions. Goschen had to inform Lobanov that the report claiming fourteen British ships were sent to reinforce the British Fleet in the Mediterranean was completely false and that only two second-class cruisers were sent to replace ships moved elsewhere. Prince Lobanov expressed his general discomfort with the suspiciously large size of the British fleet in the Mediterranean and mentioned that

Russia had only three or four small ships in that area. He continued by stating that the warships Rurik and Dmitri Donskoi, which departed from Kronstadt on November 10, would visit Portsmouth and Brest before heading to Algeria (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 571). With this move, Lobanov aimed to prevent any naval operations that his ally France and England might undertake towards the Straits.

The course of events unfolded exactly as Marschall had claimed. Gołuchowski's proposals for joint action fell through due to Russia's opposition (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 573). Ultimately, Russia informed the relevant states that it would not send any more ships to the region, apart from the three small Russian warships stationed in Piraeus, Galos, and Thessaloniki, and that the warship in Thessaloniki would be transferred to Piraeus (BOA. Y.A.HUS., 340/120, 3 C 1313). Gołuchowski, who suffered a significant loss of prestige due to Lobanov's objection, argued that the great powers should stand firm, not back down, and restrict the Sultan's powers, even if it meant dethroning him (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 572, Most Confidential). Because if they backed down, this new development would be portrayed as a success for the Sultan and would create great pressure from European public opinion on their governments. Indeed, Salisbury shared the same view with Gołuchowski, and if the plan were cancelled, the Powers would be accepting defeat in the face of the Sultan (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 645, Confidential). Additionally, a complete retreat by the Great Powers on this matter would also drive the Christians living in the Ottoman Empire to despair (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 583). As a result, the Powers would not only be ridiculed but would also prove to the Sultan that the much-touted Concert of European among the great states did not exist (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 588). Count

Gołuchowski informed the Russian Ambassador in Vienna of all this and requested that St. Petersburg reconsider the proposal (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 596).

Supported by Prince Lobanov's objection to Gołuchowski's plan, the Sultan sought assistance from Germany to have the proposal withdrawn. He informed the German officials that he was ready to guarantee order, and the safety of life and property in Istanbul. However, Germany categorically rejected the Sultan's request and stated that the best chance to restore order was to comply with the demands put forward unanimously by the great powers. In this regard, Baron von Marschall, who met with the British Ambassador to Berlin, Gosselin, mentioned that Russia had recently asked the German Government in absolute secrecy whether it would be appropriate to withdraw Gołuchowski's demands, but they had refused to do so and stated that Russia would also participate in the joint action of the other powers (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 603).

Germany had adopted a hostile attitude towards the Ottoman Empire and the Sultan since the recent Armenian events. In fact, Germany's Ambassador to Istanbul, Saurma, used very harsh language towards the Sultan due to the Armenian events, openly stating that the excesses in Anatolia should be ended and that if he wanted to retain his throne, he should follow the advice of the six powers (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 574). Alarmed by the ambassador's outburst, the Sultan invited Baron Saurma to Yıldız, but the ambassador declined the invitation, citing that his acceptance alone would create the impression that Germany was not in full agreement with the other Powers. Saurma later sent the following message containing very harsh words from the German Emperor to the Sultan through Kazım Bey:

> *"The state of anarchy prevailing throughout the empire has caused the powers (the Great Powers) to lose all confidence and to assemble a strong fleet in Turkish waters to be ready for any eventuality. The German Emperor had refrained from joining this action out of a friendly and personal feeling towards Your Majesty. However, the Sultan should be under no illusion about this matter. Germany is in complete agreement with Europe on the Eastern question, and the emperor wished to warn Your Majesty that there is a great danger of being deposed if a policy line that would restore Europe's confidence is not adopted. Your Majesty could take this as a final warning, and the emperor trusted that he would heed it."*

The emperor's message was the strongest language ever used against Sultan Abdülhamid II. As a result, the message had such an impact at the Palace that Kazım Bey had to be placed under surveillance after delivering it to the Sultan. In fact, the First Secretary of the Palace, Tahsin Bey, was sent to the German Embassy that night with Foreign Minister Tevfik Pasha to ask whether the language used by the German Emperor was correct. Baron Saurma informed the visitors that the message had been conveyed correctly and faithfully by Kazım Bey, and he praised Kazım Bey for acting with honor and courage. Disturbed by the message, the Sultan sought Baron Saurma's advice, and the ambassador advised the Sultan to consult not just one ambassador, but all the ambassadors (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 607, Very Confidential).

Salisbury was very pleased with the language used by Baron Saurma towards the Sultan and believed it was a very important step in restoring order (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 532). Realizing that the Sultan was increasingly cornered, Salisbury saw this as an opportunity and made unofficial statements

about being ready to assist the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, after turning to Germany, the Sultan once again turned to England and sent the following message to Salisbury:

> "*I am very grateful for Salisbury's message about the help he is prepared to give me. However, I have seen a summary of Lord Salisbury's speech in which he said: "I have little confidence that the promised reforms will be implemented." This statement really upset me, because the implementation of the reforms is a matter for me to decide, and I also want to implement them as soon as possible. I have told my Ministers this many times before. As such, the only reason Lord Salisbury would cast doubt on my good intentions in this way must be the machinations of some of the people present here, otherwise false statements would have been made that would have led to such a view. The most comprehensive measures have been and are being taken to restore order and restore peace. But I repeat, I will carry out the reforms. This is my sincere determination, and I pledge my word of honour. I also request the Embassy to advise the Armenians and instruct their Consuls to advise them in the strongest possible terms to be satisfied with the reforms and to keep quiet, as Lord Salisbury said in his speech. And they should be told that the reforms cannot be carried out if they create unrest.*" (TNA, FO, 424/184, Inclosure in No. 612).

Count Gołuchowski's greatest regret during the process was the inability to take measures to keep the issue secret, leading to its exposure to the public. This situation resulted in misrepresenting some of the plan's objectives to the European public and significantly damaging the process. Consequently, Count Gołuchowski acknowledged that there was now a tendency in the European press to exaggerate both the objectives and actions, producing the most harmful effects. He also recognized that some governments would exploit this situation for their own purposes, resulting in the loss of the advantages that quieter diplomacy would provide (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 641, Confidential).

Due to the open opposition from Russia and the covert opposition from Germany, Gołuchowski had to change his mind. Austrian government officials believed that, as in every matter, Count Gołuchowski had acted too hastily in his naval demonstration plans. Consequently, Gołuchowski faced heavy criticism within the government for the foreign policy he pursued (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 678). Feeling deceived by Salisbury, Gołuchowski informed England on December 6th that decisions should not be rushed to avoid damaging Concert of Europe and that actions resembling coercion against the Sultan should not be taken. Gołuchowski believed that further warnings to the Sultan would increase violent actions against the Armenians (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 672, Secret). In such a scenario, the intervention of the great powers would inevitably lead to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Considering that none of the great powers would want such a scenario under the current conditions, Gołuchowski realized that a coercive action would be like "*throwing fire on powder*," reigniting the entire Eastern question. The only thing to do was to wait patiently and see what the Sultan would do (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 753, Most Confidential).

The Great Powers were all in agreement on the value of Concert of European, but in this recent crisis, they realized that this concert was not strong enough to withstand the tension of any other proposal for united and strong action involving the use of force (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 817, Most Confidential). This was because Gołuchowski's proposal to call a limited number of warships to the Straits was

absolutely rejected by Russia (TNA, FO, 424/184, No. 871, Secret). Therefore, according to Austria, despite the dire situation in Anatolia on behalf of Christians and Armenians, there was nothing to do but give the Sultan the opportunity to do what he had committed to and continue representations (TNA, FO, 424/186, No. 1). Ultimately, from January 1896 onwards, the Austrian fleet began to withdraw definitively from the Levant, and it stationed itself in Syra (TNA, FO, 424/186, No. 91). On January 23, Gołuchowski informed Monson that the Austrian fleet had now definitively left the Levant, noting that there was no longer any reason for their presence there, especially considering that the majority of the British Mediterranean Fleet had returned to Malta (TNA, FO, 424/186, No. 118).

The shelving of the naval demonstration and the plan to occupy the Straits was a complete fiasco for Salisbury as well. When Salisbury first took office, he inherited from former Prime Minister Rosebery the initiative to help the Armenians. He also tried to align this policy with the longstanding British goal of keeping Russia out of Istanbul. To achieve both of these tasks, he saw it as essential for the British fleet to pass through the Straits. However, the Treasury and the Admiralty were convinced that England could no longer challenge the advanced defences in the straits, the expectations of the Russian fleet in front, and the French fleet behind. Thus, the assumption that the indisputable British naval power for fifty years would guarantee British interests in the Straits had ended with this initiative (Pearce and Stewart, 2002, p. 168).

Conclusion

The failure of Count Gołuchowski's plan to occupy the Straits in 1895 reveals the inherent limitations of coercive diplomacy in the face of determined resistance from both regional powers and within the ranks of the supposed allies. While Gołuchowski envisioned a unified European naval demonstration as a means to contain the Armenian unrest and constrain the Ottoman Sultan, the reality of fragmented European interests, Ottoman military preparedness, and Russian intransigence rendered the initiative unworkable. The case underscores the inability of the Concert of Europe to act collectively in a moment of crisis, despite rhetorical commitments to peace and stability in the Near East.

This study contributes to the existing historiography by integrating Austro-Hungarian, British, and Ottoman archival documents to construct a multi-layered diplomatic narrative. Unlike prior works that narrowly attribute the collapse of the plan to Russian opposition, the findings here demonstrate that the British Admiralty's technical objections, the lack of consensus within Salisbury's cabinet, and the defensive fortification of the Dardanelles by the Ottoman Empire all played equally critical roles. The analysis also highlights that Gołuchowski's overreliance on Britain's support and misreading of German neutrality further weakened the initiative's viability.

In broader terms, the failure of the plan marked the beginning of a reorientation in Austro-Hungarian foreign policy. Gołuchowski's subsequent rapprochement with Russia represented a subtle yet pivotal shift in the diplomatic geometry of Europe. It weakened the Mediterranean Agreements and foreshadowed the eventual unraveling of Vienna's strategic position in the Balkans. The loss of confidence among the Great Powers in collective action not only exposed the fragility of the Concert system but also contributed to the decentralization of European diplomacy in the face of Ottoman crises.

Undoubtedly, there were two winners in the failure of Gołuchowski's plan. The first was Russia, which ensured the continuation of the status quo and eliminated the British threat over the Straits and İstanbul, and the other was Sultan Abdülhamid II. As claimed by Gołuchowski and Salisbury, the Sultan may have been a repressive, authoritarian ruler, but his twenty-year reign had adapted Eastern despotism to the modern world, achieving more than Salisbury had realized. Recently, the fortifications made to defend the Dardanelles, along with the coastal batteries and minefields designed to keep the Royal Navy out, had shattered the perception that the Straits could be easily passed through.

Ultimately, the 1895 Straits crisis demonstrated that limited naval demonstrations absent unified political will and confronted with resolute and fortified opposition were ineffective as instruments of coercion. This case thus serves as a cautionary example of the political limits of naval power, a lesson with enduring relevance in the study of gunboat diplomacy and imperial strategy.

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