

THE BALKAN IMBROGLIO: THE DIPLOMATIC, MILITARY, AND POLITICAL
ORIGINS OF THE MACEDONIAN CAMPAIGN OF WORLD WAR I

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The Macedonian Campaign of World War I (October 1915-November 1918) traditionally remains one of the understudied theatres of the historiography of the conflict. Despite its vital importance in the outcome of the war, it is still considered as a mere sideshow compared to the Western Front and the Gallipoli Campaign. This dissertation presents a much-needed re-evaluation of the Macedonian Campaign's diplomatic and political origins within the war's early context. In doing so, this study first concentrates on a *longue durée* perspective and assesses the main historical events in the Balkans and Central Europe from the end of the French Revolution to World War I. In a perspective running throughout the entire nineteenth century, this dissertation integrates the importance of nascent nationalism in the Balkans and examine the Austro-Hungarian Empire's steady decline and subsequent diplomatic realignment toward the Balkans. Similarly, this work depicts the intense power struggle in Southeastern Europe between some of this story's main protagonists, namely the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman Empires. This dissertation also evaluates the rise of new regional powers such as Bulgaria and Serbia and examines their connection to the European balance of power and general diplomatic equilibrium. In the first half of this dissertation, I present an overview of some of the most crucial episodes that paved the way to the onset of World War I and the inception of the Macedonian Campaign: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, the Congress of Berlin of 1878, The Bosnian Crisis of 1908-1909, the Italo-Ottoman War of 1911-1912, and the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. In the second part of this study, the main thread of the analysis is the crucial Anglo-French relations that took place between the end of the nineteenth century and World War I. This study describes the importance of Anglo-French relations regarding the Macedonian Campaign's inception and highlights the fragile nature

of the Entente Cordiale and some of the fundamental issues that affected the Anglo-French conduct of military operations on the Western Front as well as in the Balkans. Therefore, this study underlines why the Macedonian Campaign, suffered so much from a lack of care, preparation, and a much-needed strategic insight and leadership that could have decisively influenced the campaign and potentially have altered the outcome of an eventually successful Allied endeavor in the Balkans.

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LIST OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

AAO	Armées Alliées d'Orient
AO	Armée d'Orient (French Eastern Army, on the Balkan Front)
AOK	Armeoberkommando (Austro-Hungarian Army High Command)
AEF	American Expeditionary Force
AFGG	Les armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre (World War I French Official History)
AN	Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine
ANZACS	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BSF	British Salonika Force
CA	Corps d'armée (French Army Corps)
CEO	Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient (French Expeditionary Corps in the East, based at Gallipoli)
CIC	Commander-in-chief
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CUP	Committee for Unity and Progress
CSG	Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre (French Superior War Council)
DI	Division d'infanterie (French Infantry Division)
EMA	État-Major de l'Armée (French Army General Staff)
EMI	École militaire d'infanterie, Saint-Maixent (French Army Infantry School)
GAE	Groupe d'armées de l'Est (French Eastern Army Group, on the Western Front)
GAN	Groupe d'Armées du Nord (French Northern Army Group on the Western Front)
GHQ	General Headquarters (British Army headquarters)
GQG	Grand Quartier Général (French Army headquarters, Chantilly)

GPN	Groupe Provisoire du Nord. (Provisional Northern Army Group, later became GAN)
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
KA	Kriegsarchiv, War Ministry Archives, Vienna
LHCMA	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, London
MAE	Ministère des affaires étrangères, Centre des Archives diplomatiques, La Courneuve
MP	Member of Parliament
NARA	The National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
OHL	Oberste Heeresleitung (German Army Supreme Command)
OSA	Österreichischen Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna
RCA	Régiment de Chasseurs Alpains (French Alpine Chasseurs)
RCAC	Régiment de Chasseurs à cheval (French Chasseurs Cavalry Regiment)
RI	Régiment d'Infanterie (French Infantry regiment)
SHD	Service historique de la défense, Château de Vincennes
SWC	Supreme War Council, Versailles
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
TOE	Théâtres d'opérations extérieures (French External Operations Theaters)

INTRODUCTION

Je ne pus m'empêcher de dire, [...] qu'après avoir vu de près ce qu'étaient les dirigeants d'une coalition, j'admirais beaucoup moins Napoléon.

[I could not stop myself to say, ... that after having seen up close the leaders of a coalition, I much less admired Napoleon.]

General Maurice Sarrail.

Within World War I's historiography, the controversial origins of the Macedonian Campaign and its strategic significance have largely been understudied and generally misunderstood. Indeed, this situation is not entirely surprising, as the defeat of Imperial Germany and the Allied victory in World War I were both achieved on the Western Front. Within the field of First World War Studies, it is not that the Macedonian Campaign does not matter, but that in relation to the Western Front, it matters very little. However, it must be noted that just like the Western Front, the Macedonian Campaign truly epitomizes coalition warfare and constitutes an appropriate example of difficult collaboration at diplomatic and military levels for both the Central Powers and the Entente.¹ Thus it is not shocking that during the Salonica Expedition, the Anglo-French's troublesome experience prompted Roy Prete to write that "Seldom has a coalition functioned so poorly. The two governments, both weak and divided, and the two commands at loggerheads with their governments over strategy, worked at cross purposes in a confused series of ad hoc political and military consultations."² Among the Central Powers, Germany equally suffered serious issues in its relations with Bulgaria. Frustrations between Berlin and Sofia stemmed from the gap between their divergent strategic objectives for the region. In Fall 1915,

¹ Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, eds., *Entangling Alliances: Coalition Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Canberra: Australian History Military Publications, 2005); about the Central Powers, Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2014).

² Roy A. Prete, "Imbroglia par excellence: Mounting the Salonica Campaign, September–October 1915," *War and Society*, 19 (May 2001): 47.

after rapidly gaining the territories they always coveted in Macedonia, the Bulgarians vehemently pressured the Germans (albeit unsuccessfully) to rapidly eliminate the Allied threat in Salonica with an all-out offensive.³ On the other hand, the German High Command considered Macedonia a useful secondary theater where the Allies diverted crucial manpower and material resources away from the Western Front, the only theater where the Germans intended to win the war. Moreover, between 1914 and 1918, whereas fighting was constant in Northern France and Flanders, the military operations in the Balkans followed a different pattern. The combats in the region were more sporadic, nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that the Balkan Front was mostly inactive during its existence or that the number of Allied troops dispatched to the region was negligible. As David Dutton confirms, “Britain and France could scarcely ignore the existence of an Allied force which at times exceeded half a million men.”⁴

These very large Entente forces were constituted by military personnel originating from Albania, Britain and its dominions, France and its colonies, Greece, Italy, Russia, and Serbia. Opposing them, the Central Powers relied mainly on Bulgarian manpower, supported by German troops and some scattered Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman units. From the very beginning, the Macedonian Campaign represented the traditional case of a peripheral approach within the war’s global framework. As such, the Anglo-French foray in the Balkans comprehensively illustrates the benefits of what was then labeled a ‘sideshow’ of the Great War, or what could be more accurately described as a useful ‘Secondary Theater.’ In September 1918, this secondary theater suddenly paid off tremendous dividends to the Allied cause. As Richard C. Hall noted about the Entente’s

³ Regarding the disagreement between Bulgaria and Germany about the strategic objectives to attain in the Balkans, see General Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memories 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1919), 278-279; for the Bulgarians’ frustration with their powerful allies, see, R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 206-219.

⁴ David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 14.

Offensive of September 1918, “Within two weeks of the beginning of the Battle of Dobro Pole, Bulgaria left the war. Two months later, the First World War was over.”⁵

Despite the ever-lasting controversy that marred its inception and progress, the Macedonian Campaign truly deserves an improved academic treatment of its political origins and wider strategic considerations. Repeatedly, several diplomatic and military historians have merely followed the low opinion of the Macedonian Campaign that had been professed by one of his most vociferous opponents, British Field Marshal Sir William Robertson. Robertson famously declared that “Of all the problems which brought soldiers and statesmen into conference during the years 1915-1917, the Salonika expedition was at once the most persistent, exasperating and unfruitful.”⁶ Although Robertson was, to some extent, right to highlight the extremely disorganized and chaotic nature of the Entente’s strategic direction of the Macedonian Campaign, it would be simply too reductive in scope to adhere *in extenso* to such a belief.

This dissertation offers a much-needed re-evaluation of the Macedonian Campaign’s diplomatic and political origins within the war’s early context. In doing so, I first concentrate on a *longue durée* perspective and assess the main historical events in the Balkans and Central Europe from the end of the French Revolution to World War I. In this perspective running throughout the entire nineteenth century, I integrate the importance of nascent nationalism in the Balkans and examine the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s steady decline and subsequent diplomatic realignment toward the Balkans. Similarly, I depict the intense power struggle in Southeastern Europe between

⁵ Richard C. Hall, *Balkan Breakthrough: The Battle of Dobro Pole 1918* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), xiv.

⁶ Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen 1914-1918*, vol. 2 (London: Cassell, 1926), 83; about Robertson’s decisions, which were central to the overall British military strategy, see David R. Woodward, *Field Marshal Sir William Robertson: Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the Great War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); to appreciate Robertson’s influence over British military strategy on both the Western Front and the Balkans, see David Dutton, “The ‘Robertson Dictatorship’ and the Balkan campaign in 1916,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 9, no. 1 (1986): 64-78.

some of this story's main protagonists, namely the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman Empires. I also evaluate the rise of new regional powers such as Bulgaria and Serbia and examine their connection to the European balance of power and general diplomatic equilibrium. In the first half of this dissertation, I present an overview of some of the most crucial episodes that paved the way to the onset of World War I and the inception of the Macedonian Campaign: the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, the Congress of Berlin of 1878, the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-1909, the Italo-Ottoman War of 1911-1912, and the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913.

In the second part of this study, the main thread of my analysis is the crucial Anglo-French relations that took place between the end of the nineteenth century and World War I; I describe their importance regarding the Macedonian Campaign's inception and highlight the fragile nature of the Entente Cordiale and some of the fundamental issues that affected the Anglo-French conduct of military operations on the Western Front as well as in the Balkans. Therefore, I underline why in the Macedonian Campaign, the French government (which since the beginning of 1915, had resentfully consented to follow the British Cabinet's lead) decided to enforce its prerogatives on the Eastern policy of the Entente, and unlike in the Dardanelles to no longer play "the role of a docile stooge."⁷ In the last five chapters of this study, I elaborate more specifically on the Anglo-French relations' inherent frailty and provide evidence that elucidates why in the fall of 1915, the two nations ultimately launched this Salonica Expedition. I address the elusive quest to solve the strategic deadlock that gripped the Entente on the Western Front. In doing so, I indicate the various reasons that prompted key British and French leaders to adopt this indirect approach and why they saw the Balkans as a favorable strategic location where they could open a new secondary theater. I evaluate the logic that drove British and French soldiers and statesmen to project their military

⁷ Edmond Delage, *La tragédie des Dardanelles* (Paris: Grasset, 1931), 261 ; Delage originally wrote, "La France ne joua là, glorieusement il est vrai, qu'un rôle de comparse docile."

forces against Bulgaria. In this dissertation's second part, I also consider the fundamental reasons why Britain and France attempted to attract the remaining neutral states in the region, Greece, and Romania to join the Entente. I consider why in the fall of 1915, the French government attached so much importance to rescue Serbia from the joint Central Powers' offensive, and I explain why the maintenance of Serbia as a fighting force was so vital to the French strategic objectives. Specifically, to maintain a military anchor point in the Balkans that could then be used against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially since the latter was seen as the Central Powers' weakest link. In late November 1915, once it became clear that the Central Powers had overwhelmed the Serbian army, the French Cabinet and Grand Quartier Général (GQG) launched a full-scale rescue effort to ensure that the last 120,000 Serbian soldiers could be safely transported out of Albania. The French army then provided the remaining Serbian forces with medical attention, allowed them to rest in Corfu and Tunisia, re-organized them in six divisions, and re-supplied them with French uniforms, weapons, and material, before sending them back promptly to Macedonia to provide a much-welcome reinforcement to the existing British and French divisions in Salonica. I provide concrete evidence revealing the underlying motivations behind the French government's decision to launch the Macedonian Campaign so hurriedly. Principally, the need to find a solution to the political crisis created by the *affaire* Sarrail and rapidly offer a high-ranking command to this troublesome general. Finally, I explain why (against the well-grounded opinion of the British Cabinet) the French government decided to stay put in Macedonia and maintain important Anglo-French forces in the region, despite the evident lack of military progress of this Allied endeavor.

Throughout this research, I have visited diplomatic and military archives in London and Paris. I also relied on official histories and published diplomatic documents such as *Les armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre*, in particular, Tome VIII, *La campagne d'Orient. Dardanelles*

et Salonique. Three volumes and ten additional appendixes. In this work, I delve deeper into a few essential protagonists' actions and careers and utilize a vast array of personal memoirs, diaries, and letters produced by the men who played a decisive role in the Campaign's opening phase. Soldiers and statesmen like the first Allied Commander-in-chief (CIC): French General Maurice Sarrail. In this study, I also use the biographies and memoirs about Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, as well as British politicians such as Prime Ministers Herbert H. Asquith, David Lloyd George, and some crucial French politicians and soldiers: President Raymond Poincaré, Prime Minister Aristide Briand, Commander-in-Chief (CIC) of the French army General Joseph Joffre, and French Ambassador to England Paul Cambon. In addition to the primary sources used throughout this dissertation, noteworthy secondary literature has also been consulted to more accurately portray the events that happened in Salonica and Macedonia more than one hundred years ago.

Among the notable works that define the Macedonian Campaign, the first point of departure must be Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika: The Macedonian Campaign 1915-1918*. This book, written in 1965, is an enjoyable and well-researched account aimed at a general readership, where the author essentially analyzed the Macedonian Campaign from a British perspective. But unfortunately, if Palmer crafted a coherent narrative of the events that unfolded in the Balkans, he nevertheless demonstrated an undisguised anti-French bias when he wrote the following grandiloquent passage about 'Desperate Frankie,' General Louis Franchet d'Espèrey:

His divisions were on the Danube. It seemed of little importance, just then, that Clemenceau and Foch had ignored his grand strategy. He was master of Central Europe. "For the first time since 1809, a French army is marching on Vienna!" he declared in pardonable anticipation. The Bonaparte complex-that supreme occupational neurosis of French commanders was claiming another victim.⁸

⁸ Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika: The Macedonian Campaign 1915-1918* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 237.

Overall, and despite this short outburst of Francophobia, Palmer's book remains a valuable introduction to the subject, however, this reference must only be consulted in conjunction with the latest scholarly works on the subject. Regarding the Macedonian Campaign's convoluted diplomatic context and its Anglo-French genesis, the quintessential work remains the splendid opus written in 1998 by David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War*. In this remarkable monograph, Dutton accessed a wide range of British and French archives and most standard memoirs, diaries, and contemporary accounts of the era. He rightly attributes the Macedonian Campaign's misfortunes to the lack of concertation and unity of thought between Paris and London. He further highlights the primary causes of the military failures in Macedonia: the dominance of political factors in Britain and France regarding the purpose of this far-away venture. The salient feature that emerges from Dutton's book is the profound and reciprocal ignorance that both British and French leaders exhibited toward one another. Sadly, this conflictual relation contributed to the British Cabinet's mistrust toward its French counterpart; this mistrust was reciprocated in Paris. Dutton's work is an indispensable study that must be utilized to navigate Allied diplomacy in the Balkans. The only minor flaw of this otherwise absorbing inquiry is the lack of details about the military operations in the region.

If Dutton's treatment of military operations in Macedonia was somehow lacking, the void has since then been admirably filled by Gérard Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient: (octobre 1915 - novembre 1918)*. Fassy's book comprehensively describes the military operations that took place in Macedonia between 1915 and 1918. This deeply researched, top-level account of the French high command's direction of the Allied efforts in Macedonia provides a wealth of new archival sources. Fassy's work lucidly depicts the numerous obstacles that stood in the way of the three French generals in charge of this hodge-podge of a coalition. Fassy convincingly

demonstrates that the successive French commanders had the challenging and unenviable task to mediate the Italo-Greek animosity about Albania and the Italo-Serbian antagonism regarding the Adriatic. The only flaw in Fassy's gripping account is his lack of emphasis on the hidden motivations from the French Government to launch the campaign. Nevertheless, Fassy's account undoubtedly proves to be the benchmark against which other military studies are then evaluated.

Bearing in mind the manifest neglect of British historiography toward the Balkan Front, the book published in 2011 by Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody, *The Devil's Eye: The British Military Experience in Macedonia, 1915-18*, constitutes a much-welcome addition to World War I literature. Wakefield and Moody gathered a wide range of first-hand accounts and recollections. The authors vividly described the British Salonika Force's (BSF) experience between 1915 and 1918 from the perspective of the men who saw combat both on the ground and in the air. Wakefield and Moody aptly conveyed the frustration felt by many British and Commonwealth troops who fought in Macedonia. These troops frequently grumbled that they were forgotten, especially compared to their counterparts of the Western Front. English-language studies relating to the Entente soldiers' common adversary in the Balkans: 'Johnny Bulgar,' are extremely rare. Nevertheless, thanks to Richard C. Hall, we finally have an opportunity to visit the other side of the barbed wire. Hall wrote a compelling account of the decisive Battle of Dobro Pole in September 1918 and mostly conducted his research in the Bulgarian archives, some of which are kept here, in the United States at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University. Hall presented a valuable assessment of the Macedonian Campaign, but this time, essentially through Bulgarian eyes.

Recently, several significant monographs have been published about the Balkan Front and the Macedonian Campaign. Here are some of the most praiseworthy: In 2005, the International Conference's proceedings organized by the Institute for Balkan Studies and the National Research

Foundation “Eleftherios K. Venizelos” were published as *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War*. This collective endeavor covers different aspects of the Macedonian Campaign: Cultural, diplomatic, military, social, and introduces an international perspective about coalition warfare in the Balkans. In 2010, *Der Erste Weltkrieg auf dem Balkan. Perspektiven der Forschung* showcased a collaborative effort by eminent German-writing scholars and was edited by Jürgen Angelow. This monograph constitutes an appropriate supplement to our knowledge of the military events in the Balkans. In 2014, Max Schiavon released *Le Front d’Orient. Du désastre des Dardanelles à la victoire finale, 1915-1918*, in this highly enjoyable book, Schiavon depicted the French military operations that took place from Gallipoli to Salonica and the Armistices of 1918. The same year, Geoffrey Wawro’s *A Mad Catastrophe. The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* critically assessed the Austro-Hungarian Empire repeated military disasters on the Balkan and Eastern Fronts against both Russian and Serbian forces. Focusing on World War I’s overture, Wawro’s book meticulously exposes the dreadful military performances of the Austro-Hungarian army and the abysmal leadership from its Chief of the General Staff, Field Marshal Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf. In 2015, James Lyon published *Serbia and the Balkan Front, 1914. The Outbreak of the Great War*, a monograph reviewing the first year of the fighting between Austria-Hungary and Serbia and is primarily based on Serbian archives and primary documents. Lyon’s book is an absolute must-read as it provides a truly neglected analysis of Serbia’s role within the larger global panorama of 1914. Still published in 2015, and as the ideal chronological complement to the reference mentioned above, Richard DiNardo delivered a real tour de force with *Invasion. The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*. DiNardo’s book is a fantastic operational and tactical description of the Central Powers’ collective efforts to subdue Serbian resistance in Fall 1915. In 2016, Jean-Yves Le Naour edited *Front*

d'Orient 1914-1919, Les soldats oubliés, a publication drawn from the proceedings of a European colloquium held in December 2014 in Marseille, France. This collection of essays composed by a cluster of European scholars provided a valuable transnational viewpoint of the Balkan Front.

As mentioned above, this dissertation concentrates chronologically on the diplomatic and political background of the Macedonian Campaign's origins. Chapter 1: Politics of the Powder Keg presents a concise retrospective of the Balkan Peninsula's turbulent history from the French Revolution-era to the Congress of Berlin. Chapter 2: The Cauldron is Boiling reviews the era between the Congress of Berlin and the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-1909 and demonstrate how the escalation of tensions between the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire's continuing decline considerably impacted the Balkan nations. Chapter 3: Death Throes of the Ottoman Empire depicts the period lasting between the Bosnian crisis and the end of the Italo-Ottoman War of 1911-1912 and highlight the natural filiation between this conflict and the Balkan Wars that immediately followed it. Ultimately, this chapter confirms why the Italo-Ottoman War (despite being often overlooked historically) was a crucial step in the countdown that led to the tragedy of World War I. Chapter 4: The Diplomatic Background of the Balkan Wars details the events that paved the way for the crucial realignment that preceded the onset of hostilities between the Ottoman Empire and the various Balkan states arrayed against it. Chapter 5: Overture to the World War depicts the Balkan Wars' central role in shaping the future diplomatic alignment of the various nations that later participated in World War I. Ultimately, this chapter shows how the Balkan Wars became the dress rehearsal for World War I.

As the Anglo-French relations were central in the design and execution of this Allied venture in Macedonia, Chapter 6: The Imperfect Entente Cordiale investigates the British and French relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and depict the diplomatic

relations that prevailed between the two nations. Chapter 7: The Genesis of the Macedonian Campaign reviews the crucial diplomatic, military, and political events that influenced the beginning of military operations in Macedonia. It also dives deeper into the Entente's search for new allies among the remaining neutral Balkan states of early 1915: Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania. Chapter 8: *L'Affaire Sarrail* offers an in-depth examination of the domestic French political reasons that largely influenced Paris' decision to launch the Macedonian Campaign, which consequently offered an exit from the political crisis in which the French government was caught. Chapter 9: *Serbiens Ende* examines the failed Allied attempt to rescue the Serbian army following the Central Powers' offensive. This chapter examines the diplomatic and military connection between the successful Austro-German-Bulgarian offensive and the arrival of the Allied forces in Salonica. Chapter 10: The Macedonian Masquerade unveils the hidden motives that drove the French government to maintain very large military forces in Greece and Macedonia when they seemed no longer necessary. This chapter confirms that throughout the Macedonian Campaign, the French government used its military presence to assert French cultural and economic domination in the Balkans while disguising it under the pretense of military necessity.

CHAPTER 1

POLITICS OF THE POWDER KEG

Violence was, indeed all I knew about the Balkans: all I knew of the South Slavs.

Rebecca West

From the French Revolution to World War I, the era was plagued by the tremors of social Darwinism, Imperialism, socialism, and, last but not least, nationalism. The notion of nationalism, which became the defining matrix of modern European history, originated at the end of the eighteenth century during the French Revolution. This concept came to the fore of international politics, especially during the German and Italian wars of unification.⁹ Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, this essentially Western European theory was eagerly embraced by the Balkans' various embryonic states. At first, the consequences of nationalism for the aspiring Balkan nations were principally cultural. Thereupon, the intelligentsia from the various Balkan nations seized the opportunity to modernize their *lingua franca*. Balkan intellectuals often invoked the former glory of their long-gone Medieval kingdoms, which had existed before the Ottoman invasion and the ensuing occupation of their countries.

Rapidly enough, the focus of nationalism morphed into a political one. The dreams of accomplishing national union, thus emulating the processes embraced earlier in the nineteenth century by Germany and Italy, drove the Balkan nations to rebel against their Ottoman masters. The Balkan political leaders of the time naturally believed that the prerequisite for their countries' progress and development hinged upon their dreams of national unity and full independence from

⁹ About the crucial Franco-Prussian War, see Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Wawro's book is by far, the best account about the Franco-Prussian War and as such, now supersedes the older but nonetheless valuable monograph written by Sir Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1961); also, Pierre Milza, *La guerre franco-prussienne: (septembre 1870 - mars 1871)* (Paris: Perrin, 2009); about the political events that paved the way for Italian independence see, Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History*, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

Constantinople's yoke. The Balkan leaders also looked at Western Europe as the political and economic model to follow. They sought to imitate the Iron Kingdom of Prussia as the state where industry and economy provided the foundations for Europe's mightiest power.¹⁰ For all the Balkan countries, Western European nationalism was undoubtedly the catalyst for creating a series of new nation-states free from Ottoman rule and empowered to embrace the liberal values of capitalism, democracy, and modernity. Vasil Levski, the renowned nineteenth-century Bulgarian revolutionary, declared, "We are a people and want to live in complete freedom in our lands, there where the Bulgarians live, in Bulgaria, Thrace and Macedonia."¹¹ It was no coincidence that these regions saw a great deal of bloodshed in the early twentieth century during the Balkan Wars and World War I. By the late nineteenth century, in the Balkans, the essence of Western nationalism had effectively replaced the old Ottoman millet arrangement. Despite its antiquated nature, the millet system permitted each principal religion to acquire a certain level of autonomy in local affairs. Salonica stood as the perfect example of this Ottoman model, which allowed the relatively peaceful coexistence of Jews, Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics.¹²

In 1804, and largely inspired by the French Revolution's powerful nature, the Serbs, followed by the Greeks in 1821, rose against their Ottoman rulers. In 1829, and in the wake of Britain, France, and Russia's decisive military assistance, the Treaty of Adrianople created a newly independent Greek state.¹³ At about the same period, an autonomous Serbian state also emerged.

¹⁰ About the rise of Prussia, followed by the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership, see Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Konstantin Pandev, *Borbite v Makedoniya i Odrinsko, 1878-1912, Spomeni* [Memoirs. The Struggles in Macedonia and the Edirne region, 1878-1912] (Sofia: Bălgarski Pisatel, 1981), 5.

¹² Regarding Salonica, see Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430-1950* (London: Harper-Collins, 2004).

¹³ For the long Greek struggle against the Ottoman Empire, and its quest for nationhood, David Brewer, *The Flame of Freedom: The Greek War of Independence 1821-1833* (London: Murray, 2001); about Russia's involvement in supporting the Greeks to gain independence from the Turks, see Lucien J. Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity, 1821-1844* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

The national unification that the Italians and the Germans achieved in 1861 and 1871 indubitably impressed the main Balkan nationalists. Observing how Italy and Germany had both accomplished their national unifications, the Balkan leaders remarked that these two recent nations had been only forged through blood and iron.¹⁴ These leaders clearly understood that they would also have to rely on their armed forces to fulfill their national destinies. Collectively, these nations saw their independence as a goal that could only be reached through armed conflict. In these conflicts, the Balkan nations had two traditional enemies: the Turks and the Austrians. On the northern edge of the Balkans sat the large multi-ethnic and transnational Austro-Hungarian Empire. For the Habsburgs, the powerful rise of nationalism was a mortal threat. In the nineteenth century alone, the Austrians bore the full brunt of it and were defeated in their respective military encounters with the Germans and the Italians.¹⁵ In the 1870s, the recently reconfigured Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary was profoundly transformed by a long era of economic growth and prosperity (known as the *Gründerzeit* of 1867–1873) fueled by the various political modifications brought to the Empire.

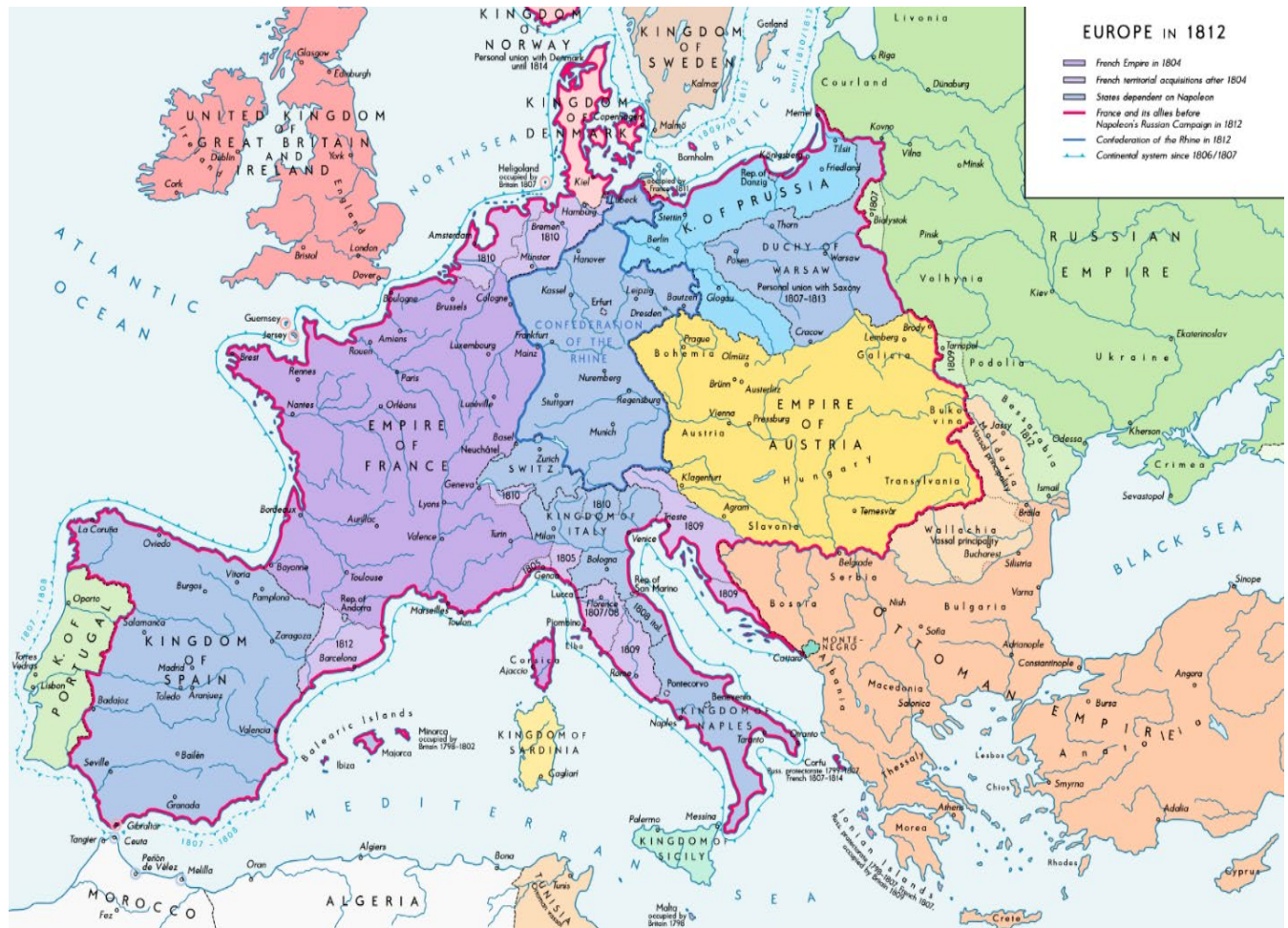
In the early years of the nineteenth century, following the Emperor of the French Napoleon Bonaparte's victory at the Battle of Austerlitz on 2 December 1805, Austria was forced to sign the Treaty of Pressburg.¹⁶ Following his victory in the 1805 Campaign, Napoleon promptly re-organized Western Germany and finally liquidated this anachronistic political commonwealth. Notwithstanding its debacle at the end of the 1805 Campaign, and despite its recent reform under

¹⁴ The story of how the Prussian military fought the wars that led to the creation of the German Empire is described by Dennis E. Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (London: Arnold, 1999).

¹⁵ The diplomatic and military context of Austria's wars against Prussia and Italy is expertly narrated by Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War. Austria's War with Prussia and Italy in 1866* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁶ About the decisive battle of Austerlitz, Robert Goetz, *1805, Austerlitz: Napoleon and the Destruction of the Third Coalition* (London: Greenhill Books, 2005); Alexander Mikaberidze, "Chapter 18: Ulm to Austerlitz," in *The West Point History of Warfare*, eds., Clifford Rogers and John Stapleton (West Point, NY: US Military Academy, 2013), 1-64.

the impetus of French power, the Austrian Empire still managed to survive.¹⁷ In 1809, the Austrian Empire, with a much enlarged and re-organized army led by Archduke Charles, decided to mount another challenge to Napoleon.¹⁸ Yet again, and within just a few months, Austria was defeated.¹⁹ Finally, in 1812, Napoleon who was at the apex of his power twisted the Austrians' arm and forced them to join his invasion of Russia.²⁰ (see Map 1).



Map 1: Europe in 1812, at the apogee of the French Empire, ruled by Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte.

¹⁷ For an engaging account of the War of the Third Coalition, see Frederick C. Schneid, *Napoleon's Conquest of Europe: The War of the Third Coalition* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005).

¹⁸ Regarding the modernization of the Austrian army and the role played by Archduke Charles, see, Gunther E. Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army, 1792-1814* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982).

¹⁹ About the Habsburg challenge to Napoleon and its ensuing defeat, see the exceptional trilogy by John H. Gill, *1809, Thunder on the Danube. Napoleon's Defeat of the Habsburgs*, 3 vols. (London: Frontline Books, 2008-2014).

²⁰ In 1810, Napoleon (after divorcing Empress Josephine, who proved incapable of bearing him any children), married Francis I's eldest daughter, thus asserting his personal and dynastic ties with the Habsburg dynasty.

During this fateful campaign, Austrian forces under the command of the always prudent Prince Karl Schwarzenberg only paid lip service to the French Emperor's request. They evaded any military engagements with their erstwhile allies the Russians, retreated from Russia and safely returned to Austria.²¹ While Napoleon's Grande Armée was destroyed in the snows of Russia, the emperor, with the remnant of his forces retreated across Prussia, which had risen in arms against him. Austria bid its time and maintained an advantageous neutrality. With the earliest stage of the 1813 campaign proving inconclusive for either belligerent, the two sides consented to a nearly two-month armistice.²² During the crucial period of 1813-1814, Prince Klemens Metternich became the Austrian foreign policy's driving force. He managed to reinsert Austria among the Allies and succeeded in giving it the coalition's leading role.²³ By August 1813, Austrian forces commanded by Prince Schwarzenberg resumed military operations against Napoleon's armies. During the second phase of the 1813 Campaign, the Alliance named Schwarzenberg Commander-in-chief (CIC) of the Allied armies, which relied on Austrian, Prussian, Russian, and Swedish contingents.²⁴ At Allied headquarters, operational plans required acrimonious discussions, and repeatedly, decisions were only reached under the personal intervention of Tsar Alexander I.²⁵

²¹ For a fascinating perspective of Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Russia that is primarily based on Russian archives and primary sources, see Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (New York, NY: Viking, 2009).

²² For the first part of the 1813 Campaign, see the outstanding monograph by Michael V. Leggiere, *Napoleon and the Struggle for Germany: The Franco-Prussian War of 1813*, vol. 1, *The War of Liberation, Spring 1813* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²³ Regarding Metternich's masterful conduct of Austrian diplomacy during the end of the Napoleonic Wars, see Enno E. Kraehe, 1, *Metternich's German Policy*, vol. 1, *The Contest with Napoleon, 1799-1814* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); also, Wolfram Siemann, *Metternich: Strategist and Visionary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

²⁴ For the best analysis of the most critical phase of the 1813 Campaign, see, Michael V. Leggiere, *Napoleon and the Struggle for Germany, The Franco-Prussian War of 1813*, vol. 2, *The Defeat of Napoleon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); for the Austro-Prussian collaboration in the fighting against Napoleonic France, see, Alan Sked, "Austria, Prussia, and the Wars of Liberation, 1813-1814," *Austrian History Yearbook* 45 (April 2014): 89-114.

²⁵ David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon: The Mind and Method of History's Greatest Soldier* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1966), 901; Robert A. Kahn, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 225.

Notwithstanding all these serious disagreements within the coalition, on 16-18 October 1813, the Allies finally confronted Napoleon during the gigantic Battle of Leipzig and defeated him.²⁶ Following their success at the Battle of the Nations, Prince Schwarzenberg and Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher drove the Allied forces across Germany, then led the invasion of France, which ultimately resulted in Napoleon's first abdication in Fontainebleau on 11 April 1814.²⁷ As Napoleon was now safely removed to his golden cage on Elba's island, the triumphant Allies gathered in Vienna.²⁸ During the negotiations at the Congress of Vienna, Europe's most prominent diplomats, such as Metternich, Talleyrand, and Castlereagh, imposed their views and decided the continent's fate. (See Map 2).



Map 2: Europe in 1815, following the Congress of Vienna.

²⁶ The finest account of this climactic contest remains Bruno Colson, *Leipzig. La bataille des nations 16-19 octobre 1813* (Paris: Perrin, 2013).

²⁷ For the Allied invasion of France, see, Michael V. Leggiere, *The Fall of Napoleon*, vol. 1, *The Allied Invasion of France, 1813-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); also Patrice Gueniffey and Pierre Branda, eds., *1814: La campagne de France* (Paris: Perrin, 2016); and Pascal Cyr, *La campagne de France: 1814, la chute de l'Empire* (Saint-Cloud: Soteca, 2017); about Marshal Blücher, one of the most iconic commanders of the Napoleonic Wars, see Michael V. Leggiere, *Blücher: Scourge of Napoleon* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).

²⁸ Napoleon's exile to Elba is chronicled by Mark Braude, *The Invisible Emperor: Napoleon on Elba from Exile to Escape* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2018).

During this congress, Metternich managed to impose a political reconstruction that fitted Austria's primary objectives.²⁹ Metternich also succeeded in re-installing Austrian dominance over Northern Italy. In the eastern and southeastern imperial domains, the Habsburg dynasty retained its grip on Hungary since the Emperor of Austria was also King of Hungary. Meanwhile, in the Balkans, the Austrians continued their penetration at the expense of the Ottomans. The arrangements concluded during the Congress of Vienna were preserved, even when during the Hundred Days, 'the Corsican Ogre' escaped from Elba, suffered his final defeat at Waterloo, then was exiled by the British to the South Atlantic Island of Saint Helena, where he finished the rest of his life.³⁰

The end of the Napoleonic Wars started an era that became the paradigm of a conservative reaction engineered by Europe's ruling dynasties. What Richard DiNardo termed "a repressive system of royal absolutist governance that came to be symbolized by Metternich himself."³¹ While he led the Austrian Empire's destiny, and despite the fury of nationalism that the French Revolution had recently unleashed, Metternich imposed a rule of absolutism and conservative politics. The Metternich system completely ignored the nascent wind of liberal change that had swept across Europe in the Napoleonic Wars' aftermath.³² In the spring of 1848, this wind of change blew the embers of national revolutions, which erupted everywhere in Central and Western Europe.³³ During the Spring of Nations, Metternich saw the conservative order he rebuilt crumble under nationalism's powerful resurgence. From Paris to Budapest, this formidable revolutionary

²⁹ About the epoch-making Congress of Vienna, see the works by Mark Jarrett, *The Congress of Vienna and its Legacy: War and Great Power Diplomacy after Napoleon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012); and Brian E. Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

³⁰ A recent appraisal of the Hundred Days is offered by Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Napoléon et la dernière campagne. Les Cent-Jours 1815* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2015).

³¹ Richard L. DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 6.

³² About the 'Age of Metternich,' see the authoritative study by Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1957); more recently, Alexandra Bleyer, *Das System Metternich: Die Neuordnung Europas nach Napoleon* (Darmstadt: Primus-Verlag, 2014).

³³ For the magnitude of the political events of that fateful year, see, Mike Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008).

movement reignited the liberal ideals which had remained caged by the absolutist reaction following Napoleon's defeat. The 1848 revolutions provoked such a potent political upheaval that even the old Chancellor Metternich was forced out from his position of power.³⁴ The shockwave of this Springtime of the Peoples threatened the reactionary Habsburg Empire's foundations.³⁵ In the Magyar Lands, where revolutionary hopes reached their peak, the Hungarian Diet's leader Lajos Kossuth declared his country's independence. At the same time, and undoubtedly problematic for the Habsburg Monarchy's political control over its non-German speaking lands, a meeting of the Pan-Slav Congress convened in Prague.³⁶ However, the Czechs were not pursuing the same independentist agenda as the Hungarians since they only wished to acquire the same political rights and legal prerogatives as their Austrian counterparts.³⁷

Despite these startling political developments, the Habsburg Monarchy, led by the intransigent Prince Felix zu Schwarzenberg and the recently adorned Kaiser Franz Josef, steadied the ship.³⁸ Between 1848 and 1849, the two men reestablished Habsburg's control over the empire and used their military power to repress all the independentist inclinations from their subjects.³⁹ During the repression, General Prince Alfred Windischgrätz reoccupied Prague, disbanded the

³⁴ This momentous period of European history is aptly described by Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848 - 1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

³⁵ Regarding the effects of the 1848 revolutions and the aspirations of the various ethnic groups that comprised the Austrian Empire, Alan Sked, "The Nationality Problem in the Habsburg Monarchy and the Revolutions of 1848," in *The 1848 Revolutions and European Political Thought*, eds.; Douglas Moggach and Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 322-344.

³⁶ About the Pan-Slav Congress of Prague, see, Jelena Milojković-Djurić, *Panslavism and National Identity in Russia and in the Balkans, 1830-1880: Images of the Self and Others* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1994), 1-2.

³⁷ István Deák, "The Revolution and the War of Independence, 1848-1849," in *A History of Hungary*, eds., Peter F. Sugar, Péter Hanák, and Tibor Frank (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 212.

³⁸ About Prince Schwarzenberg, see Kenneth W. Rock, "Felix Schwarzenberg, Military Diplomat," *Austrian History Yearbook* 11 (January 1975): 85-100; about Kaiser Franz Josef who became one of Europe's longest-serving monarchs, see Alan Palmer, *Twilight of the Habsburgs: The Life and Times of Emperor Francis Joseph* (London: Phoenix, 1990); for a more recent appraisal, see John Van der Kiste, *Emperor Francis Joseph: Life, Death and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005).

³⁹ For an accurate analysis of how the Austrian army rescued its monarchy in the tempestuous days of 1848, see Alan Sked, *Survival of the Habsburg Empire: Radetzky, the Imperial Army and Class War, 1848* (London: Longman, 1979).

Pan-Slav Congress, and finally regained control of the Austrian capital from the insurrection. In September 1848, in Hungary, the Habsburg troops commanded by the Croatian General Josef Jelačić and reinforced by a Russian army dispatched by Tsar Nicholas I brutally repressed the rebellion.⁴⁰ Lastly, the old Field Marshal Count Joseph Radetzky confronted and defeated the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont's armies, thus re-asserting the Austrian control over Northern Italy.⁴¹

During the period lasting from 1849 to 1867, the Habsburg Empire went through a progressive deterioration of its diplomatic standing within the European balance of power; it also had to deal with substantial changes to its internal political structures. In 1852, Schwarzenberg's death left Austria without one of its most competent servants. While Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire fought the Crimean War against Russia, Austria maintained an armed neutrality that forever altered its relations with the Tsarist Empire.⁴² From thereupon, a bridge had been irremediably burned between Vienna and Saint-Petersburg. It was never rebuilt, and from this moment onward, the fate of Europe was no longer the same. After Metternich's exit, Count Carl Ferdinand Buol assumed control of the Austrian Foreign Affairs Ministry and was outwitted by the Sardinian Prime Minister Count Camillo Cavour. Cavour provoked Buol to declare war against France about the possession of Northern Italy.⁴³ When hostilities began, the Austrian army

⁴⁰ A portrayal of General Josef Jelačić, 'the man who saved Austria,' and who in October 1848 at Schwechat defeated the Hungarian military chief Artúr Görgey, is presented by Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Jelačić. The Croatian Military Border, and the Intervention against Hungary in 1848," *Austrian History Yearbook* 1 (September 1965): 45-68.

⁴¹ A biographical account of the renowned Austrian Commander, has been penned by Alan Sked, *Radetzky: Imperial Victor and Military Genius* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); for Radetzky's victorious campaign in Northern Italy, see, Michael Embree, *Radetzky's Marches: The Campaigns of 1848 and 1849 in Upper Italy* (Solihull: Helion & Co., 2011).

⁴² In the context of modern European history, the Crimean War is often neglected. It does not receive the academic treatment that it fully deserves. This void has been impeccably filled by Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2010); also, Alain Gouttman, *La guerre de Crimée, 1853-1856. La première guerre moderne* (Paris: Perrin, 2003).

⁴³ For detailed accounts of how Cavour and Napoleon III intended and managed to shape Italian independence at the expense of Austria, see Alain Frèrejean, *Napoléon III* (Paris: Fayard, 2017); as well as Alan Strauss-Schom, *The Shadow Emperor: A Biography of Napoleon III* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2018).

suffered from three crucial military deficiencies. First, its equipment and weapons were ill-prepared for a conflict of this magnitude. Second, the Habsburg forces employed outmoded infantry tactics. Third, the Austrian soldiers were mostly led by under-performing commanders. Despite these debilitating deficiencies, the Austrian forces courageously went into combat, but ultimately, they were beaten by the French army at the battles of Magenta and Solferino.⁴⁴ The Franco-Austrian War of 1859 was disastrous for Austria, as the empire lost Lombardy and was forced to accept the birth of a new Italian state that aspired to snatch Venetia from the Habsburgs. Soon enough, Austria and Italy would draw their swords again.⁴⁵

In the early 1850s, Austria overcame Prussia's attempts to exert control over the whole of Germany; however, a decade later, Austria's preeminence had been battered. In 1866, Austria went to war against both Italy and Prussia, and the defeat suffered by the Austrian army at the Battle of Königgrätz decided the outcome of the conflict.⁴⁶ The Austro-Prussian War of 1866 had profound and abiding consequences for the future of the monarchy. First, it confirmed Prussia's dominance over Germany. Second, it also marked an irremediable Austrian decline in the European concert of nations. As Geoffrey Wawro summed it up, "The war of 1866 transformed Europe and shook the balance of power. Prussia climbed from the bottom rung of the power ladder to the top."⁴⁷

"By 1867, another major military defeat and more financial crises forced Francis Joseph to

⁴⁴ Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1976), 53-54; also, Geoffrey Wawro, "An 'Army of Pigs': The Technical, Social and Political Bases of Austrian Shock Tactics, 1859-1866," *The Journal of Military History* 59, no.3 (July 1995): 414-415.

⁴⁵ For contemporary French descriptions of the Franco-Austrian War, see Victor Paulin, *Guerre d'Italie en 1859: tableau historique, politique et militaire* (Paris: Librairie de l'illustration, 1859); Louis Vandeveld, *Précis historique et critique de la campagne d'Italie en 1859* (Paris: Charles Tanera, 1860); for a German perspective, see Helmuth von Moltke, *Der Italienische Feldzug des Jahres 1859*, 3 vols. (Berlin, Mittler, 1870); also, the Austrian official history of the war, see, Generalstabs-Bureau für Kriegsgeschichte, *Der Krieg in Italien, 1859*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Verlag des k. k. Generalstabes, 1872-1876); finally, Eduard Bartels von Bartberg, *Der Krieg im Jahre 1859* (Bamberg: C.C. Buchner Verlag, 1894).

⁴⁶ About the decisive Battle of Königgrätz, see chapters 9 and 10 in Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War*, 208-273.

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe, 1792-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 91.

stabilize the monarchy by negotiating independence for Hungary, thereby creating Austria-Hungary out of Austria.”⁴⁸ The Ausgleich of January 1867 marked the birth of the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary as the Austrian Empire’s scion. The principal details of the Compromise of 1867 allowed each country to preserve its political prerogatives.⁴⁹ Under this awkward arrangement and in proverbial Austrian *Schlamperei*, both the Austrian and Hungarian governments maintained reciprocal administrations that comprised defense and foreign affairs ministries. Moreover, each government was also led by its respective prime minister. Most surprisingly, this non-sensical political structure perdured until the end of World War I, where under the crushing pressure of armed conflict, it finally imploded and disappeared.

Nevertheless, the newly formed Austro-Hungarian Empire possessed two major consolidating characteristics. The first was Generalstabs [the Austrian General Staff] that directed the creation of future war plans and retained the ultimate control on the war conduct.⁵⁰ The second was the person of the Austrian monarch himself. On 8 June 1867, Franz Josef, who was already Emperor of Austria, also received the King of Hungary’s crown. The rearrangement of the Austrian Empire, which resulted in a more cumbersome political structure known as Austria-Hungary’s Dual Monarchy, drastically impacted all ethnic groups living under Habsburg’s protection. Indisputably, the Germans were the most advantaged and influential people within the empire; nevertheless, the Hungarians immensely benefited from the Ausgleich. It transformed them from mere subalterns to fully-fledged equals to the Austrians. More than ever, the Hungarians were

⁴⁸ Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 220.

⁴⁹ For more details on how the Hungarian lawyer and politician Ferenc Deák managed to negotiate advantageous conditions for Hungary within the *Ausgleich*, see, Martyn Rady, *The Habsburgs: To Rule the World* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020), 263-264.

⁵⁰ Regarding the Austrian General Staff, and the implementation of reforms in the wake of the army’s disastrous performance during the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, see, Scott W. Lackey, *The Rebirth of the Habsburg Army: Friedrich Beck and the Rise of the General Staff* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).

determined to enforce their newly gained position, especially in relation to the Slavic peoples who predominantly inhabited the southern part of the Dual Monarchy.⁵¹ After 1867, and as they were now bestowed with a brand-new authority level, the Hungarians rapidly embarked upon discriminating policies against other national groups within the empire. During the last part of the nineteenth century, these policies had the effect of severely eroding Austria-Hungary international standing.

Due to her unfavorable geographic position, which was compounded by its loss of international influence after its defeat at Prussia's hands, Austria-Hungary found itself notably absent of any imperial conquests outside Europe. Habsburg's absence from this new imperialism proved crucial as it suddenly redirected Austria-Hungary toward an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy aiming primarily at the Balkans. From that moment, the Habsburg Empire was bound to collide with another major European power's diplomatic interests, the Russian Empire.⁵² In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and with well-known consequences, Austria-Hungary also clashed with a Russian proxy, the up-and-coming regional power of Serbia.⁵³ We now return to the Balkans to examine the destiny of one of its most troublesome nations: Serbia.

In 1683, the epic siege of Vienna and the Austro-Polish victory against the Turks marked the end of the Ottoman advance into Central and Eastern Europe. In this century-old contest between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, this decisive two-month struggle for controlling the

⁵¹ Peter F. Sugar, "The Nature of Non-Germanic Societies under Habsburg Rule," *Slavic Review* 22, no. 1 (March 1963): 5; also, Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch, *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918*, vol. 3, *Die Völker des Reiches* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980).

⁵² Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, vol. 1, trans, Isabella M. Massey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 7.

⁵³ George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 29.

Golden Apple of Vienna symbolized Christendom's victory over Islam.⁵⁴ This crucial Habsburg victory against the Ottoman Empire significantly impacted Europe's fate for the next three hundred years and had two resounding results. First, it symbolized the beginning of the Russian expansion into the Balkans, which eventually clashed with Austria's designs over the region. Second, in the next two centuries, the Turk's demise under Vienna's walls proved to be the spur for the various Balkan countries' birth. Hungary, which once had been the strongest Ottoman bastion in Europe north of the Danube, became the first country to get rid of the Turk's bonds. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this progressive reflux of the Ottoman power was accompanied by the creation of countries that once had been part of the Sultan's realm.

Among Balkan countries, Serbia holds a prominent rank. As the French historian Jean-Jacques Becker confirms, "No other nationalities than the Serb held such a place in the history of the Balkans and, by extension, sometimes in the one of Europe. Would the powder keg of the Balkans have existed without the Serbs?"⁵⁵ Eventually, the antipathy that Austria-Hungary and Serbia harbored for each other led to full-grown enmity that later resulted in the disaster of World War I. In 1804, the Serbs rebelled against the Ottoman occupation and their Cerberus' heavy-handed actions: The Janissaries.⁵⁶ A pig dealer called Đorđe Petrović Karageorgević directed the revolt.⁵⁷ Without any meaningful foreign military assistance, the Serbian revolt faltered in 1813. In 1815, undeterred by their initial failure, the Serbs, under the command of Milóš Obrenović, took up the arms again. This time, their revolt proved more decisive for their long-term goals and

⁵⁴ Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Enemy at the Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans, and the Battle for Europe* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008); Wheatcroft's gripping account now supplants the older but still enjoyable book by John Stoye, *The Siege of Vienna* (London: Collins, 1964).

⁵⁵ Jean-Jacques Becker, "L'ombre du nationalisme serbe," *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire*, no. 69 (2001): 8.

⁵⁶ Historically, the Janissaries had often acted as the 'Praetorian Guard of the Sultan.' They were Christian children from the Balkans who had been converted to Islam and were then raised as soldiers. The Janissaries, in Geoffrey Parker's words were "Elite slave warriors." Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 125.

⁵⁷ Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism, its History and Ideology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953), 56.

produced two primary results. First, in 1817, and despite Serbia nominally remaining a part of the Ottoman Empire, the country led by Obrenović received the rights of self-government. Second, in the wake of Miloš Obrenović's accession to power, a long-lasting animosity developed between the Karageorgević and Obrenović families. This hostility turned into violence when some hired thugs who supported the Obrenović family assassinated Đorđe Petrović. The tug-of-war between these two dynasties which dominated Serbian politics persisted for the next eighty years.⁵⁸ As always, in the Balkans, violence, power, and politics formed an infernal triptych.

After 1817, and although the Ottoman banner still floated over Belgrade, the Serbs decidedly moved forward with their process of gaining political independence from Constantinople. They started to craft a well-defined national character and culture. The Serbs' efforts to build an enduring national identity centered essentially on their language and literature. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić's linguistic work vastly inspired their culture.⁵⁹ Like many other European people during that era of romanticism, the Serbian nationalists fondly looked back at Tsar Stefan Dušan's medieval empire. They remembered that prior to the Ottoman rule, this empire encompassed a vast area going from the Sava to the Danube and from the Adriatic to the Aegean Sea. The Serbian youth were taught about their warlike and heroic past, such as the Battle of Kosovo Polje on 28 June 1389.⁶⁰ Another seminal foundation of the Serbian culture was the

⁵⁸ Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question: 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: MacMillan, 1966), 50.

⁵⁹ Aleksandar Pavlović and Srđan Atanasovski, "From Myth to Territory: Vuk Karadžić, Kosovo Epics and the Role of Nineteenth-Century Intellectuals in Establishing National Narratives," *Hungarian Historical Review* 5, no. 2 (2016): 357–376.

⁶⁰ About the Battle of Kosovo, and its legacy that still survives today in Serbian culture and history, see, Wayne S. Vucinich and Thomas Allan Emmert eds., *Kosovo: Legacy of a Medieval Battle* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1991); also Jean W. Sedlar, *East Central Europe in the Middle Ages, 1000-1500* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1993); Florian Bieber, "Nationalist Mobilization and Stories of Serb Suffering: The Kosovo Myth From 600th anniversary to the Present," *Rethinking History. The Journal of Theory and Practice* 6, no. 1 (2002): 95-110; finally, John V. A. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from The Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2009).

literary masterpiece entitled *The Mountain Wreath*, written by the Prince-Bishop of Montenegro Petar II Petrović-Njegoš that came out in 1847. This epic narrative exalted the virtues of the legendary Serbian knight Miloš Obilić who, in the aftermath of the Battle of Kosovo Polje, killed the Ottoman Sultan Murad I before being decapitated for his action. Ever since its publication, *The Mountain Wreath*, which called for national resistance against the oppressive foreign invader, has penetrated the Serbian literature and folklore and remains a part of the Serbian national ethos.⁶¹ Finally, within the Balkans, Serbia's glory was considerably bolstered because the country stood alone in becoming independent without any great power's assistance.⁶²

In 1875-1876, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro decided to exit the Ottoman Empire; however, their collective endeavors failed disastrously. The defeat of the three Balkan nations, coupled with a growing feeling of Pan-Slavonic brotherhood, incited Tsar Alexander II of Russia to wage war against the Turks. The following Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was critical for the Russians.⁶³ Indeed, the Russians sought "a vast extension of power and influence in the Balkans and the Middle East to push back Austria-Hungary, undercut British naval superiority in the Mediterranean, and balance Prussia-Germany's territorial gains of 1870-1."⁶⁴ Once underway, the operations mainly focused on capturing Plevna. After a two-month siege, the Russians finally conquered the city and rounded up the Turkish troops that stubbornly defended it. In the wake of this success, at the battle of Shipka Pass, the Russian army inflicted another crucial blow on the

⁶¹ Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 250-260.

⁶² George Willard White, *Nationalism and Territory: Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 187.

⁶³ The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 remains largely understudied; for a modern description of the military events and their diplomatic aftermath, see Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett, eds., *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2011).

⁶⁴ Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 124.

Ottoman forces. Consequently, after these victories, the Russian army edged closer to Constantinople's doorstep.⁶⁵

Once the Russian troops were within striking distance of the Ottoman capital, the British government became increasingly alarmed and dispatched a fleet from the Royal Navy to remind the Tsar of what would potentially happen next. At that very moment, renewed Anglo-Russian hostilities were entirely possible, and British Prime Minister Disraeli warned that "Constantinople was the untouchable key to India."⁶⁶ The Russians, always mindful of Britain entering the fray to support the Ottoman Empire, swiftly forced the Sultan to sheathe his sword. The ensuing Treaty of San Stefano, signed in March 1878, granted all the strategic rewards that Russia pursued in the Balkans. This treaty comprehensively ejected the Turk from Europe and facilitated the creation of a large Bulgarian state that naturally gravitated in the Russian orbit. This massively enlarged Bulgaria stretched from the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea, thus completely cutting off the Ottomans' access to the rest of the European continent. In its entirety, the San Stefano Treaty fully confirmed the Russian intentions to build a client states' system in the Balkans instead of purely and simply taking them over.⁶⁷ (See Map 3).

⁶⁵ Barbara Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814-1914* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1964), 178; William McElwee, *The Art of War: Waterloo to Mons* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), 187-205; for an overview of the Russian way of war during this conflict, see Richard L. DiNardo, "Russian Military Operations 1877-1878," in *War and society in East Central Europe*, vol. 17, *Insurrections, Wars, and the Eastern Crisis in the 1870s*, eds., Béla Király and Gail Stokes (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1985), 125-141; Russian strategic planning is detailed by Jacob W. Kipp, "Strategic Railroads and the Dilemmas of Modernization," in *Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution*, eds., David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 95-102.

⁶⁶ Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 124.

⁶⁷ Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements: 1806-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 170-178; William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia: 1600-1914* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1992), 320-322; Richard F. Hamilton, "The European Wars: 1815-1914," in *The Origins of World War I*, eds., Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 78; for more details about Russian foreign policy in the Balkans, especially toward Sofia and Belgrade, see Charles Jelavich, *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism. Russian Influence in the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria and Serbia, 1879-1886* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1958).



Map 3: Combined Maps of the Treaty of San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

In the wake of this sudden Russian victory, the main European powers became ever more anxious about this new diplomatic and military situation that they found incompatible with the balance of power on the continent. At this critical junction, the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck perceived the risks of a potential Anglo-Russian war and decided to step in.⁶⁸ The Iron Chancellor prudently rejected siding either with the British or the Russians, both powers being valuable partners to his state, and summoned a European conference in Germany in 1878.⁶⁹ At the Congress of Berlin that lasted from 13 June to 13 July 1878, six major European powers were invited: Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia; the Ottoman Empire was also invited. Bismarck reassured his diplomatic partners that he would serve as an “honest broker, who really wants to do business.”⁷⁰ Honest, perhaps, but the business he certainly did. Bismarck, who chaired the conference, acted as the continent’s most dominating statesman and shrewdly deflected the resentment that many nations harbored against Germany after its victorious wars of unification. The White Revolutionary unapologetically donned his mantle of arbitrator of Europe, imposed his vision, and dictated the terms of a general peace that can famously be referred to as Bismarck’s European Order.’

Firstly, Bismarck did not relinquish anything from the gains that Prussia previously attained in Germany. Meanwhile, he also managed to somehow satisfy other nations’ appetites at the expense of the Ottomans. Secondly, Russia was compensated with territorial gains in Bessarabia and was also soothed by the creation of Bulgaria, Romania’s official independence, and Serbia and Montenegro’s aggrandizement. Thirdly, Austria-Hungary received *carte blanche*

⁶⁸ About Bismarck, one of the true giants of European history, see Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ Winfried Baumgart, *Imperialism: The Idea and Reality of British and French Colonial Expansion, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 22, quoted in Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 124.

⁷⁰ William Norton Medlicott, *The Congress of Berlin and After. A Diplomatic History of the Near Eastern Settlement 1878-1880* (London: Methuen, 1938), 22.

to occupy the *vilayet* of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, a remote and desolate strip of land that was only strategically relevant as a buffer zone between Serbia and Montenegro. Absurdly enough, even if Austria-Hungary became the official custodian in Sarajevo, the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina still nominally remained part of the Ottoman Empire.⁷¹ Bosnia's occupation by the Austro-Hungarian Empire had monumental consequences that tragically reverberated throughout the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. From that moment, Bosnia-Herzegovina occupied a central role in the increasingly tense European balance of power that is partially responsible for the origins of World War I. Fourthly, Great Britain, always concerned with defending the maritime routes to the East and the jewel of the crown, India, received the Turkish island of Cyprus.⁷² A key naval base that allowed the Royal Navy to position its warships closer to the Suez Canal that had only been recently inaugurated in 1869.⁷³ Fifthly, France, still reeling from the Franco-Prussian War's disaster and the amputation of its lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine, was allowed to colonize Tunisia. Sixthly, and most humiliatingly, Italy, which possessed more residents in Tunisia than France did, received absolutely nothing. A diplomatic slap in the face that the Consulta did not forget and which gravely irritated Rome for the decades to come. This international affront only incited the Italian

⁷¹ Volker Ullrich, *Die nervöse Großmacht Aufstieg und Untergang des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871 - 1918* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1997), 87; Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, vol. 2, *The Period of Consolidation, 1871-1880* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 438; Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 173.

⁷² In this high-level diplomatic transaction, the British reinforced their naval presence close to the Straits. However, they still had to open the strings of their purse to do so. Indeed, Constantinople agreed to cede Cyprus to London, "for use as a base in the Eastern Mediterranean," but in exchange Britain had to fork out the tidy sum of £98,000 per year. Norman McCord, *British History 1815-1906* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 275-277.

⁷³ As it is well-known, the British Empire always possessed a strategic interest in the Near East, and as such the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, provided the Empire with its principal maritime route to India and the British colonies in Asia. Very quickly after the completion of the Canal, British Premier Benjamin Disraeli discreetly managed to buy back a majority of the shares that the Khedive of Egypt held from the company that administered the Canal. Less than a decade later, Great Britain would extend its full control over Egypt, a take-over that completely confirmed the slow but steady disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. For more details about this episode of British Imperial expansion, see chapters 4 and 5 from Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1961).

government to pursue further colonial dreams in Africa.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the Bismarckian system did not completely succeed in satiating every Balkan nation's territorial appetites; as Richard Hall confirmed,

In place of a large independent Bulgaria, the Congress of Berlin established an autonomous Bulgarian principality under Ottoman suzerainty, a semi-autonomous Eastern Rumelia under the authority of the Ottoman Sultan and returned Macedonia to the direct rule of the Sultan.⁷⁵

Under the influence of Bismarck's authoritarian figure, the Congress of Berlin provided a *modicum* of resolution to some of Europe's most pressing diplomatic issues and temporarily released some of the Balkan cauldron's pressure. At first glance, it seems that Bismarck's diplomatic endeavors succeeded, as the congress provided some measure of political reassurance to both England and Russia. Bismarck also benevolently soothed two of Germany's recent rivals, Austria-Hungary and France. Nevertheless, what Bismarck originally achieved at the congress, primarily to maintain Germany as the dominant power on the continent, isolate France, and reduce Russian power, was rapidly undermined. Instead of consolidating Germany's long-term geostrategic security, it threatened it. By encouraging some of the Great Powers' expansion outside Europe, the Berlin settlement actually pushed Germany, Europe's mightiest military, and most robust economy into a corner. Likewise, domestically, it provoked an outcry, as some powerful German cultural, commercial, naval, and political lobbies agitated for Germany to acquire colonies abroad. Reluctantly, even Bismarck, who from the onset, was fervently opposed to German colonial expansion, and who did not wish to precipitate his country in any dangerous ventures in either Asia or Africa to satisfy the economic and cultural concerns of some of Germany's most potent organizations, gave way.

⁷⁴ Richard Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960* (London: Routledge, 1966), 24-5, quoted in Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 125.

⁷⁵ Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

Less than a decade after the congress, and despite Bismarck's grave concerns, Germany also participated, although belatedly, in the scramble for Africa, by seizing Cameroon, Namibia, Togo, and Tanganyika.⁷⁶ As an unmistakable sign of his disdain for colonial conquests, Bismarck once declared that for Germany to acquire colonies "would be like sable coats worn by Polish noblemen who don't have shirts."⁷⁷ In December 1888, shortly before the end of his tenure, Bismarck once more raged against Germany's imperial involvement in Africa, when he declared to Eugen Wolf, "Ihre Karte von Afrika ist ja sehr schön, aber meine Karte von Afrika liegt in Europa. Hier liegt Rußland, und hier - nach links deutend - liegt Frankreich, und wir sind in der Mitte; das ist meine Karte von Afrika." [Your map of Africa is really quite nice. But my map of Africa lies in Europe. Here is Russia, and here is France, and we're in the middle — that's my map of Africa.]⁷⁸ Ultimately though, the Congress of Berlin's most significant political effects directly concerned Europe. Despite its official veneer of success, the Congress of Berlin did not establish a durable peace over the continent. The consequences of some of its most blatant injustices, especially in the Balkans, were felt very rapidly.

⁷⁶ Regarding the European powers' colonial conquests in Africa, see Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876-1912* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1991); for the German colonization of present-day Tanzania and its recourse to indigenous manpower for military service, see Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014); about the violence perpetrated by Wilhelmine Germany in its empire-building process, especially in the modern country of Namibia, see David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide* (London: Faber, 2010); also recently, Marie Muschalek, *Violence as Usual: Policing and the Colonial State in German Southwest Africa* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); finally, regarding the impact of German colonialism on its subject populations around the world, Nina Berman, Klaus Muehlhahn, and Patrice Nganang, eds., *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian, and Oceanic Experiences* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2013).

⁷⁷ Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, vol. 3, *The Period of Fortification, 1880-1898* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 114, quoted in Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 125.

⁷⁸ Eugen Wolf, *Vom Fürsten Bismarck und seinem Haus: Tagebuchblätter* (Berlin: Fleischel, 1904), 16.

CHAPTER 2

THE CAULDRON IS BOILING

Agreement and harmony with Austria are a political impossibility for Serbia.

Ilija Garašanin

From the Congress of Berlin in 1878 to the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-1909, the European continent and the Balkans witnessed an era characterized by a dangerous and steady buildup of international tensions. During these thirty years, several wars, diplomatic crises, and dangerous military standoffs irremediably paved the way for the ultimate escalation of tensions: the July Crisis of 1914 that eventually resulted in the beginning of World War I. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Congress of Berlin did not particularly enhance the diplomatic stability of the European continent. As Mark Biondich stated, “The Congress of Berlin cast a long shadow over the Balkans, its decisions setting in motion forces that shaped Balkan politics well into the interwar period. The Berlin settlement failed to provide long-term solutions to the national aspirations of the Balkan peoples.”⁷⁹ Although the Congress of Berlin validated the complete independence of Serbia, it nevertheless disadvantaged secondary powers. Despite the generous territorial advantages originally gained at the Treaty of San Stefano, Montenegro found itself spoiled from the officially approved additions of the Sandžak of Novi Pazar and a portion of adjacent Northern Albania. On the other hand, Austria-Hungary extended its political presence in the Western Balkans. These notable Austrian gains produced durable resentment in Serbia and Montenegro, as the two states had previously targeted these territories as part of their planned national expansion.

⁷⁹ Mark Biondich, *The Balkans: Revolution, War, and Political Violence since 1878* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46.

Furthermore, in the Balkans, the diplomatic jockeying for territorial growth continued unabated. “Persistent Greek claims led to something of a corollary to the Berlin settlement. In 1881, the Great Powers sanctioned the Greek annexation of Thessaly and part of southern Epirus.”⁸⁰ The ink was barely dry on the Congress of Berlin’s parchment when the Bulgarians resolutely started to undermine it. Ivan Geshov, one of Bulgaria’s most prominent politicians of the time, confided to one of his friends,

Bulgaria is not only truncated but stabbed in the heart. The operation, or better to say this series of operations, inflicted upon Bulgaria, cause us terrible pains and will cripple us for a long time, but will not prove fatal to us.⁸¹

Bulgaria’s determination to reverse the settlement's effects was not an isolated position within Balkan diplomacy. Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro all perceived the Congress of Berlin as a major obstacle to realizing their national objectives and immediately negated its provisions. Meanwhile, in Russia, public and official opinions were decidedly incensed by the diplomatic offspring of the Congress of Berlin. Rancor against Germany in general, and Bismarck in particular, reached its apex. As a result of the Congress of Berlin, the League of the Three Emperors (Tsar Alexander II of Russia, Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany, and Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary) or Dreikaiserbund [the three Emperor’s League] crumpled, even if this diplomatic alliance was in George Kennan’s words, “only a personal arrangement among the three monarchs providing for a species of consultation in the event of a threat to the peace.”⁸²

In October 1879, as the diplomatic fracture between the three eastern monarchies was undeniably exposed, Bismarck believed it was time to tighten Austro-German relations and initiate

⁸⁰ Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

⁸¹ Ivan Evstratiev Geshov, *Lichna korespondentsiia* [Personal correspondence], eds., Radoslav Popov and Vasilka Tankova (Sofia: Akademichno izd-vo Marin Drinov, 1994), 29.

⁸² George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 75.

a twenty-year confidential treaty between the two Germanic powers: Die Doppelte Allianz [the Dual Alliance]. This Austro-German Alliance was signed in Vienna on 7 October 1879.⁸³ By imposing a diplomatic agreement with Austria-Hungary, Bismarck followed two main objectives: First, Austria-Hungary was Germany's clear choice in terms of culture and language. Second, Bismarck primarily saw this Austro-German Alliance as a defensive one. Indeed, the treaty's stipulations were unequivocal: if Russia attacked Austria-Hungary, Germany would join the fray; if, on the other hand, Germany became the victim of Russian aggression, then the Dual Monarchy would also come to the rescue of its German ally.⁸⁴ The conditions that Bismarck imposed intended to reign in any aggressive Austrian designs in the Balkans. Although this alliance was essentially defensive, it also served to maintain France in an isolated diplomatic position. From an Austrian perspective, this partnership also offered advantageous benefits, even if "Austria would have to play the second role to German interests."⁸⁵ Nonetheless, the Habsburg Empire also derived an essential German guarantee, in case of a potential war with the Tsarist Empire, it could benefit from German military power's always-precious support. In World War I, this proviso undoubtedly proved critical. On more than a few occasions, Austro-Hungarian forces were trounced by the Russian army and only owed their military survival to the timely and decisive assistance of the Kaiser's soldiers.

At the German Empire's highest political level, this Austro-German Alliance's acceptance did not go down smoothly. In Berlin, Kaiser Wilhelm I was utterly chagrined to see a diplomatic and military arrangement aimed at a country he wholeheartedly respected: Russia. Such was the

⁸³ Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order*, 73.

⁸⁴ Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1866-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 114.

⁸⁵ Robert A. Kahn, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 281; it was not only from a military perspective that the Habsburg Empire fell under German influence, even economically, Austria-Hungary irremediably gravitated toward the economic orbit of Germany. See, Bruce Waller, "Bismarck, the Dual Alliance and Economic Central Europe, 1877-1885," *VSWG: Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 63, no. 4 (1976): 454-467.

German Emperor's anger that he lamented that the treaty was a "perfidious betrayal of a long friendship!"⁸⁶ In this tense standoff between the Kaiser and his Chancellor, Bismarck only prevailed by pressuring his master to endorse the treaty under the very threat of his resignation.⁸⁷ In Vienna too, the mood was equally somber. The old and sick Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Julius Andrassy, who was already under fire from both German and Hungarian nationalists for the recent occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, resigned only one day after the signature of the treaty. Even his master, Kaiser Franz Joseph, grudgingly gave his consent to the treaty. He was not pleased whatsoever about the embarrassing likelihood that Austria-Hungary would be subjugated to Germany and would have to align its diplomacy with Berlin's decisions.⁸⁸

By the end of 1879, while Bismarck effectively placed Austria-Hungary under Germany's wing, he still attempted to mend the relationship with Russia. After negotiations with the Foreign Office ministers from Austria-Hungary and Russia, Bismarck managed to generate a tripartite arrangement, the Dreikaiserbund. Tsar Alexander II and Austrian monarch Franz Josef both agreed to the new accord, and it took well over a year to iron out all the remaining details. In between, on 13 March 1881, in Saint-Petersburg, Tsar Alexander II was murdered.⁸⁹ Despite the new Tsar Alexander III's skepticism, the protocol was finally ratified on 18 June 1881.⁹⁰ Notwithstanding Bismarck's tenacious efforts to bring together the three conservative eastern monarchies, issues still simmered under the surface. Unsurprisingly, disagreement again erupted between Austria-Hungary and Russia at the crossroads of their mutual geostrategic interests, the Balkans.

⁸⁶ Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, vol. 2, *The Period of Consolidation, 1871-1880* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 507.

⁸⁷ Craig, *Germany 1866-1945*, 114; before using his ultimate trump card, Bismarck wisely enrolled the support of all the necessary Prussian heavy weights, such as Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, and Prince Hohenlohe the German ambassador to France. Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, 507.

⁸⁸ Arthur James May, *The Hapsburg Monarchy, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 143.

⁸⁹ Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order*, 59-60.

⁹⁰ Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order*, 75.

Austria-Hungary was distressed at the prospect of Russia attempting to vastly expand Bulgaria's size and transform this new nation into a *de facto* vassal. This Russian support to Sofia prompted the Hofburg to offer Serbia some moderate assistance in its dispute with Bulgaria. Nevertheless, Bulgaria and Serbia, and not for the first time in their history, clashed. This time, the dispute arose over the takeover of Eastern Rumelia by Bulgaria. This act of unprovoked aggression from Sofia forced Belgrade to declare war on Bulgaria on 14 November 1885.⁹¹ In this duel between the two belligerent Balkan nations, Bulgaria gained the upper hand, and under the leadership of its new monarch, Prince Alexander of Battenberg, the Bulgarian army counter-attacked and drove back the Serbian invader. After a week of hostilities, the Bulgarians soundly defeated the Serbs at the Battle of Slivnica. Buoyed by this success, the Bulgarians were prepared to invade Serbia and march onto Niš. The Serbian repulse produced a great deal of anxiety in Belgrade and Vienna, as it was assumed that if Bulgarian troops captured Niš, then Belgrade would logically be next. At this point in the conflict, the Great Powers re-entered the diplomatic arena, and Vienna coerced the Bulgarians to stop by issuing an ultimatum.⁹² On a regional level, this deep-seated hatred between Bulgaria and Serbia had serious aftereffects. The Balkans' two dominating powers never collaborated to reverse the effects of the Congress of Berlin nor worked against the Ottoman Empire. Equally, Serbia and Montenegro did not present a united front against the Turks, thus preventing their countries' potential union.⁹³ For the Great Powers, the conclusion of the war between Serbia and Bulgaria yielded significant diplomatic results. The first one was the downfall of the League of the Three Emperors. As explained before, the profound disagreement

⁹¹ May, *The Hapsburg Monarchy, 1867-1914*, 286.

⁹² Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question: 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: MacMillan, 1966), 232.

⁹³ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 4.

between Austria-Hungary and Russia about the Balkans proved to be too wide a gap for the two powers to remain on friendly terms.

At 3:30 a.m., on 21 August 1886, after a *coup d'état* instigated by the Russian Tsar, Alexander of Battenberg King of Bulgaria, was deposed, forced out from Sofia, and dispatched to the Russian's Danubian port of Reni in Bessarabia. From there, Battenberg was placed on a train and unceremoniously shipped to Austrian Poland.⁹⁴ Following a strange turn of events, Battenberg returned to Bulgaria, and once back in Sofia, he acknowledged that he could no longer rely on the Bulgarian army's officer corps. Finally, he realized that he would never rule again due to the Russian Tsar's enmity against him.⁹⁵ On Monday, 6 September 1886, Battenberg abdicated.⁹⁶ The new King of Bulgaria, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, whom Austria-Hungary and Germany had endorsed, was formally recognized by the Narodno sŭbranie [the Bulgarian National Assembly]. Like Alexander Battenberg before him, the new Bulgarian monarch rapidly fell out of favor with the Russian Tsar. Nevertheless, this time around, the latter had to make do with him.

In June 1887, as the League of the Three Emperors was now in tatters, the German Chancellor changed his tack. While Bismarck wished to preserve the Austrian Alliance at all costs, he still made an overture to the Russians. After two months of negotiations with his Russian opposite Nikolai Karlovich Giers, the two men reached an agreement, the Reinsurance Treaty.⁹⁷ This ultra-secret diplomatic agreement dictated that Germany and Russia would adopt a neutral position if the other signatory became embroiled in a conflict with a third power. The treaty's two principal limitations were a German attack against France and a Russian attack against Austria-

⁹⁴ Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order*, 190-191.

⁹⁵ For an accurate analysis of the Bulgarian Crisis, see J.M. Roberts, *Europe, 1880-1945*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 75-78.

⁹⁶ Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order*, 192.

⁹⁷ About the diplomatic work of Giers, and his prominent role in the signature of the Reinsurance Treaty and in the future Franco-Russian agreement, see, Margaret Maxwell, "A Re-examination of the Rôle of N.K. Giers as Russian Foreign Minister under Alexander III," *European Studies Review* 1, no. 4 (1971): 351-376.

Hungary.⁹⁸ The main diplomatic benefits for Bismarck's Germany were "to remove the possibility of Franco-Russian collaboration in an aggressive war against Germany."⁹⁹ Notwithstanding Bismarck's strenuous endeavors to keep Europe's destiny on a level keel and oversee positive relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia, he could not completely avoid the potential renewal of diplomatic frictions between the Habsburg and Romanov dynasties.

The Reinsurance Treaty finally drew the curtain on Bismarck's long and illustrious diplomatic career as Europe's greatest statesman since Napoleon. On 9 March 1888, Kaiser Wilhelm I passed away. The heir to the Hohenzollern throne was Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, who became Kaiser Friedrich III. However, Kaiser Friedrich III's reign was short-lived, and on 15 June 1888, the new German Emperor fell victim to throat cancer. The next in line to receive the Kaiser's crown was the 29-year-old son of Friedrich III, Wilhelm II. As soon as he ascended the throne, the young, brash, and cantankerous monarch entered in conflict with the aged Minister-President of Prussia. Bismarck, who by now was 75 years old, perceived his new imperial master as bombastic, careless, and inexperienced in the exercise of power. Reciprocally, Wilhelm II, encouraged by Bismarck's many foes in the government and Prussian court, found the Reich Chancellor to be a selfish, manipulative, and imperious character.¹⁰⁰ Undoubtedly, both men were indeed correct about their mutual assessments. Nevertheless, only one man could preside over the destiny of the Iron Kingdom, and at this point in time, the Kaiser did. Kaiser Wilhelm did not wish to walk into his grandfather's boots who once famously declared, "Es ist schwer, unter Bismarck Kaiser zu sein." [It is hard being emperor under Bismarck.]¹⁰¹ On 16 March 1890, following a

⁹⁸ Details about the Reinsurance Treaty are provided by A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 316-319; as well as by Erich Eyck, *Bismarck and the German Empire* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), 295-96.

⁹⁹ Craig, *Germany 1866-1945*, 131.

¹⁰⁰ Lamar Cecil, *Wilhelm II*, vol. 1, *Prince and Emperor, 1859-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 130-132.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Christopher Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II* (London: Routledge, 2000), 33.

political disagreement, Wilhelm II forced the Pomeranian Jupiter to resign. Bismarck's reign over the continent's mightiest power abruptly came to an end. The course of German history would never be the same, and Europe's fortunes were forever altered with consequences that are all too familiar.

After Bismarck's removal, Leo von Caprivi became the new German Chancellor.¹⁰² Caprivi, who held Italo-Slavic origins, was a man, "Generally modest in bearing and celebrated for his discretion...He was also thoroughly realistic and knew that his qualifications for the chancellorship were limited."¹⁰³ Caprivi humbly recognized that "His sense of duty to the crown, dictated his accepting the unwelcome office."¹⁰⁴ Despite completely lacking the necessary political acumen for the job, Caprivi immediately had to deal with issues that sat prominently at the top of the German diplomatic agenda. The main one was the renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty. On this occasion, Wilhelm and his Foreign Office minister Friedrich von Holstein departed from the policy of conciliation with Russia that Bismarck had previously followed. They rejected Russian overtures to renew it and let the accord fall into oblivion.¹⁰⁵ As Craig eloquently coined it, "The Russian tie was irretrievably snapped, and the old Bismarckian diplomatic system became a thing of the past."¹⁰⁶ This fateful German decision would have long-lasting repercussions over the European equilibrium. The most crucial one was the diplomatic *rapprochement* that officially took place in 1894 between two opposite political *régimes*, the Western democratic French Third

¹⁰² Caprivi whose full name was Georg Leo Graf von Caprivi de Caprera de Montecuccoli, has often been described as a political non-entity, and as such, he never garnered too much historical scrutiny, nevertheless, for a depiction of his political tenure see, John C. G. Röhl, *Germany Without Bismarck: The Crisis of Government in the Second Reich, 1890-1900* (London: Batsford, 1967); also, Charlotte Sempell, "The Constitutional and Political Problems of the Second Chancellor, Leo Von Caprivi," *Journal of Modern History* 25, no. 3 (September 1953): 234-254.

¹⁰³ Cecil, *Wilhelm II*, 171.

¹⁰⁴ Cecil, *Wilhelm II*, 171.

¹⁰⁵ For the consequences of the non-renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty as seen from a Russian point of view, Peter Jakobs, *Das Werden des Französisch-Russischen Zweibundes: 1890-1894* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1968), 56-58.

¹⁰⁶ Craig, *Germany 1866-1945*, 232.

Republic and the Eastern autocratic Tsarist Russia.¹⁰⁷

In the wake of the Reinsurance Treaty's abandonment, the new Kaiser, easily excitable, often prone to be influenced by the more convincing voices from his entourage, and always ready to make harsh decisions without any second thoughts, next decided to embark upon a grandiose project to build a rival to Great Britain's mighty Royal Navy.¹⁰⁸ Wilhelm, always a great admirer of British naval power and a Mahanian at heart, was easily persuaded by Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz that Germany could, and more importantly, should build 'a navy second to none.' The subsequent naval rivalry with Great Britain is extremely well-documented and does not need to be reviewed Ad Nauseam within this study.¹⁰⁹ Between 1890 and 1905, the Kaiser and his foreign office led Germany onto a very dangerous path, the aggressive new course of Weltpolitik, which ultimately reversed Bismarck's policies. Germany's latest diplomatic moves had left the country isolated internationally and sandwiched by two powerful rivals, Russia and France, that now worked in unison. Following the First Moroccan Crisis of 1905 and the events that transpired in Tangier, Paul Kennedy remarked that "any German pressure upon its Western neighbor was going to provoke that small but influential part of the British Cabinet to become even more convinced of the need to uphold the Anglo-French Entente, if necessary by force."¹¹⁰

Moreover, following the Algeciras Conference of 1906, the diplomatic humiliation of

¹⁰⁷ Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order*, 410; Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, vol. 1, trans. Isabella M. Massey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 63; Volker Ullrich, *Die nervöse Großmacht Aufstieg und Untergang des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871 - 1918* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1997), 183.

¹⁰⁸ About the influence that the Kaiser's *Camarilla* possessed, see, Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); also, John C. G. Rohl, *The Kaiser and His Court: Wilhelm II and the Government of Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁹ Some of the most outstanding works regarding the Anglo-German Naval race, are: Holger H. Herwig, *Luxury Fleet: The Imperial German Navy, 1888-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980); Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1991); Jan Rieger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

¹¹⁰ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 283.

Germany was complete, as Gordon Craig noted that “the French got exactly what they wanted, and the Germans found themselves isolated except for the support of Austria-Hungary.”¹¹¹ John Keiger corroborated Craig’s opinion that “Germany’s diplomacy had backfired. To a large extent she had conspired toward her own isolation.”¹¹² Furthermore, Germany now found itself facing the daunting prospect, and the German generals’ worst nightmare, of a two-front war against its most potent military foes, France and Russia. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany had soberly realized that within the current European panorama, it could only rely on a decrepit second-fiddle, Austria-Hungary. Thus, more than ever, and despite its Austrian ally's feebleness, Berlin had to maintain at all costs its diplomatic, military, and political connections with Vienna. Tragically, what the German generals and diplomats failed to envision was that by grudgingly assenting to remain Austria-Hungary’s lone partner in the next oncoming war, Germany would inevitably find itself ‘chained to a corpse.’ Worse still, the closer Germany stood behind Austria-Hungary, the more likely the eventuality of being dragged by its Austrian ally into a conflict originating in the Balkans, which would most probably begin against the Habsburgs’ staunchest foe: Serbia.

Even if Austria-Hungary sided with Serbia during the Serbo-Bulgarian War, the atmosphere between the two countries was never truly amicable. After this conflict, relationships between the two states progressively deteriorated. One of the main bones of contention between Austria-Hungary and Serbia remained Bosnia-Herzegovina, a region that the Serbs indisputably considered part of Greater Serbia. Many in Belgrade believed that Bosnia formed an inseparable part of Serbia’s unredeemed lands and posited that Bosnia held a significant place within Serbian culture and language. In the late 1890s, tensions between Serbia and the Habsburg Empire were

¹¹¹ Craig, *Germany 1866-1945*, 321.

¹¹² John F. Keiger, *France and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 23.

further heightened. Vienna relied on the old stratagem of divide and conquer and regularly pitted the Serbs against the Croats in the Habsburg's southern lands.¹¹³ However, by the first decade of the twentieth century, and despite these recurring Austro-Hungarian attempts to poison relations between the Serbs and the Croats, the two nationalities had begun a process of *détente* toward each other.

Meanwhile, on 11 June 1903, in the Royal Palace of Belgrade, King Alexandar of Serbia and his wife Queen Draga were brutally assassinated in the middle of the night by twenty-eight officers of the Serbian army.¹¹⁴ The regicide was planned by a faction of army officers who were part of the not-so-secret organization Crna Ruka [the Black Hand], and which was led by a young and charismatic lieutenant, Dragutin Dimitrijević, better-known as the dark and enigmatic figure of Apis, a man who later played a major role in the 28 June 1914's assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo.¹¹⁵ The assassination of King Alexandar and Queen Draga shocked Europe by its savagery and put a bloody end to the Obrenović family's rule over Serbia. The next Serbian monarch King Petar I of the Karageorgević dynasty, allowed progressive democratization of the Serbian political life to occur during his reign. Consequently, the assassination of 1903 symbolizes the dawn of a new era in Serbia, both internally and from a foreign policy standpoint.¹¹⁶ From 1903 onward, Serbia embarked upon a much-less conciliatory course toward Austria-Hungary. The new Serbian foreign policy was markedly aggressive toward the Habsburg Empire

¹¹³ George Willard White, *Nationalism and Territory: Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 231; Kahn, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 446-447.

¹¹⁴ Regarding the gory details of how the Serbian King and his wife were shot at point-blank range, stabbed, hacked, and dumped through their royal bedroom window, see Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 3-5; also, Wayne S. Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West. The Events of 1903-1908* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1954), 55-59.

¹¹⁵ About Apis' role in the conspiracy hatched to kill the Serbian monarch, see, David Mackenzie, "Officer Conspirators and Nationalism in Serbia, 1901-1914," in *Essays on War and Society in East Central Europe, 1740-1920*, eds., Stephen Fischer-Galati and Béla K. Király (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1987), 117-150.

¹¹⁶ For an account that views the 1903 events as the beginning of a new phase in Serbian history, see, Alex N. Dragnich, *The Development of Parliamentary Government in Serbia* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1978), 95-98.

and unquestionably pro-Russian.¹¹⁷

In Serbia, the resentment directed at the Dual Monarchy was intensified by the Hungarians' harsh policies. The Serbian population that lived in Hungary's southern part was distinctly impacted by the policies of Magyarization enacted by Kálman Tisza's administration. These policies imposed the teaching of the Hungarian language as mandatory in every school of the country, without any second thought of considering the children's ethnic origin or the language group to which they belonged. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Serbs and the Romanians were the most adversely affected by these measures imposed by the Hungarian Parliament. (See Map 4). Moreover, in Budapest, both the government and the public opinion were opposed to providing to the empire's Serbian inhabitants the same political rights and legal prerogatives currently enjoyed by the Hungarians. From 1908, and following Austria-Hungary's official annexation of Bosnia, the Serbs who inhabited the Dual Monarchy inexorably regarded their motherland as the only possible savior. A savior that would rescue them from the despotic Habsburg government, which oppressed them and attempted to eliminate their culture and language.¹¹⁸

If the Serbian population living in the Dual Monarchy was enraged by the heavy-handed policies of Magyarization imposed, conversely, the Habsburg government rightly perceived Serbia as a dangerous menace to its existence. Serbia's international stand was essentially interpreted as the demonstration of a young and aggressive nation only undertaking an antagonistic policy toward Austria-Hungary because of the support that Russia provided. Moreover, the Ballhausplatz viewed

¹¹⁷ Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism, its History and Ideology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 191.

¹¹⁸ Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question: 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: MacMillan, 1966), 286; Tibor Frank, "Hungary and the Dual Monarchy, 1867-1890," in *A History of Hungary*, eds., Peter F. Sugar, Péter Hanák and Tibor Frank (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 255; Peter F. Sugar, "The Nature of Non-Germanic Societies under Habsburg Rule," *Slavic Review* 22, no. 1 (March 1963): 24; about the Hungarian assimilation policies pursued between the nineteenth and twentieth century see, István Deák, *Assimilation and Nationalism in East Central Europe during the Last Century of Habsburg Rule* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 1983).

Serbia as a bellicose state that only preyed either on Habsburg or Ottoman territory to propel its incomplete nation-building process. In 1909, aggravated by Serbia's hostile and unrepenting demeanor toward his country and always keen to engage in unnecessary saber-rattling, Chief of the General Staff of the Austro-Hungarian army, Feldzeugmeister Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf advocated for a precautionary strike against Belgrade.¹¹⁹

At this critical juncture, it is necessary to revisit Serbian national ambitions and realize that they were not simply limited to Bosnia-Herzegovina but also directed toward Kosovo and Macedonia. The Serbian foreign policy objectives had to reconcile the opposite realities of a messianic vision of its independence, which was deeply ingrained in the country's political consciousness, with the utterly complex ethnic composition of the Balkans. Bosnia was not the only area where Serbia expected to grow territorially. Kosovo also held a major position in these Serbian expansionist objectives. "Kosovo was at the centre of the Serbian mythscape, but it was not, in ethnic terms, an unequivocally Serbian territory. Muslim Albanian speakers were the majority there since at least the eighteenth century."¹²⁰ Moreover, the large numbers of Serbs Vuk Stefanović Karadžić tallied in Dalmatia, and Istria were actually Croats. Most of whom did not have the slightest pretense to be included in Greater Serbia. Ironically, in 1918 at the end of World War I, the Croats found themselves included in a Greater Serbia now named the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Then in 1929, the kingdom simply became Yugoslavia.¹²¹ Even if

¹¹⁹ Manfred Rauchensteiner, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und das Ende der Habsburgermonarchie 1914-1918* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), 23; Gary W. Shanafelt, *The Secret Enemy: Austria-Hungary and the German Alliance, 1914-1918* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1985), 12; Lawrence Sondhaus, *Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf: Architect of the Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 104.

¹²⁰ Wolf Dietrich Behschnitt, *Nationalismus bei Serben und Kroaten 1830-1914* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1980), 39.

¹²¹ For excellent accounts of how Yugoslavia came to be in the interwar period, see, John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); also, the excellent study by Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 141-225.

the Serbs always claimed Bosnia as rightfully theirs, a closer look reveals some ethnographic discrepancies that could unravel this claim. Bosnia, which was traditionally never part of Serbia, included a large number of Serbs, 43 percent of the overall population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and 20 percent of Catholic Croats, and 33 percent of Muslim Bosnians when Austria-Hungary seized the two provinces in 1878. The continuance of a large Muslim minority became one of the singular traits of Bosnia.¹²²



Map 4: The Ethnic Groups of Austria-Hungary in 1910.

William R. Shepherd, *Historical Atlas* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1976), 168.

¹²² Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1995), 161-164.

If Bosnia-Herzegovina's ethnic makeup could give any geographers an apoplexy, Macedonia's ethnic composition would certainly send them to their graves.¹²³ When one observes the current political map of the Balkans to assert the geographical boundaries of modern Macedonia, it is striking to remark that the lands that are included within the actual Republic of Macedonia first englobe the previous Yugoslav Republic that bore the same title; second, a stretched-out area that includes the fringes of southern Serbia and Eastern Albania; third, a considerable portion of Southwestern Bulgaria; and finally an extensive area of Northern Greece.¹²⁴ Even today, there is still a great deal of controversy about Macedonia's exact historical frontiers, and a lingering dispute remains between Athens and Skopje regarding the use of the name Macedonia. Similarly, there are still profound academic disagreements over Macedonia's cultural, linguistic, or national origins. Currently, the Macedonian language is accepted worldwide, except in three countries; one would eventually guess which ones: Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia.¹²⁵ Unsurprisingly, these are the three countries that all lost territory to make space for an independent Macedonia. When in 1897, the British diplomat and seasoned international traveler Sir Charles Eliot journeyed across Serbia, he was astonished to hear that his fellow Serbian wanderers “would not allow that there were any Bulgarians in Macedonia. They insisted that the Slavonic inhabitants of that country were all Serbs.”¹²⁶ This confusion about the ethnic composition of Macedonia was

¹²³ Regarding the extreme complexity of ‘ethnographic geography’ in Macedonia, one has only to consult the head-scratching maps, and incredibly perplexing ethnic groups’ representation tables presented, by Pery Lafazani and Myron Myridis, “Approche géographique de la région de Macédoine en 1900-1920,” in *The salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War*, ed., Yannis Mourellos (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2005), 1-35.

¹²⁴ Geographic information retrieved from a map provided by Andrew Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians. A History* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2007), 4.

¹²⁵ For more details about the extreme complexity of the ‘Macedonian Question’ see, Loring M. Danforth, “Competing Claims to Macedonian Identity: The Macedonian Question and the Breakup of Yugoslavia,” *Anthropology Today* 9, no. 4 (1993): 3-10.

¹²⁶ Barbara Jelavich, “Serbia in 1897: A Report of Sir Charles Eliot,” *Journal of Central European Affairs*, 18 (1958): 187.

reflected by the Russian diplomat G. N. Trubetskoi who during World War I pondered,

Is Macedonia a Bulgarian province? For a long time, Russia, Britain and other European countries responded with a positive answer to this question. However, many of our consuls who have studied this question *in situ* gave a different answer. Macedonia is neither a pure Bulgarian nor a Serbian region, but the Slavs who live there are a kind of raw material which can be transformed into either Serb and Bulgarian.¹²⁷

When in July 1913, in the aftermath of the Second Balkan War, the Carnegie Foundation sent an international commission of inquiry headed by the former French diplomat and Senator of the Sarthe, Baron Paul Henri Balluet d'Estournelles de Constant, to report on the atrocities that took place during the combats in Macedonia, the commission was shocked by what they found out. Even within an enlightened academic environment, the commission realized that there was no *consensus* regarding the ethnicity of the respective populations inhabiting Macedonia. The following report that the commission published in 1914 comprised not one but two ethnographic maps of the region. (See Maps 5 and 6). The first one depicted Sofia's views and showed the region as the *hinterland* of Bulgarian expansion. In contrast, the second reflected Belgrade's opinion and represented Western and Northern Macedonia to be bristling with all the Serbs who desperately longed to be reunited with their motherland Serbia.¹²⁸ If Macedonia figured prominently among Serbia's expansionist goals, the region was also key to Bulgaria and Greece's territorial expansion policies. In the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia all sponsored propaganda agencies in Macedonia. In 1886, the Serbs established 'The Society of Saint Sava,' in 1894, the Greeks founded Ethniki Etairia, and finally, in 1895, the Bulgarians created the 'Supreme Committee of External Organization.'¹²⁹

¹²⁷ A note of G. Trubetskoi on the tasks of Russia in the World War. January 10, 1917, Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii (AVPRI), f. Politarchiv, op. 482, d. 4313, l. 11. G. N. Trubetskoi was a vice-director of the First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at that moment, quoted in Lora Gerd, *Russian Policy in the Orthodox East: The Patriarchate of Constantinople (1878-1914)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 8.

¹²⁸ Centre européen de la dotation Carnegie, *Enquête dans les Balkans* (Paris: Centre européen de la Dotation Carnegie, 1914), 448-449.

¹²⁹ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 5.

CARTE ETHNOGRAPHIQUE DE LA MACÉDOINE

Point de vue bulgare

ENQUÊTE DANS LES BALKANS

DOTATION CARNEGIE



D'après Vasil Kăncov

- | | |
|---|---|
| Bulgares | Valaques |
| Russes | Grecs |
| Albanais | Turcs |

----- Frontières anciennes
 ++++++ Frontières actuelles
 Limites de la Macédoine
 Echelle de 1: 1.500.000
 0 20 40 60 80 100 km.

Prononciation: à n u, e a t s, i a b h g g g d u, j u i, ð a c h, u o u i, ð a t, ð a j.

Dressé au Bureau Cartographique de la LIBRAIRIE HACHETTE ET C^e PARIS

Imp. Erhard, f^{rs} Paris.

Map 5: Ethnographic map of Macedonia in 1913, Bulgarian perspective.
 Centre européen de la dotation Carnegie, *Enquête dans les Balkans*, 448.

CARTE ETHNOGRAPHIQUE DE LA MACÉDOINE

ENQUÊTE DANS LES BALKANS

Point de vue serbe

DOTATION CARNEGIE



D'après le Dr Cvijić

- | | | | |
|--------|--|---|------------------------------|
| SLAVES | Serbo-Croates | Albanais | ----- Frontières anciennes |
| | Serbes de langue albanaise (Arnauts) | Grecs | + + + + Frontières actuelles |
| | Bulgares | Roumains (Kitszovalaques) | — — — Chemins de fer |
| | Slaves de Macédoine | Turcs | Echelle de 1: 1,500,000 |
| | | | 0 20 40 60 80 100 km. |
| | | | |

Prononciation: c - ts, ç - tch, g - g aw, j - i, š - ch, u - ou, ū - u, E - j

Dressé au Bureau Cartographique de la LIBRAIRIE HACHETTE ET C^e PARIS

Imp. Erhard J^{me} Paris

Map 6: Ethnographic map of Macedonia in 1913, Serbian perspective.
Centre européen de la dotation Carnegie, *Enquête dans les Balkans*, 449.

These agencies supported their countries' respective efforts to sway the local Macedonian populace to embrace their national agendas.¹³⁰ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Macedonia (still nominally under Ottoman rule) becomes the central piece of the Balkan chessboard, and therefore plays a critical role in our understanding of the events that took place in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and the Macedonian Campaign of World War I.¹³¹ Therefore, it is necessary to observe the Ottoman power's steady deliquescence in its last remaining European foothold.

In Macedonia, Constantinople managed to preserve its authority by encouraging the rivalry between the Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian groups. Originally, the Ottoman authorities were inclined to lend their support to the Bulgarians, who took advantage of it to disseminate their culture and language. On 14 June 1902, the Bulgarians further strengthened their position by signing a military agreement with Russia that confirmed that the two countries would assist each other in the likelihood of a Romanian attack against either party.¹³² In 1903, a revolt directed against the Turks broke out in Macedonia. This revolt was led by the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) but was rapidly defeated by the Ottoman forces.¹³³ This botched IMRO's attempt to eliminate the Ottoman presence in Macedonia allowed various Greek and

¹³⁰ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 26.

¹³¹ For a description of Macedonia in the late Ottoman era, see chapter 12, *The Macedonia Question 1878-1908* in Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430-1950* (London: Harper-Collins, 2004), 238-254; also, for the importance of Macedonia in the Balkan context between 1875 and 1914, see, Hugh Poulton, *Who are the Macedonians?* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 48-77.

¹³² Regarding the details of the Russo-Bulgarian Alliance, see E. C. Helmreich and C.E. Black, "The Russo-Bulgarian Military Convention of 1902," *Journal of Modern History* 9 (December 1937): 471-482; also, for the Russian involvement into Balkan politics at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans. Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy 1908-1914* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

¹³³ The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization or IMRO was originally created in Salonica in 1893 and adopted the extremely original slogan of 'Macedonia for the Macedonians.' Over time, the IMRO primarily became the vehicle of the Bulgarian interests in the hotly contested region of Macedonia. For more details about Macedonian armed resistance in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Revolutionary Movements 1893-1903* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988).

Serbian groups to enhance their standing toward the Bulgarians and the Turks. Nevertheless, the Macedonian revolutionaries could not dislodge the Turks from their last seat of power in Europe, which in turn created an astounding effect on Bulgarian public opinion and an intense political uproar. At the time, the ruling Bulgarian prime minister, Stoyan Danev, remembered, “For public opinion at that time, Bulgarian foreign policy revolved around only one question, Macedonia.”¹³⁴ When the Ottoman forces repulsed the IMRO’s armed revolt, the Bulgarian army was not yet ready to enter the fray. Therefore, the outcome of this vexing international situation provided the impulse for the Bulgarian government to reorganize its army.¹³⁵ After 1903, very little doubt remained that Bulgaria would take up arms again to achieve all of its national policy’s objectives. Many in Sofia accepted the premise that the next war would unquestionably be fought against the Ottoman Empire.

In the aftermath of the Macedonian revolt, Austria-Hungary and Russia imposed the Mürzsteg Agreement on the Ottoman Empire. This plan of reforms mainly concerned the *vilayets* of Salonica, Kosovo, and Monastir. It was signed as a *memorandum* on 2 October 1903, at the Austrian Hunting Lodge of Mürzsteg, by both the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. It allowed the Sublime Porte to maintain its presence in Macedonia while guaranteeing more rights to all Christians living in these three Turkish provinces. Constantinople ratified the agreement on 24 November 1903.¹³⁶ Conscious of the current balance of power in the Balkans, Bulgaria decided to form an alliance with its longtime foe, Serbia.¹³⁷ This Serbo-Bulgarian alliance of 1904 included two distinct parts. The first one touched upon the economic and political spheres, the second one

¹³⁴ Stoyan Danev, “Kabinetüt D-r. St. Danev 1901-1903 godina,” *Rodina* 3, no. 4 (1941): 70.

¹³⁵ Ministerstvo na Voïnata Shtab na voïskata, voenno-istoricheska komisiya, *Voinata mezhdu Bülgariya i Turtsiya 1912–1913*, vol. 1, *Podgotovka na voinata* [The War Between Bulgaria and Turkey, 1912-1913, vol. 1, *Preparation for war*] (Sofia: Dürzhavna pechatnitsa, 1937), 83-84.

¹³⁶ Gerd, *Russian Policy in the Orthodox East*, 12-14.

¹³⁷ For details about the Serbo-Bulgarian Alliance, see, E.C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912-13* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 4-11.

pertained to military collaboration between the two countries. The military clauses provided for reciprocal cooperation in the likelihood of a foreign attack on either Bulgaria or Serbia and determined that the two nations would jointly partake in military operations in Kosovo and Macedonia if any of these two regions were invaded by a third party. Yet, this alliance went unheeded due to a powerful and timely Austro-Hungarian diplomatic intervention and a rapid decline in Serbo-Bulgarian relations.¹³⁸ Moreover, at about the same period, Russia entered a war with an upcoming power, the Empire of Japan.¹³⁹ The defeat of Russia during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 appalled the various Slavic Balkan states, which had always looked at their benevolent Russian patron not only as an important member of the Great Powers but also as their ultimate protector. After this shocking international development, the Bulgarians clearly understood the writing on the wall; if they had to enter a potential conflict in the Balkans, it would have to be without Russian assistance. Therefore, the Bulgarians, who owed their independence from the Ottomans to Russia's support, decided to carry on their military preparations for the expected challenge with Constantinople.

In 1908, everything rapidly changed due to the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁴⁰ At first glance, since these two Ottoman provinces were *de facto* under Austrian rule for over thirty years, "it might seem that the nominal change from occupation to outright annexation ought to have been a matter of indifference."¹⁴¹ In that instance, the news of this Austrian move in the Balkans provoked a national uproar. However, the blame for the rise in

¹³⁸ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 6.

¹³⁹ About this often neglected but nevertheless crucial conflict, see the highly engaging account by Richard Connaughton, *Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear: Russia's War with Japan* (London: Cassell, 2003).

¹⁴⁰ American historian Bernadotte Schmitt relates that "in December 1907 Aehrenthal informed Conrad that the aim of his Balkan policy was 'the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the incorporation of the non-Bulgarian part of Serbia' in the Habsburg Dominions." Bernadotte Schmitt, *The Annexation of Bosnia, 1908-1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 5.

¹⁴¹ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 34.

international tensions cannot solely be laid at the feet of the Ballhausplatz, as this intense Serbian nationalistic fervor can rightly be seen as the main factor for escalating tensions with the Habsburg Empire. On 6 October 1908, after the publication in *Odjek* (a newspaper that was the mouthpiece of the Serbian Independent Party) of an article asking for the people of Belgrade to participate in an anti-Austrian demonstration in front of the National Theater, over 20,000 people attended. At that rally, the leader of the Independent Radicals, Ljuba Davidović harangued the crowd and declared,

The loss of Bosnia will be disastrous for us all, (in that it will deliver a fatal blow to our dream of forming a south Slavic state.) Thus, we must fight against it, against the action, until just one of us remains... We will struggle until we are victorious, but if we are defeated, we will be defeated knowing that we gave our greatest effort, and that we have the respect not only of all Serbs but also of the whole Slavic race.¹⁴²

The following day, Serbian Foreign Office Minister Milovan Milovanović sent a *memorandum* to all European nations that articulated Serbia's position following this latest Austrian move. He wrote that "Serbia cannot find complete satisfaction unless the status of Bosnia-Herzegovina created by the Treaty of Berlin is wholly restored."¹⁴³ The rest of his missive confirmed that if the Great Powers were unable to consent to the Serbian demands, then Serbia should "receive compensation that would provide guarantees for the preservation of the independent life of its state and the Serbian people in general."¹⁴⁴ On 11 October, still in Belgrade, the Crown Prince Djordje joined the chorus of angry protest against Austria. He boastfully announced that he was ready and willing to go to war with Austria. He raved to the crowd of around 10,000 people, "I am extremely proud to be a soldier, and I would be proud to be the one who leads you, the Serbian people, in

¹⁴² *Odjek*, October 7, 1908, quoted in Violeta Manojlović, "Defense of National Interests and Sovereignty: Serbian Government Policy in the Bosnian Crisis, 1906-1909," (Master's Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1997), 58.

¹⁴³ Manojlović, "Defense of National Interests and Sovereignty," 59.

¹⁴⁴ This diplomatic note was printed in the Radical newspaper *Samouprava*, October 8, 1908, quoted in Manojlović, "Defense of National Interests and Sovereignty," 59.

this desperate struggle for life and death, for our nation and our honour.”¹⁴⁵ As a side note to this intense period of diplomatic tensions, it is interesting to remark that on 29 October 1909, Crown Prince Djordje renounced to become king, the reasons for which were never officially documented. Nevertheless, one can only surmise that except for the peculiar decision of beating his valet to death, such a public outburst, and the subsequent diplomatic embarrassment that it created, certainly did not help his cause to ascend the Serbian throne.¹⁴⁶

Even Nikola Pašić, the leader of the Serbian Radical party at the time of the Bosnian Crisis, clamored that “if Serbia could not convince the Great Powers to arrange a conference at which the annexation would be nullified, then Serbia had no option but to prepare for war and attempt to liberate Bosnia on its own.”¹⁴⁷ During the Bosnian Crisis, Russian politician Pavel Miliukov journeyed through Serbia and was horrified by the Serbian public’s resentment against Austria-Hungary. He reminisced that the prospect of going to war with Austria had been transformed into “a readiness to fight, and victory seemed both easy and certain. – He added that these views were universal and so unquestioned that ‘to get into an argument over [them] would have been totally useless.”¹⁴⁸

It is useful to note that before continuing with its official annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had obtained the Russian assent to proceed. However, the Austrians notably ‘forgot’ to notify their German partners about this perilous venture. Unsurprisingly, Constantinople was also upset not to be informed of Vienna’s decision.

¹⁴⁵ The Crown Prince Djordje’s fiery speech was printed the next day in *Pravda*, October 12, 1908, quoted in Manojlović, “Defense of National Interests and Sovereignty,” 69.

¹⁴⁶ Alex N. Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić, and Yugoslavia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 73-74.

¹⁴⁷ Vasa Kazimirović, *Nikola Pašić i Njegovo Doba: 1845-1926*, vol. 2 [Nikola Pasic and His Time: 1845-1926] (Belgrade: Nova Evropa, 1990), 104-106.

¹⁴⁸ Pavel Nikolaevič Miljukov, *Paul Miliukov: Political Memoirs 1905-1917* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 182.

Meanwhile, the Germans who had massively increased their economic penetration of the Ottoman Empire were rather disagreeably surprised by this typical demonstration of Austrian *Schlamperei*. Nevertheless, as internationally, the Germans were isolated and could only rely on the Austrians, they reluctantly accepted to support them in their risky Bosnian Business.¹⁴⁹ The Bosnian Crisis demonstrated that it was not the last time the Austrians led the Germans astray; the next time the Germans followed their Austrian ally into the Balkan's rabbit-hole, they fell into the abyss. From an Austrian perspective, the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was strictly in agreement with previous treaty stipulations. However, due to the Great Powers' secret diplomacy, these stipulations were not well-known by the general population, whether in Austria-Hungary or Serbia. Also, even if Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, was informed by his Austrian counterpart Alois Aerenthal, several Russian politicians were infuriated by the latest Ballhausplatz's move.¹⁵⁰ But since the Russians were still licking their wounds from a repressed revolution and a disastrous war against Japan, they could not intervene diplomatically or militarily against the Habsburg Empire, and as Richard Hamilton summed it, "For them, it was a serious loss of prestige."¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the Bosnia Crisis had crucial lasting consequences in the Tsarist Empire, as never again would the Russians find themselves humiliated diplomatically as they just had been. This resolve largely explains the uncompromising stand that Russia later adopted in the July Crisis of 1914. Finally, as a distressing domestic situation also hampered the Serbian government, it could not follow up on its original intention to intervene militarily and was obliged to accept this *fait accompli*. Most humiliatingly, Belgrade was forced to renounce its

¹⁴⁹ Francis Roy Bridge, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866-1914* (Boston, MA: Routledge, 1972), 310-311.

¹⁵⁰ Regarding Alexander Izvolsky's role and actions before and during the Bosnian Crisis, see, see chapter 4, *Iswolsky* in G.P. Gooch, *Before the War: Studies in Diplomacy*, vol.1, *The Grouping of the Powers* (London: Longmans, 1938), 331-349.

¹⁵¹ Richard F. Hamilton, "The European Wars: 1815-1914," in *The Origins of World War I*, eds., Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87.

claims on 31 March 1909.¹⁵² In Serbia, such was the public outcry that the government was even obliged to suppress virulent anti-Austrian demonstrations.¹⁵³ The overall conclusion drawn from the Bosnian Crisis is that it left Austria-Hungary victorious diplomatically; however, this momentous diplomatic episode created lasting tensions that quickly and dramatically resurfaced.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, less than two years later, two new international crises of even larger proportions erupted and involved many future protagonists of World War I. First, Italy and the Ottoman Empire clashed in North Africa during the Italo-Ottoman War of 1911-1912. Second, another larger conflict, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, finally pitted most of the Balkan states against their Ottoman Empire's archenemy. These last two conflicts proved critical in accelerating the Ottoman Empire's demise while also delineating the future political alignment of most Balkan nations that later participated in World War I.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 37.

¹⁵³ Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 370-371.

¹⁵⁴ During the Bosnian Crisis, the only diplomatic accommodation that the Austrians accepted, was to withdraw their troops from the Sandžak of Novi Pazar. For more details about this decision, see chapter 7: *The Annexation Crisis and Austria's Relinquishment of the Sandžak* in Kenneth Morrison and Elizabeth Roberts, *The Sandžak: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 73-90.

¹⁵⁵ About the role that the Italo-Ottoman War and the Balkan Wars played in the decline of Ottoman power in the early twentieth century, see chapter 1: *A Revolution and Three Wars, 1908-1913* by Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans. The Great War in the Middle East* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2015).

CHAPTER 3

DEATH THROES OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Io non ho intrapreso l'impresa di Libia per entusiasmo: tutt'altro.

[I did not undertake the Libyan enterprise out of enthusiasm: far from it]

Giovanni Giolitti

The Italo-Ottoman War of 1911-1912 remains one of history's forgotten wars. Often classified as a colonial conflict, this war has not, at least in English language literature, gathered a great deal of scholarly interest. This historical shortcoming remains rather surprising when one considers that the Italo-Ottoman War was the first major war between two great powers in almost thirty-three years. This inadequacy in modern military history derives from the fact that this war was immediately followed by the commencement of the more important Balkan Wars, which themselves became the ultimate dress rehearsal for World War I. Nevertheless, and in Bruce Vandervoort's words, the Italo-Ottoman War "has lessons of its own to teach. First among these are the problems faced by the Regio Esercito in trying to fight an unconventional war in Libya with conscripts, an unhappy experience revisited decades later by the USA and the Soviet Union."¹⁵⁶ It must also be remembered that this Italian victory over the Ottoman Empire had dramatic consequences on the international order and paved the way for the road to Sarajevo. But before exploring this Italo-Ottoman War further, it is crucial to review some of the events that occurred in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. Finally, this chapter also examines the diplomatic filiation between the Italo-Ottoman War and the Balkan Wars.

In July 1908, in Macedonia, a group of young officers from the Ottoman army led by Enver Paşa gained control of the empire. It immediately declared its intention to implement a far-

¹⁵⁶ Bruce Vandervoort, *To the Fourth Shore. Italy's War for Libya (1911-1912)* (Rome: Stato maggiore dell'esercito, Ufficio storico, 2012), 9.

reaching reform program.¹⁵⁷ This group was called the Committee for Unity and Progress (CUP) but has been traditionally referred to as the ‘Young Turks.’ In the spring of 1908, as the Ottoman Empire’s political conditions worsened and Sultan Abdülhamid II’s authority over its people declined, several small revolts broke out, and Salonica became the epicenter of this political turmoil. Anti-Ottoman revolts soon erupted in the Balkans, and regular troops were dispatched to suppress them. Following the Young Turks’ successful execution of their *coup* on 23 July 1908, the Sultan reluctantly accepted implementing their plans to modernize the empire. “The revolution was almost bloodless.”¹⁵⁸ “The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 marked a watershed in Ottoman history and profoundly impacted the shaping of the modern Middle East and the Balkans.”¹⁵⁹ In this study, I limit my analysis to events that occurred in the Balkans.¹⁶⁰ As they gained power, the Young Turks restored the 1876 Constitution. They were also keen to create and disseminate a sense of Ottoman identity among all the different ethnic and national groups that were part of the Sultan’s realm.¹⁶¹ To implement their reforms largely inspired by European states’ nationalistic agenda, the Young Turks decided to reform their armed forces through a vast modernization program.¹⁶² For that purpose, the Young Turks appealed to the German army and the British Royal

¹⁵⁷ The characters and motivations of the officers that engineered the Young Turk Revolution are described by Gwynne Dyer, “The Origins of the ‘Nationalist’ Group of Officers in Turkey 1908-18,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 8, No. 4 (October 1973): 121-164.

¹⁵⁸ Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 1.

¹⁵⁹ Mehmed Şükrü Haniöğlü, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3; Haniöğlü’s book impeccably reviews the genesis of the Young Turk Revolution and concentrates on the years 1902-1908; as a perfect complement to this monograph, and for an excellent overview of the events that took place after the crucial year of 1908, see, Noémi Levy and François Georgeon, *The Young Turk Revolution and the Ottoman Empire: The Aftermath of 1908* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

¹⁶⁰ For a global perspective about the Ottoman Empire, in the Young Turks Era, and the effects of the revolution on the critical issue of the nationalities within the empire, see, Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews, and Arabs, 1908-1918* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2014).

¹⁶¹ About the ‘nation building’ process that took place in the aftermath of 1908, and the attempts to forge an Ottoman identity, see, Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk’s Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

¹⁶² In the Fall of 1909, and for the first time in Ottoman history, grand maneuvers were introduced. See, Glen W. Swanson, “War, Technology, and Society in the Ottoman Empire from the Reign of Abdullhamid II to 1913: Mahmud

Navy to transform the Ottoman armed forces into a more modern and efficient organization. In April 1909, following a failed counter-revolution, the Young Turks deposed the old Sultan Abdülhamid II, exiled him to Salonica, and installed the more docile Mohammad V.

The Young Turks Revolution's effects promptly reverberated throughout the Balkans, as the various region's governments rapidly understood that a reinvigorated Ottoman Empire constituted a serious menace for the emancipation of their subjugated co-nationals living under the Sultan's sway. Furthermore, and at the same time, as the Bosnian Crisis unfolded, the Serbs and the Montenegrins understood that the Austrian annexation of Bosnia represented a massive blow to their nation-states' building process. On 22 October 1908, to better coordinate their future common response against any future aggressive Austrian designs, the Serbs and the Montenegrins signed a formal alliance.¹⁶³ This alliance aimed at agreeing on a common border between Serbia and Montenegro in the Sandžak of Novi Pazar. Despite the Austrians' evacuation of Novi Pazar, the Serbo-Montenegrin Alliance did not survive the Bosnian Crisis.¹⁶⁴ Finally, the lack of Russian assistance in the Bosnian Crisis further highlighted the Balkan states' need to cooperate diplomatically to impose their views on the Great Powers. During the events of 1908-1909, Bulgaria officially declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire. As a decisive episode of European history, the Bosnian Crisis placed the finishing touch on the dismantlement of the diplomatic order that had been negotiated at the Congress of Berlin, an order that stood as the ultimate barrier to fulfilling the Balkan states' avowed national goals.

Sevket and the German Military Mission," in *War, Technology, and Society in the Middle East*, eds., V.J. Parry and M.E. Yapp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 375.

¹⁶³ For the full-text of the Serbo-Montenegrin Alliance signed on 22 October 1908 between Petar Velimirović, President of the Serbian State Council (Prime Minister) and the Special emissary of the Principality of Montenegro, Serdar [General] Janko Vukotić, see Document # 541: Final Protocol, copy of a translation, 10 November 1908, in Ludwig Bittner, Hans Uebersberger, Alfred Francis Příbram, and Heinrich Srbik, eds., *Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik: Von der Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914*, vol. 1, 13. März 1908 bis 26. Februar 1909 (Vienna: Österreichischen Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1930), 411-415.

¹⁶⁴ Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), 8.

In the frantic international context that shadowed the Bosnian Crisis, Belgrade and Sofia recognized that their common territorial expansions would only become possible if their long-standing feud could be set aside. More importantly, their respective governments realized that should they cooperate militarily, they could then confront the Ottoman Empire and expel it from the Balkans. The governments of Bulgaria and Serbia understood the urgency to act against the Sublime Porte before the Ottoman Empire's full modernization could bear its fruits. Therefore, with these objectives in mind, diplomatic interactions between the Serbs and the Bulgarians intensified throughout 1909. The two governments shared the common goal, to assert their presence in Macedonia. The same year, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister General Stefan Paprikov declared, "It will be clear that if not today then tomorrow, the most important issue will again be the Macedonian question. And this question, whatever happens, cannot be decided without more or less direct participation of the Balkan states."¹⁶⁵ In turn, the Serbian Foreign Minister Milovan Milovanović answered to Paprikov why the two countries should rapidly reach an agreement,

For us there is another important consideration which speaks for the advantage of an agreement with Bulgaria. As long as we are not allied with you, our influence over the Croats and Slovenes will be insignificant. Outside of the difference of faith, these peoples have to a great degree the same culture we have. They do not see Serbia as a center, however, able to attract them. It will be something else altogether, when you and us form a powerful bloc. The all Orthodox and Catholic Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the neighboring Monarchy will begin inevitably to gravitate toward us.¹⁶⁶

The Balkan states' *détente* proceeded simultaneously as a Russian foreign policy realignment toward the Balkans.¹⁶⁷ Following their military loss against the Japanese in 1905 and their diplomatic inability to prevent the Austrian annexation of Bosnia in 1909, the Russians pursued a

¹⁶⁵ Ministerstvo na Vojnata Shtab na voškata. Voeno-istoricheska komisiya, *Voinata mezhdu Bŭlgariya i Turtsiya 1912–1913*, vol. 1 [The War Between Bulgaria and Turkey, 1912-1913] (Sofia: Dŭrzhavna Pechatnitsa, 1928-1937), 37.

¹⁶⁶ Ministerstvo, *Vojnata*, vol.1, 36.

¹⁶⁷ For a description of Russian re-orientation toward the Balkans, and the alliance concluded between Bulgaria and Serbia, see chapter 2, Charykov and the Straits in Edward C. Thaden, *Russia and the Balkan Alliance of 1912* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965), 38-57.

decidedly more aggressive approach in the Balkans. To achieve this goal, the Russians supported the scheme of an anti-Austrian Balkan league. Starting in 1911, the Russian ambassadors to Bulgaria and Serbia, Anatoly Neklyudov and Nicholas Hartwig worked behind the scene to inspire a Serbo-Bulgarian reconciliation, which would vastly reinforce Russia's overall influence in southeast Europe. During the summer of 1911, and for the last time, the Bulgarians attempted to find an agreement with the Ottomans about Macedonia. After the failure of their *démarche*, the Bulgarians adopted an uncompromising attitude toward the Turks. On 17 July 1911, in a speech to the *sŭbranie*, Bulgarian Prime Minister Ivan Geshov announced the diplomatic path that he intended Bulgaria to follow, "I think it is sufficient that you remember the example of Piedmont."¹⁶⁸ Geshov's administration planned to follow a *realpolitik* that would prevent Bulgaria from being treated in the same manner as at the Congress of Berlin. Geshov envisaged a vastly enlarged country that would include Macedonia and Thrace and carve its vital space at the expense of its Ottoman nemesis.

In Greece, one year after the Young Turks Revolution, a group of officers imitated their Ottoman counterparts and rebelled against the authorities; they succeeded in bringing down the government. The newly formed Greek government embarked upon a decidedly more nationalistic course of action and immediately took advantage of the confused state of diplomatic affairs. On the heels of the official Bulgarian independence, the Greek government attempted to control the Turkish-held Island of Crete. However, the marked indifference displayed by the Great Powers and the Ottoman resilience to relinquish this strategic location thwarted this Greek's attempt. Following this unsuccessful Greek effort, tensions continued unabated between Greece and the

¹⁶⁸ Speech by Ivan E. Geshov, 17 July 1911, *Dnevniitsi (stenografski) na petato veliko Narodno sŭbranie v gr. Veliko Tŭrnovo* [Stenographic reports of the fifth Great National Assembly in the town of Veliko Tŭrnovo] (Sofia: Dŭrzhavna pechanitsa, 1911), 230.

Ottoman Empire. “In 1910, only Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos’ refusal to seat Cretan representatives in the Greek parliament prevented another war between the Greeks and the Ottomans.”¹⁶⁹ Despite their bitterness, the Greeks did not have too long to wait before they could settle the score with their archenemy. Within merely two years, the opportunity would arise, and again, the swords would be drawn out from their scabbards. Indeed, the opportunity was provided by another aggressive European power, Italy, an imperialist state which ultimately aimed to get its lion share of the possessions belonging to the sick man of Europe.

In the fall of 1911, the Italo-Ottoman War’s beginning afforded additional motivation to the Balkan states to reach a diplomatic agreement that would coordinate their action in the prevision of a future offensive against the Turks. A well-informed British diplomat commented that,

The Italo-Turkish War brought no contribution to the conjunction of political forces that was to cause the war of the Balkan Coalition. But, in the moral sphere of international relations, it was of great effect. It radically changed the moral situation in Eastern Europe by breaking the ice for the plunge into war, on the brink of which the Balkan governments were shivering.¹⁷⁰

The Italo-Ottoman War of 1911-1912 represented a blatant act of European aggression against the Ottoman Empire and further eroded the diplomatic arrangement created by the Congress of Berlin. Crucially, it diverted important Ottoman military resources to a far-away theater, and in turn, created a favorable context for the Balkan nations to commence hostilities in southeast Europe. The origins of this often-neglected conflict can be found in the aftermath of the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when Italy was unmistakably snubbed by Bismarck and the Great Powers, thus earning the sobriquet of ‘The Least Great Power.’ As Timothy Childs confirmed,

Italian imperialistic ambitions towards the Ottoman Empire’s North African provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, known today as Libya, had their roots in the latter part of the

¹⁶⁹ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 8.

¹⁷⁰ [George Young], *Nationalism and War in the Near East (by a Diplomatist)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 160.

nineteenth century. Italy, outraged by France's occupation of Tunisia in 1881, began to cast covetous eyes on Libya as a form of consolation prize.¹⁷¹

These 'covetous eyes' that Italy directed at the North African shores were not the usual display of transalpine *braggadocio* but rather a concerted diplomatic approach that the Consulta undertook to sign an alliance with Austria and Germany. In November 1886, when the Italian Foreign Minister Carlo Felice Nicolis, Conte di Robilant sat at the negotiations table to work out the arrangements of the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany, he insisted on specific colonial terms that were agreed to and included in the documents signed on 20 February 1887.¹⁷² Luigi Albertini explained that concerning Germany, "Robilant was even able to extract a commitment which stipulated that Germany would come to Italy's assistance, should the Italian Kingdom be drawn into a war with France, following a French occupation of either the Sharifian Kingdom of Morocco or the Ottoman *vilayet* of Tripoli."¹⁷³ This Italo-German agreement undeniably reveals that the Italian Foreign Ministry considered France as its foremost Mediterranean rival. Consequently, Italian policy and the country's colonial destiny were pursued to prevent French expansion into the colonial sphere that Italy regarded as its *chasse gardée*.¹⁷⁴

For the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Italian foreign policy had attempted to carve out a specific zone of Italian influence in North Africa; particularly, as recent Italian colonial endeavors had only ended in disaster, when Italian forces suffered a shocking military defeat at the hands of French-armed Ethiopians, thus prompting one author to state that "the repulse at

¹⁷¹ Timothy W. Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya: 1911-1912* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1.

¹⁷² About those specific Italian requests toward Austria-Hungary and Germany, and the inclusion of a 'Libyan guarantee clause,' see Holger Afflerbach, *Der Dreibund: Europäische Großmacht- und Allianzpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2002), 691.

¹⁷³ Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, vol. 1, trans, Isabella M. Massey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 52-53.

¹⁷⁴ Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya: 1911-1912*, 2.

Adowa carried within itself the Tripoli War.”¹⁷⁵ But to pursue its colonial dreams in North Africa, Italy had to improve its relations with France drastically. Consequently, during the summer of 1902, Italy and France settled their differences with the Prinetti-Barrère Accord. Indeed, these diplomatic negotiations managed to resolve the colonial animosity that had persisted for the last two decades. In this agreement, Paris and Rome decided to delimitate each country’s specific spheres of interest. In the likelihood of a major colonial rearrangement, this accord specified that France would gain Morocco, while Italy would obtain *carte blanche* for its expansion in Libya. During these negotiations, Camille Barrère, the French ambassador to Rome, played a crucial role, as he soothed Franco-Italian tensions about the Mediterranean and wielded a discreet but efficacious influence with the Consulta. It was during this period that many diplomats and crown-heads of Europe noticed Barrère’s diplomatic talents. When World War I started, Barrère navigated skillfully, as France exerted enough influence for Italy to remain neutral. In 1915, Barrère reached the zenith of his diplomatic career as he was instrumental in the negotiations that brought Italy into the Entente’s camp. It was because of Barrère and the central part he played in maintaining Italy neutral at the onset of hostilities that in August 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II confided to his diary that “Our allies are detaching themselves from us like rotten pears.”¹⁷⁶ This Franco-Italian agreement finalized a diplomatic reconciliation in the making since 1898 and was crowned by a treaty of commerce between the two Latin nations.¹⁷⁷

It was not only in Paris that Italian diplomacy had gained international approval for its

¹⁷⁵ Jean-Louis Miège, *Expansion européenne et décolonisation de 1870 à nos jours* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1973), 63.

¹⁷⁶ Pierre Renouvin, *La crise européenne et la Première Guerre mondiale*, 4th ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), 209; about Camille Barrère, ‘ambassador extraordinaire,’ and his exceptionally long-lasting tenure at the French embassy in Rome between 1897 and 1924, see Léon Noël, *Camille Barrère, ambassadeur de France* (Paris: Tardy, 1948); more recently the doctoral dissertation by Gilles Ferragu, “Camille Barrère, ambassadeur de France à Rome” (PhD diss., Université de Paris Nanterre, 1999).

¹⁷⁷ William C. Askew, *Europe and Italy’s Acquisition of Libya 1911-1912* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1942), 19; Albert Pingaud, *L’Italie depuis 1870* (Paris: Delagrave, 1915), 192.

future acquisition of Libya. On 7 March 1902, a *memorandum* from London confirmed that the British government would officially recognize that “any alterations in the status of Libya would be in conformity with Italian interests.”¹⁷⁸ This type of diplomatic concessions demonstrated London and Paris’s willingness to sever the bonds between Italy and the Germanic powers of the Triple Alliance. These efforts were undertaken by British and French diplomacy, as Italy was seen (with reason) as the weak link of the Triple Alliance. Following these French and British diplomatic overtures, the Russians also recognized predominant Italian interests in North Africa. In 1909, Tsar Nicholas II approved the ‘Racconigi Bargain’ with Italian King Victor Emmanuel III.¹⁷⁹ This bilateral agreement confirmed Russia’s acceptance of Italian influence in Libya, while “In return, Italy would consider with benevolence Russian interests regarding the question of the Straits.”¹⁸⁰

Domestically, the country’s advocates of a strident colonial policy did not have trouble imposing a policy predicated on Libya’s future invasion on the Italian public opinion. In Vittorio Emanuele’s Kingdom, like everywhere else in Europe at the time, colonial aspirations were largely on the rise and enjoyed considerable popular support. Furthermore, Italian annexationists reminisced about the Roman Empire’s glorious past and reaffirmed Libya’s importance in providing Rome with its vast agricultural resources. As an unmistakable proof of the growing interest for colonial expansion within the Italian administration, the once small Ufficio Coloniale

¹⁷⁸ Document # 360: Landsdowne to Lord Currie, London, 7 March 1902, in G.P. Gooch and Harold W. V. Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914*, vol. 1, *The End of British Isolation* (London: HMSO, 1927), 290-291.

¹⁷⁹ About the Racconigi agreement of the autumn 1909, see the recollections of the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Sazonov, Sergeĭ Dmitrievich Sazonov, *Fateful Years, 1909-1916. The Reminiscences of Serge Sazonov* (New York, NY: Frederick A. Stokes, 1928), 31; Bernadotte Schmitt, *The Coming of the War, 1914*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 85.

¹⁸⁰ R. J. B. Bosworth, *Italy: The Least of the Great Powers. Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 138; Francesco Tommasini, *L'Italia alla vigilia della guerra: la politica estera di Tommaso Tittoni*, vol. 5 (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1941), 497.

[Colonial Office] was transformed into the larger organization grandiloquently renamed Direzione Centrale degli Affari Coloniali [Central Directorate of Colonial Affairs].¹⁸¹ This growing political interest was reciprocated in the influential press and colonial lobby groups alike. Starting in 1910, the fervent nationalist Enrico Corradini clamored for Tripolitania's invasion and colonization; his repeated jingoistic appeals were then published in a book.¹⁸² Corradini's demands for the colonization of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were also relayed in the nationalist newspaper, *L'idea nazionale*.¹⁸³ This policy of colonial expansion was motivated by the premise that Italy urgently needed an outlet where its many immigrants could flourish. Just like the Italian communities of South America, North Africa in general, and Libya in particular, were seen as an essential *valvola di sfogo* [relief valve] for Italy's urban plebe and indolent countryside dwellers."¹⁸⁴

Until the summer months of 1911, the kingdom's principal politicians diligently followed the old principle that the country should not precipitate the Ottoman Empire's dissolution. In this case, Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti resisted the vociferations that enjoined him to take a more confrontational stance toward the Sublime Porte, especially about the administration of Ottoman Albania.¹⁸⁵ The decisive factor in the Italian decision to invade Libya was provided by its Latin *sorellastra* [stepsister] France. In 1911, during the Second Moroccan Crisis, the French government again intervened to impose its official protectorate over the Sharifian Kingdom. The Consulta saw this latest French move as a signal for requesting a similar Italian acquisition of the Ottoman *vilayet*. "To Prime Minister Giolitti and his Minister of Foreign Affairs Marquis di San

¹⁸¹ Enrico Serra, "La burocrazia della politica estera italiana" in *La Politica estera italiana (1860-1985)*, eds., R.J.B. Bosworth and Sergio Romano (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991), 80.

¹⁸² Enrico Corradini, *Il Volere d'Italia* (Naples: Perrella, 1911), 143; the same year, Corradini (always a prolific writer) penned another chauvinistic opus calling for the colonization of Libya. Enrico Corradini, *L'ora di Tripoli* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1911).

¹⁸³ Jonathan McCollum, "Reimagining Mediterranean Spaces: Libya and the Italo-Turkish War, 1911-1912," *Diacronie Studi di Storia Contemporanea* 3, no. 23 (2015): 5-6.

¹⁸⁴ Tullio Pagano, "From Diaspora to Empire: Enrico Corradini's Nationalist Novels," *MLN* 119, no. 1 (2004): 67-69.

¹⁸⁵ Bosworth, *Italy: The Least of the Great Powers*, 151.

Giuliano, this diplomatic moment seemed the last opportunity to seize Tripolitania from the Ottoman Empire with the blessings of the other Great Powers.”¹⁸⁶

Despite Italy being an official partner in the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany, it was the Triple Entente nations of Britain, France, and Russia that primarily urged Italy to cross the Rubicon and finally invade Libya. In July 1911, and as an important preparatory step to justify the oncoming assault on the Tripolitania, the Italian government complained to the British Foreign Affairs Ministry that the Ottoman authorities were inflicting many ‘vexations’ on Italian citizens in Tripoli. As Christopher Clark remarks, “It was standard practice for European powers to legitimate their predations with the claim that their presence was needed to protect their nationals from ill-treatment.”¹⁸⁷ On 28 July 1911, when the Italian ambassador to London, Marquis Guglielmo Imperiali, mentioned the possibility of an Italian intervention to protect its foreign nationals in Libya, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey, favorably welcomed this possibility of military action from Rome. Grey confirmed to Imperiali that,

I desired to sympathise with Italy, in view of the very good relations between us. If it really was the case that Italians were receiving unfair and adverse economic treatment in Tripoli – a place where such treatment was especially disadvantageous to Italy – and should the hand of Italy be forced, I would, if need be, express to the Turks the opinion that, in face of the unfair treatment meted out to Italians, the Turkish government could not expect anything else.¹⁸⁸

Therefore, it is no wonder that the Italians interpreted these British circumlocutions as “a green light to act as they wished.”¹⁸⁹ As a good fellow to the Italians, Grey did not deviate from this course of action, and on 19 September 1911, he reiterated to the Permanent Under-secretary of

¹⁸⁶ Jonathan McCollum, “The Anti-Colonial Empire: Ottoman Mobilization and Resistance in the Italo-Turkish War, 1911-1912” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2018), 27-28.

¹⁸⁷ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 245.

¹⁸⁸ This was how Grey summarized his discussion with Imperiali to Sir Rennell Rodd, the British ambassador to Rome. Grey to Rodd, 28 July 1911, The National Archives, Kew [hereafter abbreviated to TNA], TNA, FO 371/1250/311.

¹⁸⁹ Bosworth, *Italy: The Least of the Great Powers*, 153.

State Sir Arthur Nicolson that,

It is most important that neither we nor France should side against Italy now. I promised Imperiali that if Italy showed that the Turks were not treating her as well as others in Tripoli, we would tell the Turks that any action Italy took to defend her interests had been brought by the Turks upon themselves.”¹⁹⁰

When the Italian ambassador made similar overtures to the Russian Foreign Ministry in St Petersburg, he received an equally positive response, and Italy was advised to act in a “prompt and resolute manner.”¹⁹¹ If the diplomatic activity was intensified between Italy and the Triple Entente, in contrast, Italy showed no such grace toward its allies of the Triple Alliance. On 14 September 1911, in what amounted to an Italian council of war, Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti and the Marquis of di San Giuliano convened in Rome to decide that military force should be used urgently and that hostilities should commence “now, to act before the Austrian and German governments know it.”¹⁹² If the Italians acted in such a manner, it was because the Germans had no intention to witness a war that would erupt between their Italian ally and their Ottoman partner of choice in the Near East. Furthermore, “the Wilhelmstrasse hoped that a Turco-Italian compromise would be reached because any alternative measures, such as a prolonged conflict, would disrupt the European status quo, especially in the Balkans.”¹⁹³ In the Ballhausplatz too, Austrian Foreign Minister Count Alois Aehrenthal counseled the Italians to adopt a moderate diplomatic course toward the Turks. Aehrenthal cautioned the Italians that such an imprudent course of action would have dramatic consequences over the Balkans and stressed that historically, Italy had always

¹⁹⁰ Document # 231: Grey to Nicolson, London, 19 September 1911, in G.P. Gooch and Harold W. V. Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914*, vol. 9, *The Balkan Wars*, Part I, *The Prelude, The Tripoli War* (London: HMSO, 1933), 274.

¹⁹¹ Afflerbach, *Der Dreibund*, 693.

¹⁹² Bosworth, *Italy: The Least of the Great Powers*, 160.

¹⁹³ W. David Wrigley, “Germany and the Turco-Italian War, 1911-1912,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 3 (May 1980): 319.

adhered to guaranteeing the Ottoman Empire's integrity.¹⁹⁴

The Marquis di San Giuliano was perfectly aware of what those 'dramatic consequences' could be. On 28 July 1911, in a long letter he penned to the king and prime minister, di San Giuliano listed the pros and cons for a potential invasion of Libya and lucidly recognized that such a move would severely damage the international standing of the Ottoman Empire as it would most probably "induce the Balkan peoples to action against it and hasten a crisis that might [...] almost force Austria to act in the Balkans."¹⁹⁵ What seems more surprising in di San Giuliano's letter was not truly the concern that Italian diplomacy displayed toward the Habsburg Empire but rather the potential ramifications that such a war could have. Di San Giuliano feared that "if Austria did act, there could be modifications in the territorial status quo in the Balkans and in the Adriatic that could be damaging to Italian interests."¹⁹⁶ However, and more surprisingly, it seems that in di San Giuliano's understanding, the potential political chaos that might ensue in the Balkans was mitigated by the fact that Italy, in a spirit characteristic of the era, felt that time was running out to launch a colonial expedition in Ottoman North Africa. In the same letter, di San Giuliano explained that Italy had to take action as soon as possible, otherwise,

If political causes do not weaken or dissolve the Ottoman Empire, it, within two or three years, will have a powerful fleet that would render more difficult for us and perhaps even impossible an enterprise against Tripoli.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Francesco Malgeri, *Guerra Libica (1911-1912)* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1969), 119; Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya: 1911-1912*, 44; it should be remembered that the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity had been officially guaranteed by the major European powers (including Sardinia) in article VII of the Treaty of Paris in 1856, and by Italy in article LXIII at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, vol. 1, 1535-1914 (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1987), 154; 191; furthermore, Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni had also declared that "the integrity of the Ottoman Empire is one of the foundations of Italian Foreign Policy." Tommaso Tittoni, *Italy's Foreign and Colonial Policy (1903-1910)*, trans. Baron Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914), 21.

¹⁹⁵ Di San Giuliano to Giolitti, Fiuggi, 28 July 1911, quoted in Giovanni Giolitti, *Quarant'anni di politica italiana: dalle carte di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 3, *Dai prodromi della grande guerra al fascismo 1910-1928*, ed. Claudio Pavone (Milan: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1962), 53.

¹⁹⁶ Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya: 1911-1912*, 45.

¹⁹⁷ Di San Giuliano to Giolitti, Fiuggi, 28 July 1911, in Giovanni Giolitti, *Quarant'anni di politica italiana*, 54.

What seems truly surprising in di San Giuliano's analysis is the lack of truthfulness about the Ottoman Empire's current military capabilities. For sure, Ottoman authorities were committed to modernizing their fleet and land forces, but nonetheless, Ottoman preparations had nothing comparable to the actual readiness of the Italian fleet and the considerable increase in Italian naval building. Thus, it appears extremely unlikely that the Ottoman navy could have challenged the balance of power that was entirely favorable to the Regia Marina in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁹⁸

On 29 September 1911, Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire and proceeded with its conquest of that empire's North African *vilayet*, the province of Tripoli. This attack was the beginning of what English-speaking historians have labeled "the Italo-Turkish, the Turco-Italian or the Tripolitan War, which to the Italians was La Guerra di Libia [the Libyan War] and was called in Turkish Trablusgarp Sava [the War of Tripoli] or Osmanh-talyan Harbi [Ottoman-Italian War]." ¹⁹⁹ The first military engagement of the war occurred on 3 October 1911, when an Italian naval squadron commanded by Admiral Luigi Faravelli laid anchor in Tripoli Bay and bombarded the six Ottoman forts that defended the city. "At 3.15, a thunderous boom rent the air. The Benedetto Brin had fired the first shot at the Red Fort."²⁰⁰ The naval bombardment continued the following day, and a force of 2,000 Italian sailors rapidly occupied Tripoli.²⁰¹ By 11 October 1911, Italian forces had secured Tripoli, and throughout the month, all major coastal towns had been conquered: Tobruk on 4 October, Derna on 18 October, Benghazi on 20 October, and finally Homs on 21 October. ²⁰²

After this rather successful start, the rest of the campaign proved incredibly difficult as

¹⁹⁸ Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya: 1911-1912*, 46; for a contemporary description that accurately depicts the disparity between the Italian and Ottoman fleets in terms of modern warships, see, Fred T. Jane, *Jane's fighting ships, 1914*, 2nd. ed. (New York, NY: Arco Pub, 1969), 411-413.

¹⁹⁹ Charles Stephenson, *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War 1911-1912* (Ticehurst: Tattered Flag Press, 2014), vi.

²⁰⁰ Tullio Irace, *With the Italians in Tripoli* (London: John Murray, 1912), 12.

²⁰¹ Irace, *With the Italians in Tripoli*, 18.

²⁰² Bosworth, *Italy: The Least of the Great Powers*, 165.

Libya's pacification did not go as planned. The Italian army found the military operations against Ottoman forces and their Arab irregulars more difficult than anticipated. If controlling the coastline proved relatively simple, especially as the Italians dominated the maritime routes between Sicily and North Africa, penetrating into Libya's core turned out to be a long and brutal effort. In the first six months of the war, the Italian army was bottled up on the coastline. Even if on 5 November 1911, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica's annexation was officially declared, the Libyan heartland was still not under effective Italian control, and military operations continued unabated. While Italian forces toiled to precipitate the end of Ottoman rule in North Africa, the Consulta also attempted to bring the Sublime Porte to the negotiation table.

To decide the war's outcome, the Italians employed their uncontested naval superiority to pressure the Turks. In January and February 1912, the Regia Marina launched a successful offensive in the Levant and annihilated Ottoman naval forces at the Battle of Beirut, thus eradicating the only possible menace to the Italian control of the South Mediterranean. After this successful engagement, the Italians launched another naval attack against the Dardanelles. On 18 April 1912, a couple of Italian warships fired upon two outside fortifications that protected the Straits' entrance. Although this bombardment did not significantly influence the war's outcome, it confirmed to the Turks that Italian naval power could threaten all their overseas provinces. On 28 April 1912, the Regia Marina mounted another offensive on the southern edge of the Aegean Sea and the Dodecanese Islands. "Between 28 April and 21 May 1912, the Italians seized control of thirteen islands, whose Greek natives greeted them as heroes and liberators."²⁰³ Following a brief respite, the Regia Marina resumed its offensive operations by unleashing eight submarines against the Straits. Again, this Italian naval offensive demonstrated the Ottoman impotence in defending

²⁰³ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 249.

their shores and nearby Mediterranean possessions. As Paul Halpern confirmed,

The war with Italy was a painful lesson to the Turkish government on the value of sea power. They were unable to communicate directly with Libya, for the Italian Navy had unchallenged command of the sea route...The bulk of the Turkish fleet was forced to shelter behind the guns of the Dardanelles, and those small units caught outside were quickly mopped up.²⁰⁴

If the Italians were masters of the *Mare Nostrum*, altogether, land operations were very different. The Italians found it extremely difficult to bring Ottoman forces to fight into traditional engagements, especially since the Turks were adept at evading direct confrontations with superior Italian forces. Being denied the decisive victory they so desperately looked for, Italian troops vented their frustration on the local Arab populace, and in the process, committed several massacres.²⁰⁵ Notwithstanding the technological discrepancy between a modern and well-armed European army and a less than adequately equipped Ottoman-Arab force, the Italians suffered serious reverses against their enemy. Starting on 23 October 1911, Turk and Arab assailants penetrated the Italian defensive perimeter around Tripoli and obliterated entire Italian infantry units in a succession of coordinated attacks. An Italian eye-witness of the fighting confirmed that “The Italians suffered eight officials and 370 dead soldiers, plus 13 officials and 112 wounded soldiers.²⁰⁶ As a British commentator embedded with Italian troops commented, “Here the hardest fighting of the war took place, and here the Italians lost a greater number of killed than in all the other engagements of the first six months.”²⁰⁷ Inside Tripoli, a swarm of Libyan rebels also attacked the occupying forces and created havoc. If the Turks and their Arab *Mujahideen* had unsettled the Italian military with their irregular tactics, the Italians repaid them in kind by using their superior

²⁰⁴ Paul G. Halpern, *The Mediterranean Naval Situation, 1908-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 318.

²⁰⁵ For a detailed account of some of the atrocities perpetrated by Italian troops, see Malgeri, *Guerra Libica*, 193-201.

²⁰⁶ Pompilio Schiarini, *Il soldato italiano in Libia (1911-1912)* (Rome: Stamperia reale D. Ripamonti, 1914), 98.

²⁰⁷ William Kidston McClure, *Italy in North Africa. An Account of the Tripoli Enterprise* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1913), 61.

technology whenever they could deploy it against the Ottomans. The following section details how this conflict represented a paradigm of modern warfare.

In the early hours of 5 January 1912, British reporter George Frederick Abbott, who was attached to the Ottoman forces, was awakened from his tent in the Libyan desert “by a volley of rifle and revolver shots accompanied by a dull drumming sound overhead.”²⁰⁸ Abbott went out of his tent to see Arab and Turkish soldiers firing at ‘something in the sky.’ This ‘something’ was an Italian monoplane which ‘looked like a giant dragon-fly’ and flew well over their heads at an altitude of around 2,000 feet. Unperturbed by these few inoffensive firecrackers in the sky, the Italian aircraft ‘flew gracefully’ to the southwest of the Ottoman encampment. In the following days, the Italian monoplane came back and dropped ‘from the clouds bundles of proclamation to the Arabs,’ which descended slowly ‘like so many flakes of toy snow.’ Gladly realizing that their lives were not at risk of being killed by paper leaflets, ‘the Arabs left off firing, and stooping, picked the sheets up eagerly, in the vain hope that they might be bank notes.’ As Abbott amusingly acknowledged, “The performance was worthy of Italy’s best theatrical traditions.”²⁰⁹

Abbott also remarked that “The Arabs, beyond emptying their rifles at the visitor, showed small emotion at the visit.”²¹⁰ However, this time around, Abbott’s Arab and Turkish comrades were fortunate enough only to be bombarded by Italian propaganda written in excellent Arabic. For the rest of this conflict, the marked scientific and industrial disparity between a modern European army and its Ottoman adversary certainly bore a much deadlier impact. The Italo-Ottoman War was a distinctively modern confrontation, as for the first time in history, the Italian

²⁰⁸ George Frederick Abbott, *The Holy war in Tripoli* (London: E. Arnold, 1912), 192.

²⁰⁹ This overall passage is based on the description provided by the British war correspondent and writer, George Frederick Abbott (1874-1947). Abbott, *The Holy war in Tripoli*, 192. Abbott, was Cambridge educated, and in 1900, had gone to Macedonia to study the regional folklore. He was an acknowledged specialist of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, in 1922, he also wrote *Greece and the Allies 1914-1922*.

²¹⁰ Abbott, *The Holy war in Tripoli*, 192.

army regularly used airplanes for reconnaissance missions. In this war, the Italians used their nascent airpower to pinpoint the Ottoman infantry positions and artillery emplacements accurately, then reported them either to their field-artillery or to their warships, which subsequently fired upon the Ottoman defensive lines from the nearby Libyan coastline. The Italo-Ottoman War was the first military conflict to witness aerial bombardments.²¹¹ In February 1912, an orderly Ottoman retreat between the Zanzur Oasis and Gargaresch to the southeast of Tripoli turned into utter pandemonium when the Italian airship *P3* released its bombs on the retreating Turkish forces.²¹² Regarding the role of Italian aviation and airships in the bombardment of Ottoman forces, British observer Ernest Bennett confirmed that,

The balloons are intended to carry 250 bombs charged with a high explosive, and a few can be dropped from an aeroplane, though in this case the aviator has to guide the machine with one hand and use the other for fixing the fuse in the bomb, placed between his knees.²¹³

During the fighting between Italian and Ottoman forces in Libya, “Italian aviators flying French-manufactured Bleriot and Austrian-designed Taube [Dove] monoplanes performed both reconnaissance and strike missions against Turkish positions.”²¹⁴ Overall, if aircraft employment during the Italo-Ottoman War had limited effects, its potential truly amazed the international

²¹¹ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 243; Michael Paris further confirmed that “The Italians were particularly pleased with the performance of their airships. The *P2* and *P3* made 127 ascents before January 1912, eighty-six to attack Turko-Arab positions, and they dropped some 330 bombs.” Michael Paris, *Winged Warfare: The Literature and Theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain, 1859-1917* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 109.

²¹² Lieutenant-colonel Gustavo Ramaciotti, *Tripoli. A Narrative of the Principal Engagements of the Italian-Turkish War during the Period 23 October 1911, to 15 June 1912* (London: Hugh Rees, 1912), 117; the same airship, *P3* commanded by Maggiore [Major] Sulsi, also mounted a cine camera and used this to film enemy encampments, thus introducing the first recorded aerial observation of the enemy in an armed conflict. Paris, *Winged Warfare*, 108.

²¹³ Ernest N. Bennett, *With the Turks in Tripoli. Being Some Experiences of the Turco-Italian War of 1911* (London: Methuen, 1912), 24-25. Sir Ernest N. Bennett (1865-1947) was an acclaimed war correspondent and prolific author, who had witnessed many conflicts, such as the Cretan Insurrection of 1897 against the Ottomans, the British Expedition to Sudan and the Battle of Omdurman in 1898, as well as the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Later, he also reported on the Italo-Ottoman War (1911-1912) as well as the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). During World War I, he served in the British Red Cross unit that was sent to Serbia in 1915 during the terrible Typhus Epidemic. He had received one of his two degrees from Oxford University and was later elected as a Member of Parliament (MP) for Oxfordshire in the British House of Commons.

²¹⁴ Richard Hallion, *Strike from the Sky: The History of Battlefield Air Attack, 1910–1945*, 2nd. ed. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 11.

correspondents who observed it.²¹⁵ The Italian use of airpower resonated within the other European powers, especially with the French army, which rapidly grasped the immense opportunities that military aviation could offer. “During the Balkan Wars of 1912, for example, France sent aircraft and a contingent of aviation officers to the assistance of Serbia; during colonial fighting in Morocco, French airmen undertook limited bombing missions in support of the capture of Taza in 1914.”²¹⁶ Another technological device that featured conspicuously during the Italo-Ottoman War was the searchlights. Their first recorded use was during the American Civil War (1861-1865), then a few years later during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) and the Siege of Paris, where “an arc light was developed as a searchlight.”²¹⁷ A decade later, “The English fleet under Admiral Seymour, in 1882, by means of its searchlights, prevented the Egyptians from erecting water batteries at Alexandria on the night of 11 July.”²¹⁸ The Italian army made prolific use of searchlights and used them to prevent Ottoman night attacks or made the Ottoman infantrymen pay a heavy price when they persisted with them. A first-hand testimony detailing this use of modern military technology is provided by Bennett, who remembered,

As we reached Bir Terin, our bivouac for the night, the gleaming searchlight of an Italian cruiser swept over the desert and caught our little caravan in the arc of its faint radiance. The sight of the poor Arabs silhouetted against the electric rays saddened me. Searchlights, maxims, batteries, warships, aeroplanes – the odds seemed so terrible!²¹⁹

In many ways, the conflict between the Italians and the Turks “was an unusual war...inasmuch as in order to conduct it at all Italy had to confine its military and naval activities to areas where they would neither cause a widening of the conflict, nor conflict with the interests of the Great

²¹⁵ Anthony Robinson, *Aerial Warfare: An Illustrated History* (New York, NY: Galahad Books, 1982), 127.

²¹⁶ Hallion, *Strike from the Sky*, 11.

²¹⁷ David L. Woods, “Searchlights/Signal Blinkers,” in *Military Communications: From Ancient Times to the 21st Century*, ed., Christopher H. Sterling (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 395.

²¹⁸ Ernest Boghosian, “History of Naval Searchlights,” *Naval Engineers Journal* 68, no. 3 (August 1956): 503.

²¹⁹ Bennett, *With the Turks in Tripoli*, 77.

Powers.”²²⁰ The war in Libya was also fought alongside unconventional methods, which could only be described with the modern label of ‘asymmetrical warfare.’ Indeed, the Ottoman forces mainly engaged in guerrilla tactics against superior Italian numbers and deployed many Arab irregular fighters. Moreover, due to the difficult nature of the ground on which they were forced to operate, and the limited fighting abilities of Italian infantry to operate successfully on such terrain, the Italians were confronted by what Stephenson framed as a “tactical and operational deadlock and the subsequent paralysis of Italian strategy.”²²¹

The Italo-Ottoman War represented the penultimate step before the commencement of World War I. One more time, it proved that the *consensus* which had been previously observed about preserving the Ottoman Empire’s integrity had now completely disintegrated. This *consensus* was now replaced by a relentless new wave of European imperialism that no longer had any qualms at dismembering the Ottoman carcass to fulfill its ever-growing colonial appetite. In this conflict, the Italians epitomized the nature of this hawkish attitude. A few years later, during World War I, European Imperialism reached its climax with the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, a high-stakes diplomatic bargain that made the acquisition of Ottoman territories in the Middle East a primary war aim for London and Paris.²²² For the Italians, the Italo-Ottoman War was anything but a walk in the park. It was not the type of conflict that they erroneously came to expect; and where they anticipated winning easily against “poor black

²²⁰ Stephenson, *A Box of Sand*, vi.

²²¹ Stephenson, *A Box of Sand*, vi.

²²² As James Barr explained, “In the Sykes-Picot agreement they [the British and the French] split the Ottomans’ Middle Eastern empire between them by a diagonal line in the sand that ran from the Mediterranean Sea coast to the Persian frontier. Territory north of this arbitrary line would go to France; most of the land south of it would go to Britain, for the two powers could not agree over the future of Palestine.” James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914-1948* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), x; regarding French motivations to divide the Middle Eastern possessions of the Ottoman Empire with Great Britain, and to also get its share of the enormous oil reserves from the Middle East, see, Edward Peter Fitzgerald, “France’s Middle Eastern Ambitions, the Sykes-Picot Negotiations, and the Oil Fields of Mosul, 1915-1918,” *The Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 4 (December 1994): 697-725.

simpletons.”²²³ During this short but murderous struggle, localized small-unit combats, constant Arab attacks against the Italian lines of communications linking the coastal towns to the center of the country transformed this war between two major powers into a guerrilla in the desert. Ultimately, if the Italians conquered the Libyan coastline and the capital of Tripoli, they were still unable to pacify the country’s interior. As Rachel Simon confirmed, “The Italians were frustrated that the occupation entered into a standstill, making it expensive and requiring a force reaching 100,000.”²²⁴ They had to stay in their coastal encampments, behind their barbed wire and the reassuring presence of their naval guns.

On the other hand, if the Ottomans were truly defiant in the sands of Libya, their undeniable naval inferiority was severely exposed and pushed the Ottomans into a strategic corner. By October 1912, and thanks to their mastery of the seas, the Italians used the threat of a renewed offensive in the Aegean Sea to coerce the Turks. Furthermore, as the war seriously disrupted the international shipping going through the Straits, the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires exerted heavy diplomatic pressure on Constantinople to force the latter to agree with Rome. Finally, on 8 October 1912, and due to the Balkan states declaring war on the Ottoman Empire, the Turks had no further options but to come to terms with the Italians. On 15 October, the Turks concluded a secret peace treaty that officialized Tripolitania and Cyrenaica’s autonomy under Italian control. Constantinople also issued a Ferman [an imperial decree] that confirmed the end of Ottoman rule in the North African *vilayet*. The war came to an official conclusion on 18 October 1912 with the Treaty of Lausanne.²²⁵ Once the treaty was signed, peace did not promptly return to the newly

²²³ Bosworth, *Italy: The Least of the Great Powers*, 165.

²²⁴ Rachel Simon, “Italo-Turkish War 1911-1912,” in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, eds., Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2016-08-23. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10949. Accessed December 10, 2020, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/italo-turkish_war_1911-1912

²²⁵ The full texts for the *Ferman* and the Peace Treaty are presented in Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya: 1911-1912*, 243-253.

conquered Italian colony, as it took over twenty years for the Italians to subdue local Arab resistance and finally consolidate their hold on Libya.

CHAPTER 4

THE DIPLOMATIC BACKGROUND OF THE BALKAN WARS

World War I was the natural continuation of the Balkan Wars. Less than twelve months after the conflict's end, some of its protagonists, most notably Serbia, were back on the warpath. Throughout the long nineteenth century, wars in the Balkans were not, unfortunately speaking, a novelty. Until the first decade of the twentieth century, these wars had always been 'limited' to the extent that they never degenerated into a generalized European conflagration. Sadly, the last remaining years before 1914 witnessed a profound transformation. In the fall of 1911, the Kingdom of Italy unleashed war against the Ottoman Empire to occupy the *vilayet* of Libya. In turn, this wanton aggression opened Pandora's Box and provoked a concerted offensive from several Balkan states against the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, the Great Powers, which until that point had always managed to contain these localized conflicts, completely imploded. Following the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, Austria-Hungary then confronted a growing existential threat on its ever-dangerous southern border, with the unmistakable increase of Serbian military power. Furthermore, in the wake of the Italo-Ottoman War and the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman Empire's successive military defeats and loss of political control in southeastern Europe created a new, confusing, and precarious diplomatic equilibrium.²²⁶ In this instance, the two opposing European alliances, the Triple Alliance of Germany-Austria-Hungary and Italy, and the Triple Entente of France, Great Britain, and Russia, inexorably slid into the Balkan quagmire. Once again, Balkan politics forcibly influenced the European balance of power and precipitated a perilous pattern of tensions that inevitably led to the July Crisis of 1914.

²²⁶ Regarding the steady deliquescence of Ottoman power from the Young Turks Revolution in 1908, to the end of the empire, see the magnificent opus penned by Sean McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908-1923* (London: Penguin Books, 2015).

In early October 1912, as the Italians were decisively utilizing their naval power to push the Ottomans into a strategic corner, the groundwork for the imminent attack of the Ottoman forces in the Balkans had already been laid. Nearly one year before, on 28 September 1911, on the same day that the Italians forwarded their ultimatum to the Turks, the Serbian Foreign Minister Milovan Milovanović confirmed to “Stefan von Ugron zu Ábranfálva the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Belgrade, that if the conflict between Italy and Turkey became protracted, repercussions would be inevitable. Montenegro would make far-reaching demands for Turkish territory, and Bulgaria would soon follow her example.”²²⁷ Nearly simultaneously to the Italian declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire, the Bulgarian and Serbian governments convened a meeting to arrange their concerted military action against Constantinople.²²⁸ The Bulgarian Prime Minister Ivan E. Geshov, who also oversaw the Foreign Ministry, directed the negotiations for the Bulgarians. The Serbian Foreign Minister Milovan Milovanović led the Serbian delegation.

In November 1911, a preliminary version detailing the war plans against Turkey was agreed upon by both parties. Four months later, and under the Russian Foreign Ministry's watchful eye, the Serbs and the Bulgarians finally found an agreement.²²⁹ This defensive treaty signed on 7 March 1912 made contingencies for joint military action against both the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. It also worked out an ‘understanding’ about Macedonia. The treaty explicitly recognized the Bulgarian desideratum in Thrace and the Serbian ones in Albania and Kosovo.

²²⁷ John D. Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle: Montenegro and Austria-Hungary, 1908-1914* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1983), 89.

²²⁸ Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans. Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy, 1908-1914* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 36.

²²⁹ For the text of the Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty of 7 March 1912, see Ivan Evstatiev Gueshoff, *The Balkan League* (London: John Murray, 1915), 117-122; the text is also reproduced in G.P. Gooch and Harold W. V. Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914*, vol. 9, *The Balkan Wars*, Part 2, *The League and Turkey* (London: HMSO, 1934), 1011-1013.

Furthermore, it stated that if Macedonian autonomy could not be worked out, then the two nations would partition the entirety of the region. (See maps 7 and 8).

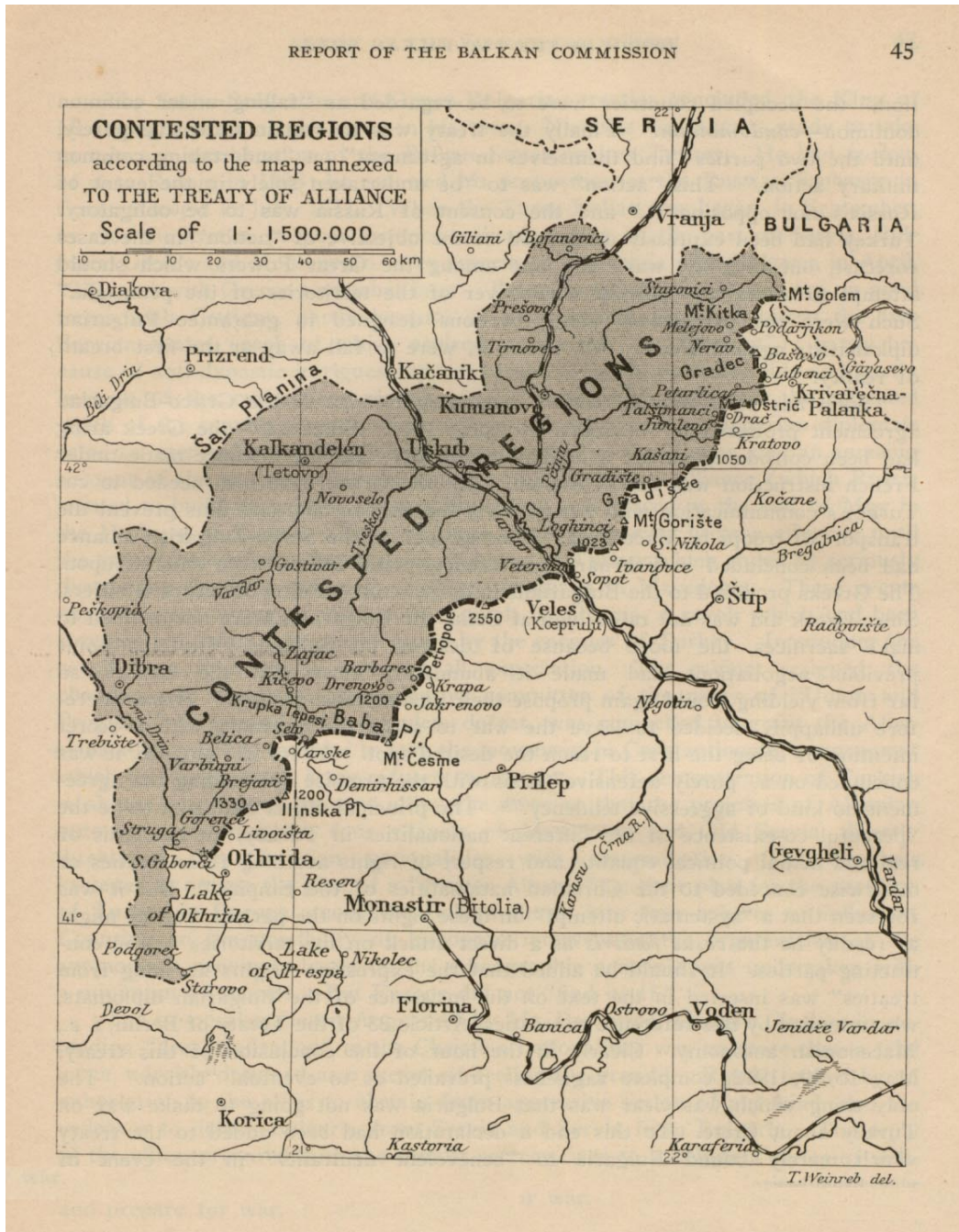
The Bulgarians were to obtain outright southern Macedonia, including Ochrid, Prilep, and Bitola. Northern Macedonia, including the important town of Skoplje, was assigned by the agreement to a 'disputed zone' with the Russian Tsar acting as arbitrator if Bulgarians and Serbs could not arrive at a suitable arrangement for the allocation of the territory.²³⁰

In Sofia, many Bulgarians believed that Macedonia's future autonomy would only be the preliminary phase of its rightful incorporation into the Kingdom of Bulgaria. If this ambitious plan could not be fulfilled, then Sofia could always share Macedonia with Belgrade as the treaty had stipulated. If Austria-Hungary was considered as a potential adversary of Bulgaria and Serbia, the treaty's main objective was to expel the Ottoman Empire from its last remaining possessions in the Balkans.

Overall, Bulgarian diplomacy felt rather satisfied with this Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty. It had managed to demand and receive full Serbian recognition for most of its planned territorial expansion in Macedonia. Within the Bulgarian diplomatic corps and government, the mood was rather optimistic, as Russia was trusted to adjudicate the eventual dispute with Serbia in Sofia's favor. If spirits were elated in Sofia's official circles, the same could not be said about their Serbian counterparts, particularly within the military elite. The treaty openly discontented many high-ranking officers, including Chief of the General Staff of the Serbian army, General Radomir Putnik. Equally, Nikola Pašić, the Serbian Radical Party's leader, vented his frustration against the newly signed agreement. He wrote, "In my opinion, we conceded too much, or better said we abandoned some Serbian areas which we should never have dared to abandon even if we were left without an agreement."²³¹

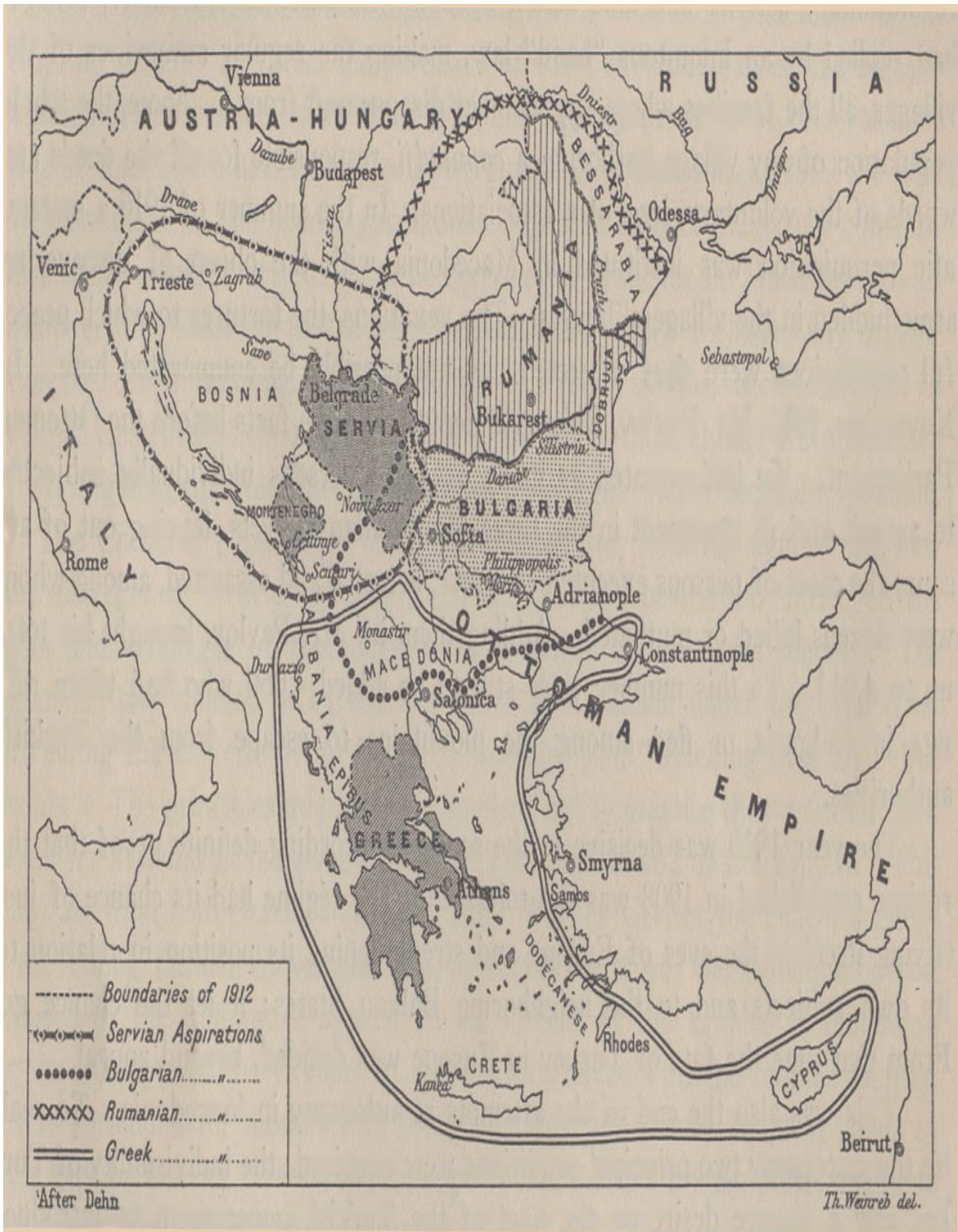
²³⁰ Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), 11.

²³¹ Alex N. Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić, and Yugoslavia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 101.



Map 7: Contested regions according to the map annexed to the Treaty of Alliance.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington, DC: The Endowment, 1914), 45.



Map 8: Map of the Balkan States' aspirations, showing the boundaries of 1912.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*, 38.

The reason for Pašić's bitterness was evidently caused by Macedonia, the ever-poisonous issue of Balkan politics. For Pašić, the fact that Serbia had only accepted to acquire Kosovo and the Sandžak of Novi Pazar was too much to swallow, especially if Serbia's destinies were solely entrusted to the good graces of the Russian monarch. Therefore, in Pašić's mind, ending with a tiny northwest portion of Macedonia was simply not good enough for a proud and ambitious nation like Serbia. Pašić, like many of his compatriots, believed that Serbia was entitled to the whole of Macedonia, and consequently, the perceived weakness exhibited by Serbian diplomacy through its recent acceptance of the treaty was for him, nothing short of treacherous. In July 1912, and with an uncontestable effect on the region's destiny, Milovan Milovanović passed away, thus depriving the Serbian government of an influential and moderate leader. In the wake of Milovanović's death, the ardent nationalist Nikola Pašić then assumed the prime minister and foreign affairs minister's portfolios. As Pašić unambiguously expressed before, "He was never keen about the treaty with Bulgaria, and was determined to undermine it if necessary, to carry Serbian territorial expansion to its utmost."²³²

If Belgrade and Sofia were looking toward each other to form the nucleus of an alliance aimed at ousting the Turk from southeast Europe, it did not preclude them from attracting Greece into this nascent diplomatic and military arrangement. Before the Bulgarians and the Serbs concluded their talks, Geshov's administration had already initiated a *rapprochement* toward Athens to add a third and important partner to the Balkan League. This Bulgarian interest was reciprocated in Athens, as the Greek government was also keen to form an alliance that focused on expelling the Ottoman Empire from the region. This willingness to conclude an alliance with Sofia was motivated by the recent embarrassment that Greece had suffered during the Cretan Crisis

²³² Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 12.

of 1909 and confirmed why the Greek government rapidly proceeded with its diplomatic overture toward Sofia. On 16 May 1912, Greece signed a treaty of alliance with Bulgaria, followed by a military convention ratified on 22 September 1912.²³³ In this military convention, the Bulgarian and Greek General Staffs planned the following deployment against Ottoman forces:

In the hypothesis that a Turkish army would be concentrated in the region of Uskub, Koumanovo, Kratovo, Kotchani, Velès, the Allied troops which were intended to act in this theatre of operations would be distributed as follows:

- 1) A Serbian army of two divisions will march through the Karadagh toward Uskub. This army will constitute the right-wing of the Allied troops.
- 2) A Serbian army of five infantry divisions and one cavalry division will advance along the Moravitz and Ptchinia valleys in the direction of the Koumanovo-Kratovo front. This army will constitute the center of the allied troops that have the objective to operate against the enemy.
- 3) A Bulgarian army of three divisions will form the left-wing of the Allied troops with the goal to cooperate against the right-wing and on the rear of the enemy, in the direction of Kustendil-Egri-Palanka-Uskub and Kustendil-Tzarévo-Sélo-Kotchani.²³⁴

However, if this treaty, just like the Serbo-Bulgarian one signed earlier, had established the military and diplomatic collaboration that was going to take place between the two countries, it did not indicate the terms of an eventual division of the Ottoman-held possessions in the region. In truth, this error can be assigned to Sofia, as the Bulgarians underestimated Greek military power and were confident that their powerful army would suffice to defeat the Turks in Macedonia and occupy the area they coveted before the Greeks could move in. This misplaced confidence would produce severe after-effects.”²³⁵ In the summer months of 1912, and as the war raged between Italy and the Ottoman Empire, “Greek diplomacy then moved on to sign ‘gentlemen’s agreements’ with

²³³ For the diplomatic treaty and the military alliance full texts, see, [George Young], *Nationalism and War in the Near East (by a Diplomatist)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 396-400.

²³⁴ This military plan (formally penned in French) utilizes contemporary French spelling for Macedonian towns. For the sake of historical integrity, I have transcribed these names as they were written in the original text, even if today Uskub (as the Ottomans named it) is the present capital of Macedonia, Skopje. All translations from French are mine. Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, 395.

²³⁵ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 12.

both Serbia and Montenegro.”²³⁶ Unsurprisingly, during the summer of 1912, Greece and Serbia consulted each other about forming an official alliance, and it was only on 22 October 1912 that the Greeks finally submitted a draft for this alliance. Still, the details of this collaboration were not finalized when the war started, as both countries could not agree on an official division of the soon-to-be conquered Ottoman territories. Eventually, negotiations reached an impasse, and in the end, all the Greeks could extract from the Bulgarians, the Montenegrins, and the Serbs was a firm commitment to fight against the Turks, which from the former’s perspective was the most crucial objective.

After the Greco-Bulgarian alliance was officialized, both the Bulgarians and the Greeks made overtures to the Montenegrins.²³⁷ The Montenegrins were well-aware of the current climate and knew exactly the potential upsurge of all these negotiations. As far back as December 1910, King Nicola had provided weapons to the Christian Albanians fighting the Turks in Northern Albania. Moreover, even if Montenegrin diplomatic influence was limited to what one could label small state diplomacy, King Nicola appealed to the other Balkan states. In January 1911, the Montenegrin monarch proposed to the Serbian ambassador in Cetinje to form an alliance “for mutual advance in case of pending events in the Balkans.”²³⁸ In June of the same year, the Montenegrin king also made overtures to Sofia.²³⁹ However, the Bulgarians did not promptly reply to the Montenegrins until they had secured agreements with Athens and Belgrade. It was only in

²³⁶ Katrin Boeckh, *Von den Balkankriegen zum Ersten Weltkrieg: Kleinstaatenpolitik und ethnische Selbstbestimmung auf dem Balkan* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996), 29.

²³⁷ About the Greco-Bulgarian alliance, see Elena Stelova, “Bŭlgaro-grŭtskite politicheski otnosheniya v navecherieto na Balkanskata voina,” [Bulgarian–Greek Political Relations on the Eve of the Balkan War], *Izvestiya na Instituta za voenna istoriya* 37 (1984): 48-58.

²³⁸ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 13.

²³⁹ Mary Edith Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1920), 222; Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, 106.

August 1912 that Bulgaria signed a treaty with Montenegro.²⁴⁰ Finally, on 27 September 1912 in Lucerne, Switzerland, and following the Bulgarians, the Serbs signed a military and political convention with Montenegro that “aimed at the liberation of all Serbs under the Turkish yoke.”²⁴¹

Once Montenegro had officially sided with Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia, the Balkan League was complete, and these four states were now ready to achieve their national destinies. During the summer of 1912, the Ottoman position in Albania and Macedonia noticeably worsened as troubles in the Albanian *vilayet* intensified. Simultaneously, in Macedonia, the IMRO revolutionaries' deliberate attack against the small town of Kochana's marketplace enflamed the already volatile situation. This latest incident provoked an implacable Ottoman reaction that “resulted in the massacre of more than one hundred Slavs there and outraged the Bulgarians.”²⁴² The Ottoman army's efforts to disarm the local populace proved ineffective, as a good number of the empire's forces were already committed to Libya against the Italians. This political turmoil in the Balkans led to a vigorous counter-reaction in Constantinople and the Young Turks' demise. In the last days of August 1912, a group opposed to the Young Turks installed a new administration at the empire's helm.

As explained in chapter 1, most Balkan states envisioned their national expansion through their armed forces, and to that end, these countries had steadily built up their respective military. The national budgetary appropriations were mainly intended to finance their armies' increase and improvement for the forthcoming conflict with the Turk. In most Balkan states, the military authorities enjoyed large prerogatives, which they repeatedly used to influence the political course they wanted their governments to pursue. In that same vein, the Serbian Deputy Chief of Staff,

²⁴⁰ B.D. Kesiakov, *Prinos kûm diplomaticheskata istoriya na Bûlgariya 1878-1925* [Contribution to the Diplomatic History of Bulgaria, 1878-1925] (Sofia: Vistosha, 1925), 45.

²⁴¹ Henryk Batowski, “The Failure of the Balkan Alliance of 1912,” *Balkan Studies* 7, no.1 (1966): 113.

²⁴² Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 13.

Colonel Živojin Mišić, who later became Vojvoda [Field Marshal] during World War I, reminisced,

Among all our people, and especially in the military, an unusually broad mood in favor of this war prevailed. Absolutely no one doubted a successful outcome. All conscripts and reserve officers, equipped for war, happy and proud, passed through the streets of their collection places. Suddenly all previous quarrels among the officer corps ceased, all were now brothers, and they went off hand in hand to this holy war.²⁴³

Like in Serbia, the other Balkan states' military establishments shared those feelings, and once general mobilization was declared, the mood was largely jubilant at the prospect of war. In Bulgaria, the future commencement of hostilities was welcome. However, in Constantinople, as the empire was already committed to a fight to the finish with Italy while also dealing with severe unrest in Yemen, there was little stomach for another fight with the Balkan states. The only exception was within some of the younger and more bellicose elements of Ottoman society, such as students from the Ottoman University of Constantinople. "The first demonstration organized by university students was on October 3, 1912. On the same day, many students from the Law, Medicine, Political Science Schools, took the main avenues to all clamor for war."²⁴⁴

To better coordinate their future military strategy against the Turkish forces deployed in Europe, the Bulgarian and Serbian staff met on several occasions. On 29 April 1912, in Belgrade, the two staffs signed a military convention. This convention stated that if the Austro-Hungarian Empire attacked Serbia, Bulgaria would assist the latter, and reciprocally, if the Ottoman Empire or Romania attacked Bulgaria, Serbia would then assist Sofia. Subsequent *addendums* to the convention were signed on 2 July and 28 September 1912 and settled the military strategy to be

²⁴³ Draga Vuksanović-Anić, *Stvaranje moderne srpske vojske: francuski uticaj na njeno formiranje* [The Creation of a Modern Serbian Army: French Influence on its Formation] (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1993), 135-136.

²⁴⁴ Yücel Aktar, "The Impact of the 1912 'War Meetings' on the Balkan Wars," *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire* 67 (1988): 169-170.

adopted before the conflict.²⁴⁵ In the first place, the Serbian General Staff had requested the Bulgarians to dispatch 100,000 men to Macedonia and the Vardar, to safeguard an allied victory in the area they considered the most important theater of the war. The Bulgarians disagreed and General Fichev, their Chief of Staff, contended that the Thracian theater was the crucial one in the coming war. Consequently, the Bulgarians had to position the bulk of their forces there, and ultimately, Fichev's view carried the day. On 28 September 1912, in Belgrade, the two staffs finally reached an agreement confirming that the principal Bulgarian effort would be directed toward Thrace, while the primary Serbian offensive would target Macedonia.²⁴⁶

In military terms, directing most Bulgarian forces against the Ottoman army in Thrace was a sound decision. However, within the larger strategic picture, producing the main Bulgarian effort away from Macedonia (which remained the number one political priority for Sofia) was far from the best possible course of action. As it later turned out, after conclusively defeating its Ottoman enemy, the Serbian army found itself occupying the Macedonian zone that had been originally offered to Bulgaria in the March agreement. Colonel Mišić reminisced in his memoirs that before the onset of hostilities, General Fichev had fully appreciated the difficulties created by this Serbo-Bulgarian agreement. Mišić recalls that Fichev mentioned a Bulgarian proverb about Macedonia that said, "It is difficult for any country an army passes through."²⁴⁷ On 5 October 1912 in Sofia, after concluding the latter military arrangement with the Serbs, the Bulgarians signed another military alliance with the Greeks as their mobilization was already underway. "General Fichev and Minister-President Geshov signed for Bulgaria, Captain Ioannis Metaxas (the future Greek

²⁴⁵ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 14.

²⁴⁶ Branko Perović, Mitar Durišić, and Velimir Terzić eds., *Prvi balkanski rat, 1912-1913*, Knjiga 1, *Operacije srpske vojske* [The First Balkan War, 1912-1913, vol. 1, The Serbian Army operations] (Belgrade: Istoriski Institut Jugoslovenske Narodne Armije, 1959), 144-145.

²⁴⁷ Živojin Mišić, *Moje uspomene*, vol. 2 [My memories] (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod 1969), 268.

dictator) and Demeter Panas, Greek minister to Sofia, signed for Greece.”²⁴⁸ The prominent feature of this military convention was the Greek promise to the Bulgarians that the Greek fleet would restrict the access of the Aegean Sea to the Ottoman navy, thus denying the latter an opportunity to transport its troops from Asia Minor to Europe.²⁴⁹ In return, the Bulgarians guaranteed that they would direct the largest part of their armed forces to Macedonia unless the Serbs effectively deployed 120,000 men to this theater. If the latter option were implemented, the Bulgarians would utilize most of their troops in the Thracian theater. In any case, Bulgaria and Greece decided not to sign an armistice with the Turks unless they both agreed to do so.

From these various military conventions, it transpires that the Bulgarian general staff did not put too much stock in the Greek army's military effectiveness and was therefore content with the already mentioned military convention between the two countries. The Bulgarian top-brass believed that they could defeat the Turks without Greek assistance. With hindsight, the Bulgarians should have clarified the political delimitations of their sphere of influence in southern Macedonia to avoid any contentious issues with their Greek allies. This observation is especially relevant when considering that as the largest harbor on the Aegean Sea, Salonica had always been the number one target for Greece. Bearing in mind their conflicting territorial ambitions, it is rather surprising that Bulgarian diplomacy did not ensure to define the borders of their envisioned territorial acquisitions more precisely.

After all these diplomatic maneuvers were complete, Sofia started to press for the application of “Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin, which it interpreted to mean the establishment of autonomy for Macedonia.”²⁵⁰ By officially demanding Macedonia's future autonomy, the

²⁴⁸ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 14.

²⁴⁹ Ivan Fichev, *Balkanskata voina 1912–1913. Prezhivelitsi, belezhki i dokumenti* [The Balkan War, 1912–1913: Experiences, Notes, and Documents] (Sofia: Dürzhavna pečatnitsa, 1940), 69.

²⁵⁰ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 15.

Bulgarians believed that an independent Macedonia would soon be attached to the Kingdom of Bulgaria. After the Ottomans refused the Balkan states' demands to establish full autonomy in the European provinces of their empire, the Balkan League promptly declared general mobilization. Despite being appraised of the extremely tense diplomatic climate prevailing in the Balkans, the Great Powers' attempts to avert war proved weak and ineffective. The countdown to war was over, and on 8 October 1912, the First Balkan War officiously started with an attack by the Montenegrin forces against the Turkish troops.²⁵¹ On 14 October, the Greeks finally revealed their intentions, and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos then welcomed Cretan delegates into the Elliniko Kinovoulío [the Hellenic Parliament]. For the Ottomans, and just like in 1897, this symbolic political gesture represented an unmistakable *casus belli*. On 16 October 1912, the Ottoman Empire officially declared war on the Balkan League. The next day all the Balkan League protagonists duly responded, the Balkan Powder Keg finally exploded, and its flames consumed the region for the next six years.

²⁵¹ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 252.

CHAPTER 5

OVERTURE TO THE WORLD WAR

Farewell, my comrades. Do not forget to take with you your full-dress uniforms, because you will need them for the grand entry into Sofia two months from now.

Nizam Paşa

When the First Balkan War started in the early days of October 1912, it did not surprise the major European chancelleries, which had accurately anticipated that following the commencement of hostilities in North Africa, fighting would soon spread to the whole Balkan Peninsula. What surprised most diplomats and politicians across the continent was the rapidity and scope of the Balkan League's military successes against the Ottoman Empire. As fighting erupted throughout the Balkans, the Bulgarian, Greek, Montenegrin, and Serbian forces went on the offensive against the Ottoman army. Before examining the military operations that occurred during the first phase of the conflict, this chapter reviews the various forces assembled by the Balkan League and the Ottoman Empire. International military experts were usually impressed by the Bulgarian army. Two years before the onset of hostilities, in July 1910, after a voyage to the Balkans, the American military *attaché* in Paris, Major T. Bentley Mott, commented,

The Army of Bulgaria is recognized in European military circles as having exceptional value. It is small, well instructed, and armed with the most modern weapons, chosen from the best constructors in Europe. It has for years been kept as a sharpened tool, ready for immediate use to defend the country from powerful neighbors which have repeatedly threatened or else to undertake, alone or in conjunction with other powers, the carving out of a larger independence or larger territory from troublesome neighbors.²⁵²

Additionally, most of the Bulgarian officers had been trained in Germany and Russia, and the officers serving in the Bulgarian General Staff were all appraised of the most recent military

²⁵² The National Archives and Records Administration [hereafter abbreviated to NARA], College Park, MD, War College Division, General Correspondence 1902-1920, Records Group [hereafter abbreviated to RG] 165-5964-3. Report of Major T. Bentley Mott, 28 July 1910, quoted in Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), 16.

theories. Many division and army commanders embraced the precepts of *l'offensive à outrance* [all-out offensive] as articulated by its most famous proponent, French Colonel Louis Loyzeau de Grandmaison.²⁵³ When the Balkan Wars started, Loyzeau de Grandmaison's teachings had already been integrated into the Bulgarian combat doctrine. These lessons were conspicuously applied during the Bulgarian Third Army's operations in Thrace.²⁵⁴ Before the conflict, the Bulgarian army was the largest in the Balkans and generally recognized as an efficient military organization. In September 1912, the Bulgarian army establishment amounted to 3,500 officers, 57,300 rank and file.²⁵⁵ The Bulgarian armed forces were organized into the active army, the active army reserve, and the Opolchenia [militia]. The Opolchenia was divided into two levies: The first one providing additional troops to the active army, and the second one deployed in the country's interior.²⁵⁶ Table 1 shows the order of battle of the Bulgarian army, as of 2 November 1912. However, when the war broke out in 1912, the overall number of the Bulgarians under arms increased to 379,000 soldiers who served in ten divisions (nine infantry and one cavalry).²⁵⁷ The Bulgarian infantrymen were equipped either with the Austrian Mannlicher M1880/90 or its M1895 version. In total, the Bulgarians "had 343,428 rifles in service at the start of the war, and during the conflict, these were supplemented by imports of 50,000 Russian M1891s."²⁵⁸

²⁵³ To comprehend Loyzeau de Grandmaison's influence over the French army's combat philosophy, see the article by Joseph C. Arnold, "French Tactical Doctrine 1870-1914," *Military Affairs* 42, no. 2 (1978): 61-67.

²⁵⁴ Philip Howell, *The Campaign in Thrace 1912. Six lectures* (London: H. Rees, 1913), 57.

²⁵⁵ Part I. *Military Notes on the Balkan States*, in General Staff, War Office, *Armies of the Balkan States, 1914-1918: The Military Forces of Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, Rumania, and Serbia* (London: Imperial War Museum, Department of Printed Books. In association with Battery Press, Nashville, TN: 1996), 27.

²⁵⁶ Part II. *Handbook of the Bulgarian Army*, Chapter 1, *Composition of the Army and Conditions of Service*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 4.

²⁵⁷ 1st line: 234,000 of all ranks and 324 guns. 2nd line: 87,000 men and 324 guns. Total: 321,000 men and 648 guns, plus the *Opolchenia* (equivalent to the Austrian or German Landwehr) at 58,000 men. Total of men under arms: 379,000. Part II. *Handbook of the Bulgarian Army*, Chapter I, *Composition of the Army and Conditions of Service*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 5-12

²⁵⁸ Philip Jowett, *Armies of the Balkan Wars 1912-13: The Priming Charge for the Great War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2011), 23.

Table 1: Order of Battle of Bulgarian Army, 2 November 1912

<p>General Headquarters: Commander-in-chief: Tsar Ferdinand. Deputy Commander-in-chief: Lieutenant-General Mikhail Sasov.</p>		
<p>Headquarters Field Army: Major-General Ivan Fichev Operations Department. Cartographic Department. Office of Artillery Inspector. Sanitary Inspection.</p>		<p>Command of the Rear: Major-General Vitcho Dikov Chief Commissary. Office of Communications and Movements. Military-Judicial Office: Major-General Georgi Agura. Field Military Prosecutors.</p>
<p>First Army: Commander-in-chief: Lieutenant-General Vasil Kutinchev. 1st Sofia Infantry Division. 6th Bdin Infantry Division. 7th Rila Infantry Division. 10th Mixed Division. First Army Volunteer Brigade: Supplementary Units and Services.</p>	<p>Second Army: Commander-in-chief: Lieutenant-General Nikola Ivanov. 2nd Infantry Division. 3rd Balkan Infantry Division. 8th Tundja Infantry Division. 2nd Cavalry Brigade. Second Army Volunteer Battalion: Supplementary Units and Services.</p>	<p>Third Army: Commander-in-chief: Lieutenant-General Radko Dimitriev. 4th Preslav Infantry Division. 5th Danube Infantry Division. 9th Pleven Infantry Division. 3rd Cavalry Brigade. Third Army Volunteer Battalion: Supplementary Units and Services. Macedonian-Thracian Volunteer Corps: Commander-in-chief: Major-General Nikola Genev. 1st Brigade. 2nd Brigade. 3rd Brigade.</p>

Source: Ministerstvo na Vojnata Shtab na voškata. Voенno-istoricheska komisiya, *Voinata mezhdu Bŭlgariya i Turtsiya, 1912–1913*, vol. 2, *Lozengradskata operatsiya* [The War Between Bulgaria and Turkey, 1912-1913, vol.2, The Lozengrad Operations] (Sofia: Dŭrzhavna Pechatnitsa, 1928), 486-487.

Moreover, each infantry division utilized four machine-gun sections. In turn, each section employed four 8-mm Maxim guns. Each infantry division also retained its organic artillery regiment, including nine batteries of four guns each. When the fighting started, the Bulgarians employed the quick-firing French-made Schneider 75-mm gun. The Bulgarian artillery also used fifty-four six-gun batteries of German Krupp 87-mm guns and twenty-four six-gun batteries of older guns. Finally, the Bulgarian artillery was equipped with twelve four-gun mountain batteries of Krupp 75-mm guns.²⁵⁹ During the Balkan Wars, the Bulgarians used their heavy artillery in

²⁵⁹ All artillery information provided in this section was obtained in Yako Molhov, “Bŭlgarskata artileriya prez Balkanskata voina 1912,” [The Bulgarian artillery during the Balkan War in 1912], *Voенnoistoricheski sbornik 57*,

siege operations against the Ottoman fortresses of Adrianople and Lozengrad. Furthermore, since 1904-1905 and the war between Russia and Japan, the Bulgarians had observed how effective field artillery was when directed against enemy infantry.²⁶⁰

Before the Balkan Wars, the Greek army had a total peacetime establishment of 32,910 men of all rank and file.²⁶¹ During wartime, the Greek army's effectives increased to 110,000 men and included four infantry divisions and six light infantry battalions (Evzones).²⁶² The Greek army was divided into five army corps. Each corps encompassed three infantry divisions, except the last one, which had only two.

- Army Corps A (Athens): 1st division (Larissa), 2nd division (Athens), 13th division (Chalkis).
- Army Corps B (Patras): 3rd division (Patras), 4th division (Nauplia), 14th division (Calamata).
- Army Corps C (Salonika): 10th division (Verroia), 11th division (Salonika), 12th division (Kozani).
- Army Corps D (Cavalla): 5th division (Drama), 6th division (Seres), 7th division (Cavalla).
- Army Corps E (Janina): 8th division (Janina), 9th division (Janina).²⁶³

Like the Bulgarians, the Greek soldiers were equipped with the Austrian Mannlicher-Schonauer rifle. Each infantry division comprised one field artillery regiment, which relied on three groups of three four-gun batteries, all armed with the French-manufactured Schneider 75-mm guns.

no. 1 (1988): 74-75.

²⁶⁰ Molhov, *Bŭlgarskata artileriya*, 75.

²⁶¹ 1,973 officers, 4,505 Non-commissioned officers, 25,419 privates, 160 Chaplains and students, 853 Trumpeters and musicians. Part III. *Handbook of the Greek Army, Introduction*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 4.

²⁶² Just before the Balkan Wars started, Greek naval historian Dimitrakopoulos estimated the strength of the Greek army to 105,000 men. A. Dimitrakopoulos, "The Contribution of the Greek Navy to the Allied Effort during the First Balkan War, 1912-13," in *Acta, International Symposium of Military History 'Mudros 92' 'Paulos Melas 92'* (Athens: 1993), 52, quoted in Zisis Fotakis, *Greek Naval Policy and the Great Powers, 1910-1919* (London: Routledge, 2005), 42.

²⁶³ Part I. *Military Notes on the Balkan States* in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 67.

Furthermore, the Greek army also deployed two mountain artillery regiments still equipped with the Schneider 75-mm guns and one heavy artillery regiment.²⁶⁴

Within the Balkan League, only Greece possessed a navy that could challenge the Ottoman naval forces, and during the Balkan Wars, the Greek navy served a dual purpose. First, the Greek warships cordoned the Dardanelles to prevent the Turkish vessels transporting troops from reaching the Aegean or the Adriatic Sea. This task was crucial, as stopping Ottoman naval transport would ensure that the existing Turkish armies fighting in the Balkans could not be reinforced and resupplied. Second, the Greek navy had to occupy any Aegean islands occupied by the Ottoman forces. “The Royal Hellenic Navy's pride was the 10,000-ton armoured cruiser RHNS *Averof*, launched from the Orlando shipyard at Livorno on 12 March 1910.”²⁶⁵ Additionally, the Greek navy had sixteen destroyers (built between 1906 and 1912), nineteen torpedo boats, and a single submarine, altogether about 11,000 men served in the Greek navy.²⁶⁶ By Balkan standards, the Greek fleet looked impressive and was commanded by Rear Admiral Pavlos Kountouriotis. Kountouriotis was one of Greece’s highest-ranking officers and one of its most influential voices. Greek historian Phocas claims that Kountouriotis convinced Venizelos that the Greek fleet should be deployed offensively.²⁶⁷ Once Venizelos gave his approval, the orders were rapidly issued; they stated that “The primary objective of the Hellenic Fleet must at all events be for it to become master of the Aegean Sea and to sever maritime communications between Asia Minor and European Turkey.”²⁶⁸ Throughout the Balkan Wars naval phase, Admiral Kountouriotis cut off the Ottoman Empire's maritime communications. Furthermore, during the Battles of Elli

²⁶⁴ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 17.

²⁶⁵ John C. Carr, *RHNS Averof: Thunder in the Aegean* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Maritime, 2014), 4.

²⁶⁶ Demetrius John Cassavetti, *Hellas and the Balkan Wars* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1914), 31.

²⁶⁷ Dimitrios G. Phocas, *O Stolos tou Aegeou, 1912-1913* [The Aegean Fleet, 1912-1913] (Athens: 1940), 18-19.

²⁶⁸ Information found in chapter 6, *The Liberation of the Aegean Islands*, Hellenic Army General Staff, *A Concise History of the Balkan Wars 1912-1913* (Athens: Army History Directorate Publication, 1998), 132.

(December 1912) and Lemnos (January 1913), he twice led the Greek navy to victory against its Ottoman counterpart. Like in the Italo-Ottoman War, the Balkan Wars confirmed the Ottomans' naval inferiority and the crucial repercussions of this inferiority on both wars' outcomes.

The Montenegrin armed forces were undoubtedly the smallest and the weakest in the Balkan League. They were deficient in every aspect, manpower, training, equipment, and basic education. The Montenegrin army was nothing more than a mere frontier force that could not be used in any offensive or defensive capacity.²⁶⁹ The British General Staff provided the following information about the Montenegrin army: six infantry divisions, one artillery brigade, and 63 machine guns for 47,489 men. However, even these low numbers must be checked with circumspection, as a significant proportion of the men included in this total lived abroad, many of them in the United States.²⁷⁰ Montenegrin 'soldiers' were equipped with 35,000 Russian M. 98 rifles that "were received from the Czar in 1898. Furthermore, the Montenegrins had an additional stock of 30,000 Berdan rifles and 40,000 rifles of various patterns."²⁷¹ Finally, "On the day war was declared, the Montenegrin army possessed 126 various model canons, whose calibers ranged from 65 to 240-mm."²⁷²

Within the Balkan League, Serbia possessed the second-largest force in the region. Before the Balkan Wars, the Serbian army was composed of the Narodna Vojska [national army] and the Poskanya Odbrana [the reserve army]. The national army was composed of three Bans or levies,

²⁶⁹ Part I. *Military Notes on the Balkan States*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 60.

²⁷⁰ Part I. *Military Notes on the Balkan States*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 61; for the number of men who were actually outside Montenegro, but still accounted in the army's effectives, Part IV. *Handbook of the Montenegrin Army*, Chapter I, *Composition of the Army and Conditions of Service*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 7.

²⁷¹ Part IV. *Handbook of the Montenegrin Army*, Chapter II, *Organization and Mobilization*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 14-15.

²⁷² Novica Rakočević, "The Organization and Character of the Montenegrin Army in the First Balkan War," in *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*, eds., Béla Király and Dimitrije Djordjević (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1987), 122-123.

160,507 men from the first Ban, 120,000 men from the second Ban, and 60,000 from the third Ban, which gave the Serbian army 340,507 men under arms. The first Ban comprised men between 21 and 31 years old, the second Ban included men between 32 and 37 years old, and the third Ban regrouped men between 38 and 45 years old.²⁷³ Finally, an additional force, the Poslednja Odbrana [final defense], was made of men between 18 and 20 years old and men between 45 and 50 years old.²⁷⁴ As a famous Soviet revolutionary confirmed, these men were only “wearing peasant clothes, with lambskin caps and opanci.”²⁷⁵ In 1903, Serbia had fully re-arranged its armed forces into five conscription regions: Danube, Drina, Morava, Šumadija, and Timok. The peculiarity of the Serbian army organizational structures laid in the fact that,

Each divisional region recruited and equipped one first-levy infantry division and one second-levy infantry division. For example, the Danube divisional region equipped the Danube I Division (first-levy) and the Danube II Division (second-levy), the numbers corresponding to the levy. Each divisional region also provided men, horses, and other materiel in equal ratios to the Cavalry Division and a Combined Infantry Division (first-levy). Under this organizational scheme, Serbia’s operational army totaled eleven infantry divisions and one cavalry division: Danube I, Danube II, Drina I, Drina II, Morava I, Morava II, Šumadija I, Šumadija II, Timok I, Timok II, the Combined Division, and the Cavalry Division.²⁷⁶

In turn, each first-levy infantry division consisted of two brigades, each divided into two regiments, and each regiment itself split into four battalions of 1,000 men each.²⁷⁷ Each battalion was also endowed with its own machine-gun detachment. Overall, the maximum strength of a first-levy Serbian division was 16,448 men, accompanied by three cavalry squadrons, and supplemented by its organic artillery consisting of twelve batteries of four guns forty-eight guns per division. A

²⁷³ The figures provided for the Serbian army derive from Part VI. *Handbook of the Serbian Army*, Chapter I, *Composition of the Army and Conditions of Service*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 4-6.

²⁷⁴ Gale Stokes, “Milan Obrenović and the Serbian Army,” in *East Central European Society in World War I*, eds., Béla Király and Nandor F. Dreisiger (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1987), 556.

²⁷⁵ The *Opanci* were the traditional shoes worn by Serbian peasants. Leon Trotsky, *The War Correspondence of Leon Trotsky: The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913* (New York, NY: Monad Press, 1980), 61.

²⁷⁶ James Lyon, *Serbia and the Balkan Front, 1914. The Outbreak of the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 78.

²⁷⁷ Arhiv Vojnoistorijskog instituta [Archives of the Military History Institute], Fond 3, Kutija 2, RegBr 29a, Fasc 1. *Formacija celokupne vojske* [Formation of the entire army], quoted in Lyon, *Serbia and the Balkan Front*, 79.

second-levy Serbian division was slightly smaller; it comprised one infantry brigade divided into three regiments during wartime, equaling twelve battalions of 1,000 men each for an overall strength of 12,000 men. These second-levy divisions were also supplemented by cavalry, engineers, artillery, and other additional units attached to a first-levy division. Finally, third-levy forces were regrouped in companies, battalions, and sometimes regiments, subsequently incorporated within divisional-size units. First Ban's Serbian artillery consisted of:

1. A two-battery brigade of horse artillery.
2. Five divisional regiments, each of 3 brigades of 3 batteries of field artillery.
3. One 2-brigade regiment of (howitzer) heavy artillery.
4. One 3-brigade regiment of mountain artillery.
5. One regiment (2-battalions) of fortress artillery.

Total: -2 horse, 45 field, nine mountain, five howitzer batteries, and one mortar battery with 188 field guns, 36 mountain guns, 22 howitzers, and six mortars.²⁷⁸ Overall, Serbian artillery possessed 224 guns, twenty-two howitzers, and six mortars; compared with the leading European armies, these figures were extremely low; nevertheless, Serbian artillery acquitted itself very convincingly during the Balkan Wars.

When matched with the Balkan League's forces, the Ottoman army seemed quite capable of rising to the challenge. However, it must be remembered that due to the Italo-Ottoman War, a large number of Ottoman troops had been deployed across the Mediterranean Sea fighting the Italian army in Libya. In 1911, even before the onset of hostilities in North Africa, the Ottoman army was undergoing a profound transformation. This reorganization of the Ottoman forces had started in 1910 and had created a new structure for army corps and divisions.²⁷⁹ In addition to these

²⁷⁸ Part VI. *Handbook of the Serbian Army*, Chapter VII, *Artillery* in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 36.

²⁷⁹ Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans: 1912-1913* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 51.

modifications, the Erkani Harbiye Umumiye Dairesi [Ottoman General Staff] altered the numbers of men serving in artillery and infantry regiments. Also, it transformed the organizational structures of large-size infantry units. For example, before 1911, Ottoman infantry regiments relied on a ‘square structure’ of four battalions, “but beginning in 1911, the army moved to a three-battalion regimental system. This process was incomplete on the eve of the Balkan Wars.”²⁸⁰ Furthermore, the infantry regiments were also supposed to incorporate new machine-gun sections into their midst, a course which was also unfulfilled by 1912. In this new divisional model, Ottoman artillery regiments grew from two to three battalions, allowing one artillery battalion to be organically linked to an infantry regiment that it would later support in combat. The Ottoman army added more firepower, and as Erickson confirmed, “while infantry regiments decreased their strength by 25 percent (although adding machine-guns), the artillery regiments of the Ottoman army increased their strength by 33 percent.”²⁸¹ Like most European military organizations, the Ottoman forces relied on *Nizam* [active army] and *Redif* [a reserve force]. During peacetime, infantry battalions were kept with minimum numbers of officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) and enlisted men, but during wartime, these *Kadrolar* [cadres] were reinforced by *Ihtiyat* [reservists]. By 1911, and at its optimal wartime level, the typical Ottoman first-levy’s infantry battalion included “23 officers, 1,048 infantrymen, and 63 other soldiers. Reserve infantry battalions were authorized 29 officers, 800 infantrymen, and 63 other men for a total strength of 892 men.”²⁸² By 1912, the Ottoman army was organized into six armies and an additional army corps. These forces were stationed across the empire’s faraway regions. In total, there were seven military districts where an army headquarter or an inspectorate was located (see Table 2). Across

²⁸⁰ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 51.

²⁸¹ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 51.

²⁸² Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 51-52.

the empire, between active and reserve forces, the Ottoman army numbered 336,742 men, 47,960 animals, 2,318 artillery, and 388 machine guns.²⁸³

Table 2: Ottoman Army Inspectorates

Balkans: Second Army Inspectorate with V, VI, VII, Independent army corps, and Second Redif Inspectorate.
Thrace: First Army Inspectorate with I, II, III, IV army corps, and First Redif Inspectorate.
Caucasus: Third Army Inspectorate with IX, X, XI army corps, and Third Redif Inspectorate.
Anatolia: Sixth Redif Inspectorate.
Syria: Second Army Inspectorate with VII army corps and fifth Redif Inspectorate.
Mesopotamia: Fourth Army Inspectorate with XII, XIII army corps, and Fourth Redif Inspectorate.
Arabia-Yemen: XIV and Independent army corps.

Source: Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 53.

Despite these numbers, the Ottoman army suffered from crippling deficiencies. In 1908, after their successful *coup*, the Young Turks had immediately embarked upon modernizing the empire’s armed forces. For that purpose, the Ottoman government had invited foreign military missions to reorganize its land and naval forces, responding to the call from Constantinople were officers from the Royal Navy and the German army. By 1912, the level of success achieved by these British and German military missions remained debatable. More specifically, the growth of a professional officer corps accustomed to European (or more specifically German) methods was still contentious.²⁸⁴ In that respect, General Otto Liman von Sanders’ mission to the Ottoman Empire remains a valuable case study of the type of difficulties that high-ranking German officers experienced in their daily interactions with their Ottoman colleagues. As von Sanders expressed

²⁸³ Turkish General Staff, *Balkan Harbi (1912-1913) 1 Cilt, Harbin Sebepleri, Askeri Hazırlıklar ve Osmanlı Devletinin Harbi Girişi* (İkinci Baskı) [The Balkan War (1912-1913), vol. 1, *Causes of War. Military Preparations and War Entry of the Ottoman Empire*. Second Edition] (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993), 100, quoted in Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 54; The artillery comprised 892 field artillery guns, 42 horse artillery guns, 95 howitzers, 174 mountain guns and howitzers, for a total of 1,203 pieces. The remaining 1,115 were artillery pieces permanently located in some of the empire’s fortified areas. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 54.

²⁸⁴ For a well-documented outlook about the influence of German military missions in the Ottoman Empire, see, Ulrich Trumpener, “German Officers in the Ottoman Empire, 1880–1918: Some Comments on their Background, Functions, and Accomplishments,” in *Germany and the Middle East 1835–1939*, ed. Jehuda Lothar Wallach (Tel Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, Institute of German history, 1975): 30-44; also, Carl Max Kortepeter, “Ottoman Military Reform During the Late Tanzimat; The Prussian General Von Der Goltz and the Ottoman Army,” in *The Ottoman Turks: Nomad Kingdom to World Empire* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1991): 247–260.

in his memoirs, “The five years of my service in Turkey were years of struggle, not only against the World War enemies, but against those who never ceased in their efforts to minimize the influence of the German military mission.”²⁸⁵

For their part, the British had the lackluster task of reorganizing the Ottoman navy, and, between February 1909 and September 1914, the British Admiralty sent three consecutive naval missions to Turkey: the first one (between February 1909-March 1910) was headed by Rear Admiral Sir Douglas Gamble; this mission was then followed by Admiral Hugh Williams, between April 1910 and April 1912; and finally, the last one was led by Admiral Sir Arthur Limpus who only left Constantinople in September 1914, when he was posted to Malta.²⁸⁶ In January 1910, and rejoining von Sanders’ less than stellar opinion about the Ottoman army, Gamble declared that reorganizing the Ottoman Navy was,

An awful task and a thankless one. I mean one never sees any radical change or improvement -- and it requires a man in strong health and full vigour to stand the disappointment and continued grind... They are talking very big about a programme of construction, and the engagement of the officers I want, but nothing practical has been done and until the actual steps have been taken, I cannot believe in any of their promises or assurances.²⁸⁷

Gamble’s opinion was replicated by his successor, Admiral Williams, who also vituperated against the Ottoman navy’s lack of progress in implementing meaningful reforms. In April 1912, just before the end of his mission and his return to England, Williams wrote,

I do not think that anyone who has not experienced service at the Turkish Admiralty at this period can have any idea of the difficulties I have had to struggle against in the face of German intrigue and the opposition of nearly all senior officers to any reform at the Admiralty or the Arsenal.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Otto Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey* (Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins Co., 1928), vii; to better appreciate the vicissitudes that von Sanders underwent during his troubled years in Turkey, see the article by Ulrich Trumpener, “Liman von Sanders and the German-Ottoman Alliance,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 4 (October 1966): 179-192.

²⁸⁶ Chris B. Rooney, “The International Significance of British Naval Missions to the Ottoman Empire, 1908-14,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34, no. 1 (January 1998): 1.

²⁸⁷ TNA, FO, Adm I, box 8192. Gamble to Graham Greene, Secretary to the Admiralty, 27 January 1910.

²⁸⁸ TNA, FO 371, vol 1487, file 22853, Report by Admiral Hugh Williams, 29 April 1912.

Curiously, Admiral Williams' contract with the Ottoman Admiralty was only written in Turkish and French and referred to him as a 'conseiller technique' [technical advisor]. At the same time, his letter of appointment from the British Foreign Office stated his title as 'naval adviser.' The first French term simply indicated a rank of technical advisor with a low level of authority; in contrast, the second was indeed a position in which Williams was bestowed with an advisor's position to the highest Ottoman naval authorities. As Paul Halpern commented, "Williams therefore had some difficulty in asserting himself."²⁸⁹

Notwithstanding the rumblings of British admirals and German generals about the decaying nature of Ottoman armed forces, and despite the many organizational weaknesses that affected them, the active Ottoman infantrymen were in general disciplined, experienced, and provided with adequate equipment and weapons. On the other hand, the reserves did not receive any structured training, were provided with old and unreliable weapons, and did not receive adequate food rations. Moreover, to compound existing Ottoman military problems, the *Redif* were often men who were neither Turks nor Muslims. These men possessed very little appetite to fight and die for the Sultan. Edward Erickson also stated that,

The Ottoman Empire had a 1912 population of 24 million people, of whom 1,08 million were men aged twenty to twenty-five years old and another 4 million men aged twenty-six to forty. However, the Ottoman General Staff believed that the empire could actually count on 15 million Muslim citizens as reliable military assets in wartime.²⁹⁰

Such a marked discrepancy stemmed from the large numbers of Albanians, Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, and other minorities that the Ottoman authorities could not trust in a time of war. Just like in World War I, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was confronted with similar difficulties, the Ottomans were considerably weakened by the fragility of their multi-

²⁸⁹ Paul G. Halpern, *The Mediterranean Naval Situation, 1908-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 315.

²⁹⁰ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 59.

ethnic, multi-national, and multi-confessional empire. Nevertheless, “In peacetime, the general staff utilized 1.8 percent of its available Muslim manpower (280,000 men) but planned to mobilize an additional 450,000 men in wartime. Altogether the initial military manpower potential of the empire was reckoned at 730,000 men.”²⁹¹

Before taking the field against the Balkan League forces, the most galling issue for the Ottoman army was the dire lack of individual weaponry that affected many of its infantrymen. In 1912, the Ottoman army only possessed 713,404 rifles.²⁹² Unfortunately for the Turks, “In order to totally equip the mobilized Ottoman army of forty-three regular and fifty-four reserve divisions, the cavalry brigades, and the *Aşiret* [Light Cavalry divisions], the Turks needed a total of 1,092,448 rifles.”²⁹³ To prepare for the impending hostilities, the Ottoman army distributed 321,176 rifles for the First Army in Thrace and 235,244 rifles for the Second Army in Macedonia. Nevertheless, Ottoman soldiers still desperately needed more rifles, and as Erickson confirms, “upon mobilization, about 20 percent of the mobilized manpower of the two strategically critical Ottoman armies were without weapons.”²⁹⁴ To further compound the already severe shortage of individual firearms, the Ottoman army also suffered from another critical problem: standardization. Ottoman infantrymen were equipped with three different rifle models: The Mauser 7.65-mm, the Mauser 9.5-mm, and the Henri Martini. These issues caused serious problems once operations were underway. Another major concern that plagued the Ottoman army was the illiteracy of many of its soldiers. This reality seriously hampered the deployment and use of modern weapons such as machine guns and artillery. The artillery problems were not so much the lack of guns, as the Ottomans possessed many reliable Krupp 75-mm, but rather the means to transport them. Here

²⁹¹ *Balkan Harbi (1912-1913)*, 74-75, quoted in Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 59.

²⁹² *Balkan Harbi (1912-1913)*, 130-153, quoted in Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 59.

²⁹³ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 59.

²⁹⁴ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 60.

again, the Ottomans gravely lacked in oxen and horses to carry the caissons. Erickson states that “The Transportation corps was short [sic] wagons and needed 47,834 reserve animals to meet wartime requirements.”²⁹⁵

Making matters worse, and as shown in the previous pages, roughly fifty percent of Ottoman forces were not garrisoned in Europe but across the rest of the empire. Thus, the most pressing challenge for the Ottoman Empire was not to find troops for fighting against the Balkan League but to promptly transport them to the vital war theaters in Macedonia and Thrace. In terms of naval operations, “The Ottoman fleet included six armored ships, two armored cruisers, eleven torpedo destroyers, thirty torpedo ships and nineteen other transportation and antiquated vessels.”²⁹⁶ The latest Turkish warships were the 3,800-ton light cruiser *Hamidiye* built in 1903 and the *Mecidiye* built in 1904. Collectively, these two vessels could mount a challenge to the Greek flagship, the *Averof*, but as is seen later, the Greek navy proved to be a formidable opponent for the Ottoman naval forces.

Before coordinating its military action against the Balkan League’s armies, the Ottoman General Staff was confronted by a strategic dilemma and was forced to deal with one aggravating operational matter. First, the Ottomans had to decide whether they wanted to fight to the finish against the Italians in Libya or cut their losses there and turn East to face the Balkan states' armies, which posed a graver threat to Constantinople. As seen in chapter 3, the Ottoman government concluded that it had to seek peace with Italy before regrouping and preparing for the war, which was about to start in Macedonia and Thrace. Once the Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of Lausanne on 18 October 1912, the Ottomans finally regained their much-needed strategic freedom

²⁹⁵ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 61.

²⁹⁶ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 19.

of action. Still, they were truly ill-prepared to meet the fury of the oncoming onslaught.²⁹⁷ Second, when the Balkan Wars started, the Chief of the Erkani Harbiye Umumiye Reisi [Ottoman General Staff] Ahmet Izzet Paşa, spent the critical opening phase of the war fought against the Balkan League in Yemen. Due to the gravity of the rebellion that unfolded in the Arabian Peninsula, Izzet Paşa left Constantinople for Yemen in the waning days of January 1911 and only arrived in the Arabian Peninsula on 13 March 1911 to command the Yemen Kuvvayi Umumiye Kumandani [Yemen General Forces]. He later returned to Turkey in January 1913, and in his absence, Ferik Hadi Paşa, the Ottoman Second Army commander, took over the Chief of the General Staff's job.²⁹⁸ Overall, this absence certainly had significant results on the direction of Ottoman operations underway in the Balkans.

Contrarily to what Richard Hall claims, that ‘The Ottomans lacked a clear plan for confronting a threat from the Balkan Peninsula,’ the Ottomans did have a plan, in fact, they had twelve of them.”²⁹⁹ (See table 3). In 1909, under the influence of the celebrated German military theorist General Freiherr Colmar von der Goltz, the Ottoman General Staff revised the existing war plans.³⁰⁰ This revision became even more necessary as a year later, the Ottoman army fully

²⁹⁷ According to the Peace Treaty of Lausanne, the Italian government promised to depart the recently conquered Dodecanese Islands, however and under the pretext of defending these islands against any bellicose actions arising from the Balkan Wars, it reneged on its promise and occupied these islands until World War II was over.

²⁹⁸ Turkish General Staff, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi* [History of the Turkish Armed Forces] (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1971), 253, quoted in Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 64.

²⁹⁹ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 20.

³⁰⁰ Wilhelm Leopold Colmar von der Goltz (1843–1916), was a Prussian officer who finished his illustrious career with the rank of *Generalfeldmarschall* (Field Marshal). Von der Goltz, saw combat in both the Austro-Prussian War (1866) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), during the fighting in France, he served on the staff of Crown Prince Friedrich Karl. Goltz remains one of the greatest German military writers of his time and in 1883, he published *Das Volk in Waffen, ein Buch über Heerwesen und Kriegführung unserer Zeit* [*The Nation in Arms*]. A book largely inspired by his recollections of the Franco-Prussian War and how Léon Gambetta had energetically raised new armies to carry on fighting against the German forces. Between 1883 and 1895, Goltz headed the German military mission to the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, in his instructor's role at the Harp Akademisi [Ottoman War Academy] he taught a generation of officers who later reached the highest military and political positions within the empire. Handan Nezir Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey: The Ottoman Military and the March to World War I* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 24; In World I, Goltz became Military Governor of Belgium, and enacted ruthless retributions for any acts of Belgian resistance. On 11 October 1914, in a letter addressed to his wife, Goltz confirmed “The killing of many civilians, for again, they had fired on German troops south of Ghent.” *Generalfeldmarschall Colmar Freiherr von der*

revamped its structures and organization. In a typical German manner, the Ottoman army war plans combined active and reserve formations, which had to be transported and deployed to their staging areas. The Ottoman General Staff crafted both mobilization and campaign plans, and twice a year (in the spring and fall), these plans were updated to incorporate the recently drafted men.³⁰¹ The Ottoman General Staff believed that it would realistically take five to six days for reserve battalions to mobilize their men and an additional ten to fifteen days for these battalions to be available in their deployment zones.³⁰² By 1912, the Ottoman General Staff had produced twelve war plans. The first five plans were the most refined ones, and war plan # 5 was the most detailed that had been forwarded to all armies down to army corps and division levels.

Table 3: Ottoman General Staff War Plans

<i>Plan Number</i>	<i>Potential Opponent(S)</i>
1	Bulgaria
2	Bulgaria and Greece
3	Greece
4	Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro
5	Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro
6	Serbia and Montenegro
7	Montenegro
8	Italy or a major power
9	Austria-Hungary
10	Russia
11	Russia and Bulgaria
12	Russia and a Balkan coalition (excluding Bulgaria)

Source: Turkish General Staff, *Balkan Harbi (1912-1913), 1 Cilt, Harbin Sebepleri, Askeri Hazirliklar ve Osmanli Devletinin Harbi Girişi* (İkinci Baskı) [The Balkan War (1912-1913), vol. 1, *Causes of War. Military Preparations and War Entry of the Ottoman Empire*. Second Edition] (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basimevi, 1993), 185, quoted in Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 62.

Goltz, *Denkwürdigkeiten* (Berlin, E.S. Mittler & Sohn: 1929), 375, quoted in John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 558; in 1915, Goltz was sent to assist the Turks, and directed the Ottoman forces in Mesopotamia which between December 1915 and April 1916, laid siege to Kut Al Amara where they encircled British forces led by Major General Charles Townshend. Goltz passed away in Baghdad in April 1916, just two weeks before the British surrendered. For a biographical outlook about von der Goltz, see Hermann Teske, *Colmar, Freiherr von der Goltz ein Kämpfer für den militärischen Fortschritt* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1957).

³⁰¹ Turkish General Staff, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, 227, quoted in Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 65.

³⁰² Turkish General Staff, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, 228, quoted in Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 66.

The Ottoman General Staff focused particularly on two crucial theaters, Eastern Thrace, especially around Adrianople, and Macedonia, and Western Greece.³⁰³ First Army staff located in Thrace was tasked to implement plan # 1 against Bulgaria, while Second Army staff deployed in the Balkans was charged with putting into effect plan # 4. In plan # 1, the Turks were supposed to concentrate five regular and two reserve army corps (215 battalions) in the eastern theater (Thrace) and three regular and four reserve army corps (239 battalions) in the western theater (Macedonia).³⁰⁴ Plan # 1 correctly foresaw that Thrace would become the main stage of the war and that the Bulgarians would concentrate the bulk of their forces there to seize Constantinople. Plan # 1 also identified the shortcomings of the Turkish railroad network, and to remedy it, it planned to use naval transport instead. Plan # 4 estimated that the three states of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro could deploy 488 battalions. In response, the Ottoman General Staff planned to send 308 battalions in Thrace and 301 battalions in Macedonia.³⁰⁵ The Ottomans believed that these numbers were sufficient to deal with the enemy's concentrations in Thrace and Macedonia. Even if plan # 4 did not include Greece as a potential foe, the Turks still expected to array forty-eight battalions on the Greek border and protect their railroads from any potential *Komitadjis'* attacks.³⁰⁶ As it turned out, the Ottomans were right when they accounted for a full coalition of Balkan states that included Greece. The Ottoman war plans were primarily defensive and invited the Balkan League forces to commit themselves first. The Ottoman General Staff rightly perceived the Bulgarian army as the most dangerous foe and correctly guessed that the Bulgarian army would concentrate the bulk of their forces in Thrace to threaten Constantinople.

As always in the Balkans, geography and topography dictated war planning, especially as

³⁰³ Turkish General Staff, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, 192, quoted in Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 63.

³⁰⁴ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 63.

³⁰⁵ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 63.

³⁰⁶ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 63.

the peninsula's mountainous environment complicated the vital issue of troop transportation for all protagonists. The first principal railroad artery that traversed the Balkans ran southeast from Belgrade to Sofia, Adrianople, and Constantinople. This railroad permitted both the Bulgarian and the Ottoman forces to be rushed to their common border. The second railroad, which branched out from the first one, ran south through the Vardar Valley, from Niš in Serbia to Salonica in Macedonia. This railroad also joined another line that followed a southern course toward Adrianople. "This line, and two narrow-gauge lines extending from Skoplje to Mitrovitsa in the Sandžak of Novi Pazar and Salonica to Monastir, helped the Ottomans somewhat offset the presence of the Greek fleet in the Aegean."³⁰⁷ When it came to railroads, the Ottomans did not manage their network efficiently, as "Many of the non-Moslem employees were dismissed."³⁰⁸ The Muslim workers hired to replace the Christian ones did not have the necessary training or experience to properly run the Ottoman rail network. These self-inflicted wounds critically hampered the operational movement of troops and supplies for the Ottoman army.

On the Balkan League's side, the Greeks exploited the railroads that linked Athens to the border towns of Larissa and Trikala. The Montenegrins utilized a small but extremely useful railroad that connected Antivari (a harbor on the Adriatic Sea) to Lake Scutari in the country's interior; this line proved vital to transport the war supplies of the small Montenegrin army. Besides, due to the scarcity of railroads, all belligerents had to rely on the Balkans' infamous roads, if any roads existed at all. In general, all armies in the Balkans were severely hindered by their lack of motorized transport. Therefore horses, donkeys, or oxen were frequently the most reliable means to transport supplies, men, or wounded combatants. The British General Staff even laconically

³⁰⁷ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 20.

³⁰⁸ Şerif Paşa, *Quelques réflexions sur la guerre turco-balkanique* (Paris: Imprimerie l'Hoir, 1913), 49; Dimitrakopoulos, *The Contribution of the Hellenic Navy*, 58-59, quoted in Fotakis, *Greek Naval Policy and the Great Powers, 1910-1919*, 49.

commented that in Montenegro, “failing other agencies, women are employed.”³⁰⁹ Given these logistical impediments, it is thus not surprising that the transport of material and men proved to be one of the major issues that affected the opposing armies during the Balkan Wars.

As indicated in the previous pages, geography and topography and the immediate proximity of the Ottoman border prescribed that the Bulgarian army should carry its main effort in the Thracian theater. Indeed, the region's large and gently rolling fields decrease in width to form a bottleneck leading to Constantinople. Thrace was undoubtedly the decisive theater of the First Balkan War, and this is where the Bulgarians produced their main effort. In Thrace alone, the Bulgarians deployed three armies: 1st Army commanded by General Vasil Kutinchev (79,370 men), 2nd Army under General Nikola Ivanov (122,748 men), and 3rd Army led by General Radko Dimitriev (94,884 men). Furthermore, the Bulgarian army also utilized 48,523 men in the western theater of Macedonia and kept 33,180 men stationed in the Rhodopes; a further 16,000 Macedonian-Thracian Volunteers reinforced this contingent. Altogether, in the First Balkan War and within the different army branches, Bulgaria managed to call under arms the astonishing number of 599,878 men from a male population that only reached 1,914,160.³¹⁰ When one considers that this manpower effort represented 31,3 percent of all Bulgarian males, it is overall quite impressive.

³⁰⁹ Part I. *Military Notes on the Balkan States*, in General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States*, 63.

³¹⁰ All figures provided derive from the Official Bulgarian History of the Balkan Wars, *Voinata mezhdu Bŭlgariya i Turtsiya 1912–1913* [The War Between Bulgaria and Turkey, 1912-1913]; for the 1st and 3rd armies, vol. 2, 657-658; for the 2nd army, vol. 1, 566; for the troops stationed in the western theater (Macedonia), numbers extracted from vol. 6, *Deistviyata na zapadniaya operatsionen teatur* [The actions of the Western Operational Theater] (Sofia: Dŭrzhavna pechatnitsa, 1935), 258; for the numbers of volunteers who were deployed in the Rhodopes, figures were gathered from Nikola Todorov Zhekov, *Bŭlgarskoto voinstvo 1878-1928* [The Bulgarian Soldiery 1878-1928] (Sofia: Bratia Miladinovi, 1928), 204; the overall number of men mobilized by Bulgaria and who were also utilized in non-combat duties, are derived from Ministerstvo, *Voŭnata*, vol. 1, 308-309; for his part Erickson estimated the Bulgarian army at a maximum strength of 459,810 men, Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 68; another Bulgarian historian believed that the Bulgarian armed forces committed to the Balkan Wars reached a grand total of 607,422 soldiers. Momchil Yonov, “Bulgarian Military Operations in the Balkan Wars,” in *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*, 64.

On 24 September 1912, the Ottomans mobilized their forces located in Europe. The number of Ottoman troops arrayed across the two theaters of Macedonia and Thrace was estimated at around 175,000 men in Macedonia (western theater) and 115,000 men in Thrace (eastern theater).³¹¹ The *Times*' war correspondent Lionel James remarked that the British military mission's observers attached to the Ottoman army were extremely pessimistic about the conflict's conclusion, especially as they realized that the Ottoman army was drastically undermanned, and "They saw units prepared to take the field that were so short of officers that the majority of the sections were commanded by sergeants."³¹² The 1st Ottoman Army in Thrace was commanded by Abdullah Paşa, while Ali Risa Paşa led the 2nd Army in Macedonia. The 1st Army in Thrace had positioned I Corps under Djavaid Paşa with 20,000 men; II Corps under Shevket Turgut Paşa with 14,000 men, III Corps under Mahmut Mukhtar Paşa around Kirk Kilise (Lozengrad), with 38,000 men, and finally, IV Corps under Ahmed Abuk Paşa, around Adrianople, with 20,000.³¹³ At the Balkan Wars outset, the Ottoman General Staff was confronted with a strategic predicament that the German General Staff later encountered in World War I, namely, to fight a two-front war against a powerful coalition. If in 1914, the Germans faced the combined British and French armies later reinforced by the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) on the Western Front and the Russian army on the Eastern Front; in 1912, the Turks faced a similar predicament and were also forced to

³¹¹ These numbers are provided by Kemal Soyupak and Huseyin Kabasakal, "The Turkish Army in the First Balkan War," in *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*, 159; however, Mahmoud Moukhtar Paşa, former commander of the Ottoman Third Army Corps confirmed that the number of Ottoman troops in Thrace (in the I, II, III, IV and VI corps) was 150,000 men. Mahmut Mukhtar Paşa, *Mon commandement au cours de la campagne des Balkans de 1912*, trans. Édouard Minart (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1913), 2; more recently, the figures of 175,000 men in western theater and 115,000 men in the eastern theater were confirmed by Mehmet Beşikçi, "The Ottoman Mobilization in the Balkan War: Failure and Reorganization," in *The Wars of Yesterday. The Balkan Wars and the Emergence of Modern Military Conflict, 1912-1913*, eds., Katrin Boeckh and Sabine Rutar (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2018), 166.

³¹² Lionel James, *With the Conquered Turk* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1913), 46.

³¹³ Ronald L. Tarnstrom, *Balkan Battles* (Lindsborg, KS: Trogen Books, 1998), 58.

fight a two-front war to protect their two strategic centers.³¹⁴ These two centers were both located in the northwest part of their empire. The first strategic center of the Ottoman Empire was its capital, Constantinople, and the nearby *vilayet* of Adrianople, located in the eastern Thracian Peninsula. Nestled on the Bosphorus, Constantinople was indeed the vital administrative, commercial, financial, and military hub of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the adjacent areas were the most economically viable of the empire. “The second and almost equally important strategic center of gravity consisted of the remaining Turkish *vilayets* in the Balkans: Yanya, Manastir, Kosovo, Salonika, and Iskodra.”³¹⁵ From an Ottoman perspective, the Balkan *vilayets* provided valuable human and economic assets. Finally, the Balkans constituted the last foothold that the Ottoman Empire possessed in Europe; their loss would prove catastrophic for the prestige of the Sultan’s realm.

This strategic conundrum profoundly disadvantaged the Ottoman General Staff. If defending one of these two centers against a single potential enemy was entirely within the Ottoman Empire's military capabilities, achieving the same results against a coalition that simultaneously attacked both nodes of the empire proved beyond the military means of the Turks. In this aspect, the Ottoman Empire’s strategic dilemma strangely resembled the one that the German Reich later confronted in World War I. However, the comparison ends here, if the

³¹⁴ For the perennial Western Front, see, Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); Roger Chickering and Stig Förster eds., *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Michael S. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); William J. Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009); also by the same author, William J. Philpott, *Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (London: Little, Brown, 2014); Peter Hart, *The Great War: A Combat History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); about military operations on the Eastern front, see, Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (London: Penguin, 1975); Dennis E. Showalter, *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires, 1914* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2004); Timothy C. Dowling, *The Brusilov Offensive* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008); Michael S. Neiberg and David Jordan, *The Eastern Front 1914-1920: From Tannenberg to the Russo-Polish War* (London: Amber Books, 2008); John R. Schindler, *Fall of the Double Eagle. The Battle for Galicia and the Demise of Austria-Hungary* (Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

³¹⁵ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 65.

Germans had methodically prepared their military forces for this eventuality (with the Schlieffen Plan) and relied on their superior economy, industry, and highly efficient railroad network (which had been specifically built for this two-front war purpose), the Ottomans with their crumbling economic and industrial resources, underequipped armed forces, as well as their archaic railroads could not contemplate such a scenario.³¹⁶

Furthermore, unlike the Germans, who enjoyed the advantage of impeccably maintained interior lines of communication, the Ottoman General Staff possessed no such competitive edge against its Balkan rivals. Consequently, the Ottoman General Staff was forced to deal with the unforgiving nature of the Balkan's mountainous topography. More importantly, the Ottoman armies had to fight two distinct campaigns in two separate theaters. They faced numerically superior forces that were well-equipped, extremely motivated, and which seized the initiative in both Thrace and Macedonia. Although they were confronted by serious transportation issues when attempting to defend these two distant operational theaters, the Turks positioned the Kircaali detachment (commanded by Yaver Paşa) southwest of Adrianople to link their armies in Thrace and Macedonia. The fortress in Adrianople was garrisoned by no less than 50,000 men commanded by Sukru Paşa.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Many forests have been cleared and even more ink has been spilled to debate (sometimes even bitterly) the validity of the Schlieffen Plan, here are some of the most consequential works about it: Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (London: Greenwood Press, 1958); Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen and Prussian War Planning* (New York, NY: Berg, 1990); Annika Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); additionally, the controversial opus penned by Terence Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning 1871-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Terence Zuber, *German War Planning, 1891-1914: Sources and Interpretations* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004); Pierre-Yves Hénin, *Le plan Schlieffen. Un mois de guerre, deux siècles de controverses* (Paris: Economica, 2012); more recently, Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Gross eds., *The Schlieffen Plan: International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I*, English translation edited by Major-General David T. Zabecki (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014); for the crucial aspect of logistics and transports, especially railroads, see, Dennis E. Showalter, *Railroads and Rifles: Soldiers, Technology, and the Unification of Germany* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975); Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); David Stevenson, "War by Timetable? The Railway Race before 1914," *Past & Present*, no. 162 (February 1999): 163-194.

³¹⁷ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 22.

The Bulgarian army had progressively transformed its strategic philosophy from a resolutely defensive posture to a much more aggressive one. This offensive strategy aimed to capture the Ottoman Empire's nexus, Constantinople. As mentioned earlier, both the Balkan League and the Ottoman Empire had recognized the crucial importance of Thrace. In 1903, Captain Ivan Fichev, who served in the Bulgarian General Staff's operational section, had designed the campaign plans for the potential war with the Turks. When he penned this operational plan, Fichev had digested the lessons drawn from the Greek forces' defeat in the Greek-Turkish War of 1897. Believing that Bulgaria would fight alone, Fichev essentially adopted a defensive strategy that positioned "two army corps facing Macedonia and three army corps facing Ottoman Thrace."³¹⁸ One of Fichev's main strategic goals was to forestall the Ottoman advance into Eastern Thrace, leading to the Bulgarian capital's capture. Fichev correctly assumed that if strategically, the Bulgarian army could efficaciously use its interior lines of communications from an operational standpoint, it should nonetheless adopt an offensive posture. Fichev did not leave anything to chance, as in 1904, he imagined the direction of a potential Ottoman offensive following the Meric River. He "even considered the possibility of an Ottoman amphibious operation in the Black Sea."³¹⁹

Nevertheless, by 1908, the Bulgarian General Staff had drastically altered its plan from a strategic defense to a more aggressive one predicated on an up-tempo advance and individual initiative. Here, one can recognize the influences of German *Aufstragtaktik* and French *offensive à outrance* within Bulgarian infantry doctrine. The new 1908 war plan called for the Second and Third Bulgarian Armies to cross the Tunca River in Eastern Thrace. "Furthermore, a newly formed detachment would drive south to the Aegean Sea. The Bulgarian western army would pin the

³¹⁸ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 71.

³¹⁹ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 71.

Ottoman forces in Macedonia to that theater.”³²⁰ In 1911, Fichev, who was now a general, decided to position three armies in Thrace, hoping that the Bulgarian forces would enjoy numerical superiority against their opponents. Fichev imagined nothing less than the capture of Constantinople, and to his credit, by the fall of 1912, the Bulgarian army nearly pulled it off. Fichev, in a manner reminiscent of German operational methods later employed against Serbia in 1915 and Romania in 1916, decided to implement successive lines of advance while isolating the fortress of Adrianople and carry on a rapid march toward Constantinople. In 1912, and in accord with the Serbo-Bulgarian military convention, Fichev adjusted his strategic plan to make provision for the Serbian forces which would fight alongside his army. He also dispatched one infantry division to the Rhodopes Detachment to respect the Bulgarian pledge made to Serbia. Fichev understood that if the war lasted too long, the Ottomans would have the chance to shift forces from the Asian half of their empire to Europe and use superior numbers against the Bulgarian army. In Fichev’s mind, Bulgaria and the Balkan League had to strike hard and fast against the Ottomans. Like the Germans, Fichev sought a decisive battle of annihilation that would rapidly secure the war’s outcome.³²¹

In Eastern Thrace, Fichev split his forces into three armies. Second Army was positioned in front of the fortress of Adrianople but would not attack it. Fichev sought the destruction of Ottoman forces, not the capture of their strongholds. He declared, “an attack against Adrianople was incompatible with the main object of the war: the destruction of enemy forces.”³²² Within the Bulgarian military thinking, It is rather surprising to observe that Fichev declared that Adrianople

³²⁰ Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 71.

³²¹ Regarding this concept of a decisive battle which aimed at the destruction of most of the enemy’s forces in one major engagement, one must notably mention the influence of Count Alfred von Schlieffen, and his obsession for a ‘Cannae concept’ of battle. See, Chapter 2 in Jehuda Lothar Wallach, *The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The Theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and their Impact on the German Conduct of two World Wars* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 41-46.

³²² Fichev, *Balkanskata voina 1912–1913*, 90.

was not his primary objective (which in his operational philosophy made great sense) when his Deputy Commander-in-Chief, General Mihail Savov, following the Bulgarian army's operations, bragged to the war correspondents "that he would sacrifice *à la japonaise* [the Japanese way] fifty thousand men to conquer this stronghold immediately."³²³ One would have reasonably expected Fichev and Savov to be on the same wavelength to win the war. First Army was located between Adrianople and the fortress of Lozengrad, and finally, Third Army was arrayed northeast from First Army and was screened by the Cavalry Division. When the Bulgarian armies penetrated Eastern Thrace, their general staff assumed that the Turks would not deploy their 200-250,000 men before 1 November 1912.³²⁴ However, and to the Bulgarian General Staff's surprise, the Ottoman army was ready two weeks sooner than they had expected.

On 21 October 1912, before he even had the chance to arrange his troops properly, Abdullah Paşa ordered a poorly planned offensive that followed a line running from Adrianople to Lozengrad. In a manner reminiscent of the greatest Napoleonic maneuvers, Abdullah Paşa wanted to conduct a classical double-envelopment of the Bulgarian forces that had recently crossed the border and were located between the two fortresses of Adrianople and Lozengrad. In his haste to attack the Bulgarians, Abdullah Paşa caved completely to War Minister Nizam Paşa's pressure. Like some of the Bulgarian generals who opposed him, Nizam Paşa was deeply influenced by the French principle of the *offensive à outrance*, which accorded more importance to the combatants' natural *élan* than to the deadly firepower facing them.³²⁵ Just like the French infantrymen learned in the deadly month of August 1914, the Ottoman combatants also paid a

³²³ Louis Thomas, *Histoire de la guerre contre les Turcs (1912-1913)* (Paris: Les Marches de l'Est, 1913), 71.

³²⁴ Ministerstvo, *Voïnata*, vol. 2, 41.

³²⁵ Borislav Ratković, "Prvi balkanski rat 1912-1913," [The First Balkan War 1912-1913], *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 39, no. 2-3 (1988): 118.

dreadful price for following such inept doctrine.³²⁶

More than ever, the Ottoman Empire's survival in Europe hinged on its armies' success in Thrace. The other Ottoman forces located in Macedonia and Albania were, isolated, poorly supplied, and too far from the vital Thracian theater to possibly affect the conflict's outcome. Hence perhaps why Nizam Paşa believed (like General Joseph Joffre did in 1914) that only the offensive could ensure the empire's survival. Nizam Paşa also demonstrated over-inflated confidence in the abilities of Turkish arms when he boasted to the Press Corps, "We have only two months' more good weather for fighting, as it is too cold in the Balkans for winter operations, but that should give us ample time to cross the frontier and take Sofia."³²⁷ By embracing this naïve and unsuited offensive philosophy, Nizam Paşa utterly disregarded the more realistic Ottoman War Plan # 5 that adopted a prudent defensive position against superior enemy forces in Eastern Thrace to await further reinforcements coming from Smyrna and Syria.³²⁸ The Ottoman General Staff was not alone in preaching prudence against the Balkan League forces, the advisor to the War Ministry,

³²⁶ Regarding the unbelievably high numbers of French infantrymen slayed at the beginning of World War I, in August 1914, see the critical account presented by Jean-Michel Steg, *Le jour le plus meurtrier de l'histoire de France: 22 août 1914* (Paris: Fayard, 2013).

³²⁷ Quoted in Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *With the Turks in Thrace* (London: George H. Doran, 1913), 78. Ashmead-Bartlett was the Correspondent of the *London Daily Telegraph* who was attached to the Ottoman army during the Balkan Wars, as such he had the opportunity to get acquainted with Nizam Paşa. Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett (1881 – 1931) was a celebrated English war correspondent and writer. He was the eldest heir from the Conservative Party Member of Parliament, Sir Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett. Ashmead-Bartlett (Junior) served in the British army with the Bedfordshire Regiment and fought during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). After his service in South Africa, Ashmead-Bartlett went to Manchuria to chronicle the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Once back to Britain, Ashmead-Bartlett published his most famous book, *Port Arthur: The Siege and Capitulation* (1906). He then accompanied the French army in its 'pacification campaign' of Morocco (1907-1908). Ashmead-Bartlett also reported on the Italo-Ottoman War (1911-1912), then later witnessed the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). Finally, during World War I, he was one of the most influential reporters who covered the Allied landings at Gallipoli, where his extremely critical description of the operations eventually contributed to the dismissal of Sir Ian Hamilton, the Commander-in-chief of the Allied forces in the Dardanelles. For the rest of World War I, and after being stonewalled by the British General Staff, he was attached (as a part of the British Press Group) to the Grand Quartier Général (GQG) of General Joseph Joffre. Biographical details consulted through an online article written by Alan Kucia, "Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett (1881-1931)," in *Administrative/Biographical history*, London University: Institute of Commonwealth Studies, accessed January 26, 2021, https://aim25.com/cgi-bin/search2?coll_id=4568&inst_id=16

³²⁸ Aḥmad Izzat Paşa, *Denkwürdigkeiten des marschalls Izzet Pascha*, trans. Karl Klinghardt (Leipzig: K.F. Köhler, 1927), 179.

General Colmar von der Goltz, recommended to the Ottoman top-brass that,

For a serious war, the forces destined to Thrace must be concentrated behind the Upper Ergene River between Sarai and Muradli in entrenched positions. The choice is easily explained by the natural strength of the positions and the most important fact that the railway there runs along the whole position with four stations which can serve as halting places: Tcherkesskeuy, Chorlu, Muradli, and Seidler, so that the communications and supply were extremely easy.³²⁹

Goltz advised the Ottomans that “there ought to be only advance troops which could retard the forward movement of the enemy over the small and numerous rivers flowing from the Strandja Mountains to the Ergene.”³³⁰ Unfortunately for the Ottoman army, Nizam Paşa did not listen to Goltz’s advice, and the consequences for Turkish troops were disastrous.

The Battle of Lozengrad (Kirk Kilise in Turkish) took place along a thirty-six miles front that stretched in an easterly manner between the fortresses of Adrianople and Lozengrad. This battle lasted between 22 and 24 October 1912. The Ottoman’s left wing was secured by the Adrianople Fortress, while their cavalry division covered the space between Adrianople and IV Corps. The I, II, and III Corps formed the right-wing of the Ottoman line and protected the fortress of Lozengrad.³³¹ On 22 October, Ottoman forces encountered the vanguard of the Bulgarian First Army. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian Second Army, which came from the West, pushed forward Adrianople and halted the sortie from the fortress’s troops attempting to join the Ottoman offensive. That same night, and under the leadership of its charismatic commander, General Radko Dimitriev, the Bulgarian Third Army assaulted the Ottoman positions at Lozengrad, and after some vicious fighting where the Bulgarian infantry fully demonstrated its tenacity, endurance, and spirit,

³²⁹ Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz, “Causes of the Late Turkish Defeat,” *Infantry Journal* 9, no. 5 (March-April 1913): 731.

³³⁰ Goltz, “Causes of the Late Turkish Defeat,” 731-732.

³³¹ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 26.

broke through the Turkish lines.³³² The fortifications at Lozengrad were not as strong as the ones of Adrianople. Before the war's commencement, von der Goltz had unwisely surmised that "the fortifications of Lozengrad could hold off the Prussian army for three months."³³³ One can only wonder why Goltz harbored such a belief. French war correspondent Louis Thomas confirmed that,

The city was defended by two forts, in the West, Eraklissa, in the East, Skopo, protected by fieldworks. It was mentioned that there was a network of additional defenses...backed by a very impressive siege artillery. The forts were empty, Skopo was not armed, Eraklissa only had four cannons.³³⁴

As Thomas reported, and as later events proved, von der Goltz's assurance was unfounded.

Meanwhile, the Bulgarian First Army under General Vasil Kutinchev launched a two-pronged offensive northeast of Adrianople and southwest of Lozengrad. In the afternoon of 22 October 1912, the Bulgarian First Army faced the full force of the Turkish onslaught; Kutinchev parried the Ottoman attack, coming from Adrianople that was directed against his right-wing. Displaying the aggressiveness and initiative characteristic of the Bulgarian commanders, Kutinchev immediately counter-attacked and oriented some of his forces into the breach between the Ottoman cavalry and Adrianople. At this crucial phase of the battle, the Ottomans missed a golden opportunity to inflict a serious blow on the Bulgarians. Hall commented that "If carried out by a stronger force with resolute leadership, this Ottoman sortie out of Adrianople might have turned the Bulgarian right-flank and secured an Ottoman victory."³³⁵

As the fighting raged on the Bulgarian First Army's front, the Bulgarian Third Army blocked an Ottoman attempt to encircle its left wing. With sound judgment, the Bulgarian General

³³² Dimitriev was nicknamed 'Napoleon,' apparently due to his short stature, as well as his natural inclination to always be the first one to lead his troops into combat.

³³³ Paşa, *Quelques réflexions sur la guerre turco-balkanique*, 21.

³³⁴ Thomas, *Histoire de la guerre contre les Turcs*, 76.

³³⁵ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 26.

Staff had placed its cavalry division between the First and Third Armies. On 23 October, after being pushed back by frantic night attacks, relentless artillery barrages, and furious bayonet charges, the Ottomans broke and precipitously left Lozengrad, retreating in a southeastern course. In the early hours of 24 October, when no enemy's counter-barrage answered a Bulgarian artillery bombardment aimed at the Ottoman batteries, an infantry patrol from Third Army discovered that the defenders had vanished through the night. During the fighting at Lozengrad, and even at night, Bulgarian infantry, backed by tremendous artillery barrages that devastated hastily prepared defensive positions, created havoc within the Ottoman ranks. When considering their lack of combat experience and training, it is not surprising that these Ottoman troops, often made of scared reservists, poorly equipped, badly fed, exhausted by long marches, and led by inferior officers, broke down and fled in front of their Bulgarian foes.

By 24 October 1912, and following an axis that ran from Lozengrad to Adrianople, the Ottoman troops retreated in headlong panic. Torrential rains exacerbated the Turks' moral breakdown, and "In addition, the action of the Bulgarian cavalry in capturing the baggage train of the Ottoman I Corps at the beginning of the Battles spread trepidation among the Ottomans."³³⁶ As the Ottoman retreat turned into a rout, many Ottoman soldiers unceremoniously dropped their packs and weapons while their gunner counterparts promptly abandoned numerous artillery pieces behind. After this military disaster, Mahmut Mukhtar Paşa, commander of the Ottoman III Corps, lamented,

Military history gives no other example of a similar rout beginning without cause. Without fighting, the Bulgarians had achieved a great victory. Without having been pressured by the enemy, beaten only by the bad weather and the conditions of the road, the Turks fled as if they had suffered an irreparable disaster, and lost one-third of their war materials.³³⁷

³³⁶ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 27.

³³⁷ Mukhtar Paşa, *Mon commandement au cours de la campagne des Balkans de 1912*, 43.

In this instance, Mukhtar Paşa lied blatantly to exonerate himself for the lack of leadership and military acumen that he and his fellow Ottoman commanders displayed. The Bulgarian infantry did fight, heavy combat took place during the Battle of Lozengrad, and adverse meteorological conditions also heavily impacted the Bulgarian troops. Furthermore, even if the Balkan roads turned into a quagmire, the Bulgarians kept walking. During this first phase of the war, the Bulgarian soldiers exhibited a superior energy level, drive, and determination compared to their Ottoman opponents. The Bulgarian infantrymen were extremely motivated, led by courageous and resourceful combat leaders. Once the Ottoman troops started to retreat, the Bulgarians were hot on their heels. They pursued them vigorously through rain and mud until they finally arrived in a region for which they possessed very little cartographic information. In truth, even the Bulgarian General Staff was surprised to observe how far its armies had progressed. The Bulgarian forces were stopped once they reached the well-prepared fortification lines of the Chataldja that stood only twenty miles away from Constantinople. Ultimately, with their backs against the wall and their capital ripe for the taking, the Ottomans fought with renewed determination and courage. For once, Ottoman artillery created havoc on the advancing Bulgarian infantry and accurately targeted the many waves that the Bulgarian infantry threw against Ottoman lines. This defensive battle won by the Ottoman forces proved to be the zenith of the Bulgarian army's advance into the Sultan's realm. Indeed, this was the closest that Bulgarian forces ever came to capture Constantinople.

The outcome of the Battle of Lozengrad confirms that the Bulgarian army utilized modern military technology in a much better manner than its Ottoman enemy. The forces in presence during this crucial engagement were pretty much equal. The Bulgarians held 80 infantry battalions against 106 for the Ottomans; 22 cavalry squadrons against 43; 120,000 men against 110,000; 262

guns against 280; 80 machine guns against 72.³³⁸ However, these numbers failed to reveal the deep gap between the two armies, especially in artillery and infantry efficiency. If, on paper, the Ottoman forces could deploy 26 more battalions, they counted 10,000 men less than the Bulgarians. This fact alone substantiates the earlier information that the Ottoman corps, divisions, and regiments were critically undermanned. In terms of the artillery used during this campaign in Thrace, both armies were evenly matched; nevertheless, the Bulgarian artillery was highly effective and regularly used shrapnel against Ottoman defensive positions. Furthermore, at Lozengrad, the Bulgarian troops also efficiently used their machine guns platoons to protect their advancing infantrymen. Finally, “Contributing to success at Lozengrad were the initiative and resourcefulness of junior commanders, the close interaction between artillery and infantry.”³³⁹

Overall, the Bulgarian army productively utilized modern military technology and was competently led by resourceful generals, better supplied, more organized, trained to higher standards, and relied on aggressive tactics implemented by highly motivated troops. The Ottoman forces did not possess any of these attributes, and the results of this first confrontation unmistakably highlighted the disparity between the two armies. A French observer noted that the Bulgarians victory at Lozengrad could be attributed to the “good form and skillful fulfillment of the strategic plan.”³⁴⁰ It was not only from a strategic perspective that the Bulgarian General Staff displayed its superiority. In terms of operational planning, the Bulgarians also demonstrated greater flexibility; they prepared their engagements with better care, marched long, fought hard, and relentlessly pursued the enemy. As General Radko Dimitriev later wrote in his memoirs, in five days of combat, his Third Army covered more than 120 km “across an extremely rugged

³³⁸ Yonov, “Bulgarian Military Operations in the Balkan Wars,” 68.

³³⁹ Yonov, “Bulgarian Military Operations in the Balkan Wars,” 69.

³⁴⁰ Georges Marie Antoinat, *La guerre des Balkans en 1912: campagne de Thrace* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1913), 55.

terrain... without a single road, with two rainy days, and in the autumn when the days are so short.”³⁴¹ These Bulgarian efforts were undeniably a feat of arms that would have made Napoleon’s *Grognards* proud.

At Lozengrad, the Bulgarian casualties amounted to 6,522 killed, wounded, or missing in action.³⁴² The Bulgarian First Army, which bore the brunt of the Ottoman attacks, suffered a graver death toll than the Third Army. On the opposite side, the Ottoman casualties were estimated to be 1,500 killed and wounded, and between 2,000 to 3,000 as prisoners, as well as a considerable amount of material, including a whole corps of artillery of seven rapid-fire batteries.³⁴³ For the Ottomans, losing Lozengrad was a catastrophe, prompting General Cherif Paşa to write later that “Kirk Kilisse was the key to the Ottoman Empire. And that key had been surrendered to the enemy.”³⁴⁴ The Ottoman foot soldiers, just like their commanders, were deeply demoralized by this defeat. On 25 October 1912, General Abdullah Paşa summoned Mukhtar Paşa, and told him, “With this Army, it is not possible to continue the war and defend the country, in order not to fall into a worse situation, I beg you to ask the Council of Ministers, of which you are a member, to settle the question by diplomacy.”³⁴⁵

While the Bulgarian armies progressed in Thrace, the Serbian armies proceeded in the western theater of the Balkan Wars, Macedonia. Serbian war plans against the Ottoman Empire called for the deployment of their forces in four distinct units. The Serbian First Army was led by Prince Alexander and his Chief of Staff, Colonel Petar Bojović. It was composed of the Morava I,

³⁴¹ Radko Dimitriev, *Treta armiya v Balkanskata voina, 1912* [The Third Army in the Balkan War, 1912] (Sofia: Voen.-izd. fond, 1922), 155-156.

³⁴² Ministerstvo, *Voïnata*, vol. 2, 300.

³⁴³ Lieutenant-colonel Paul Boucabeille, *La guerre Turco-balkanique 1912-1913: Thrace-Macedoine-Albanie-Epire* (Paris: Librairie Chapelot, 1914), 155.

³⁴⁴ Paşa, *Quelques réflexions sur la guerre turco-balkanique*, 26.

³⁴⁵ NARA, RG 165-7277-213 1-2. Report of Lieutenant Sherman Miles, “Captured Turkish Dispatch,” 11 January 1913; quoted in Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 28.

Drina I, the Danube I and II, the Timok II Divisions, and the Cavalry Division. Altogether this army equaled 132,000 men and was the largest contingent of the Serbian forces; it was concentrated in the South Morava Valley and throughout the region of Vranje. The Serbian Second Army commanded by General Stepa Stepanović included the Timok I Division, the Bulgarian 7th Rila Division for a total of 74,000 men and was located around Čustendil and Dupnica. The Serbian Third Army was directed by General Božidar Janković and included parts of the Sumadija I Division, some units of the Drina II and Morava II brigades, and amounted to 76,000 men. Furthermore, the Toplica Group also included the rest of the Sumadija I and the Morava II; this group was positioned in the vicinity of Toplica and Merdar. Finally, the Medvedje Group, which comprised the Drina II, Morava I Divisions, was located in Medvedje, on the Tupal Heights. The Army of the Ibar, commanded by General Mihail Živković, included the Sumadija II Division, the 5th Supplementary Regiment, and numbered 25,000 men; this army was concentrated around Raška. Finally, the 12,000 men Javor Brigade, which comprised the 4th Infantry Regiment and the 3rd Supplementary Regiment, was positioned at Javor.³⁴⁶

The Serbian High-Command led by Chief of Staff General Radomir Putnik had devised an all-out offensive plan against the Ottoman forces arrayed in Macedonia. Putnik believed that the Ottomans would direct their forces toward the center of Macedonia, alongside the Morava and Vardar Rivers, and wait until further reinforcements arrived from Asia Minor.³⁴⁷ Consequently, Putnik ordered the First Army to head toward the Morava and Vardar River. The Third Army was supposed to advance toward Kosovo and the Second Army in the direction of Krivoreka and Bregalnica. Putnik planned to destroy the Ottoman armies in central Macedonia. He also wanted

³⁴⁶ This whole paragraph is based on the figures provided by Borislav Ratković, "Mobilization of the Serbian Army for the First Balkan War, October 1912," in *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*, 155.

³⁴⁷ Ratković, "Mobilization of the Serbian Army for the First Balkan War, 155.

to ensure that the Serbian forces could rapidly occupy the ‘contested region’ of Macedonia delimited in the March 1912’s convention with Bulgaria. The Second Army’s role was to trap the Ottoman forces attempting to retreat from the Vardar and stop any potential Ottoman reinforcements from joining the fray in Macedonia. The Third Army would march south into Kosovo and attack the Ottoman left-wing, located in Central Macedonia, as soon as possible. “The initial Serbian plan of operations was based on the assumption that the main force of the Turkish Army of the Vardar would be grouped in the area of Ovče Polje.”³⁴⁸ This is where Putnik believed the bulk of the Ottoman forces to be and where he intended to defeat them.

On 19 October 1912, the Serbian First Army crossed the Serbo-Macedonian border and marched south into the Ottoman-held territory, with its left-wing protected by the cavalry division. Three days later, on 22 October, and much sooner than the Serbian General Staff had anticipated, the First Army met the Ottoman forces positioned around Kumanovo. The Ottoman Vardar Army commanded by Zeki Paşa was organized around the V Corps (Salonica) that served under Kara Said Paşa, VI Corps (Monastir) under Djavid Paşa, and VII Corps (Uskub) led by Feti Paşa.³⁴⁹ These three army corps were aligned east, north, and northwest of Kumanovo. The next day, and under an icy rain, fighting erupted all along a ten-mile front. On the morning of 23 October, and as per Nizam Paşa’s instructions, Zeki Paşa began the Battle of Kumanovo.³⁵⁰ Zeki attacked the right-wing of the Serbian forces, and in the initial phase of the engagement, the Serbs suffered large numbers of casualties. At that moment, the Ottomans possessed numerical superiority against the Serbs, especially as many of the Serbian units were fed piecemeal into the battle zone.

³⁴⁸ Ovče Polje is close to Skopje, Savo Skoko, “An analysis of the Strategy of *Vojvoda* Putnik during the Balkan Wars,” in *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*, 18.

³⁴⁹ For the sake of clarity, Monastir was the name given by the Ottomans to the current Macedonian town of Bitola. Likewise, Uskub was the Turkish name for the capital of Macedonia: Skopje.

³⁵⁰ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 47.

Moreover, the Serbs had not yet deployed their artillery, hence why the Ottomans gained a temporary advantage. Nevertheless, even if they first fought against the larger Turkish troops, the arriving Serbian regiments counter-attacked immediately. A colonel from the Morava Division commented, “I think that we must go over into attack immediately, because in the Bulgarian War of 1885, we had a bitter lesson in a similar situation, while one division fought, the other rested and played music.”³⁵¹ However, at Kumanovo (and unlike in 1885), the Serbs did not come to play music but to fight. And fight they did, as they launched ferocious attacks against the Ottoman positions, prompting one observer to say, “This Serbian fight was a real Japanese assault of the kind I had witnessed at Port Arthur, where no one tried to save his life.”³⁵² In Belgrade, the Austrian military *attaché*, Major Otto Gelinek, was impressed by the average Serbian soldier's conduct during this major engagement. He later confirmed that the Serbian officers themselves were also surprised,

They could not believe how their peasant was calm and cool-headed, in battle. The British military *attaché* watched the frontal deployment of two Serbian battalions under heavy artillery fire. They did the manoeuvre according to all the rules, as if it happened on a military exercise. Regiment and battalion commanders, young lieutenant-colonels and majors between 32 and 40 years of age, headed the assault of their troops. Many high-ranking officers were killed or wounded. The lower-ranking officers deserve the same praise.³⁵³

By 24 October, as Putnik poured more men into the battlefield, the Serbian attacks grew in intensity. They were also now efficiently supported by a larger quantity of heavy artillery. Slowly, the tide of battle turned in the Serbs' favor. The increasing fire of Serbian guns completely subdued

³⁵¹ Stevan S. Shapinac, “Kako smo ushli u Kumanovsku bitku,” [How we entered the Battle of Kumanovo] in *Nova Europa* 6, no. 12 (1922): 373.

³⁵² Vatslav Kolfach, “Bitka kod Kumanova,” [The Battle of Kumanovo], in *Dnevnik pobeda: Srbija u balkan. ratovima 1912-1913* [Victory Diary: Serbia in the Balkans Wars of 1912-1913], ed., Silvija Đurić (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 1988), 71.

³⁵³ Excerpt from Otto Gelinek, *Resüme über die Serbische Armee nach ihrem Feldzug gegen Bulgarien im Sommer 1913*, Österreichischen Staatsarchiv, [hereafter abbreviated to OSA], Kriegsarchiv: Vienna, Austria, Register 2, Box 9, Folder, 15/1.

the Ottoman artillery to the point that the Serbian infantry could now press its attacks home without any hindrance from the Turkish guns. In Macedonia, like in Thrace, a common trend that various war correspondents observed was that the Serbian and Bulgarian gunners proved far superior in training and efficiency when compared to their Ottoman counterparts. Unlike the Bulgarian and Serbian riflemen who often attacked under the protection of their gunners, “Ottoman artillery acted separately from the infantry and lacked forward observers to help determinate the effectiveness of its fire.”³⁵⁴ Besides these noted limitations, another factor that seriously hampered the Ottoman artillery at Kumanovo was Zeki Paşa’s incomprehensible failure to position his heavy artillery batteries that had recently arrived from Skopje.³⁵⁵

Later on, in the afternoon of 24 October, the Ottomans started to withdraw on the entirety of their frontline. Like in the Thracian theater, where they fought against the Bulgarian infantry, the Ottoman reserve units fared poorly, were often prone to panic, and fled immediately once committed to dangerous combat conditions. At Kumanovo, the Serbian First Army casualties amounted to “687 dead, 3,208 wounded, and 597 missing.”³⁵⁶ On the other hand, the Ottoman forces also lost 12,000 dead and wounded, and 300 men were taken prisoner.³⁵⁷ At Kumanovo, if the Serbs had not foreseen that the Ottomans would arrive as quickly as they did and rapidly go on the offensive, they nevertheless reacted swiftly and counter-attacked energetically. Kumanovo marked an important albeit not entirely decisive phase of the war in the western theater. After the war, stringent criticism was leveled against Putnik for not having displayed the initiative needed to pursue the retreating Ottoman forces successfully, thus letting them retire safely and in an

³⁵⁴ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 48.

³⁵⁵ Paşa, *Quelques réflexions sur la guerre turco-balkanique*, 58.

³⁵⁶ Perović, *Prvi balkanski rat, 1912-1913*, Kńiga 1, 718.

³⁵⁷ Aleksandar M. Stojíćević, *Istorija naših ratova za osloboženje i ujedinjenje od 1912-1918 god* [History of our Wars for Liberation and Unification from 1912-1918] (Belgrade: N. Kovačević, 1932), 164.

organized manner, free to fight another day. This criticism was misplaced, as Savo Skoko confirmed, “The Turkish army did not pull out, but rather retreated in panic and disorder.”³⁵⁸ Further evidence confirms Skoko’s views, as following the rout of Kumanovo, both the VI and VII Army Corps were pretty much destroyed. Between them, they could only muster about 10,000 men, a figure that did not even match the full size of a Serbian infantry division.

In Macedonia against the Serbs, as in Thrace against the Bulgarians, the Ottoman offensives unleashed by Nizam Paşa failed. The first critical issue that affected the Ottoman forces was their lack of training, which prevented them from accomplishing the complex maneuvers that unrealistic commanders ordered them to execute. The second and perhaps most striking issue that plagued the Ottoman commanders was the extremely poor choices they made regarding the locations of the battles fought against the Serbs. Kumanovo was ill-suited for meeting the Serbs head-on; it was located too far north in Macedonia, dangerously close to the approaching and numerically superior Serbian armies. Moreover, Kumanovo could also be easily enveloped from the flanks, which it eventually was, just like the Serbian war plans had envisioned. When the various maps of the region are closely examined, it seems astonishing that the Ottomans had advanced literally where the Serbs wanted them to.

Following Kumanovo, the Serbian armies pushed toward Prilep, but extremely poor weather conditions and the region's atrocious roads constantly hindered the Serbian advance. Once in Prilep, the Serbs assaulted the Ottoman positions, and after some heavy fighting, they managed to eject them from the town. At Prilep, a German observer confirmed that the Ottoman forces lost 300 dead, 900 wounded, and 152 prisoners, while the Serbs lost about 2,000 dead and wounded.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ Skoko, “An analysis of the Strategy of *Vojvoda* Putnik during the Balkan Wars,” 20.

³⁵⁹ Albin Kutschbach, *Die Serben im Balkankrieg, 1912-1913, und im Kriege gegen die Bulgaren* (Stuttgart: Franckh, 1913), 50.

Even for a rear-guard action, these numbers confirm the violence of the combats that took place during the Ottoman retreat.

On 8 November 1912, after the battles of Kumanovo and Prilep, the Serbian General Staff ordered the First Army to seize Monastir.³⁶⁰ The Serbian forces marched toward the city then split into two large groups. One came from the northwest, while the second advanced from the northeast. Retreating ahead of the Serbs, the Ottoman forces had destroyed the railroad that ran from Veles to Monastir. Furthermore, heavy rain, a bitter cold, and the wretched Balkan roads made the Serbian army's progress a slow-going process. The horses pulling the artillery pieces often bogged down, while the soldiers had to endure the most excruciating conditions. After their successive defeats at Kumanovo and Prilep, the Ottomans hurriedly trudged toward Monastir. Once there, they established a new defensive perimeter for the last engagement in the Macedonian Theater. Zeki Paşa commanded the Vardar Army, which he positioned around Monastir. The Ottoman forces were dispersed accordingly, from East to West: on the right-wing, V Corps under Kara Paşa, in the center, VI Corps commanded by Djavid Paşa, and lastly, on the left-wing of the Ottoman line, VII Corps led by Feti Paşa. Additional troops from the Kochana and Janina Divisions reinforced the existing three army corps. As mentioned previously, the Ottoman army corps and divisions were drastically undermanned and affected by high desertion rates. After the engagements at Kumanovo and Prilep, Ottoman forces only amounted to 38,350 men and 100 artillery pieces, while the Serbian First Army totaled 108,544 men.³⁶¹ Despite being severely demoralized and defeated twice in a short period, the Ottomans still managed to organize their defenses on the Oblakov Heights, located northwest of Monastir.

³⁶⁰ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 51; Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 253.

³⁶¹ Ratković, "Prvi balkanski rat 1912-1913," 130.

On the morning of 16 November 1912, the fighting started with a ferocious artillery duel. For two days, the mountainous ground and the accurate fire from Ottoman artillery considerably slowed down the Serbian infantry in its progression. On 17 November, after two days of intense combat, the Serbian divisions managed to take the Oblakov Heights, which were the Ottoman defensive organization's focal point. On 18 November, the Serbs positioned their heavy artillery on the Oblakov Heights and methodically eliminated the last Turkish batteries that blocked their infantrymen's path. Meanwhile, the Serbian right-wing progressed through the Ottoman lines. This final Serbian push decided the battle's outcome and provoked the entire Vardar Army's retreat, or what was left of it. As it happened in Thrace, the Ottoman retreat again turned into a rout. The Ottoman V Corps retreated directly to Florina (northwest Macedonia), while the VI and VII Corps found refuge in the Albanian town of Berat.³⁶² The Ottoman Army of the Vardar lost 1,000 dead, 2,000 wounded, and 5,600 prisoners. In contrast, Serbian casualties reached a total of 539 dead, 2,121 wounded, and 329 missing.³⁶³ During this three-day battle, Feti Paşa, commander of VII Corps, was killed in action, the highest-ranking officer from either side to die in combat during the Balkan Wars. Following their victory, the Serbs entered Monastir on 19 November 1912. With the city's occupation, the Serbs controlled a key location in southwest Macedonia, thus strongly reinforcing their claim on the region they actively coveted. On 22 November, after occupying Monastir, the Serbs next entered the city of Ohrid. Following the Serbian occupation of Kumanovo, Prilep, Monastir, and Ohrid, five hundred years of Ottoman occupation in Macedonia abruptly came to an end. In the meantime, the Serbian Third Army moved westward into Northern

³⁶² Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 52.

³⁶³ Borislav Ratković, "Biltojska Bitka," [The Battle of Bitola], *Vojnoistoriski glasnik* 39, no. 2 (1988): 207.

Albania to assist the Montenegrin army, which was besieging the fortress of Scutari (Shkodër) in Albania.³⁶⁴

As the Bulgarians and the Serbs played a key role in inflicting decisive defeats on the Turks, it is now time to examine the Greek military participation. Ever since the Balkan Wars' inception, the Greek army had only one goal: to conquer the 'Pearl of the Aegean' Salonica. Salonica was not only Macedonia's largest city but also the Balkan's main harbor. Its possession generated a great deal of interest from all regional powers. The Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos had made it abundantly clear that Salonica was the number one political objective of the Greek government. Prophetically, he declared, "We shall march on Thessaloniki and Serres. We shall get there in good time. The allocation of territory will take place on the basis of the military occupation."³⁶⁵ Meanwhile, between 22 October and 2 November, the Greek Army of Thessaly commanded by Crown Prince Constantine, which had the objective of capturing Salonica, pushed northeast. After some hard-fought actions at the Sarantaporos Pass and Yanitsa, the Army of Thessaly finally managed to break through the Ottoman defensive positions. The second Greek force, the Army of Epirus, under General Constantine Zapundakis, was tasked to seize the Albanian town of Ioannina. Following their success at Yanitsa, the road to Salonica laid wide-open. When in the last week of October 1912, the Bulgarians realized that Greek infantry units had already encircled Salonica, they were forced to make some hard choices. First, they decided to let the Serbs occupy Monastir, and second, hoping to beat the Greeks to the punch, they rushed the 7th Rila Division to Salonica. Previously, the 7th Rila Division was part of the Serbian

³⁶⁴ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 253. Before the Balkan Wars, and World War I, the northern Albanian town of Shkodër was often referred to Scutari. In line with the usage of the time, I have elected to keep using Scutari throughout, as many English and French writers have done in their books published during and after World War I.

³⁶⁵ Quoted in Eleutherios Prevelakis, "Eleutherios Venizelos and the Balkan Wars," *Balkan Studies* 7, no.2 (1966): 372.

Second Army but had been detached from the Serbian forces to enforce the Bulgarian claim to Salonica. In Salonica, the Ottoman commander, Hassan Tahsin Paşa was now confronted with a binary choice. He could surrender the city either to the Bulgarians or the Greeks. Therefore, he decided to conduct negotiations with both. In this instance, the canny Hellenes had decisively outsmarted their Slavic allies and offered much better terms to the Ottomans.³⁶⁶ As the negotiations came to an end and the Bulgarians pressured him to agree to their terms, the Ottoman commander replied to the Bulgarian emissary, “I have only one Thessaloniki, which I have already surrendered.”³⁶⁷ On 8 November 1912 at 23:00, and following this high-level diplomatic bargain, Tahsin Paşa officially surrendered Salonica to the Greek forces. “In total, 25,000 soldiers, and approximately 1,000 officers surrendered, and a total of 70 guns, 30 machine guns, 1,200 horses and plenty of materiel of all kinds came into possession of the Hellenic Army.”³⁶⁸ As Venizelos had shrewdly hinted, when it came to the fate of Salonica, the issue was pragmatically resolved on a first-come, first-served basis. Once it arrived in Salonica, the Greek army rapidly occupied positions east and northeast of the city. While the Greek army captured Salonica, the Royal Hellenic Navy laid claim to the Chalcidice Peninsula.³⁶⁹ From a Greek perspective, the country’s main political objectives had been fulfilled. Nonetheless, this entertaining Greek-Bulgarian tragicomedy was not over yet. On 9 November 1912, when General Georgi Todorov, commander of the 7th Rila Division accompanied by Crown Prince Boris, and Prince Kyril, arrived with his 24,000 men to Salonica, he rapidly informed Tsar Ferdinand that, “From today Salonika is under

³⁶⁶ Regarding the controversial capture of Salonica, the Bulgarians rapidly affirmed that the Greeks, always being astute businessmen, had paid off a very substantial amount of money to the Ottoman commander to convince the latter to surrender Salonica to Greek forces. Georgi Markov, *Bŭlgariia v Balkanskiia sŭyuz sreshtu Osmanskata imperiia* [Bulgaria in the Balkan League against the Ottoman Empire] (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1989), 91-92.

³⁶⁷ Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966), 449.

³⁶⁸ Hellenic Army General Staff, *A Concise History of the Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 66-68.

³⁶⁹ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 61.

the scepter of Your Majesty.’³⁷⁰ Despite arriving second in the race to Salonica,’ the Bulgarians were undeterred and still intended to claim the city as theirs. Endeavoring to avoid the Balkan League's immediate disintegration, the Greek General Staff accepted the 7th Rila Division as the Greek army's guests.³⁷¹ Therefore, a curious joint occupation ensued whereby 25,000 Greeks and 15,000 Bulgarians shared the city. However, this fragile condominium did not last long, and eventually, following the Second Balkan War and Bulgaria’s defeat, Salonica remained a permanent part of the Hellenic Kingdom. (See map 9).



Map 9: Map of the occupied regions by the belligerents, end of April 1913.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*, 55.

³⁷⁰ Fichev, *Balkanskata vojna 1912–1913*, 231.

³⁷¹ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913*, 62.

As the dispute between the Greeks and the Bulgarians for the control of Salonica demonstrates, the First Balkan War did not resolve any of the various Balkan League members' conflicting territorial claims. On the contrary, the First Balkan War simply sowed the seeds for further upheaval. In the March 1912 Agreement, Bulgaria and Serbia had both accepted a division of Macedonia's spoils. The Bulgarians were supposed to keep southern Macedonia, including Ohrid, Prilep, and Monastir. The Serbs were to receive Kosovo, the birthplace of their national folk, and the Sandžak of Novi Pazar. However, if Bulgaria and Serbia could not find an agreement over Northern Macedonia, the discord about 'the disputed zone' should then have been resolved by the Russian monarch. "The Sofia government presumed that Russia would not actively oppose its efforts to attain the San Stefano borders."³⁷² As the war went on, the pursuance of Serbian desideratum about Macedonia was temporarily eschewed over the most pressing issue of Serbian advance into Northern Albania and the enticing prospect that Serbia could finally get its hands on a much-desired outlet on the Adriatic. This situation represented the quandary of Serbia's natural expansion. This expansion could either be directed west at the Adriatic Coast or turn east toward the object of both Bulgarian and Greek desires: Macedonia.

This quandary obliged Serbian leaders to decide how they wished to direct the country's expansion. As the Hofburg unmistakably warned Belgrade, further Serbian progress into Albania would place Serbia and the Habsburg Empire on an inevitable collision course. The Serbs, realizing that the Austro-Hungarian statement was no bluff, understood that they would have to forego a harbor on the Adriatic. As this realization sunk in, the Serbian leaders then contemplated revising the March 1912 Agreement with Bulgaria, with terms that would prove largely favorable to Serbia. Chief among the objectives they had in Macedonia was Monastir, a city for which the

³⁷² Richard C. Hall, *Bulgaria's Road to the First World War* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1996), 80-81.

Serbian troops had fought so hard that there was no longer any will to abandon it to Bulgaria. Rightfully worried about these latter developments, the Bulgarians immediately contacted Nikola Pašić to seek clarification over the issue. In his typical evasive manner, the Serbian Prime Minister attempted to reassure the Bulgarians and declared that “all differences could and would be settled easily.”³⁷³ Yet, the Serbian leaders now further contemplated Monastir and Prilep's permanent occupation, which they had originally promised to Bulgaria, as well as the annexation of Skopje.³⁷⁴ In Sofia, and despite Pašić's latest reassurances, the Bulgarian leaders became increasingly alarmed when they received distressing dispatches that the Serbian troops had roughly mishandled the Bulgarian minority in Macedonia. Here a somehow amusing anecdote certainly provides some context to the latter point. While he leisurely strolled around a recently liberated Macedonian hamlet, Serbian heir to the throne Prince Alexander, casually interpellated a rather indifferent dweller:

‘What are you?’
‘Bulgarian.’
‘You are not Bulgarian. Fuck your father!’³⁷⁵

Despite Prince Alexander's colloquial exchange with this Bulgarian peasant, in Macedonia, in the early months of 1913, an uneasy truce still prevailed between the Bulgarians and the Serbs. Nevertheless, the Bulgarians became increasingly alarmed when “In January 1913, the Serbian government for the first time officially requested a redefinition of the frontier fixed by the treaty of alliance.”³⁷⁶ By the end of April 1913, Belgrade and Sofia accepted to present their respective claims to Russian arbitration. Eager to settle the issue once and for all, the Bulgarians sent the

³⁷³ Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, 161.

³⁷⁴ Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, 161.

³⁷⁵ Quoted in Ivan T. Teodorov, *Balkanskite vojni (1912-1913): istoricheski, diplomaticheski i strategicheski ocherk* [Balkan Voices (1912-1913): Historical, Diplomatic and Strategic Essay] (Sofia: Khermes Pres, 2007), 259.

³⁷⁶ E.C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912-13* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 353; Gueshoff, *The Balkan League*, 90.

highly skilled diplomat Dimitar Rizov as their plenipotentiary to Belgrade. Nine years before, Rizov had already taken part in the negotiations that had resulted in the Serbian-Bulgarian Treaty of Alliance of 1904.³⁷⁷ (See chapter 2). Assuredly, Rizov was the right man for the job, as he previously dealt with the Serbs and favored diplomatic *rapprochement* with Serbia. However, following some laborious discussions with the Serbian government, Rizov became aware that this time around, the Serbs were not going to give back any of the Macedonian territories that sat within the area originally promised to Bulgaria. Territories for which the Serbian army had paid a horrific blood tax and which the Serbian government was already rapidly incorporating within Greater Serbia.

Furthermore, Rizov was horrified to discover the power exerted by the avowed Pan-Slavist and influential Russian Ambassador to Belgrade Baron Nicholas Genrikhovich Hartwig. Hartwig's influence within the Serbian government was so great that Rizov informed the Bulgarian Prime Minister that the Russian Ambassador was nicknamed 'the Regent,' as he enjoyed unrestricted access to the Serbian monarch and was known to be his unofficial advisor in diplomatic affairs.³⁷⁸ Before he left Belgrade, Rizov cautioned Hartwig that, "If it now comes to a war between us and Serbia, the principal and indeed the only culprit would be you, Hartwig."³⁷⁹ On 28 May 1913, one day after Rizov departed Belgrade, the masquerade finally ended. Nikola Pašić publicly announced to a jubilant Skupština [the Serbian National Assembly] that Serbia would conserve all the conquered territories. However, due to Serbia's persistent claims to an area originally promised to Bulgaria, and despite a special clause guaranteeing Russian arbitration

³⁷⁷ Regarding the already mentioned Serbo-Bulgarian Alliance of 1904, see Kiril Valchev Merjanski, "The Secret Serbian-Bulgarian Treaty of Alliance of 1904 and the Russian Policy in the Balkans Before the Bosnian Crisis," (Master's Thesis, Wright State University, 2007), 27.

³⁷⁸ Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, 175.

³⁷⁹ Ivan E. Geshov to Stefan Bobchev, 27 May 1913. *Narodno sūbranie. Doklad na parlamentarnata izpitatelna komissia*. Box 482, Folder 124; quoted in Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, 175.

(which never came), war could no longer be avoided between Belgrade and Sofia. During the last week of May, the Serbian General Staff dispatched a large number of troops to the Bulgarian border, and civilian rail transport was abruptly interrupted.³⁸⁰ On 30 June 1913, Pašić addressed the Skupština to justify his annexation of the Macedonian territories originally promised to Bulgaria and defend himself against the Serbian nationalists who clamored Serbia should have occupied these territories outright anyway. As the discussions were underway, Pašić was interrupted by a government official and informed that this very morning, at 2 am, the Bulgarian forces had launched an attack against the Serbian positions without an official declaration of war. This latest communication created a furor in the national assembly's benches, and Pašić immediately left the debates to be appraised of the General Staff's planned counter-offensive.³⁸¹

Following the Second Balkan War, Serbia, Greece, Romania, and the Ottoman Empire united against Bulgaria. These nations' goals were to detach, conserve, or reconquer some of the lands that Bulgaria either held *de facto* or had recently occupied during the First Balkan War. It would push our analysis too far to visit this second part of the conflict. In early July 1913, the Bulgarian forces were repulsed by the Serbian armies at Bregalnica.³⁸² Following this engagement, and between 15 and 18 July, the Serbs launched a counterattack, which in turn was also stopped by well-prepared Bulgarian defensive positions. The Bulgarians managed to block a Serbian attempt to invade western Bulgaria. Meanwhile, as the Serbs got bogged down, the Greeks launched an offensive from the south. This Greek offensive ended up with the disastrous Battle of Kresna Gorge. The Hellenic army only avoided destruction because of the armistice negotiations about to start in Bucharest. As the Bulgarians were already committed to fighting the Greeks and

³⁸⁰ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 258.

³⁸¹ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 258.

³⁸² Also spelled Bregalnitsa For more details about this action, see Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 110-112.

the Serbs, the Romanians chose the perfect moment to invade Bulgaria with more than 330,000 men.³⁸³ Their ultimate objective was the conquest of the Danubian region of Bulgaria known as Southern Dobrudzha.³⁸⁴ Simultaneously, the Ottomans re-entered the fray and launched an offensive against southeast Bulgaria to regain Adrianople and all the lands they previously lost in the fall of 1912. Confronted by the threat of a double invasion and unable to face four different armies alone, the Bulgarian government was forced to recognize the futility of further fighting and immediately initiated negotiations for a conference that would take place by the end of July in Bucharest.

On 30 July 1913, the various delegations arrived in the Romanian capital. The Greek, Serbian and Montenegrin prime ministers, Venizelos, Pašić, and Vukotić, headed their respective delegations while Titu Maiorescu represented the Romanian government. The new Bulgarian Finance Minister, Dimitur Tonchev, General Fichev, President of the *sŭbranie* Sava Invancev, and the publicist Simeon Radev led the Bulgarian mission. Also present at the conference were all the Great Powers' ambassadors. Although they did not intervene directly in the negotiations' outcome, they still wielded a discreet but nonetheless appreciable influence. From the conference's beginning, the Romanians refused to invite the Ottoman representatives. They insisted that the problems at hand should only be discussed between the Balkan allies recently involved in the conflict.³⁸⁵ The new Bulgarian Prime Minister Vasil Radoslavov, who was not the most gifted orator, preferred not to be implicated in the negotiations confirming Bulgaria's overall defeat; therefore, he stayed in Sofia.³⁸⁶ In Bucharest, Tonchev's objective was to split the allies. However,

³⁸³ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 117.

³⁸⁴ During World War I, in September 1916, the Bulgarians, who no doubt did not forget this perfidious attack launched at the last minute by the Romanians, took their revenge when they rapidly reconquered the northern part of the Dobrudzha that they had lost to Romania at the very end of the Second Balkan War.

³⁸⁵ Andrej Toshev, *Balkanskite vojni* [The Balkan Wars], vol. 2 (Sofia: Hudozhnik, 1931), 411.

³⁸⁶ On 13 July 1913, the Pro-Russian cabinet headed by Stoyan Danev was forced to resign. Danev's plight was considerably worsened when the Russians refused to alleviate Bulgaria's fate. St. Petersburg had amply cautioned

he must have felt bitterly disappointed when the Greeks, the Romanians, and the Serbs adopted a united front. On 18 July, before the conference even started, the Bulgarians had already settled with the Romanians and “offered to cede to Romania the part of Bulgarian territory situated northeast of a line between Tutrakan and Baltchik.”³⁸⁷ Once the Romanians reached their war aim, they displayed a conciliatory attitude toward Bulgaria and attempted to moderate the Greek and Serbian demands. The Romanians’ attitude was motivated by the desire to remain the strongest state in the Balkans, especially since Bucharest did not wish to see the Greeks and the Serbs becoming too powerful in the region.

Negotiations between Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia were far more acrimonious, as again, the respective diplomats stumbled upon the ever-vexing question of Macedonia. The Bulgarians wanted to obtain the Vardar River’s east bank as their new border with Serbia.³⁸⁸ On the other hand, Serbia and Pašić wanted to enforce their claims to Macedonia down to the Struma Valley, thus cutting off most of the area that had been originally promised to Bulgaria. At this critical juncture, and despite the Great Powers’ plea for moderation, the Serbs did not compromise an inch. All they accepted to give to Bulgaria was the small town of Shtip, “in honor of General Fichev.”³⁸⁹ In these intense diplomatic exchanges, the Serbs did not give much and received plenty. When Bulgaria and Greece opened their negotiations, the main bone of contention remained the secondary Aegean harbor of Kavala. Since they had already lost their number one priority (Salonica), the Bulgarians were bent to obtain the second-best harbor in the region, especially as

Sofia to not start a war with the Ottomans; as the Russian advice was never heeded by the Bulgarians, in the end, the latter were left to their own demise by their big Slavic brother.

³⁸⁷ Document # 222: Bulgarian Foreign Affairs Ministry to the Romanian Government through the Italian embassies in Sofia and Bucharest, in Ministère des affaires étrangères, Documents diplomatiques, *Les événements de la péninsule balkanique. L'action de la Roumanie septembre 1912 - août 1913* (Bucharest: Imprimerie de l'État, 1913), 168-169.

³⁸⁸ Telegram from Tsar Ferdinand to Crown Prince Boris, 4 August 1913, Hoover Institute, Stanford University, Stanford, CA: Archives of Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria. Box 43, folder 1, quoted from Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 123.

³⁸⁹ Fichev, *Balkanskata voina 1912–1913*, 462.

“Kavala was also at the center of a rich tobacco-producing region in eastern Macedonia.”³⁹⁰

Unfortunately, their recent military defeat did not give the Bulgarians much leverage to influence the negotiations’ outcome. Venizelos laconically declared to General Fichev,

General, we are not responsible. Before 16 June (29 June) we were afraid of you and offered you Seres and Drama and Kavala, but now when we see you, we assume the role of victors and will take care of our interests only.³⁹¹

In the most surprising diplomatic arrangement of all, Austria-Hungary and Russia supported Bulgarian claims to Kavala, whereas France and Germany sided with Greece. This most bizarre situation also confirmed that the Great Powers slowly slipped into the treacherous Balkan quicksand. In this instance, the odd Franco-German duo prevailed, and Greece kept Kavala, while Bulgaria was offered in consolation the very limited maritime outlet of Dedeagach. After this bitter diplomatic wrangling, the delegates signed the Treaty of Bucharest on 10 August 1913. The principal consequence was the division of Macedonia into three areas: Greece received Aegean Macedonia, Serbia got the lion’s share, the biggest part of Macedonia which ran along the Vardar River, and included not only ‘the contested zone,’ but also the area originally pledged to Bulgaria in the March 1912 Agreement. Finally, Bulgaria was given the crumbs with a tiny portion “known as Pirin Macedonia.”³⁹² With the Treaty of Bucharest, both Greece and Serbia received more lands than they had originally wanted back in Fall 1912. (See map 10). Also, both states managed to curb Bulgarian military power; however, this military victory over Bulgaria did not last long. By 1915, Bulgaria would be back on the warpath and square off again with its archrival, Serbia.

Meanwhile, as the new Bulgarian government was now faced with the prospect of an Ottoman invasion and the potential capture of Sofia, it had to come to terms with Constantinople

³⁹⁰ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 124.

³⁹¹ Fichev, *Balkanskata voina 1912–1913*, 464.

³⁹² Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 124.

quickly. The Bulgarian brokering position was substantially undermined by the fact that Ottoman armies had not only re-occupied Eastern Thrace, but their cavalry had also penetrated deep inside the Bulgarian borders.



Map 10: Territorial Modifications in the Balkans. Conference of London [May 1913] and Treaty of Bukarest [August 1913].

Source: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*, 70.

The Russian government unenthusiastically attempted to request (on Bulgaria's behalf) Adrianople's retention. Still, as the other Great Powers were not interested, this *démarche* came to naught, and the city remained within the Sultan's realm. After this Russian endeavor's failure, the Bulgarians were forced to negotiate, and just like in Bucharest, they were in for another rough ride. On 6 September 1913, in Constantinople, negotiations started, and General Savov and Andreï Toshev were the two main Bulgarian representatives; their Ottoman interlocutors were the Foreign Affairs Minister Mehmet Talat Bey, assisted by the Minister of the Navy Mahmud Paşa, and Halil Bey.³⁹³ The Bulgarians aspired to retain Lozengrad, and General Savov bluntly told his Ottoman counterparts: "Bulgaria who defeated the Turks on all fronts, cannot end this glorious campaign with the signing of an agreement which retains none of the battlefields on which so much Bulgarian blood has been shed."³⁹⁴ Mahmud Paşa, undeterred by this slight excess of Bulgarian bravado, responded, "What we have taken is ours."³⁹⁵ Since the Bulgarians had first defeated them, the Ottomans had demonstrated extraordinary powers of recovery and now dictated their specific terms to Sofia. All the battlefields of Lozengrad, Lyule-Burgas, and Adrianople, which in General Savov's own words, had seen so much Bulgarian blood spilled, all returned to the Ottoman Empire. The Bulgarian government only managed to cling to a small area of northeast Thrace adjacent to the Black Sea. The Treaty of Constantinople was ultimately signed on 30 September 1913. Surprisingly enough, despite their century-old hatred for each other, the Bulgarians and the Turks found themselves fighting alongside Germany in World War I.

The Treaty of Constantinople was followed by further agreements between the Ottoman

³⁹³ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 125-126.

³⁹⁴ Markov originally wrote, "Bulgarien, das die Turkei an allen Fronten geschlagen hat, diese ruhmreiche Kampagne nicht mit der Unterzeichnung eines Vertrages beenden kann, nach dem keines der Schlachtfelder, auf dem so viel bulgarisches Blut vergossen wurde, unser bleibt." Georgi Markov, "Bulgarien auf der Friedenkonzferenz in Konstantinopel (August-September 1913)," *Bulgarian Historical Review* 18, no. 4 (1990): 67-68.

³⁹⁵ Toshev, *Balkanskite voini*, vol. 2, 453.

Empire and the remaining belligerents, Greece and Serbia. On 14 November 1913, the Treaty of Athens was signed between Greece and the Ottoman Empire, and diplomatic relations were restored; however, the thorny issue of the Aegean Islands was left unresolved. This unresolved issue certainly exacerbated future relations between Greece and the Ottoman Empire, and following World War I, the two countries resumed their never-ending hostility during the Greek-Turkish War of 1919-1922. Finally, on 14 March 1914, the Ottomans and the Serbs settled their dispute with yet another Treaty of Constantinople. This peace treaty confirmed most of the conditions that had been previously agreed upon during the London Peace Conference of December 1912.

The Balkan Wars were a historical moment of considerable missed opportunities. With the various agreements signed in 1912 between Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia, the potential for a post-Ottoman region that could have co-existed peacefully truly existed. A Balkan League where all states contributed to an equitable balance of power would have likely provided better relations among the League's members. Besides, a politically united Balkan region could have also resisted further dangerous Austro-Hungarian encroachments. Nonetheless, this possibility never materialized, and three distinct factors caused the Balkan League's failure. The first one was Bulgaria's unwillingness to accept an equitable division of Macedonia with Greece and Serbia. Bulgarian ambitions were so radical that they prevented a solution for some of the contested issues such as Salonica. Had Bulgaria decided to come to an agreement with Greece about southern Macedonia, they could have largely avoided further bloodshed.

The second main factor contributing to the ultimate Balkan League's downfall was Austria-Hungary and Italy's inescapable presence in the Adriatic, as they both effectively blocked the path of Serbia to the sea. Collectively, Austro-Hungarian and Italian interests coalesced to create a 'so-

called independent Albania.’ This artificial state became a bulwark against the Serbian ambitions that targeted the obtention of a crucial naval base in the Western Balkans. This rejection of Serbia’s enlargement toward the Adriatic had drastic consequences for the Balkan League. It suddenly re-orientated Serbian expansion from West to East and led to Belgrade’s decision to seize further territory at Bulgaria's expense. Nevertheless, as shown in the preceding chapters, even if Serbia could have settled on the Adriatic, there was no guarantee that Belgrade would not have sought more vital space in Macedonia.

Third and foremost, the decisive factor that undermined the Balkan League was the lack of Russian diplomatic influence over Bulgaria and Serbia. Indeed, St. Petersburg had previously accepted the role of arbitrator regarding any potential dispute between Belgrade and Sofia. Still, since the Russians did not exert the necessary influence to mediate between the two competing Slavic nations, they relinquished their control of the situation, and the Balkan Cauldron exploded. Furthermore, as the Russian ambassadors in Belgrade and Sofia sent conflicting and misleading reports to St. Petersburg, the Russian diplomacy lost its influence over the Bulgarian government and consequently orientated its policy toward supporting Serbia. This recent diplomatic shift had severe repercussions for the events that unfolded in July 1914, where Russia could never exert any further influence over Bulgaria.

Finally, from the weakened military and diplomatic position where it stood, at the end of the Italo-Ottoman War of 1911-1912, the Ottoman Empire could ill afford to begin another conflict immediately. Pragmatic decision-making was urgently needed in Constantinople, and the Sublime Porte could have attempted to satisfy Serbian aspirations by agreeing to limited concessions in Kosovo and Macedonia. However, the Ottomans were truly in an unenviable position, even if they might have tried to come to terms with the various Balkan states, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece

proved to be recalcitrant interlocutors. Simply put, the Ottoman General Staff, which just went through a disastrous war in North Africa, was no longer capable of throwing its hat in the ring and would have been well-advised to heed Frederick the Great's prescient advice "Wer alles verteidigen will, verteidigt nichts." [Whoever wants to defend everything is defending nothing.]³⁹⁶

From all the belligerents, Bulgaria was the country that had the most to gain from the Ottoman Empire's demise. However, during the First Balkan War, Sofia made a few crucial political mistakes that eventually yielded disastrous results. The Bulgarian army made a promising start against the Ottoman forces and went from a position of force, with many good cards to play, to one where it was left with none. One of these errors was to pursue what Richard Hall calls "The chimeras of Salonika and Adrianople."³⁹⁷ Indeed by attempting to acquire a safeguard in Thrace, where most of the population was not Bulgarian anyway, the Bulgarian government wasted precious military resources and missed the opportunity to focus its efforts on its number one priority, Macedonia. It would have been far more efficient to let Thrace aside and fully focus on Macedonia, where other Balkan nations harbored similar dreams of expansion. Had Bulgaria decided to reach a compromise over Salonika with Greece, there is a very strong possibility that it could have averted fighting with Greece during the Second Balkan War. Leaving Bulgaria alone to deal with Serbia. Furthermore, Bulgaria did not see the writings on the wall when it failed to negotiate with Bucharest for the Dobrudzha. Bulgaria could no longer realistically deal with the threat exerted by Romanian forces on its northern frontier, especially as it was already committed to fighting on all its other borders. The Second Balkan War was the only instance in European history where a country fell prey to an invasion from all its neighbors. In World War I, the bitter

³⁹⁶ *Ausgewählte Werke Friedrichs des Grossen*, vol. 1, *Historische und militärische Schriften*, ed. Gustav Berthold Volz (Berlin: Hobbing, 1916), 249; also, King Frederick II of Prussia, *Frederick the Great on the Art of War*, trans. and ed. Jay Luvaas (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1999), 120.

³⁹⁷ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 140.

disillusion created by the Balkan Wars' calamitous conclusion irremediably pushed Bulgaria into Germany's arms, which, unlike the Entente, could offer Sofia all the compensations that the latter wanted in Macedonia.

Greece played its hand efficaciously during the Balkan Wars and benefited from extremely favorable consequences by first harnessing the Bulgarian army's strength to carry the bulk of the fighting against the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, Greece utilized its naval power to effectively blockade the Ottomans and seized its number one objective Salonica. Second, in the Second Balkan War, when push came to shove, Greece found itself allied with Serbia and enjoyed the position of confronting the Bulgarian forces when the latter were stretched to the limits and had to fight on four separate fronts. Finally, the Battle of Kresna Gorge confirmed that even a weakened Bulgarian army was still strong enough to inflict a crushing defeat on the Greeks, who were saved by the bell, and the armistice's negotiations about to start in Bucharest. Thus, Greece came out of the Balkan Wars victorious but exhausted. Moreover, Greece's unresolved issues with the Ottoman Empire still lingered, and after World War I, during the Greek-Turkish War, the Greek government pursued an unrealistic expansionist policy in Anatolia and was ultimately defeated by the newly created Republic of Turkey led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk).

The undisputed victor of the Balkan Wars was Serbia. In the First Balkan War, the Serbian armies had prevailed against their Ottoman foes in Albania and Macedonia, while in the Second Balkan War, they had defeated the Bulgarian forces. For Serbia, the major Balkan Wars' consequence was to fulfill its territorial expansion in Macedonia. However, the country paid an extremely high price and was left considerably over-extended by the recent absorption of so much land and population. Furthermore, the newly conquered populations only harbored hatred for their new Serbian masters. "Armed rebellions by Albanians in Kosovo and by supporters of IMRO and

Bulgaria in Macedonia opposed Serbian rule from 1913.”³⁹⁸ Following their defeat in the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman Empire managed to survive as a political entity by retaining its far-flung *vilayets*, but not for long. The Ottoman Empire only lasted for a few more years after World War I, when under the strain of renewed defeat and the imperialist pressure exerted by the British and French empires, it finally collapsed and vanished forever. From the ashes of the Ottoman Empire rose an ambitious new state, which enthusiastically embraced a national philosophy closely centered on a well-defined Turkish identity. The dark picture emerging from the Balkan Wars is one of desperate inhumanity, mass slaughter, atrocities, and endless destruction, propelled by an incandescent nationalism that fed on long-lasting local animosities and ethnic rivalries that are so characteristic of the Balkans. This violent legacy did not end with the Balkan Wars but lasted for the rest of the twentieth century. Endemic violence returned in the 1990s during the wars that tore apart the former Republic of Yugoslavia. This new eruption of violence in the Balkans, the massacres, and horrendous ethnic cleansing that took place, left the West aghast. However, it did not surprise the few specialists who knew the region well enough to remark that this was not the first time the Balkan Powder Keg exploded. One can only hope that it was the last time.

³⁹⁸ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, 141.

CHAPTER 6

THE IMPERFECT ENTENTE CORDIALE

*Nos deux vieux peuples, nos deux grands peuples demeurent liés l'un à l'autre.
Ils succomberont tous les deux ou bien ils gagneront ensemble.*

*[Our two ancient peoples, our two great peoples remain linked together.
They will both succumb or else they will win together.]*

Charles de Gaulle, 8 July 1940.

Coalition warfare was truly the essence of World War I. Both the Central Powers and the Triple Entente found themselves embroiled in a global conflict where they were forced to collaborate at the diplomatic, economic, political, and military levels. If in the Central Powers, Germany clearly dominated its Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Ottoman partners, on the Entente's side, the cooperation between France, Great Britain, and Russia was altogether more balanced, as the three nations possessed and retained a much greater level of independence in their diplomatic and military decision-making. From the beginning of the conflict, Britain and France attempted to control the Triple Entente to pursue their war aims. Nonetheless, both nations had to reckon with their partners' own sets of political objectives and priorities. As Britain and France fought together in the Balkan Theater and on the Western Front, this chapter examines the peculiar relation these two nations had cultivated long before they squared off against the Central Powers. Over the centuries, these two intimate enemies repeatedly clashed and predominantly perceived each other as foes, never friends. This lasting enmity constitutes this chapter's background and helps us understand why this historical antagonism considerably influenced the Macedonian Campaign's course of events. Hence, this chapter examines the attitudes prevalent on both sides of the Channel and review some mental maps that guided several of London and Paris's key decision-makers. By depicting how the various generals and ministers in Britain and France perceived, and more importantly, judged their counterparts, this chapter offers an explanation that

illustrates why the two Allies went through so many troubles in agreeing, arranging, and sustaining an Allied expeditionary force in the Balkans.

Against the backdrop of this tormented Anglo-French relationship in the twentieth century, the imperfect entente prominently on display between 1914 and 1918 nevertheless remains a powerful symbol of the victorious, albeit difficult, diplomatic and military collaboration that Britain and France maintained to win the Great War. In stark difference to World War II and the disastrous collapse that occurred in the spring of 1940, in World War I, Britain and France managed to withstand the strains of coalition warfare and the ultimate challenge that Germany posed to them. It is noteworthy that before fighting together in World War I, and with the notable exception of the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the two nations had never been allies. As Jean-Jacques Becker confirms,

In the course of their long history before the twentieth century, the French and the British had fought side by side only rarely. In the nineteenth century, the only instance was the siege of Sebastopol in the Crimean War, when alongside 90,000 French soldiers there were only 20,000 British.³⁹⁹

Due largely to the Entente Cordiale signed on 8 April 1904 by Foreign Ministers Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, Marquess of Lansdowne, and Théophile Delcassé, the two countries started a period of diplomatic *détente* that forever changed the fate of Anglo-French relations.⁴⁰⁰ As David Dutton reveals, “the fact that Britain and France had been enemies in war no fewer than eight times

³⁹⁹ Jean-Jacques Becker, “Testing the Entente Cordiale,” in *Cross-Channel Currents. 100 Years of the Entente Cordiale*, eds., Richard Mayne, Douglas Johnson, and Robert Tombs (London: Routledge, 2004), 47.

⁴⁰⁰ It seems that the first time the expression ‘Entente Cordiale’ was coined was in October 1844, when King of France Louis-Philippe visited London, and declared in a speech that, “France asks nothing from England. England asks nothing from France. We only desire *entente cordiale*.” Quoted in Michèle Ressi, ed., *Dictionnaire des citations de l’histoire de France* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1990), 418; much has been written about the Entente Cordiale, for an excellent account that relates its inception, see, Christopher Andrew, “France and the Making of the Entente Cordiale,” *The Historical Journal* 10, no. 1 (1967): 89-105; by the same author, *Théophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale: A Reappraisal of French Foreign Policy 1898-1905* (London: Macmillan, 1968); Antoine Capet, *Britain, France and the Entente Cordiale since 1904* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); regarding the ‘military conversations’ that took place between the British and French General Staffs, see, William J. Philpott, “The Making of the Military Entente, 1904–14: France, the British Army, and the Prospect of War,” *The English Historical Review* 128, no. 534 (2013): 1155-1185.

between 1689 and 1815 was probably a more important element in the popular psyche of the two nations.”⁴⁰¹ In the late 1890s, during the Scramble for Africa, Britain, and France had been bitter rivals. Additionally, the extremely tense context of colonial affairs exacerbated the rivalry between the two powers as it contributed to a reinforcement of tensions that was largely amplified by the warmongering sections of both British and French presses. These tensions reached their apex with the 1898’s Fashoda Incident, where the two governments contemplated the possibility of war before the French finally backed down.⁴⁰² In France especially, the spirits were inflamed by what many journalists perceived as a damaging diplomatic defeat at the hands of *La perfide Albion* [Perfidious Albion]. On 9 November 1898, fervent Bonapartist and political director of the newspaper *l’Autorité*, Paul de Cassagnac, commented that “Fashoda is nevertheless going to become in our history more atrocious than Crécy, Agincourt, Waterloo, or Sedan. Over there, at least we fought.”⁴⁰³ The next day, and still fuming against what he perceived as a humiliating French climbdown for ‘such a hole lost in the desert,’ de Cassagnac added that,

If Germany is detestable, it is because of a precise, and limited fact which could be erased. With the cause, the effect would disappear. Good neighbor relations, the agreement, an honest alliance would succeed to the acute situation created by Alsace-Lorraine. But with England, it is something else. Her hate against us is insatiable. And ours has the duty to elevate at the same level. Germany is an adversary. England that is the enemy, the enemy of yesterday, of tomorrow, of always.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰¹ David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 1.

⁴⁰² Many references describe the ‘Fashoda Incident’ for the British, and ‘la crise de Fachoda’ for the French (note the marked difference in appreciation on both sides of the Channel) some of the most praiseworthy are, Roger Glenn Brown, *Fashoda Reconsidered: The Impact of Domestic Politics on French Policy in Africa, 1893-1898* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969); C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, “Gabriel Hanotaux, The Colonial Party and the Fashoda Strategy,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 3, no. 1 (1974): 55-104; Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident of 1898: Encounter on the Nile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Marc Michel, *Fachoda: guerre sur le Nil* (Paris: Larousse, 2010).

⁴⁰³ Paul de Cassagnac, “Que vaut Fachoda?,” editorial, *L’Autorité*, November 9, 1898, <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/lautorite/09-nov-1898/1041/3733741/1>

⁴⁰⁴ Paul de Cassagnac, “L’ennemi,” editorial, *L’Autorité*, November 10, 1898, <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/lautorite/10-nov-1898/1041/3733743/1>; also, Eber Malcolm Carroll, *French Public Opinion and Foreign Affairs: 1870-1914* (New York, NY: The Century Co, 1931), 175-176. The passage cited in this footnote is de Cassagnac’s words, however, Carroll erroneously attributed them to another French newspaper, *l’écho de Paris*. About French public opinion and how the Fashoda Crisis was perceived at the time, see, Rachel Arié,

This long-lasting rivalry between the two countries, epitomized by the recent colonial flashpoint of Fashoda, which after all was nothing more than a desert strip along the Nile, should not obscure the fact that, as George Clemenceau pointed out, “France could not go to war over marshland in Africa, while the Germans held Strasbourg.”⁴⁰⁵ Curiously, at the time, various French politicians profoundly disagreed with Clemenceau’s assessment, thus revealing the duality of French foreign policy, with one main enemy in Europe: Germany; and another in the world: Britain.

In the late nineteenth century, this fierce colonial rivalry was not strictly limited to Britain and France in Africa. In Asia, and Persia (nowadays Iran), the vital geostrategic area lying at the intersection of their mutual imperial interests, Britain, and Russia (which had become Allies in 1907), also regarded each other as steadfast competitors.⁴⁰⁶ Crucially for our purpose, this epoch of intense imperial rivalry was the defining period in which many high-ranking British officers and politicians - who later presided over the British Empire’s destiny - started their careers. As David French sums it, “The men who made British strategic policy during the First World War belonged to a generation which had reached maturity and formed their vision of the world in the late 1870s and early 1880s when they had learned to see Russia and France as Britain’s most bitter

“L’opinion publique en France et l’affaire de Fachoda,” *Revue d’histoire des colonies* 41, no. 144-145 (1954): 329-367.

⁴⁰⁵ George Clemenceau quoted in Philip M. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement* (London: Longman, 1996), 10.

⁴⁰⁶ Regarding this Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia, and the subsequent Treaty signed by both countries, see the excellent account penned by Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London: J. Murray, 1990); Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia; 1894-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); as well as, Jennifer Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001); and the collection of British primary sources and diplomatic documents about the Anglo-Russian rivalry, presented by Martin Ewans ed., *The Great Game: Britain and Russia in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2003); for the official Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907, see Appendix I - *Full Text of Convention between the United Kingdom and Russia relating to Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet. Signed at St. Petersburg, August 31, 1907*; in G.P. Gooch and Harold W. V. Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914*, vol. 4, *The Anglo-Russian Rapprochement 1903-7* (London: HMSO, 1929), 618-621; also, Ewen W. Edwards, “The Far Eastern Agreements of 1907,” *Journal of Modern History* 26, no. 4 (1954): 340-355; Ira Klein, “The Anglo-Russian Convention and the Problem of Central Asia, 1907-1914,” *Journal of British Studies* 11, no. 1 (1971): 126-147; for the specific Anglo-Russian spheres of influence in Persia, see, Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

imperial competitors.”⁴⁰⁷ Despite this British animosity toward both France and Russia, the rapid ascent of a powerful challenger, Wilhelmine Germany, had significantly altered the international panorama of Britain’s potential enemies. Imperial Germany joined the list of competitors and became Britain’s number one international rival. Nevertheless, even though Germany, not France, posed the gravest threat to British strategic security, some influential decision-makers in the British Cabinet kept planning for a potential conflict with France. As late as 1 July 1914, a mere few weeks before the two nations entered World War I, Sir Maurice Hankey (the *éminence grise* of the British Cabinet) drafted a document in which he contemplated the likelihood of a French invasion of Britain.⁴⁰⁸

The Entente Cordiale of 1904, despite the veneer of official cordiality and *fanfare* accompanying its signing, never truly eliminated the basis for such a persistent Anglo-French antipathy, nor did it completely resolve the central question of Great Britain’s entry into a generalized conflict on the European Continent. As Keith Hamilton confirmed, “The entente cordiale was not nearly as free of discord as its name suggests.”⁴⁰⁹ After the signature of the Entente, Britain and France still had a few unsettled issues, such as the French arms trade and the French take-over of Morocco, which on two separate occasions nearly precipitated the whole of Europe on the brink of war. By 1906, and despite lingering Francophobic sentiments in England, Germany had arguably eclipsed France and Russia as the number one potential enemy. Furthermore, this Anglo-French *rapprochement* was initiated under the premise that in colonial affairs, Britain and France had to agree about British domination in Egypt and French control over

⁴⁰⁷ David French, *The Strategy of Lloyd George Coalition 1916-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 3-4.

⁴⁰⁸ Hankey wrote, “If France attacked, she would use submarine, mines and aircraft to keep the British Navy at a distance.” Keith Wilson, “The Channel Tunnel Question at the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1906–14,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990): 119.

⁴⁰⁹ Keith Hamilton, “The Poor Relation. Spain in Anglo-French relations, 1898–1914,” in *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century. Rivalry and Cooperation*, eds., Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone (London: Routledge, 1999), 50.

Morocco. Indeed, these premises were largely dictated by an aggressive German *Weltpolitik* directed against the imperial aggrandizement that London and Paris were conducting.⁴¹⁰ Within the British Foreign Office's upper echelons, a few pragmatic spirits such as Sir Eyre Crowe perceived Germany as an existential menace to the British Empire and advocated for a *de facto* alliance between Britain and France. Conversely, a few French diplomats and politicians shared Crowe's views and lobbied for a more formal political agreement. However, within the British Cabinet, an acute feeling of anxiety to abandon Britain's splendid isolation' still prevailed.⁴¹¹

In December 1905, under Sir Edward Grey (the new Secretary of State of the Foreign Office), the Entente slowly morphed into "a habit of diplomatic cooperation, supported by military and later naval conversations."⁴¹² At first, the meetings and conversations that had started under Landsdowne's stewardship progressively evolved into a much more comprehensive military collaboration that made full contingency for a possible German invasion of France.⁴¹³ Gradually, more and more British leaders came to see Imperial Germany as the only viable adversary and France as the only reliable military partner in case of war. How far British Foreign Policy had shifted in the years preceding World War I was demonstrated by this realignment aiming to secure new allies on the Continent. Nevertheless, despite several French appeals to transform the Entente into an official alliance, the British government still refused to cross this diplomatic Rubicon. In

⁴¹⁰ For a cogent description of Wilhelm II's *Weltpolitik*, see, Eber Malcolm Carroll, *Germany and the Great Powers, 1866-1914: A Study in Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1938).

⁴¹¹ About the abandonment of Britain's 'Splendid Isolation', see, John Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain, The Balance of Power, and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999); also, Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (New York, NY: Random House, 2014).

⁴¹² David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20; about Sir Edward Grey, one of the key British Cabinet members at the onset of war, see, Keith G. Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey: A Biography of Lord Grey of Fallodon* (London: Cassell, 1971); and more recently, Michael Waterhouse, *Edwardian Requiem. A Life of Sir Edward Grey* (London: Biteback, 2013).

⁴¹³ Regarding the progressive British involvement in continental affairs and the military preparations that ensued see, Sir Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd, 1972); also, William J. Philpott, "The General Staff and the Paradoxes of Continental War," in *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation, 1890-1939*, eds., David French and Brian Holden Reid (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), 95-111.

1907, the permanent secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) even declared that “the military discussions and arrangements were not binding on the [British] government.”⁴¹⁴

More worryingly for French diplomacy, in case of a Franco-German war and regardless of how this war might potentially begin, there was still no official confirmation that Great Britain would assist France. Indeed, the Quai d’Orsay was acutely aware that if France had to fight Germany, it might very well have to do so alone, as Britain would not join the fray.⁴¹⁵ Overall, leading British diplomats and politicians opted for this non-committal approach to France, on the basis that had they offered their unconditional support to the French Government, it might have encouraged the latter to adopt a more confrontational stance against Germany and irremediably drag Britain into a continental conflict which the British wanted to avoid at all costs. Faced with such prognostications, it is therefore not surprising that the French Government was unconvinced of the British assistance’s credibility. Equally, the French General Staff prepared its military plans under the assumption that the British army ‘might’ fight alongside the French army against Germany. In any case, within the Entente’s strategy, “the French depended more on the Russians than on the British.”⁴¹⁶

As late as 1913, the French ascertained that Britain’s commitment to assisting France was still questionable since the British arrival in France could be late due to “political or naval reasons.”⁴¹⁷ The British obfuscation to fully commit themselves was always present at the back of

⁴¹⁴ This document, which is not dated, as well as the letter from Major General Neville Lyttelton, Chief of the General Staff, 26 July 1907, are both kept at the château de Vincennes, the center of the *Service historique de la défense* [hereafter abbreviated to SHD], 7N 1782.

⁴¹⁵ As Trevor Wilson noted, on 1 & 2 August 1914, Prime Minister Asquith had clearly stated and re-affirmed that “Britain was not bound to enter the war on France’s side.” Trevor Wilson, “Britain’s ‘Moral Commitment’ to France in August 1914,” *History* 64, no. 212 (October 1979): 387.

⁴¹⁶ Robert A. Doughty, “French Strategy in 1914: Joffre’s Own,” *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 2 (April 2003): 435.

⁴¹⁷ Ministère de la Guerre, État-Major de l’Armée [hereafter abbreviated to EMA]: SHD, 7 N 1782, Note du 4e Bureau pour le 3e Bureau, 4 March 1913.

many French diplomats and politicians' minds who, nonetheless, kept pursuing this commitment. Until the eleventh hour, Britain adamantly refused to declare its official support for France if the latter was forced to fight against Germany. As two historians pointed out, "It was never in doubt that British troops would defend India. But it remained in doubt until 4 August 1914 whether they would defend France."⁴¹⁸ In their calculations, French military planners only accorded a very moderate belief in an eventual British assistance. As such, Plan XVII did not confer the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) any clearly defined part.⁴¹⁹ Nevertheless, by renouncing an offensive through Belgium (which might have been a sound strategic option but a disastrous diplomatic decision), French planners still attempted to convince the British Cabinet of their utmost respect for Belgian neutrality to pressure British forces to intervene alongside the French army.⁴²⁰ In any case, the French were so eager to receive this British help that their military deployment and subsequent operations never sanctioned the crossing of the Franco-Belgian border. Had French forces done so, they would have most assuredly lost the prospect of British armed assistance.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁸ Christopher M. Andrew and Alexander Sydney Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas: The Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), 12.

⁴¹⁹ Plan XVII, was the French war plan of mobilization and concentration prepared by the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* (CSG) in the event of war between France and Germany. Its entire concept was reviewed, improved, and redrafted under Joffre's direction between 1911 and 1914. Its final version was released on 15 April 1914. Moreover, in February 1914, Joffre had a simplified version of the plan entitled *L'instruction sur la concentration*, sent to all the army commanders. For more details about Plan XVII, see chapter 10, *Plan XVII. La mise sur pied du plan* in Marshal Joseph Joffre, *Mémoires du maréchal Joffre (1910-1917)*, vol. 1 (Paris: Plon, 1932), 162-206; also, for a thorough explanation of Joffre's role in the inception of Plan XVII, see the aforementioned article, Doughty, "French Strategy in 1914: Joffre's Own," as well as, Douglas Porch, "French War Plans, 1914: The 'Balance of Power Paradox,'" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 1 (2006): 117-144; Jean-Jacques Becker, "Le plan XVII et la première guerre mondiale," in *Les militaires et le recours à la force armée : faucons, colombes ?*, eds., Thomas Lindemann and Michel Louis Martin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 87-96; Eugenia Kiesling, "Strategic Thinking: The French Case in 1914 (& 1940)," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2010): 89-104.

⁴²⁰ Regarding the French army's obligation to respect the neutrality of Belgium and Luxemburg, see, Guy Pedroncini, "Relations internationales et stratégie: l'influence de la neutralité belge et luxembourgeoise sur la stratégie française: le plan XVII," *Revue internationale d'Histoire militaire* (1978): 299-310.

⁴²¹ Douglas Porch, "The French Army in the First World War," in *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 1, *The First World War*, eds., Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1988), 200; David Stevenson, *Cataclysm. The First World War as a Political Tragedy* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004), 41; Samuel R. Williamson, *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 212; Raymond Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 1, *Le lendemain d'Agadir* (Paris: Plon, 1926), 224-225.

This French anxiety that the British might not join the war was not completely unfounded, as in April 1914, even the Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, Sir Arthur Nicolson, declared that “I am afraid that should war break out on the continent, the likelihood of our dispatching any expeditionary force is extremely remote.”⁴²² What Nicolson wrote to Buchanan appears to be a rather realistic assessment, as, during the July Crisis, this British uncertainty about entering the war on France’s side persisted until the last minute. This was why Asquith’s government publicly declared that no formal commitment obliged Britain to intervene on France’s behalf.⁴²³ As late as 1 August 1914, Sir Edward Grey reiterated to the French Ambassador Paul Cambon “that France must make up its own mind about whether to take sides in a Russo-German war, without being able to count on any British assistance.”⁴²⁴ The crucial lesson that this constant British wavering offers is that Britain’s final choice to enter World War I was primarily determined neither by any sort of moral commitment to France, even after a full decade of intense diplomatic and military negotiations, nor by any pledge to honor and defend Belgium’s neutrality, of which Britain was one of the main custodians, but rather by a very self-centered evaluation of its national interests and ultimate strategic security.⁴²⁵ Thus, paradoxically, Britain joined World War I as much to protect its own strategic interests as to keep a watchful eye on its number one imperial rival: France.

⁴²² TNA, FO 800/373/42, Nicolson to Buchanan, 7 April 1914; also quoted in Zara Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy: 1898-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 130.

⁴²³ About Asquith, and his less than inspiring leadership see, Roy Jenkins, *Asquith* (London: Collins, 1964); also, George H. Cassar, *Asquith as War Leader* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994).

⁴²⁴ Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics*, 34; for the famous Grey-Cambon conversations, and their ultimate result on the British entry into World War I, see, John Keiger, “Sir Edward Grey, France, and the Entente: How to Catch the Perfect Angler?,” *The International History Review* 38, no. 2: *Sir Edward Grey and the Outbreak of the First World War* (2016): 285-300.

⁴²⁵ William Philpott stated that “What is clear is that Britain’s decision to enter the war resulted from a sober assessment of her national interests, and not from any perceived moral obligation to France, ten years of close diplomatic cooperation notwithstanding.” William J. Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-18* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 13.

The British rationale was that if France and Russia vanquished Germany, these two states would control the Continent's destiny, thus leaving Britain one more time isolated and without Imperial Germany's precious counterweight to block this threatening Franco-Russian partnership.⁴²⁶ However, what also transpires from these Anglo-French relations prior to World War I was the undeniable strategic interdependence that now linked Britain to France. Britain needed the land power procured by the vast French army to oppose German forces, while from a maritime perspective, France needed British naval supremacy. Furthermore, during the July Crisis, as John Keiger has explained,

When French decision-makers did return to French soil on 29 July, a mere three days before French general mobilization and only five days before war was declared on France, their overriding aim in managing the crisis was to ensure that in the event of war the country would enter the conflict united and with British support.⁴²⁷

On 4 August 1914, after much typical British muddling, Asquith's Cabinet reached the *consensus* that it was indeed in Great Britain's vital strategic interests to resist German aggression in Belgium and finally offer France the military support that the latter had so persistently endeavored to gain. Additionally, from a British perspective, French military power was "the *sine qua non* of British involvement in a European land war that it would fight that war in conjunction with France."⁴²⁸ By 1914, the British army, although a well-trained fighting force, desperately lacked the numerical strength that, on the other hand, the French army possessed. Therefore, it is evident that Britain could not have gone to war without its powerful ally. In 1917, the South African General Jan Christiaan Smuts, one of the influential members in Lloyd George's War Cabinet, humbly recognized that "We entered the war in a very small way with a small military force and not as a

⁴²⁶ Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics*, 37.

⁴²⁷ John F. Keiger, Chapter 5: *France*, in *Decisions for War, 1914*, ed., Keith Wilson (London: Routledge, 1995), 121.

⁴²⁸ Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 4.

principal combatant but rather as an auxiliary to France.”⁴²⁹ Smuts accurately described the balance of power, where Britain was very much the junior partner in the coalition on land.

The onset of hostilities profoundly altered the nature of the Anglo-French relationship that had existed until that moment. The strains of war fostered the rapid consolidation of a *de facto* alliance where none existed before. Moreover, and at Russia’s behest, the three nations of Britain, France, and Russia steeled their resolve, and “As early as 5 September 1914, with the Pact of London, the English, Russians, and French agreed not to seek a separate peace.”⁴³⁰ The Pact of London marked a symbolic moment of the wartime Entente, as it affirmed the tripartite decision to fight the war to the very end. Nevertheless, this Pact of London did not establish the necessary unit of military command, nor did it create the structures for a much-needed strategic, economic and military collaboration between the three nations. These primordial prerequisites were only attained later in the war when the Entente’s military fortunes seemed to reach their lowest ebb. In respect to the Anglo-French relations, the coming of the war, although it somehow strengthened the existing bonds between Britain and France, did not eliminate previous enmities and mutual misgivings. Despite ten years of laborious efforts to bring the two countries closer, persistent national stereotypes often dominated regular interactions between British and French decision-makers. Lord Esher detailed the basic reasons for what he conceived as the notable differences between Britons and Gauls. Esher declared,

It is rather absurd, not to give reasons to the French, but you cannot bring an Englishman and a Frenchman, if they are pure bred of their race together. The Anglo-Saxon -call him

⁴²⁹ William Keith Hancock and Jean Van Der Poel, eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, vol. 3, *June 1910-November 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 488.

⁴³⁰ Georges-Henri Soutou, “War Aims and War Aims Discussions,” translated by Jocelyne Serveau, in 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, eds., Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2017-04-06. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10240/1.1. Accessed February 18, 2021, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/war_aims_and_war_aims_discussions

so- has so little in common with the Gaul in temperament, education, habits or feeling.”⁴³¹ On 15 November 1914, Field Marshal Sir John French described the experience he gained from French commanders, “*Au fond* they are a low lot, and one always has to remember the class these French generals mostly come from.”⁴³² It seems that Sir John deeply resented fighting with the French, more so than fighting against the Germans. Still annoyed by his Gallic counterparts, Sir John further lamented, “Truly, I don’t want to be allies with the French more than once in a lifetime. You can’t trust them.”⁴³³ Other high-ranking British commanders reproduced Sir John’s opinion. Sir William Robertson, never the last one to express his profound displeasure of fighting alongside the French, offered what he must have considered straightforward advice to Haig,

As a whole, the French commanders and their staffs are a peculiar lot. Now and again in some respects they are quite good, but on some occasions they are most elementary and impracticable. The great thing to remember in dealing with them is that they are Frenchmen and not Englishmen, and do not and never will look at things in the way we look at them.⁴³⁴

These sentiments reflect the prevailing attitude that many British soldiers and statesmen harbored for the French and the marked sense of superiority they felt toward other continental nations. Even a pragmatic spirit such as the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Robert Cecil admitted to his superior Sir Arthur Balfour that,

There is undoubtedly a difference between the British and the continental point of view in international matters. I will not attempt to describe the difference, but I know that you will agree in thinking that, where it exists, we are right and the continental nations are, speaking generally wrong.⁴³⁵

⁴³¹ March 9, 1915, Oliver Esher, ed., *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher*, vol. 3: 1910-1915 (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1938), 220.

⁴³² Quoted in Philip Magnus, *Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London: John Murray, 1958), 302; about Sir John and his very short tenure at the helm of the BEF, see Richard Holmes, *The Little Field Marshal: A Life of Sir John French* (London: Cassell, 2005).

⁴³³ Quoted in George H. Cassar, *The Tragedy of Sir John French* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 225.

⁴³⁴ Robertson to Haig, 5 January 1916, quoted in Robert Blake, ed., *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952), 122.

⁴³⁵ TNA, CAB 24/26/74, Cecil to Balfour, 25 August 1917, and later included in a *memorandum* (2074) presented to the British Cabinet on 18 September 1917, also quoted in Victor Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 102.

Curiously, in terms of the overlying prejudices that inhabited many British commanders, one repeatedly came back to the fore. Several British generals and politicians usually portrayed their French ally as endowed by what was considered at the time, typically feminine attributes. They often tended to describe the French as rash, emotive, and volatile. For them, the French sadly lacked the steely resolve that they, as Englishmen, possessed in abundance. Thus, prompting Philipp Bell to comment that “The stereotype of France became a capricious woman – the flighty Marianne as against the solid John Bull.”⁴³⁶ Even one of the very few Francophile British commanders of World War I, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, asserted that the French were “half men, half children, and half women and that is this last half which always beats us.”⁴³⁷

Oddly enough, after noticing these deeply rooted anti-French stereotypes, it could be assumed that the British were not fighting the right opponent and that some of their commanders might have preferred to side with the calmer, more manly, and robust Germans. This impression is confirmed by Robertson when he declared, “If only we and the Boche were allies, how easily we could beat all this crowd!”⁴³⁸ Unsurprisingly, Lloyd George confirmed Robertson’s aversion for non-British people, he recalled, “In the order of his distrust came Frenchmen, first and deepest of all, then Italians, Serbians, Greeks, Celts, and last of all — if at all — Germans. The Austrians had no existence for him except in his arithmetical tables.”⁴³⁹ Robertson was not the only one who displayed such a distrust for foreigners in general and the French in particular. Haig was also exasperated to be allied with what he judged such a bunch of inept partners. He said,

⁴³⁶ Bell, *France and Britain, 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement*, 20.

⁴³⁷ General Henry Wilson, Diary 18 March 1917, quoted in French, *The Strategy of Lloyd George Coalition 1916-1918*, 289. One can only be amused by Wilson’s arithmetic, as he surely meant that the French were one third man, one third children, and one third women. About Wilson, a most accomplished political intriguer, see Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: A Political Soldier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴³⁸ Quoted in Ben Pimlott, ed., *The Second World War diary of Hugh Dalton, 1940-45* (London: Cape, 1986), 694. By “all this crowd,” one can guess that Robertson meant the French and the Italians.

⁴³⁹ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. 2, 1915-1916 (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1933), 218.

I must say that I feel disgusted with our allies who have succeeded in putting us in these straits. We almost seem to be fighting against the laws of nature in trying to keep alive races who are obviously of an inferior kind and who themselves feel inferior to the Germans, so England has a burden to carry.⁴⁴⁰

Among Britain's Latin allies, the Italians certainly did not escape Haig's wrath; he wrote to Lord Esher, "The Italians seemed a wretched people, useless as fighting men but greedy for money. Moreover, I doubt whether they are really in earnest about this war. Many of them, too, are German spies."⁴⁴¹ The next in line to face Haig's firing squad were his despised comrades-in-arms, the French. Just like the Italians, they too unmistakably received their well-earned chastisement at the point of Haig's razor-sharp pen,

Napoleon was such a scoundrel and so capable and unscrupulous, one never tires of reading about him. I fancy the French are much the same now as then. Few realize the difference between right and wrong, between honest, straightforward dealing and low cunning.⁴⁴²

Shortly after the Armistice, when they were supervising the British forces' deployment part of the Allied occupation of the Rhineland region of Germany, General Sir Ivor Maxse recalled Haig telling him, "The French! They're the fellows we shall be fighting next!"⁴⁴³

These repeated stereotypes shed light on why a few French military and political leaders also felt aggravated toward their British ally. In June 1921, on his return from a tour in Asia that took him through Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and India, Georges Clemenceau agreed to meet his old nemesis, David Lloyd George. During a brief meeting at the British House of Commons, Lloyd George and Clemenceau had one of their many and infamous tit for tat's exchanges where the former asked the latter if he had anything to tell him. Clemenceau answered: "Oui bien, j'ai à vous dire que dès le lendemain de l'armistice, je vous ai trouvé l'ennemi de la France." [Yes

⁴⁴⁰ Haig to Jenty, 20 December 1917, *Haig Papers*, National Library of Scotland.

⁴⁴¹ Haig to Esher, 26 October 1917, *Haig Papers*, National Library of Scotland.

⁴⁴² Haig to his wife, 23 August 1917, MS.28012, *Haig Papers*, National Library of Scotland.

⁴⁴³ Quoted in Denis Winter, *Haig's Command. A Reassessment* (London: Viking, 1991), 27.

indeed, I have to tell you that from the very day after the armistice, I found you an enemy to France.] To which, Lloyd George replied: ‘Well, was it not always our traditional policy?’”⁴⁴⁴ Clemenceau’s tense exchange with Lloyd George illustrates why for many French decision-makers, the shadow of Perfidious Albion was always present in their consciousness and responsible for the tendency they displayed to blame the British for any potential breakdown of the Entente.⁴⁴⁵

Despite these fractures that grievously harmed the day-to-day running of Anglo-French relations, issues were sometimes only resolved through what I call an informal network of personal acquaintances between British and French decision-makers. This unofficial form of diplomacy took shape hesitantly when individual ambassadors, ministers, or politicians simply crossed the Channel to confer with their counterparts. What World War I also revealed about the nature of the Anglo-French relationships was the multiplication of representatives (official or not) who brought their expertise to the already wobbling and complex machinery of the Entente. However, the information that these individuals (sometimes acting in a semi-official capacity) gathered or distributed was not always the most reliable and accurate, thus adding to the already existing high degree of confusion and tumult.⁴⁴⁶

On 21 January 1915, in a *memorandum* presented to the British Cabinet, Viscount Herbert Samuel expressed that he did not believe that the current Entente would survive after the war and that in his opinion, soon after Germany’s defeat, France and Russia would rapidly resume their old habits of opposing British domination across the world. Furthermore, what Samuel had in mind,

⁴⁴⁴ Georges Clemenceau, *Grandeurs et misères d'une victoire* (Paris : Plon, 1930), 92-93; also quoted in Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Clemenceau* (Paris; Fayard, 1988), 879.

⁴⁴⁵ Regarding the traditional outlook that French public opinion usually harbored about the British, see, Martyn Cornick, “The Myth of Perfidious Albion and French National Identity,” in *Statecraft and Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David Dutton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 7-33.

⁴⁴⁶ Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-18*, 69-70.

was the British take-over of the Ottoman *vilayet* of Palestine, which he believed would become a necessary strategic buffer between the French territories in the north (Lebanon and Syria) and British-held Egypt in the south. Samuel also wanted to display Britain's benevolence toward the creation of a national Jewish state.⁴⁴⁷ Various British historians have also defended the idea that Lord Kitchener was always aware of this British strategic predicament which meant that Britain was fighting with allies, which tomorrow would become its enemies. Hence why in 1915, Kitchener defended the creation of a large-scale continental army for Britain. Moreover, Kitchener wanted to preserve his New Armies to influence the outcome of the war. In Lord K's mind, 1917 would be the crucial year of the war when he envisioned French and Russian strength to be utterly exhausted, while conversely, British military power would reach its apex and dictate a Pax Britannica on allies and enemies alike.⁴⁴⁸

In the early part of the war, the BEF's size reflected Britain's traditional military approach.⁴⁴⁹ This approach was similar to the one that Britain, which as part of a continental

⁴⁴⁷ For Samuel's clear exposition of British involvement within the previously held Ottoman territories, see TNA, CAB 37/123/43, Herbert Samuel, *Memorandum (Secret) "The Future of Palestine,"* 21 January 1915; also see Chapter 2, *The Samuel Proposal and British Policy in Turkey-in-Asia*, Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914-1918. British-Jewish-Arab Relations* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1973), 8-24.

⁴⁴⁸ In fairness to Kitchener, he was right when he believed that by 1917, the French and Russian armies would indeed be totally worn-out by this terrible war of attrition, especially as from the beginning, they were the ones which had carried out the brunt of the fighting against the German army. However, he was wrong, about husbanding the British army's strength to win the war. Especially since he did not witness (as he perished on 5 June 1916, when the ship taking him to Russia hit a German mine and sunk a few miles from the Orkney Islands' coast) that by 1917, even his new armies had equally melted in the cauldrons of the Somme and Passchendaele. David French tends to rehabilitate Kitchener's reputation by stating that "Kitchener was far more than just a great poster. He originally intended that the New Armies would win the peace for Britain after the French and Russian armies had won the war for the Entente." French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916*, 245; and French, *British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905-1915*, 127; regarding the enigmatic personality of Lord K, see the following biographies, most of them panegyric in style: Sir George Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920); Viscount Reginald Esher, *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener* (London: Murray, 1921); Philip Warner, *Kitchener: The Man Behind the Legend* (London: Hamilton, 1985); Trevor Royle, *The Kitchener Enigma: The Life and Death of Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, 1850-1916* (London: Joseph, 1985); finally the excellent article by Keith Neilson, "Kitchener: A Reputation Refurbished?" *The Canadian Journal of History* 15, no.2 (1980): 207-228.

⁴⁴⁹ As an indication of the real strength of the BEF, John Bourne stated that "By 22 August the BEF was over 90,000 strong, divided into two corps, each of two divisions, with a cavalry division and an independent infantry brigade formed from lines of communication troops." J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1989), 18.

coalition, had previously followed for the fifteen years that the Napoleonic Wars lasted.⁴⁵⁰ During the Peninsular War, if the British forces under General (later Field Marshal) Sir Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, were not insignificant in numbers, it was undeniably Austrian, Russian, and Prussian armies (that dwarfed them in size) which did most of the fighting against Napoleon's forces. Equally, in August 1914, the BEF was dispatched to France under the same premises, encapsulating what William Philpott describes as "Basil Liddell Hart's original thesis of a British way in warfare."⁴⁵¹ To sum up the gist of Liddell Hart's argument, he posited that during World War I, Britain had been wrong to abandon its traditional naval strategy and should not have dispatched such a large conscript-army to the Continent. Here, one must offer a word of caution against accepting at face value Liddell Hart's theory. Despite the historical parallel that he drew between the Napoleonic Wars and World War I, the conflagration that started in August 1914 was no longer a conflict in which the British could reasonably adopt such a strategy. First, railroads now permitted nations such as Germany to move their forces across Europe faster than the British could transport theirs to the Continent. Second, the economic pressure that Britain intended to exert against Germany could only deliver results if the latter was entirely cordoned from accessing any further economic and industrial resources, which in due time, is, of course, exactly what happened. Not only did Germany disposed of a considerable economic platform from which to operate, but during the war, the German conquests west and east of the continent allowed the Reich to harness the agrarian, economic, and industrial potential of Northern France, Belgium, Romania,

⁴⁵⁰ As a renowned English historian explained, Britain "had in fact the tradition of waging continental war with the most lavish expenditure in money, and the greatest economy in human life." C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, *The Role of British Strategy in the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 2.

⁴⁵¹ William Philpott, "Managing the British Way in Warfare. France and Britain's Continental Commitment, 1904–1918," in *British Way in Warfare: Power and the International System, 1856-1956*, eds., David French and Greg Kennedy (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2010), 83.

and Ukraine.⁴⁵²

As it turned out, when the war started in August 1914, the French were generally not impressed by the British. If the French were indeed glad to see their ally take their place on the battlefield, they also noticed that the British mobilization took place three days later than theirs. This first French impression of British dilatoriness created a situation where “a legacy of misunderstanding and ill-will remained behind to cloud future allied relations.”⁴⁵³ This legacy of misunderstanding and the numerous frictions that marked the beginning of the war are more prevalent than originally accepted. Furthermore, if from a French perspective, it was always clear that the war was going to be fought as part of a coalition, in which Russia was always France’s primary partner, and Britain only a secondary ally; Britain, on the other hand, was faced with a true dilemma, what William Philpott defines as a strategic paradox, where the choice was between “following an independent or an alliance strategy... However, the paradox persisted in her planning for intervention on the continent.”⁴⁵⁴ Shielded by the Channel and protected by the powerful Royal Navy, Britain possessed the luxury of time and space to muddle over its intervention. Faced with

⁴⁵² This paragraph is based on Liddell Hart’s ideas, exposed in his writing during the inter-war years’ period. Basil Liddell Hart, “Economic pressure or continental victories,” *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute* 76, (1931): 486-503; Michael Howard presented some criticism of Liddell Hart’s ideas, “The British way in warfare – a reappraisal,” in Michael Howard, *The Causes of War* (London: Temple Smith, 1983), 169-186; for more assessments about Liddell Hart’s philosophy, see, Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of his Military Thought* (London: Cassell, 1977), 65-80; also, Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), 177-204; for the German occupation of Northern France and Belgium, see, Helen McPhail, *The Long Silence: Civilian Life under the German Occupation of Northern France, 1914–1918* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); James E. Connolly, “The History of Occupied Northern France in the First World War,” in *France in an Era of Global War, 1914-1945*, eds., Alison Carrol and Ludivine Broch (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 31-49; Annette Becker, *Les cicatrices rouges 14–18: France et Belgique occupées* (Paris: Fayard, 2010); for the German economic exploitation of Eastern Europe, see, Christian Westerhoff, “A kind of Siberia’: German Labour and Occupation Policies in Poland and Lithuania during the First World War,” *First World War Studies* 4, no.1 (2013): 51-63; for the German occupation in Romania, see, David Hamlin, “Dummes Geld’: Money, Grain, and the Occupation of Romania in WWI,” *Central European History* 42, no. 3 (September 2009): 451-471; also by the same author, David Hamlin, “The fruits of occupation: food and Germany’s occupation of Romania in the First World War,” *First World War Studies* 4, no.1 (2013): 81-95.

⁴⁵³ Roy A. Prete, “French Strategic Planning and the Deployment of the BEF in France in 1914,” *Canadian Journal of History* 24, (April 1989): 42.

⁴⁵⁴ Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-18*, 13.

German forces just across the Rhine, General Joseph Joffre, President Raymond Poincaré, and the two-million French soldiers rapidly mobilized on the Western Front confronted a much simpler alternative. For all these men, the question was not IF France would have to fight with Germany, but rather WHEN.

Notwithstanding the fact that they were going to fight alongside the French, on 9 August 1914, Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener confirmed to BEF commander Sir John French, “I wish you to distinctly understand that your command is an entirely independent one and that you will in no case come in any sense under the orders of any Allied general.”⁴⁵⁵ These instructions highlight that although the smallest allied force in the field, the BEF would not be subjected to any Allied or French general’s authority. With Kitchener’s statement in mind, it becomes easier to fathom the future difficulties Joffre later confronted when coordinating the British and French armies’ actions in the war’s opening phase. Furthermore, as it happened during the early fighting in August at Le Cateau and Mons, the British were always inclined to protect their exit route to the Channel ports. During the first weeks of the war, the British and French high command had serious disagreements and a few famous fallouts while conducting combat operations. Sir John did not collaborate well with the French Fifth Army under General Charles Lanrezac, which at some crucial moments led to an extremely precarious situation in the field and much unnecessary resentment.⁴⁵⁶ In reality, both Allies were forced to respect the Entente’s higher interests against

⁴⁵⁵ Instructions to Sir John French from Lord Kitchener, 9 August 1914, Appendix 8, in Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds, *History of the Great War Based on Official documents, Military Operations*, vol. 1, *France and Belgium, 1914. Mons, the Retreat to the Seine, the Marne and the Aisne, August-October 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 442; also quoted in Roy A. Prete, “Joffre and the Question of Allied Supreme Command, 1914-1916,” in *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 16, ed., Gordon C. Bond (Auburn, AL: Auburn University, 1989), 329.

⁴⁵⁶ It must be stated that during the stressful opening of the war in August 1914, French’s less than resolute command and his deplorable lack of nerves, were both evidently on display. However, he still kept his job for one more year, whereas following his serious disagreement with French, Lanrezac, was quickly sacked by Joffre, who replaced him by General Louis Franchet d’Espèrey. For this ever-lasting controversy, see Jules Isaac, *Joffre et Lanrezac: étude critique des témoignages sur le rôle de la 5e armée (août 1914)* (Paris: Étienne Chiron, 1922); Louis-Albert Roques,

their own. In all aspects, diplomatic, economic, and military, Britain, France, and Russia had to collaborate better if they wished to retain any chances to win this war. As early as December 1914, Lord Esher had identified some of the most debilitating issues that plagued the Entente,

With regard to France, it would be comparatively simple to establish ties of intimacy. This is an essential condition to carrying on a war with a highly organized and concentrated military power such as Germany. We cannot afford to procrastinate and muddle along, owing to the economic strain upon France, a strain which is not felt to the same extent in this country.⁴⁵⁷

In the early phase of the war, the two countries, especially Britain, became conscious that victory could only be achieved through a joint effort. Thus, preserving this imperfect Entente proved to be the primary objective of both British and French wartime diplomacy. This is essentially why the British Cabinet (despite frequently regarding the French government as a truly irritating partner to deal with) was always cautious not to overtly criticize it, lest it provoked its fall from power.

In May 1915, in the aftermath of the failed Anglo-French offensive in Artois and following the Russian army's prolonged retreat on the Eastern Front, French War Minister Alexandre Millerand pressured both governments to enforce an urgently needed unified command that would be entrusted to the Commander-in-chief of the French armies, General Joseph Joffre. However, in early September 1914, and despite his ephemeral success during the Miracle of the Marne, it was improbable that General Joffre would have been chosen as the *de facto* Allied supreme commander.⁴⁵⁸ A pretty reserved man, Joffre lacked the pleasant and more extroverted personality of the future Allied Generalissimo Ferdinand Foch, who in 1918 finally convinced the British, French and American governments to give him the supreme command of all Allied armies on the

La sécurité française: suivie d'une étude sur Lanrezac, Gallieni, Joffre (Paris: Occitania, 1929); Georges Beau and Léopold Gaubusseau, *En août 1914, Lanrezac a-t-il sauvé la France ?* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1964).

⁴⁵⁷ 24 December 1914, Esher, *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher*, vol. 3: 1910-1915, 200.

⁴⁵⁸ About this colossal engagement that changed the fate of World War I, see, Pierre Miquel, *La bataille de la Marne* (Paris: Plon, 2003); and the exceptional account penned by Holger H. Herwig, *The Marne, 1914: The Opening of World War I and the Battle that changed the World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2009).

Western Front. Historical assessments regarding Joffre differ widely, as sometimes Joffre's long moments of silence convinced his interlocutors that he possessed sound judgment and intuition. However, not everyone was convinced of Papa Joffre's wisdom. Here is how Liddell Hart described him,

Joffre's was not a character which lends itself to an extensive summing-up, for his virtues were primarily passive. His passivity, like his silence, was carried to such a pitch that he was one of the greatest of human enigmas. Reluctant to believe that a man in so great a position could be as simple as he appeared...even the Allied leaders who met him at close quarters felt there must be unplumbed depths in the apparent shallows.⁴⁵⁹

Yet, most British soldiers and statesmen were not dupped by Joffre's apparent silent wisdom and believed that he was simply unsuited in communication skills and leadership for such a high position. Especially as in the early stage of the war, the British had proceeded with the build-up of a very large army that they surely did not wish to see the French squandering in unproductive and extremely costly offensives. In December 1915, when General Sir Douglas Haig replaced Sir John French, Kitchener offered the former new instructions, which empowered him with even more independence than the latter. In 1916 and 1917, the British and French general staffs indeed cooperated slightly better than during the first two years of the war. However, General Headquarters (GHQ) and the British Cabinet always shied away from accepting a fully unified command until the German Spring Offensives crisis of 1918. In the aftermath of General Joffre's downfall in late December 1916, according to Captain Edward Spears, the British *liaison* officer to the French Grand Quartier Général (GQG), French resentment and frustration considerably increased toward their British ally. Spears remembers,

The French began to feel that their early efforts, when they had borne the brunt of the war, were being forgotten, and that as the claims and pretensions of their allies grew in

⁴⁵⁹ Basil Liddell Hart, *Reputations: Ten Years After* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1928), 38-39; about Joffre 'the greatest of human enigmas,' see, Arthur Conte, *Joffre* (Paris: Orban, 1991); also, André Bourachot, *Joffre: de la préparation de la guerre à la disgrâce, 1911-1916* (Paris: Bernard Giovanangeli, 2010); and finally, what is by far, the most objective and balanced biography about Joffre, Rémy Porte, *Joffre* (Paris: Perrin, 2016).

proportion to their own diminishing strength, they would find themselves helpless and deprived of all influence when the time came for the final great settling of accounts between the nations.⁴⁶⁰

Spears also remarked that after three long years of hard fighting, the French seemed very tired of seeing British (and in the last year of the war, Americans) occupying large tracts of their territory, even if the Tommies or Doughboys fought shoulder to shoulder with the Poilus. Spears wrote that “To many Frenchmen the sight of part of their country in enemy hands, and of allies, however well-intentioned, exercising some measure of authority over another part, was exasperating.”⁴⁶¹

At the beginning of World War I, and until at least 1916, when the British armies finally reached over a million men in the field, French and Russian soldiers saw most of the combats against the Kaiser’s army. Like in its recent past, Britain originally intended to use its superior economic, industrial, and financial capabilities, as well as the Royal Navy’s mastery of the seas to suffocate Germany and the Central Powers and provide a small but significant, secondary support to the French on the Western Front.⁴⁶² As David French phrased it,

The enemy would be defeated by a combination of British gold and French and Russian soldiers. The strategy of ‘business as usual’ had the inestimable advantage to the British that they would not have to pay the heavy blood tax of a continental land war.⁴⁶³

As British political and military leaders conceived it, France and Russia would carry the main load of fighting against Germany, especially since the French disposed of an imposing army, and the Russian manpower supply appeared quasi-limitless. From a British perspective, such a strategy

⁴⁶⁰ Brigadier-General Edward L. Spears, *Prelude to Victory* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), 61.

⁴⁶¹ Spears, *Prelude to Victory*, 63.

⁴⁶² Regarding the Royal Navy’s control of the seas during the Great War, and how it was effectively used to bring down Germany’s economy, see Eric W. Osborne, *Britain’s Economic Blockade of Germany, 1914–1919* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

⁴⁶³ David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 15; French’s argument, is reinforced by Lloyd George, who remarked, “The outbreak of war found this country totally unprepared for land hostilities on a Continental scale. Our traditional defence force has always been our navy, and this weapon has been kept efficient and ready at all times. But our Army, mainly used for policing our widely scattered Empire, was a small, highly trained force of professional soldiers, excellent for their normal tasks, but lacking both the numbers and the equipment for large-scale fighting against European armies.” David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. 1, 1914-1915 (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1933), 112.

made perfect sense. Thus, the BEF, with its six infantry divisions complemented by a single cavalry division, was seen as an appropriate force for the land war.⁴⁶⁴

The Triple Entente of Britain, France, and Russia was articulated within four different aspects: Economic, military, naval, and political. Regarding the Entente's arrangements, David French confirmed that "Only in the naval sphere was Britain the undisputed leader of the alliance from the start to the finish of the war."⁴⁶⁵ Britain possessed the smallest army of the Triple Entente, and as explained before, it was only in 1916 that it fielded an army that at least could be compared with all the other Great Powers already committed to the fighting. It could appear that in the Entente, Britain did not pull its own weight; however, it must be remembered that the three nations were all independent powers, with their own military traditions, war aims, and ultimate political goals. It must also be noted that the British contribution in the economic and financial aspects of the war was equally critical to the overall success of Allied arms.⁴⁶⁶ In opposition to the Entente, the Central Powers had a different dynamic, where ultimate leadership only resided within Germany's implacable grip.⁴⁶⁷ In a letter dated 3 September 1917, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George explained to American president Woodrow Wilson the unilateral domination that

⁴⁶⁴ David French, *British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905-1915* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 51; French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916*, 65; Jehuda Lothar Wallach, *Uneasy Coalition: The Entente Experience in World War I* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 25.

⁴⁶⁵ French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916*, xi.

⁴⁶⁶ Regarding the crucial role played by British economy and finance during the war, see, Stephen Broadberry and Peter Howlett, "The United Kingdom during World War I: business as usual?," in *The Economics of World War I*, eds., Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 206-234; as well as Nicholas A. Lambert, *Planning Armageddon. British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁴⁶⁷ For Germany's domination of the Central Powers, a valuable first-hand description is presented by Hermann Von Kuhl, "Unity of Command among the Central Powers," *Foreign Affairs* 2, no. 1 (September 1923): 130-146; also, Richard W. Kapp, "Divided Loyalties: The German Reich and Austria-Hungary in Austro-German Discussions of War Aims, 1914-1916," *Central European History* 17, no. 2/3 (June - September 1984): 120-139; and Holger H. Herwig, "Disjointed Allies: Coalition Warfare in Berlin and Vienna, 1914," *The Journal of Military History*, 54, no. 3 (July 1990): 265-280; Nicole Piétri, "La conduite d'une guerre de coalition. États-majors allemand et austro-hongrois pendant la Première Guerre mondiale," in *Des étoiles et des croix: mélanges offerts à Guy Pedroncini*, ed., Jean-Claude Allain (Paris: Économica, 1995), 79-90.

Germany exerted over the Central Powers,

As compared with the enemy, the fundamental weakness of the Allies is that the direction of their military operations lacks real unity. At a very early stage of the war, Germany established a practically despotic dominion over all her Allies...The direction of the war on [the Allies'] side has remained in the hands of four separate governments and four separate General Staffs (namely those of France, Great Britain, Italy and Russia.⁴⁶⁸

A British diplomat posted in the Balkans, Sir Valentine Chirol, echoed Lloyd George's opinion; he wrote to Arthur Nicolson, "At Berlin they make up their minds to do a thing and just press a button. With us there are interminable consultations between four capitals."⁴⁶⁹ Unlike the Central Powers, which the Germans completely dominated, the democratic nature of the Triple Entente allowed all three partners to maintain their strategic views and prerogatives, thus contributing to the always difficult conduct of coalition warfare.

Furthermore, by the end of 1914, and contrary to expectations that had predicted that the war would be over before year's end, the grim business of war continued. In a matter of weeks, the war of movement that still prevailed after the Battle of the Marne and the Race to the Sea morphed into a long and difficult war of attrition, predicated upon trench warfare and a continuous line that ran from Switzerland to the Channel.⁴⁷⁰ A war of attrition that very few had anticipated and for which Britain, unlike France and Russia, would now have to contribute to a far greater level to match the enormous efforts in men and material consented by its two allies. By February

⁴⁶⁸ Peter Rowland, *David Lloyd George: A Biography* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975), 416.

⁴⁶⁹ Chirol to Nicolson, 23 August 1915, TNA, FO, 800/379; also quoted in C. J. Lowe, "The Failure of British Diplomacy in the Balkans, 1914-1916," *Canadian Journal of History* 3 (1968): 100.

⁴⁷⁰ For the specific evolution of a war of movement and maneuver to a war of attrition, see, David French, "The Meaning of Attrition, 1914-1916," *The English Historical Review* 103, no. 407 (April 1988): 385-405; also, chapter 2, *The Failure of the War of Movement, Summer-Winter 1914* in David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004), 37-78; Robert T. Foley, *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun: Erich von Falkenhayn and the Development of Attrition, 1870-1916* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jean-Jacques Becker, "Réflexions sur la guerre en 1915 sur le front occidental (D'après les notes des généraux Fayolle et Haig)," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 3, no. 219 (2005): 5-13; for the logic that presided over the conduct of attrition warfare, see the excellent article by Robert T. Foley, "What's in a Name?: The Development of Strategies of Attrition on the Western Front, 1914-1918," *The Historian* 68, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 722-746.

1915, Lloyd George believed that it was time for Britain to change its course of operations. He desired the three allies to synchronize their strategies and arrange a joint military conference to plan the Entente's strategy more carefully on both the Eastern and Western Fronts. Lloyd George also demanded that Britain abandon the old business as usual approach in favor of a fully pledged commitment of the country and its whole empire. Moreover, Lloyd George also advocated for transforming Britain's traditional economy into a war economy that would cater to the British army's immense material needs while still ensuring the bare minimum for British civilians. Lloyd George seconded Field Marshal Horatio Kitchener's opinion by insisting that on top of the current troops deployed in France, Britain should raise a continental-style army and proceed with all necessary haste to recruit a further one and a half million men. Lloyd George believed that this gigantic British recruitment effort could only bear fruits by mid-1916. In conclusion, Lloyd George promoted nothing less than for Britain to commit itself entirely to the massive exigencies of total war. For him, victory was only possible at this very high price.⁴⁷¹

Remarkably enough, it was only in July 1915, in the Northern French town of Calais, that the British and French Prime Ministers met in their first formal conference of the war. Although these conferences were convened to solve current differences, they were, unfortunately, nothing more than just a fragile *modus operandi* that did not replace a permanent and central decision-making organ that was so badly needed in this first phase of the war. Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, who on 23 December 1915 had become the new Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), often lamented against the lack of organization and efficiency that prevailed during many

⁴⁷¹ In this *memorandum*, Lloyd George declared that, "I believe that France has strained her resources to the utmost, and she can hardly do much more...I do not believe Great Britain has even yet done anything like what she could do in the matter of increasing her war equipment." TNA, CAB 24/1/7, Page 5 in *Memorandum* (Secret) by Mr. Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, "Some further considerations on the conduct of the war," 22 February 1915.

of these inter-allied conferences.⁴⁷² Robertson wrote,

The Conferences were assembled on no kind of system either as to time, place, or purpose, while all the attempts to regularize them failed because so many people were concerned that it was impossible to make arrangements to suit the convenience of everybody. When arranged, they had more than once to be deferred, adjourned or abandoned altogether, because some unforeseen event, such as the sudden interruption of political troubles at home, made it undesirable for the ministers of one country or another to be absent from their posts...The number of people present rendered the preservation of secrecy and the prompt dispatch of business impossible. It was seldom that less than a score would attend, and when all countries were represented the number might amount to as many as a hundred, made up of Prime Ministers, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Army, Navy, Munitions and Finance, Ambassadors, Commanders-in-Chief, and other technical delegates, secretaries, assistant secretaries and interpreters.⁴⁷³

Similarly, Paul Cambon, French Ambassador to England, blamed his government for the lack of adequate preparation it exhibited during these international meetings. He scolded French politicians and generals alike. Before a conference in Boulogne in October 1916, Cambon stated,

The English have set off well briefed on all points; papers, statistics, state of their forces and transport resources. They have all that is needed for a serious discussion and will find themselves, as last time, in the presence of people without precise ideas on anything. At the last conference in London, Briand and Joffre came to ask as always for men for Salonika. They were told with chapter and verse of the transport difficulties. Our representatives had nothing to counter these figures. It was deplorable.⁴⁷⁴

Both the British and French decision-makers regarded these many repetitive conferences less as occasions where both parties could make sensible headways about the war's direction than as instances when they would simply present their specific platforms or desired programs for joint action. In fact, the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George was so "Disappointed by long inconclusive meetings, that he came to conferences with resolutions already drafted."⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Supplement to the *London Gazette*, January 3, 1916, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29426/supplement/120>

⁴⁷³ Field Marshal William Robertson, *Soldiers and statesmen, 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1926), 211.

⁴⁷⁴ Paul Cambon, *Correspondance 1870-1924*, vol. 3, (1912-1924). *Les guerres balkaniques. La Grande Guerre. L'organisation de la paix* (Paris: Grasset, 1946), 130; about Paul Cambon, who served as French Ambassador to England between 1898 and 1920, and who was instrumental in both the inception of the Entente cordiale, see Keith Eubank, *Paul Cambon, Master Diplomatist* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960); and Laurent Villate, *La République des diplomates: Paul et Jules Cambon 1843-1935* (Paris: Science infuse, 2002).

⁴⁷⁵ Anthony Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery. France's Bid for Power in Europe 1914-1940* (London: Arnold, 1995), 33.

In his diary, Lord Derby recalled a conversation he had with Kitchener back in 1915, when the latter confided to him that “What I am anxious for is that when it comes to peace we shall have the biggest army in the field. It would never do for the French to have more than us.”⁴⁷⁶ Kitchener’s last statement unambiguously reveals his continued distrust toward the French ally and ostensibly demonstrates Britain’s profound attachment to the traditional balance of power. Despite fighting against a powerful enemy, Britain did not possess the same willingness as France to destroy Prussian militarism. In British thinking, preserving Germany’s standing was central to maintain the ideal balance of power on the Continent. As David Dutton posits, “The French may well have suspected that Britain did not wish to see their unqualified victory in the war. Throughout the conflict, resentment was felt at what was seen as Britain’s inadequate contribution to the common purpose.”⁴⁷⁷ For the whole duration of the war, the frontline’s length held respectively by the British and French armies on the Western Front lingered as a contentious issue between the two General Staffs. These Anglo-French frictions peaked during the German Spring Offensives of 1918, particularly during the Blücher, Goertz, and Yorck operations, when it seemed that just like in late August 1914, the Germans were on the verge of capturing Paris.⁴⁷⁸

Long after the war, diplomatic *attaché* to the French embassy in London, Paul Morand, recalled his feelings at what he saw as the unbalanced contribution of the two countries, “I am horrified by the disproportion between France’s efforts and her share in the diplomatic game... The English make use of us. There is no equality of sacrifice.”⁴⁷⁹ Equally, a few French commanders

⁴⁷⁶ Quoted in Randolph S. Churchill, *Lord Derby. King of Lancashire. The Official Life of Edward, Seventeenth Earl of Derby 1865-1948* (New York, NY: Putnam’s Sons, 1960), 192.

⁴⁷⁷ Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 7.

⁴⁷⁸ More details about this stressful moment of Anglo-French relations are offered by Chapter 8, *Operations Blücher, Goertz, and Yorck: 27 May–5 June 1918*, in Major-General David T. Zabecki, *The German 1918 Offensives: A Case Study of The Operational Level of War* (Hoboken, NY: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2005), 206-232; and Chapter 8, *The German Offensives of 1918 and the Crisis in Command*, in Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition Britain and France during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186-227.

⁴⁷⁹ Paul Morand, *Journal d'un attaché d'ambassade: 1916-1917* (Paris : La Table Ronde, 1948), 28.

also vented their frustration with their British ally. General Émile Fayolle explained that Britain “will reap the main benefits of this war. Once again, she will have persuaded the continental nations of Europe to cut each other’s throats for her greater advantage.”⁴⁸⁰ Fayolle’s feelings seem to perfectly illustrate why there was never much trust between the two nations. Despite fighting together for four long years, the two countries continuously regarded each other as imperial rivals, hence why neither of them wanted the other partner to bolster its position in the post-war world. In 1915, when the British Cabinet, following the First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill’s lead, floated the idea of an independent British expedition to Alexandretta and Syria, French Minister of War Alexandre Millerand immediately insisted that “The English should not land there by themselves. We must therefore...be in a position to intervene rapidly, if not at the same time as the English, then immediately in their wake.”⁴⁸¹

One crucial aspect in which the Entente’s structures were largely deficient was in the war’s strategic direction. Right from the start, the Entente needed a well-structured organization with the necessary administrative departments that would have largely eased the frictions of coalition warfare. During the whole course of the war, inter-allied disputes frequently erupted, driving English and French diplomats, politicians, and military leaders to bitterly complain about the inefficacy of the Entente’s machinery and the precious time wasted in countless conferences which

⁴⁸⁰ Marshal Émile Fayolle, *Cahiers secrets de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1964), 161; Fayolle became Marshal of France on 19 February 1921, one of the only eight men who during and shortly after World War I received France’s highest military distinction: Joseph Joffre (1852–1931), Ferdinand Foch (1851–1929), Philippe Pétain (1856–1951), Joseph Gallieni (1849–1916), Hubert Lyautey (1854–1934), Louis Franchet d’Espèrey (1856–1942), Émile Fayolle (1852–1928), Michel Maunoury (1847–1923). For more details about the French Marshals of the Great War see, Jacques Jourquin, *Les maréchaux de la Grande guerre, 1914-1918: dictionnaire comparé et portraits croisés* (Saint-Cloud: 14-18 éditions, 2008).

⁴⁸¹ Alexandre Millerand to Théophile Delcassé, 5 January 1915, Ministère des affaires étrangères, [hereafter abbreviated to MAE], Centre des Archives diplomatiques, La Courneuve, France, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 867; also quoted in Christopher Andrew and Alexander Sydney Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas: The Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion*, 70; for a biographical outlook about Alexandre Millerand during the war, see, Marjorie Milbank Farrar, *Principled Pragmatist: The Political Career of Alexandre Millerand* (New York, NY: Berg, 1991); and recently, Jean-Louis Rizzo, *Alexandre Millerand socialiste discuté, ministre contesté et Président déchu* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013).

discussed everything and resolved nothing. Ultimately, the improvements needed for a better coordination of the war's conduct were slow and hard to come by. It was only through a "painful process of trial and error that the two governments moved hesitantly towards a greater understanding of how to conduct coalition warfare."⁴⁸² This understanding became more important than ever, especially as the French army needed more support from its British ally.

Midway through 1916, Britain had finally caught up with France and Russia and was now able to field its New Armies on the Continent. This British contribution was not a minute too late, as in 1915, the Allies had been drained by the many military reverses they suffered. In the East, the Russians had been smashed by the Austro-Hungarian and German forces during the Gorlice–Tarnów Campaign. In Spring and Fall 1915, the French had launched powerful offensives in Artois and Champagne, which brought no results except for endless and depressing casualty lists.⁴⁸³ On the Italian Front, the Italians were also unable to break through the Austro-Hungarian defenses.⁴⁸⁴ In 1916, on the Western Front, the French army was indeed 'bled white' through the meat-grinder of Verdun and desperately needed some support from the British army. In 1917-1918, and due to the enormous casualties it suffered in the first two years of the war, the French army progressively became more reliant on British manpower.

Even if the balance of power was changing within the Entente, and Britain was gaining the upper hand, it was still obliged to align its military and political objectives with France. As David

⁴⁸² Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 8.

⁴⁸³ For the failed French offensives in Artois and Champagne, see, Chapter 4, *An Offensive Strategy, May-October 1915*, of Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 153-202; and Chapter 3, *1915: On the Offensive*, in Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014), 70-124.

⁴⁸⁴ For the Italian army's unsuccessful efforts against the Austrians, see, Chapter 3, *First Endeavors*, in John Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 97-145; and Chapter 9, *From Position to Attrition*, in Mark Thompson, *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 106-113.

French explains, “The factor which dominated British strategy between 1914 and 1918 was that she fought the war as a member of a coalition, the Entente Alliance.”⁴⁸⁵ This factor alone elucidates why from the beginning of the war to its bitter end, British leaders were always anxious to see Russia or France throwing the towel. In retrospect, their anxiety was proved correct for Russia and unfounded for France. On several occasions during the war, the British government was informed that the Germans had attempted to rupture the Entente by offering separate and acceptable conditions to France or Russia. As early as December 1914, the new Commander-in-chief of the German army, General Erich von Falkenhayn, had proposed to the Reich Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, that the latter should “seek to negotiate a separate peace with Russia through diplomatic channels.”⁴⁸⁶ Therefore, safeguarding the coalition’s integrity until a victorious end was in sight became paramount for the Allied war aims.

There were additional deficiencies that crippled the Entente; one was that neither country had arranged its military and political command structures to efficiently respond to the exigencies of a war that nobody had anticipated to last so long. Between 1915 and 1917, the crafting of a common strategy on the Western Front had been weakened “by the four-fold division of authority between the governments and high commands of Britain and France.”⁴⁸⁷ Before any major decision could be taken and any plans accepted, general consent had to be reached between the

⁴⁸⁵ David French, “Allies, Rivals and Enemies: British Strategy and War Aims during the First World War,” in *Britain and the First World War*, ed. John Turner (London: Unwin and Hyman, 1988), 24; Paul Kennedy made compelling remarks about the essence of coalition warfare during the Great War, see Paul Kennedy, “Military Coalitions and Coalition Warfare over the Past Century,” in *Coalition Warfare: An Uneasy Accord*, eds., Keith Neilson and Roy A. Prete (Waterloo, ON Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), 1-16.

⁴⁸⁶ Lancelot L. Farrar, *Divide and Conquer. German Efforts to Conclude a Separate Peace, 1914-1918* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1978), 105; Gerhard Ritter, *Sword and Scepter. The Problem of Militarism in Germany*, vol. 3, *The Tragedy of Statesmanship - Bethmann Hollweg as War Chancellor* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1972), 45; About the crucial political role played by Bethmann-Hollweg, see, Konrad Hugo Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972); regarding the secret negotiations which took place during the Great War, see, Guy Pedroncini, *Les négociations secrètes pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969).

⁴⁸⁷ Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-18*, 91.

British and French General Staffs and their mutual governments. The Anglo-French relations on the Western Front were often characterized by a profound distrust and the dissimulation of information that should have been shared. These frictions sometimes brought the Entente to the edge of collapse. These already noted difficult relationships between British and French authorities were aggravated by the sometimes nefarious rivalry between civilian and military leadership over strategy formulation.

In the early months of 1917, and following Joffre's fall from power, a semblance of unity of command for all Allied armies on the Western Front was attempted.⁴⁸⁸ Following Lloyd George's initiative, Joffre's successor, the bilingual and Protestant General Robert Nivelle, assumed command over the British and French armies. However, his overall position was only short-lived.⁴⁸⁹ This unfortunate attempt to impose unity of command rapidly petered out more because of internal British discordances and the constant power struggle between Lloyd George and Sir Douglas Haig than from a realistic evaluation of the Allied conduct of military operations.⁴⁹⁰ In April 1917, the Nivelle offensive's *fiasco* on the Chemin des Dames and the subsequent mutinies that engulfed two-thirds of French divisions on the Western Front completely wrecked any hopes that Nivelle might have entertained of keeping the necessary support from the primary British decision-makers. Nivelle's failure rapidly condemned him to lose his recent

⁴⁸⁸ Regarding the circumstances which presided over General Joffre's replacement at the head of the French army, and his token nomination as Marshal of France, see David Dutton, "The fall of General Joffre: An episode in the politico-military struggle in wartime France," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 1, no. 3 (1978): 338-351.

⁴⁸⁹ About Robert Nivelle, who inherited the tragic sobriquet of "*Le boucher du Chemin des Dames*," [the butcher of the Chemin des Dames], see the very-well researched and nuanced biography by Denis Rolland, *Nivelle: l'inconnu du Chemin des Dames* (Paris: Imago, 2012).

⁴⁹⁰ Regarding the extremely tense relations between British politicians (Lloyd George) and generals (Haig and Robertson) in the crucial year of 1917, see, Brian Bond, "Soldiers and Statesmen: British Civil-Military Relations in 1917," *Military Affairs* 32, no. 2 (October 1968): 62-75; as well as chapters 6 to 9 from David R. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1983), 104-213; finally, chapters 3 to 6 in French, *The Strategy of Lloyd George Coalition 1916-1918*, 67-170.

appointment as the nominal CIC of the Allied armies on the Western Front.⁴⁹¹

In November 1917, in the aftermath of the Italian disaster of Caporetto, the Allies finally created the necessary administrative structure to coordinate the war's strategic direction, the Supreme War Council (SWC).⁴⁹² The SWC installed in Versailles became the perennial organ for the coordination of Allied military operations. Even if the SWC represented a brand-new inter-allied command structure, several issues persisted that still hindered the Allied armies' full integration.⁴⁹³ For example, the SWC did not supplant the three Allied commanders who directed the American, British, and French armies on the Western Front. These three men, General Sir Douglas Haig for the BEF, General Philippe Pétain for the French army, and General John J. Pershing for the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), were still in charge of the conduct of operations of their armies and remained responsible solely to their governments. The SWC represented the highest Allied command organization that included the prime ministers and representatives of each Allied and associate nations. It met monthly and was tasked to "watch over the general conduct of the war."⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ The literature which describes the Chemin des Dames offensive's bloody failure is exhaustive, see, Louis Larreguy de Civrieux, *Pages de vérité. L'offensive de 1917 et le commandement du Général Nivelle* (Paris: Van Oest, 1919); René-Gustave Nobécourt, *Les fantassins du Chemin des Dames* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1965); Pierre Miquel, *Le chemin des dames* (Paris: Perrin, 1997); David Murphy, *Breaking Point of the French Army: The Nivelle Offensive of 1917* (Barnsley: Pen et Sword, 2015); about the French army mutinies of 1917, many monographs were published, here are the most praise-worthy, Richard M. Watt, *Dare Call it Treason* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1963); Guy Pedroncini, *Les Mutineries de 1917* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967); Denis Rolland, *La grève des tranchées: les mutineries de 1917* (Paris : Imago, 2005); André Loez and Nicolas Mariot, eds., *Obéir-désobéir: Les mutineries de 1917 en perspective* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2008).

⁴⁹² For more details about the climatic but not decisive Battle of Caporetto, see, Cyril Falls, *Caporetto 1917* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965); Mario Morselli, *Caporetto 1917: Victory or Defeat?* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁹³ About the Supreme War Council, see, David F. Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council. American War Aims and Inter-Allied Strategy, 1917-1918* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961); Priscilla Roberts, "Tasker H. Bliss and the Evolution of Allied Unified Command, 1918: A Note on Old Battles," *The Journal of Military History* 65, no. 3 (July 2001): 671-695; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, "Supreme War Council," in 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, eds., Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2016-04-06. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10886. Accessed February 23, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/supreme-war-council> / Meighen McCrae, *Coalition Strategy and the End of the First World War: The Supreme War Council and War Planning, 1917-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁴⁹⁴ Tasker H. Bliss, "The Evolution of the Unified Command," *Foreign Affairs* 1, no. 2 (December 1922): 6.

Ultimately, when in Spring 1918, the German Offensives threatened to split the British and French armies, the dire urgency of the military situation brought home to the Allied governments the imperious necessity to rapidly name a CIC to direct the overall operations. Following the Doullens and Beauvais Agreements of 26 March and 3 April 1918, “the British, French and American governments entrusted the strategic direction of military operations to General Foch.”⁴⁹⁵ Yet, if Foch became the Generalissimo, there were still some obvious limitations to his prerogatives, as an important part of the Beauvais Agreement stipulated that,

The Commanders-in-chief of the British, French and American armies exert the plenitude of their tactical conduct over their armies. Each Commander-in-chief will have the right to call upon his government, if in his opinion, his army finds itself in danger by any instructions received from General Foch.⁴⁹⁶

Therefore, even if the Allies finally agreed to place their armies under a single leader, Foch was still very much restricted in his freedom of action as supreme commander. He had the complex task to coordinate the military actions of three different armies, which confronted the same enemy (Germany) but had essentially developed different strategies to defeat it. Reflecting on his experience as the American Representative at the SWC, General Tasker Bliss defined the fundamental weakness of the Entente powers. In his opinion, they “were allied little more than in the sense that each found itself fighting, at the same time with the others, its own war against one enemy, and too largely for separate ends.”⁴⁹⁷ What Bliss observed, indeed, gave credence to what Lord Kitchener replied to Churchill in a Cabinet Meeting, that “unfortunately we had to make war

⁴⁹⁵ Beauvais Agreement, 3 April 1918, quoted in Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition. Britain and France during the First World War*, 201; regarding the central role that Foch played in the final and crucial year of the war, and his nomination as the Allied *Generalissimo*, see Part II: *Supreme Command* in Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command. The Forging of a First World War General* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); also, Rémy Porte and François Cochet, eds. *Ferdinand Foch (1851-1929): Apprenez à penser* (Paris: Éditions Sotéca, 14-18, 2010).

⁴⁹⁶ Beauvais Agreement, 3 April 1918, quoted in Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition. Britain and France during the First World War*, 201.

⁴⁹⁷ Bliss, “The Evolution of the Unified Command,” 2.

as we must, and not as we should like to.”⁴⁹⁸ Notwithstanding Bliss and Kitchener’s realistic observations, the Allies’ strategic predicaments could have been much worse, and as Winston Churchill remarked, “There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them.”⁴⁹⁹ As the Entente’s pillars, Britain and France did not conduct the war in the most efficient manner, quite the contrary; but even during the darkest hour of the spring of 1918, they managed to stay united and maintained their fragile but nonetheless successful alliance. As Douglas Johnson confirms, “Whilst the alliance creaked and groaned, it remained firm until the armistice.”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ TNA, CAB 42/3/16, 5-6, Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee held at 10 Downing Street (secret), 20 August 1915.

⁴⁹⁹ Kay Halle, *Irrepressible Churchill: A Treasury of Winston Churchill's Wit* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1966), 157.

⁵⁰⁰ Douglas Johnson, François Bédarida and François Crouzet, eds. *Britain and France: Ten Centuries* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980), 82.

CHAPTER 7

THE GENESIS OF THE MACEDONIAN CAMPAIGN

Yet it is true that if you could have had your way last January about Salonika, or in the alternative I cd have had my way last February about the Dardanelles, the whole face of the war wd have been changed.

Winston Churchill
to David Lloyd George,
25 January 1916

The Macedonian Campaign remains one of the least understood military undertakings of World War I. Its inception and the reasons behind its continuation have intrigued generations of historians. Probably more controversial than its origins, the hidden agenda that justifies why the Allies maintained their forces in Macedonia in the first place still invites a great deal of controversy. In the war's immediate aftermath, several politicians, generals, and historians across the Channel wondered why in 1915, as the Allies were already stuck on the Western Front and in the Dardanelles, they decided to launch another expedition to the Balkans? What were the motives behind it? Who were the British and French generals and politicians who lobbied to open a new military theater in the Balkans? What were the official diplomatic or military objectives? These questions oblige us to revisit the central theme of coalition warfare and the strategic objectives that the Allies pursued in 1915. This chapter finally illustrates the severe frictions that the campaign created in London and Paris and how these frictions ultimately affected the operations on the ground.

If the Macedonian Campaign was launched with the avowed ambition of rescuing the Serbian army, which at the time was being defeated by the combined forces of Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Germany, it would then prove relatively simple to explain why the Allied forces

disembarked in Salonica in the early days of October 1915.⁵⁰¹ However, if this Allied attempt to offer a helping hand to the Serbs did not constitute the only rational explanation behind the resumption of military operations in the Balkans, what were the extraneous factors that obliged the Allied forces to remain in Salonica? Once it became apparent that saving the entire Serbian army was largely beyond the means of the meager Allied contingent which had been hastily dispatched to Macedonia, why did the Anglo-French forces not promptly reembark and go back to the Western Front, where they could have been better employed to fight the German army? There are four sets of reasons that provide elements of answer confirming why the Macedonian Campaign started and why it was maintained against the better judgments of various British and French leaders who did not see any logical reasons for its continuation.

The first reason hinges on the military necessity to maintain the Serbian army in the field and rescue its last fighting forces at all costs. In that respect, Serbia's strategic importance for the Allies and especially the French must not be underestimated and is examined in Chapter 9, *Serbiens Ende*. In August and December 1914, the Serbs had successfully repelled two ill-conceived and poorly led Austro-Hungarian invasions. Still, after these Pyrrhic victories, the Serbs were no longer capable of mounting any offensive actions and stayed on the defensive while attempting to reorganize their forces. In the fall of 1915, Serbia's third invasion, planned by Field Marshal August von Mackensen and his chief of staff, Generalmajor Hans von Seeckt, was led by some of the best German fighting units, which were reinforced by Austro-Hungarians and Bulgarian forces. This time, the Central Powers' offensive completely overwhelmed the Serbs, who rapidly requested Allied assistance. As Belgrade's desperate plea for help could not be

⁵⁰¹ The Central Powers offensive against Serbia, as one of the main causes for the inception of the Macedonian Campaign is explored in Chapter 9: *Serbiens Ende*.

ignored in London and Paris, it provides the official justification for why the Macedonian Campaign started in the first place.

The second reason was based on the Allied decision to enroll the remaining neutral Balkan states in the Entente. This search for new allies started immediately after the onset of hostilities. For the British, the rationale to add the regional powers of Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania to the Entente was based on the assumption that these nations (and Bulgaria in particular) could provide tremendous military benefits to the Entente. London also assumed that these nations could not be left alone to remain neutral or, worse, side with the Central Powers. On several occasions, the British desperately attempted to entice Bulgaria. However, as Bulgarian national objectives focused solely on Macedonia, they irremediably conflicted with the Allied support already pledged to Serbia. The British essentially found themselves trying to square the circle. On the other hand, the French did not possess too much hope of convincing Sofia, especially as doing so would have meant to betray Serbia, an option that most French leaders refused to contemplate. This French support to Belgrade was based on the pragmatic reason that Serbia was already fighting alongside Britain and France and had, until that point, valiantly resisted Austrian aggression. In the end, these British endeavors to lure Bulgaria to the Entente only proved to be a *chimera*.

The third reason delves through the intrigues and complexity of French domestic politics. It boils down to the primary question of what the French government was supposed to do with the political soldier *par excellence*, General Maurice Sarrail. This reason alone elucidates the mysterious motivation for the Allied intervention in Salonica and corroborates its continuation past the point of military relevance and the initial objective of rendering assistance to the Serbian forces retreating toward the Adriatic. Subsequently, Chapter 8, *L'affaire Sarrail*, reveals the existing schism between the French General Staff, Government, and parliamentary opposition,

while illustrating the crucial influence that French domestic politics exerted over the Entente's strategic decisions.

The fourth reason examines why the French government conveniently utilized the opportunity of rescuing Serbia to fulfill its undeclared imperial objectives, which were to assert French cultural and economic domination over the Balkans and Macedonia. French decision-makers conveniently used the Macedonian Campaign to kill two birds with one stone. First, the French Cabinet quickly kicked the troublesome General Sarrail out of Joffre's way. It offered him an important army command that would finally satisfy the unending clamor of his many parliamentary partisans on the benches of the *Assemblée nationale*. Second, once French troops arrived in Salonica, and Sarrail no longer provoked political headaches for the government, French political leaders and colonial lobbyists alike rapidly seized an excellent opportunity to penetrate the Balkans culturally and economically. Indeed, this penetration was carried out under the French army's auspices and intended to transform the Balkans into the perfect commercial conduit between Southern France and the Levant. Only when these hidden motivations are closely examined can the Macedonian Campaign's baffling strategic context make sense against the war's larger background. With a few exceptions, this last reason has not generally received much scholarly attention. Due to its central role in the French decision to send thousands of Allied soldiers to Macedonia, this fourth set of reasons is analyzed separately in Chapter 10, *The Macedonian Masquerade*.

Within the historiography of World War I, the Macedonian Campaign generally received a less than satisfactory treatment. Most British and French soldiers who served in the Balkan Cauldron became largely forgotten in the Great War's overall remembrance. These men, who had been unfairly ridiculed by Clemenceau's infamous moniker of 'The Gardeners of Salonika,'

became the forgotten army of World War I. These British and French soldiers who fought and suffered as much as their brethren of the Western Front never received the same respect and recognition afforded to their counterparts stationed in Belgium and Northern France. At its peak, the Allied forces in Macedonia represented a very large military force. As David Dutton wrote, “contemporaries could scarcely ignore the existence of an allied force which at times approached half a million men.”⁵⁰² Nevertheless, the number of Allied troops sent to Macedonia did not necessarily correlate to military strength and undeniable successes on the battlefield. Undeniably, and for a long period, the Macedonian Campaign seemed to lack a strategic *raison d'être* that could justify deploying such a large Allied contingent for so little return.

Furthermore, the campaign's continuation defied all logical explanations and hoodwinked even the most astute military observers. This confusion seemed warranted when one considers that some of the most ardent advocates for the inception and continuation of Allied endeavors in the Balkans were French. It is only fair to ponder why over three years, successive French Cabinets sent hundreds of thousands of Poilus to Salonica when cities such as Lille and a large portion of Northern France's most productive industrial areas were all under German occupation. In December 1915, well-after the first French troops had already disembarked in Salonica, one of France's wartime leading politicians, Georges Clemenceau, challenged the French Government's decision to send troops to the Balkans, and commented, in his typical and irreverent manner that,

Do we need so much efforts to understand that the French Front established in the position where it is, the conquest of France by the Kaiser, which is the first objective of the war, can end only in its multiple endeavors with a German victory in France, or a French victory in Germany.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² David Dutton, “‘Allies are a Tiresome Lot’ Britain, France and the Balkan Campaign 1915-1918,” in *Statecraft and Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David Dutton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 36.

⁵⁰³ My own translation. Georges Clemenceau, “L'établissement du front français,” *L'homme enchaîné*, December 26, 1915; <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7590435p.item> also quoted in David Robin Watson, *Georges Clemenceau. A Political Biography* (New York, NY: David MacKay Company, Inc, 1974), 255.

Astoundingly, many in France's political *élite* still disagreed with Clemenceau. At the beginning of the Macedonian Campaign, Allied forces were confined to what the Germans ironically termed 'the biggest internment camp in Europe.' Compared to the combats on the Western Front, the Macedonian Campaign's fighting was considerably smaller in scale, prompting one scholar to comment that in Macedonia, "The real war was waged against the malarial mosquito."⁵⁰⁴ Indeed, malaria and mosquitos created havoc and enormous medical problems for the Allied forces in Salonica. A Greek historian confirmed that the official statistics for "British soldiers treated in hospital for malaria in 1916 reached a total of 29,254, of whom 21,902 were transferred to Malta and Britain."⁵⁰⁵ These men never returned to combat duties. On the French side, the situation proved equally grim, and Patrick Facon stated that between 1915 and 1918, diseases afflicted 94,5% of the French soldiers (356,779 out of 378,000) who served in Greece and Serbia.⁵⁰⁶ Over the thirty-eight months that the Macedonian Campaign lasted, 119,473 French soldiers were hospitalized, 96,033 of whom fell victims of malaria.⁵⁰⁷ It was only in Fall 1918 that finally, the Allied forces in Macedonia influenced the war's outcome and played a major role in the Entente's overall success over the Central Powers.

Many World War I's scholars have often compared the Macedonian Campaign with another infamous side-show of the war, the Dardanelles Expedition. However, the latter has received far greater academic attention than the former. Generally, World War I's British historiography has sometimes created an over-inflated impression that the Dardanelles Expedition could have significantly altered the war's course, maybe even decide its outcome. Some historians

⁵⁰⁴ J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1989), 149.

⁵⁰⁵ Gerasimos E. Pentogalos, "Medical Problems on the Salonica Front, 1915-1918," in *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War*, ed., Yannis Mourellos (Thessaloniki: Institute of Balkan Studies, 2005), 212.

⁵⁰⁶ Patrick Facon, "Le soldat français d'Orient face à la maladie," in *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War*, ed., Yannis Mourellos (Thessaloniki: Institute of Balkan Studies, 2005), 223.

⁵⁰⁷ SHD, Dossier spécial Franchet d'Espérey, correspondance avec les Poilus d'Orient, 1931-1936.

were sometimes quasi-lyrical about what the Allies could have potentially achieved at Gallipoli. In a truly Churchillian fashion, Alan Moorehead even wrote, “Seen in this new light the Gallipoli campaign was no longer a blunder or a reckless gamble; it was the most imaginative conception of the war, and its potentialities were almost beyond reckoning.”⁵⁰⁸ Future British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, who fought at Gallipoli and knew first-hand the Dardanelles’ horrors, presented a somehow more balanced opinion of the campaign. He viewed the Dardanelles Campaign as “an immortal gamble that did not come off...Sir Winston...had the one strategic idea in the war. He did not believe in throwing away masses of people to be massacred.”⁵⁰⁹

Compared with the Dardanelles Expedition, the Macedonian Campaign did not generate as much scholarly interest among British scholars. In our judgment, two causes justify this lack of historical interest. First, Gallipoli was a rather short military operation that only spanned between February 1915 and January 1916, and as such, this expedition did not last long enough to be tainted by the same high level of controversy and political machinations as the Macedonian Campaign. Second, Salonica was as much a French endeavor as Gallipoli was a British one. In the case of the Dardanelles, the French grudgingly accepted to tag along with the British to play a submissive associate’s role.⁵¹⁰ However, in the Balkans, the French were the ones who called the shots. Paul

⁵⁰⁸ Alan Moorehead, *Gallipoli* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1956), 364. The literature about Gallipoli and the Dardanelles is exhaustive, only a few praiseworthy accounts are presented, see, Geoffrey Miller, *Straits: British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire and the Origins of the Dardanelles Campaign* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1997); Fred R. Van Hartesveldt, *The Dardanelles Campaign, 1915: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997); Jenny Macleod, ed., *Gallipoli. Making History* (London: Frank Cass, 2004); Graham T. Clews, *Churchill's Dilemma: The Real Story Behind the Origins of the 1915 Dardanelles Campaign* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010); Peter Hart, *Gallipoli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Harvey Broadbent, *Defending Gallipoli: The Turkish Story* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2015); Klaus Wolf, *Victory at Gallipoli, 1915. The German-Ottoman Alliance in the First World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2020).

⁵⁰⁹ Trumbull Higgins, *Winston Churchill and the Dardanelles* (London: Heinemann, 1963), 185; Stephen Roskill, *The Strategy of Sea Power: Its Development and Application* (London: Collins, 1962), 125-126.

⁵¹⁰ Edmond Delage, *The Tragedy of the Dardanelles* (London: John Lane, 1932), 251; Although Gallipoli, was originally a British project that Winston Churchill imagined and implemented, the French forces that were dispatched to the Dardanelles amounted to 42,000 sailors and soldiers, 15,000 of whom never returned to France or its colonies. About the French army during the Dardanelles Expedition, see Eleanor van Heyningen, “Helles: The French in Gallipoli,” *The Joint Imperial War Museum / Australian War Memorial Battlefield Study Tour to Gallipoli* (September

Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, remarked that just like the French had been forced to follow the British in the Dardanelles Expedition without any appropriate consideration of the operation's potential, equally the British were hurried to enter the Macedonian Campaign without having the chance to study the campaign's full ramifications properly.⁵¹¹

Thus, it is no longer surprising that many proponents of the Macedonian Campaign were chiefly French. Robert David, a former French officer who served in Macedonia, wrote about the campaign, that it was "A magnificent dream! Its realization was not impossible: it would have shortened the war by over a year, and our financial restoration greatly eased, - it was the complete dislocation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire."⁵¹² Even the usually cautious French diplomatic historian Albert Pingaud appeared melancholic when he pointed out the potential strategic results that the Macedonian Campaign could have yielded if it had been pursued earlier and with greater vigor. Pingaud wrote that if in early 1915, the Entente could have added the 200,000 men, who were already immobilized in the Dardanelles, to the existing divisions originally sent to Salonica, the offensive potential that such a force could have exerted would have dramatically changed the Entente's military fortunes. This Allied force could have taken the Austrians from the rear, immediately vanquish their resistance, and maybe shorten the war's term by three years!⁵¹³ Just like Moorehead, who had equally expressed great confidence that Gallipoli could have delivered a crushing blow to the Central Powers or, on this occasion, to the Turks, Pingaud believed that Salonica represented 'the secret key' to unlock the gate of Allied victory, this time against the

2000): 1-11; Matthew Hughes, "The French Army at Gallipoli," *RUSI Journal* 150, no.3 (June 2005): 64-67; John Horne, "A Colonial Expedition? French Soldiers' Experience at the Dardanelles," *War & society* 38, no. 4 (2019): 286-304.

⁵¹¹ Paul Cambon to Jules Cambon, 6 December 1915, MAE, archives privées de Jules Cambon. 43 PA AP.

⁵¹² Robert David, *Le drame ignoré de l'armée d'Orient. Dardanelles-Serbie-Salonique-Athènes* (Paris: Plon, 1927), ix.

⁵¹³ Albert Pingaud, *Histoire diplomatique de la France pendant la Grande Guerre*, vol. 1, *Les alliances et les interventions* (Paris: Éditions Alsatia, 1938), 215.

Austrians. Neither of these authors fully considered the realistic implications that defeating the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian Empires might not have decisively affected Germany. Even with the appropriate levels of strategic planning, operational preparations, adequate manpower, and sufficient material resources, the only potential results that these two campaigns might have offered to the Allies would have been to defeat either Turkish or Austro-Hungarian forces in 1915/1916. Ultimately, neither of these campaigns could have guaranteed Germany's military downfall.

In the case of the Macedonian Campaign, the Allied forces originally assembled were extremely fortunate that Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL), the German Supreme Command, strongly reined in the Bulgarians not to immediately attack the small Allied contingent that had arrived in the fall of 1915 and pushed it back to the Aegean Sea. General Erich von Falkenhayn and the Germans preferred to see the Allied divisions bottled up in Salonica to remain inactive than fighting the German army on the Western Front. Thus, from its beginning, the Macedonian Campaign, just like the Western Front and the Dardanelles, turned into a stalemate. Therefore, it is no longer startling that several generals and politicians at the time, and quite a few historians in their wake, have all dismissed the Macedonian Campaign as totally irrelevant to the war's success. This military irrelevance vastly undermines the excessive optimism that some British and French politicians conferred upon the Macedonian Campaign. Nonetheless, the fact that the Macedonian Campaign became such a central item on the weekly Allied agenda indicates to the diplomatic and military historians alike that not everything about this controversial campaign appears as simple as it may look. There is still much room for further archival research and historical inquiry. Back in 1917, George Ward Price already expressed that "my own opinion is that until all the documents now held secret in different countries, Allied and enemy, are revealed, there will be very few men

indeed who know the inside story of the Allies' doings in the Balkans these two years past."⁵¹⁴

At the end of 1914, after a few months of relatively fluid warfare which did not produce the decisive envelopment of the enemy that General Joffre and his German counterparts Generals Moltke, then Falkenhayn had imagined, it was evident that the French and German strategic plans had dramatically failed to produce the conclusive victory that both sides expected. This Franco-German stalemate in Northern France and Belgium was characterized by a long and continuous defensive system of opposite trenches that ran between the Swiss Border and the English Channel and became known as the Western Front. This Allied inability to dislodge the German army from its defensive positions and end the war rapidly led some of the Entente's military and political leaders to the conclusion that to regain the strategic initiative, they would have to possibly extend the military operations beyond the Western and Eastern Fronts to project their forces to another theater, namely the Balkans.

Various individuals across the Channel claimed to be the instigator behind a campaign which, even if it bogged down for almost two and a half years, eventually produced a tangible success. A success that precipitated the Central Powers' rapid demise and the Allied victory of November 1918. In his *Carnets*, General Louis Franchet d'Espérey claims that he was the first to conceive an operational project aiming to deploy French troops to the Balkans. To his credit, Franchet always showed a specific interest in the region, which before the war, he had visited on several occasions. In the fall of 1914, French Fifth Army's commander Franchet prepared a project which, in the spring of 1915, envisioned that the French would land eight divisions at Salonica and go up by train through the Vardar Valley toward Serbia. Once the French troops had linked with the Serbian forces, Franchet imagined that this Franco-Serb army would advance toward Budapest

⁵¹⁴ George Ward Price, *The Story of the Salonica Army* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 237.

and Vienna, thus severing the vital connection between the Germanic Powers and the Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, Franchet's strategic design would have allowed the French and the Serbs to join hands with the Russians through Romania.⁵¹⁵ On 6 October 1914, at Jonchery, the Fifth Army's Headquarters (HQ), Franchet presented his project to the French President Raymond Poincaré and the war minister Alexandre Millerand who toured the front. On 1 December 1914, Franchet gave a copy of his plan to his friend the Deputy Paul Bénazet, who once in Paris handed it over to the President of the Chamber of Deputies Paul Deschanel. In turn, Deschanel forwarded it to the government.⁵¹⁶

Franchet was not the only French general who wished to adopt this type of indirect approach very early in the war. At the same period, General Édouard de Castelnau, the Second Army's commander, was also less than optimistic about Allied chances of success on the Western Front. Castelnau did not think that the British and French armies could break the deadlock. Therefore, he wisely advised stopping futile frontal attacks, which wasted precious French manpower, and urged the adoption of a defensive philosophy on the Western Front. This new strategy would provide France and Britain with enough time to rebuild large reserves of ammunition and shells and wait for the British armies to reach their full potential. Castelnau believed that Britain and France should attract Italy and the Balkan states to the Entente while also trying to convince the Japanese government to send troops to Europe. Finally, Castelnau advised that in the spring of 1915, the Allies should open a new theater of operations in the Balkans and

⁵¹⁵ Paul Azan, *Franchet d'Espérey* (Paris: Flammarion, 1949), 143; about Franchet d'Espérey, see the recent biography written by Pierre Gosa, *Franchet d'Espérey: Un maréchal méconnu: le vainqueur des Balkans, 1918* (Paris: Nouvelles éditions latines, 1998).

⁵¹⁶ This passage derives from Franchet d'Espérey's *Carnets* which are kept within the French army archives at the Château de Vincennes, SHD, 1K mi 44, Maréchal Louis Franchet d'Espérey, *Carnets*, XI, 1-3; This version of events is confirmed in Poincaré's memoirs, Raymond Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 5, *L'invasion, 1914* (Paris: Plon, 1928), 360; Alexandre Ribot, *Lettres à un ami. Souvenirs de ma vie politique* (Paris: Bossard, 1924), 330; Azan, *Franchet d'Espérey*, 142-143.

launch a powerful Anglo-Franco-Serb offensive against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which he perceived (with good reason) as the weakest link in the Central Powers. He shared Franchet's belief that once the Austrians were defeated, the Allied prospect of victory would be drastically improved.⁵¹⁷

On 1 January 1915, during the New Year's Day Reception given by the French President Poincaré at the Palais de l'Élysée, Aristide Briand, who at the time served as Minister of Justice, informed Prime minister René Viviani and the other cabinet members of his skepticism to obtain a military decision in France. He suggested that the Allies should search for a strategic solution somewhere else than on the Western Front. Briand wanted to land 400,000 men to Salonica to protect Serbia, and second, to influence the other Balkan states to join the Entente.⁵¹⁸ Briand believed that his plan to take the Central Powers from the rear would vastly enhance Allied fortunes.⁵¹⁹ It seems that strategy was not the only motivation that drove Briand to propose an expedition to Salonica. The cultural, commercial, economic, and financial factors all played a prominent part in Briand's appeal for an Allied landing in Macedonia. In fact, Briand had responded to the pressure exerted by various colonial organizations and a section of the French press that urged the government to act promptly and plant the flag to bolster French presence in

⁵¹⁷ Yves Gras, *Castelneau ou l'art de commander* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1990), 215-216; Noël Édouard Marie Joseph, Vicomte de Curières de Castelnau, was one of the best French generals of World War I, unfortunately for him, he was also from an old aristocratic and deeply Catholic family, which certainly did not help his cause, hence why he never received as much military distinction, nor academic attention (at least in English), than some of his contemporaries such as Joffre, Foch, or Pétain; about him, see not only Gras' excellent biography, but also, Benoît Chenu, *Castelnau le quatrième Maréchal, 1914-1918* (Paris: Bernard Giovanangeli éditeur, 2017).

⁵¹⁸ Albert Pingaud, "Les origines de l'expédition de Salonique," *Revue historique* 176 (1935): 449; Pingaud relates that Briand had devised his scheme back in November 1914, then discussed the matter on 4 February 1915 during a dinner at the British Embassy in Paris, with Lloyd George, and Lord Bertie, who was forced to act as a translator between the two men. Lady Blanche Mayard Gordon-Lennox, ed., *The Diary of Lord Bertie of Thame, 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), 108.

⁵¹⁹ Georges Suarez, *Briand*, vol. 3, *Le pilote dans la tourmente* (Paris: Plon, 1939), 90. It is interesting that Jean de Pierrefeu (who served at the French GQG), wrote that it was Castelneau himself who confirmed that Briand unscrupulously appropriated his ideas, to favorably impress his cabinet's colleagues. Jean de Pierrefeu, *G.Q.G., Secteur 1*, vol.1, *L'État-major de la victoire. Le crépuscule de Joffre. La tragique aventure de Nivelles* (Paris: L'Édition française illustrée, 1920), 189.

the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans.⁵²⁰

A few days after the New Year's reception, during a meeting at the Élysée, President Poincaré, Prime Minister Viviani, and Briand presented the latter's Balkan scheme to General Joseph Joffre without whose approval, no military action could be contemplated.⁵²¹ Joffre adamantly refused to contemplate any potential French deployment in the Balkans, especially as he prepared his spring 1915 offensives in Artois and Champagne. Joffre explained that he would need every available French private and therefore had none to spare for a frivolous plan hatched without proper manpower and logistic evaluations. Joffre's refusal was backed by both War Minister Alexandre Millerand and Foreign Affairs Minister Théophile Delcassé.⁵²² Joffre and his phalanx refused to withdraw any French divisions from the Western Front for an adventure they considered without any future.⁵²³ Unable to convince Joffre, Poincaré, Viviani, and Briand conceded defeat, and the whole Balkan scheme was dropped.⁵²⁴ However, if Joffre believed that this unnecessary distraction was now laid to rest, he was sorely mistaken, as it would not be the first time, nor the last, that he would have to discuss the possibility of sending French troops to the Balkans. As is seen later in this work, future military and political circumstances all contributed to force his hand and eventually accept an expedition to Salonica.

In the early days of February 1915, General Joseph Gallieni also contributed to the strategic reflections taking place and proposed an expedition to the East. His former secretaries indicated that Gallieni wished to launch an expedition landing in Salonica before moving east and attacking

⁵²⁰ George H. Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles. A Study of Failure in the Conduct of War* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 35.

⁵²¹ Raymond Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 6, *Les tranchées, 1915* (Paris: Plon, 1930), 6.

⁵²² Regarding the reign of Delcassé at the Quai d'Orsay before and during the Great War, see, Charles Wesley Porter, *The Career of Théophile Delcassé* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936).

⁵²³ Gérard Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient (Octobre 1915-novembre 1918)* (Paris: Economica, 2003), 14.

⁵²⁴ Émile Herbillon, *Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison pendant la guerre mondiale*, vol. 1, *Du général en chef au gouvernement* (Paris: Tallandier, 1930), 90.

Constantinople with an army strong enough to coerce the Bulgarians and the Greeks to join it. Once the Allied forces had conquered the Ottoman's capital, Gallieni then suggested moving against the Austrians with the Romanians' help.⁵²⁵ Gallieni secretaries also claimed that as soon as Joffre was informed about Gallieni's plan, he became extremely irate and knew immediately that this whole foolish idea was, of course, Gallieni's. Joffre was arguing, as usual, that if French troops were withdrawn for the Balkans, he could no longer defend the Western Front."⁵²⁶ It seems rather doubtful that Joffre would have been so enraged when learning about Gallieni's plan, especially as he had already heard similar schemes in early January. It appears that Gallieni's former secretaries tried to enhance the late War Minister's reputation by relating Joffre's supposedly angry reaction. After the war in France, an acrimonious debate took place to argue who between Gallieni and Joffre should rightfully claim the laurels for the Miracle of the Marne.

As these various initiatives were presented in France, in Great Britain too, a few influential decision-makers pursued similar avenues. By the end of December 1914, Colonel Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the recently created War Council, Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George, and First Sea Lord Winston Churchill, came to the same conclusion about the Allied military situation. They were all worried that the terrible war of attrition that developed on the Western Front would carry on unabated without any glimmer of hope for the Allies. These three men wished to enroll the remaining neutral Balkan states into the conflict to exert more pressure on Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. They also wanted to relieve the strain that weighed

⁵²⁵ Marius Leblond and Ary Leblond, *Gallieni parle...* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1920), 79; Gaëtan Gallieni, ed., *Les carnets de Gallieni* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1934), 144-145; Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi, *Guerre et théâtre, 1914-1918* (Nancy: Berger-Levrault, 1919), 136-137; Maurice Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), 254.

⁵²⁶ Marius Leblond and Ary Leblond, *Gallieni parle...*, 79. Gallieni passed away on 27 May 1916, just a few days before his British alter-ego Lord Kitchener who died on 5 June 1916. About Gallieni, one of France's most famous soldiers and builders of empire, see the excellent biographies by Marc Michel, *Gallieni* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); and Pierre Montagnon, *Joseph Gallieni, le vrai vainqueur de la Marne* (Versailles: Via romana, 2016).

on the Russians, who were reeling from the successive defeats they suffered at the hands of the German armies led by Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff. This dire Russian situation was compounded by the desperate appeal made by Grand Duke Nicolas, CIG of the Russian armies. He had solicited an immediate offensive from Paris and London to alleviate German pressure on the Eastern Front.⁵²⁷ Based on their bleak assessment of the Western Front and the even more distressing situation of the Russian armies on the Eastern Front, Churchill, Lloyd George, and Hankey wholeheartedly believed that something had to be done somewhere else than on the Western Front. They were also convinced that with Kitchener's New Armies' rapid growth, there was ample room to maximize British military power and inflict a reverse on the Central Powers. On Wednesday 30 December 1914, while on a train to London for his cabinet meeting, Asquith described the prevailing spirit in his cabinet, "When our new armies are ready, as they will soon begin to be, it seems folly to send them to Flanders where they are not wanted, & where (in W's phrase) they will 'chew barbed wire,' or be wasted in futile frontal attacks."⁵²⁸

On 1 January 1915, when Poincaré was regaling his cabinet members and numerous guests of honor, with Champagne, Caviar, foie gras, and petits fours, in the cozy salons of the Élysée, in London, David Lloyd George circulated a lengthy *memorandum* "Suggestions as to the Military Position," to British Prime Minister Asquith and the rest of his Cabinet colleagues. Lloyd George expanded his views on how and why the war should be directed with more imagination and audacity. In his first point, Stalemate of the Western Front, he described the deadlock prevailing in Northern France and Flanders and suggested that Germany be forced to fight on open ground.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 23.

⁵²⁸ Michael G. Brock and Eleanor Brock, eds., *H. H. Asquith, Letters to Venetia Stanley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 345.

⁵²⁹ How Lloyd George intended to force the Germans to fight in the open, he did not say.

In his fourth point, Necessity of Winning a Victory Somewhere, he commented that,

There is a real danger that the people of Great Britain and France will sooner or later get tired of long casualty lists explained by monotonous and rather banal telegrams from headquarters about 'heavy cannonades,' 'making a little progress' at certain points, 'recovering trenches,' the loss of which has never been reported, &c., with the net result that we have not advanced a yard after weeks of heavy fighting.⁵³⁰

In the same paragraph, Lloyd George insisted that,

A clear definite victory which has visibly materialised in guns and prisoners captured, in unmistakable retreats of the enemy's armies, and in large sections of enemy territory occupied, will alone satisfy the public that tangible results are being achieved by the great sacrifices they are making, and decide neutrals that it is at last safe for them to throw in their lot with us.⁵³¹

Perhaps, the most important part of this *memorandum* was the sixth point, The First Operation. Lloyd George wished to see Britain and France attacking together in the Balkans, but only with the Greeks, the Romanians, and the Serbs' support. There were certainly some interesting points in Lloyd George's suggestion. However, the numbers he quoted and the crushing potential he attributed to the various Balkan Armies in influencing the war's outcome were a total exaggeration of the true military potential of the nations he mentioned. Except for Bulgaria and Serbia, which both had proved the valor of their armies on the battlefield, no other regional powers held such a military potential. In this sixth point, Lloyd George estimated the various Balkan Armies to 200,000 Greeks and Montenegrins, 500,000 Romanians. Lloyd George even gave the fantasist amount of an army of 1.4 M to 1.6 M men, which would attack Austria-Hungary on her Achilles' heel, its southern border. At the time of Lloyd George's suggestion, Greece and Romania's military track records were a far cry from the decisive military factor that he pictured them to be. Most importantly, Lloyd George's *memorandum* underlined the diplomatic importance that Britain

⁵³⁰ *Memorandum* (secret) by the Right Hon. D. Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, "Suggestions as to the Military Position," 1 January 1915, TNA, CAB 42/1/8/3.

⁵³¹ TNA, CAB 42/1/8, 3, Lloyd George, "Suggestions as to the Military Position," 1 January 1915; also reproduced in David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. I, 1914-1915 (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), 323-325.

attached to the various Balkan states' role in their long-term vision of how the war should be prosecuted. On Saturday, 2 January 1915, even Lord Kitchener, who was convinced that Germany could only be defeated on the Western Front, came around the idea of opening another theater to rescue the badly bruised Russians on the Eastern Front rapidly. Kitchener explained his rationale to an unconvinced Sir John French, "The feeling here is gaining that although it is essential to defend the line we hold, troops over and above what is necessary for that service could be better employed elsewhere."⁵³² In the meantime, Lloyd George reiterated his views to the British cabinet. However, during a War Council held on 13 January 1915, it was not Lloyd George's Balkan scheme that captured the cabinet's imagination but rather Winston Churchill's plan for a naval offensive against the Dardanelles. Still, this maritime option did not preclude contingencies for a potential army operation in the Balkans. Lloyd George noted that the War Council

decided that if it becomes apparent in February and March that a stalemate is established on the Western frontier, it is desirable that British troops should be employed in another field of operations. That preparation be made so as to put us in a position to engage in such operations if it be found desirable to undertake them. That a Sub-Committee be appointed to consider such preparations, to consist of the Secretary of State for War, the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Balfour and myself.⁵³³

On 29 January, in a letter to Lord Kitchener, Lloyd George explained that only by sending a considerable Allied contingent to Salonica would Britain and France exert enough pressure to convince the Balkan states to follow the Entente. He wrote, "I am fairly confident you will not get these Balkan States to decide until they see Khaki!"⁵³⁴ On 22 February 1915, he distributed another of his famous *memorandums*, *Some Further Considerations on the Conduct of the War*, in which he recommended, just like Castelnau had in France, a strictly defensive attitude on the Western Front and the inception of a campaign in the Balkans. He believed that only through an alternative

⁵³² TNA, WO 30/57/50/64, Kitchener to French, 2 January 1915.

⁵³³ TNA, CAB 22/1, War Council, Minutes of Meetings, 13 January 1915.

⁵³⁴ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. 1, 1914-1915, 351.

military strategy would the Allies find themselves in a position where they could potentially vanquish Germany.⁵³⁵

In this context, it is helpful to recall that some Balkan powers also desired to receive Allied military assistance to fulfill their national objectives. Greece, in particular, endeavored to obtain British diplomatic, military and naval assistance to attain those goals. Already in August 1914, Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos had offered an alliance to the British Cabinet. Venizelos contemplated that the Ottoman Empire might declare war on Great Britain very soon and that Bulgaria might launch an offensive against either Greece or Serbia.⁵³⁶ The enticing prospect of gaining additional allies in the Balkans notably appealed to the British Cabinet. However, at that early stage of the war, the British did not wish to act in a manner that might be construed as provocative by Bulgaria or the Ottoman Empire. Above all, the British government refused to provide any pretext for either country to join the fray on the Central Powers' side. The British much preferred creating a Balkan Confederation that comprised Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Serbia.

Nonetheless, imagining the creation of a friendly Balkan confederation was easier said than done. Trying to overcome the profound hatred and resentments that the various Balkan states harbored toward one another, especially in the cruel aftermath of the Balkan Wars, was simply beyond the reach of the most skilled diplomat. On 29 November 1914, and confirming this generally held opinion, Prime Minister Asquith wrote to his celebrated confidante Venetia Stanley that, "Desperate efforts are being made to find some territorial formula which will bring Bulgaria

⁵³⁵ TNA, CAB 24/1/7, David Lloyd George, *Memorandum* (Secret) by Mr. Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, "Some further considerations on the conduct of the war," 22 February 1915; Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. I, 1914-1915, 366-373.

⁵³⁶ Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 18.

& Roumania into the fighting line alongside of Servia & Greece. It is not an easy job.”⁵³⁷ Other historians also commented on this ‘diplomatic riddle’ that confronted the British Foreign Office. In Keith Neilson’s words, “The Balkans was a tangle of conflicting claims and deep-seated enmities. In addition, several countries involved in that region’s politics seemed unable to decide whether or not to commit themselves definitely to one side or the other.”⁵³⁸

The British promoters of a Balkan Confederation faced considerable difficulties when they attempted to attract the various regional powers on the Entente’s side. This predicament became clearer when in late October 1914, the Ottoman Empire finally revealed its true intentions and entered the war on the Central Powers’ side.⁵³⁹ For many within Whitehall, Bulgaria was seen as the only viable solution to the Balkan problems confronting the Entente. Allied diplomacy unsuccessfully attempted to bribe Bulgaria at the Ottoman Empire’s expense. However, this approach was bound to fail, as the Bulgarians had their sights firmly set on Macedonia and the areas recently conquered during the Balkan Wars by Greece and Serbia. Since France had essentially become the protector of Serbia’s territorial integrity, and Greece was still courted to join the Entente, London and Paris soon realized that satisfying Bulgarian desideratum was simply beyond their reach. Nonetheless, some British statesmen kept on wooing Bulgaria in the hope of convincing Sofia to maintain its neutrality and not listen to Berlin’s Siren Song.

In December 1914, the British Cabinet had “a long discussion on Bulgaria. L.I.G., W.S.C [Churchill] and Masterman wanted us to offer the whole of Macedonia to Bulgaria as a bribe to maintain neutrality.”⁵⁴⁰ In this diplomatic Poker game between the Central Powers, the Entente,

⁵³⁷ Brock and Brock, *H. H. Asquith, Letters to Venetia Stanley*, 324.

⁵³⁸ Keith Neilson, *Strategy and Supply: The Anglo-Russian Alliance, 1914-1917* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 44.

⁵³⁹ Regarding the circumstances which prevailed upon the Ottoman Empire’s entry into the war, see the remarkable monograph written by Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914. The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵⁴⁰ Edward David ed., *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse* (London: John Murray, 1977), 208.

and Bulgaria, Sofia held all the best cards and smartly waited its turn.⁵⁴¹ Overall, Bulgarian diplomacy could afford to be patient before showing its winning hand. Finally, Bulgaria settled on the Central Powers and Germany since the latter could offer all that Sofia ever wanted, Macedonia. Only a few British Cabinet members were familiar enough with the Balkan diplomatic quandary to recognize that it would be extremely difficult to sway Sofia to the Entente. Foreign Office Secretary Sir Edward Grey lamented that “The settlement after the Second Balkan War was not one of justice but one of force. It stored up inevitable trouble for the time to come.”⁵⁴² Grey also realized that making concessions to one Balkan state would inevitably alienate the others and push them into the Central Powers’ open arms. Hence, Grey favored transforming the whole region into a neutral zone; however, it seemed unlikely that Balkan neutrality could have been adopted. Even if it had, it would not have resolved the bitter resentment that most powers harbored for each other. What Grey failed to comprehend was that in the Balkans, it was truly a zero-sum game. Within the British Cabinet, and because of his quiet and reserved style, Grey usually annoyed the more vocal Cabinet members, who were all determined to find a way out of this diplomatic impasse.

Among them, Lloyd George was prepared to act decisively and cut the Gordian Knot. Lloyd George’s diplomatic understanding of the Balkan diplomatic situation was primarily shaped by the intelligence collected and the advice professed by two Radical MPs, Noel and Charles Buxton. In August 1914, the Buxton Brothers began a ‘semi-official’ tour of the Balkans and regularly fed Lloyd George with their ideas of how Britain should be navigating the treacherous waters of Balkan diplomacy. They counseled him to promote a Balkan Confederation as a bulwark

⁵⁴¹ Keith Robbins, “British Diplomacy and Bulgaria, 1914-1915,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 49 (1971): 560-585.

⁵⁴² Edward Grey, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Stokes, 1925), 263.

against both the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires.⁵⁴³ The Buxtons posited that since King Carol of Romania passed away, there were no longer any impediments to forming a pro-Entente coalition in southeast Europe. Therefore, the Buxton Brothers crafted a relatively straightforward plan for the region's political reorganization, which they believed would appeal to all concerned powers, thus allowing them to join the Entente.⁵⁴⁴ On 15 January 1915, in one of his innumerable letters to Venetia Stanley, Asquith summarized Noel Buxton's plan,

They are strong pro-Bulgars, and are quite sure that if we offered (1) Bulgaria, the slice of Macedonia Irredenta which (Monastir, &c) the Serbs stole from her two years ago (2) Servia, Bosnia & a good bit of the coast of Dalmatia (3) Roumania, Transylvania & one or two oddments & (4) Greece, Southern Albania, Rhodes, & the other islands, & perhaps Smyrna & a strip of the shore of Asia Minor in the region – we could bring the whole lot in to fight on our side... They all hate one another & are as jealous as cats – particularly the Serbians & Bulgarians; but in the case of the 2 latter we cd. Save them from the repulsive necessity of fighting side by side, by putting them back to back – the Serbs going for Austria & the Bulgars for Turkey... On the whole (tho' the difficulties are prodigious) I am attracted by the plan.⁵⁴⁵

Despite Noel Buxton's entertaining plea to Asquith, which the latter, not understanding a great deal about the region, happily endorsed, undertaking the responsibility of harmonizing relations between regional rivals remained a daunting task even for the most seasoned diplomat. Especially, when for centuries, relations between Balkan states had been poisoned by hate and violence. Until September 1915, these fleeting delusions continued to produce unnecessary noise in Whitehall and Downing Street. However, when the curtain fell and Bulgaria joined the Central Powers, these delusions were finally dashed. On 26 February 1915, during a two-and-a-half hours War Council,

⁵⁴³ T. P. Conwell-Evans, *Foreign Policy from a Back Bench, 1904-1918: A Study Based on the Papers of Lord Noel Buxton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 88-115.

⁵⁴⁴ Here one must be cautious of trusting the 'Balkan Prophecies' produced by the Buxton Brothers. In British official circles, the Buxtons were known as strong pro-Bulgarian agitators who often interfered with official foreign policy through back-channels. Grey and most of the British Cabinet (except Churchill and Lloyd George) were utterly irritated by them for always meddling with the British government affairs, while bypassing the British Ambassador in Sofia, Sir Henry Bax-Ironside. About the Buxtons, Bax-Ironside laconically commented that "these amateur diplomatists are indeed kittle-cattle." TNA, FO 800/43/1, 69, Henry Bax-Ironside to William Terrell, 8 December 1912; Asquith went even further than his ambassador in Bulgaria, and lampooned Noel Buxton as an "an amiable nincompoop." Robbins, "British Diplomacy and Bulgaria, 1914-1915," 567.

⁵⁴⁵ Brock and Brock, *H. H. Asquith, Letters to Venetia Stanley*, 380-381.

Lloyd George, never afraid of a good challenge, even offered his expert services as a ‘British Ambassador Extraordinaire,’ who would go “to visit Russia & all the Balkan states, & try to bring them into line.”⁵⁴⁶ Asquith remarked that Grey was not impressed whatsoever with the suggestion and immediately shot it down. Thankfully, on that occasion, Asquith and Grey managed to restrain the Welsh Wizard’s ambassadorial aspirations and left such matters within the capable hands of his majesty’s veteran diplomatic personnel.

The various diplomatic initiatives reviewed above reflect the intense debates taking place in the British and French governments. In both Cabinets, these discussions reveal the existing malaise that some of the Allied decision-makers felt toward the Western Front’s impregnability, highlighting why these men continuously attempted to find a solution elsewhere. In London especially, the motivations that drove Churchill and Lloyd George to find another operational theater where British and Dominion troops could be better employed find their roots in the natural British unwillingness to fight a traditional ‘continental conflict.’ This disinclination to fight a typical land war played a non-negligible influence within certain British decision-makers and explained the Easterners versus Westerners’ debate. It is not our intention to revisit this hundred-year-old historiographical debate but situate it within this study’s context to demonstrate the various influences that it bore on the Allied conduct of military operations in the Balkan Peninsula. David French has convincingly demonstrated that the actual division between the primary decision-makers was not defined by the strategic divergences between Easterners and Westerners, but rather that,

This sharply defined division into two separate schools of thought was a caricature of the debate about war policy conducted within the British government between 1914 and 1916 and cannot be sustained by the evidence which is now available. It was created by the

⁵⁴⁶ Brock and Brock, *H. H. Asquith, Letters to Venetia Stanley*, 449.

memoirs and biographies of the participants which were published in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁴⁷

French is correct that the usual depictions of the Easterners versus Westerners debate have compelled some historians to inadequately interpret the more complex nature of the crucial discussions that took place during the war. However, it is also true that both Easterners and Westerners shared one common objective: Germany's defeat. Overall, both sides recognized the Western Front's importance, but the main differences between these two philosophies resided in the methods which had to be employed to attain this objective. Nonetheless, when reviewing both Haig and Robertson's official and private writings during the conflict, it is crystal clear that the Westerners' views these two men held were indeed crucial for Allied and British strategy. As David Woodward noted,

Both men believed, as Haig expressed it, that the war had 'to be won in London.' In other words, the high command must keep the strategic control of the war out of the hands of the civilians so that British resources would be mobilized and concentrated on the western front and the 'side shows' either limited or eliminated.⁵⁴⁸

Finally, nobody can truly comprehend some of the controversies over the Macedonian Campaign's inception without acknowledging the existence of an Easterner perspective. Moreover, this Easterner's perspective also entails that considerable Anglo-French military resources would be allocated away from Northern France and Belgium. This Easterners versus Westerners rift existed during World War I, even before it became consecrated in the Great War's infamous controversies. William Philpott confirmed that the easterners believed that with the current balance of forces between the protagonists, a decisive victory could not be won on the western front, and that until Russia had developed her overwhelming military strength on the eastern front the Central Powers could not be defeated. Therefore, while recognizing that the western front was the main front for

⁵⁴⁷ David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), x.

⁵⁴⁸ David Woodward, ed., *The Military Correspondence of Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, December 1915-February 1918* (London: Bodley Head for the Army Records Society, 1989), 312-313.

the Anglo-French armies, they argued that it was only necessary to hold this front in sufficient strength to prevent a German victory. At the start of 1915, they hoped to use military resources surplus to these requirements to diplomatic and military advantage elsewhere, to force the Dardanelles and open a warm water route to Russia, or to reinforce Serbia via Salonika.⁵⁴⁹ Easterners were convinced that the Entente had to turn up the heat against the Central Powers on other fronts, to force Germany to decrease its strength on the Western Front, “and that the Allies would only gain the military superiority required to drive the Germans from occupied France and Belgium after German strength in the West had been so reduced.”⁵⁵⁰ Embracing this Easterner’s philosophy, Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Leo Amery believed that the role of an Anglo-French contingent in Macedonia “should be that of Wellington’s Army in the Peninsula, to create a constant drain on the enemy’s resources, and only to attempt the advance on Belgrade when the enemy’s resistance has begun to crumble everywhere else.”⁵⁵¹

As explained earlier in this chapter, Allied decision-makers attached the greatest importance to attract the neutral Balkan states to the Entente before launching their expedition to Salonica. As is seen in the following pages, this quest for obtaining new allies remained arduous and ultimately unsuccessful. After the negotiations’ failure with the Ottoman Empire, both British and French diplomats sought the support of the remaining neutrals: Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania. However, in Greece, political instability and the personal conflict between Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and King Constantine further complicated an already murky situation to transform Allied negotiations with the Greek government into a duplicitous diplomatic

⁵⁴⁹ William J. Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-18* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 69.

⁵⁵⁰ William J. Philpott, “Kitchener and the 29th division: A study in Anglo-French strategic relations, 1914–1915,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 16, no. 3 (September 1993): 376.

⁵⁵¹ John Barnes and David Nicholson eds., *The Leo Amery Diaries*, vol. 1, 1896-1929 (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 122.

game in which the Greeks proved far superior to their British and French counterparts.

On 15 February 1915, when the British and French ambassadors to Greece confirmed to Venizelos their governments' intentions to land troops in Salonica, Venizelos immediately refused to accept their arrival, arguing that, based on his previous declarations, Greece would only join an Allied expedition, if Romania also participated in it. Venizelos' refusal stood as the perfect example of the Byzantine nature of Balkan diplomacy. A diplomacy involving a great deal of double-dealing and pretenses often complicated important discussions and frequently frustrated Allied diplomats. In February-March 1915, the British and French governments waited impatiently for the Greeks to officially join the fray on the Entente's side. However, the Greeks refused to join the Allies until the Romanians had officially committed themselves to this venture. Furthermore, the Russians also refused to countenance any Greek participation in the Allied venture to the Dardanelles as they feared Greek designs over Constantinople. Ronald Bobroff confirmed that, "The Russians were suspicious of any Greek military or naval activity that might provide them an opportunity to seize territory to which Russia staked religious claims but, more importantly, that would threaten Russia's sole control of the Straits."⁵⁵²

In turn, the Romanians, led by their elusive Prime Minister Ion Brătianu, invoked countless excuses to turn down the invitation. Some of the justifications Brătianu gave to the Allies were that his army lacked adequate weapons and ammunitions and therefore was not in a condition to fight (which in Fall 1916 proved correct, as Romania was crushed in less than three months), the state of Romanian public opinion, and finally, for good measure, that Romania could not join the

⁵⁵² Ronald P. Bobroff, *Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 138-139.

Allies if the Italians were not also part of the expedition.⁵⁵³

As Allied negotiators attempted to persuade Venizelos, they were simultaneously committed to another round of discussions with both the Bulgarian and Romanian governments. In exchange for their participation, both countries demanded territorial guarantees that the Allies could difficultly satisfy. On 1 October 1914, Romania signed a secret agreement with Russia. In exchange for its benevolent neutrality toward Russia during the ongoing conflict, it obtained the annexation of Transylvania after the Allied victory.⁵⁵⁴ Therefore, as Albert Pingaud pointed out, why would the Romanians risk the horrors of war when they could wait for an Allied victory that would deliver to them the irredentist Romanian lands part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire? To accept an alliance with the Entente, the Bulgarians simply demanded the whole of Macedonia and Thrace, which they had lost in 1913 during the Second Balkan War.⁵⁵⁵ These Bulgarian demands became central to the ongoing process of negotiations. Nonetheless, since Serbia was already fighting with Britain and France, Allied diplomats and ministers could not convince Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić to give back to Bulgaria the Macedonian lands for which so many Serbian soldiers had died during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913.

Meanwhile, as the Allies could not obtain the necessary diplomatic support to launch their operations in the Balkans, they decided instead to shift their focus to another project, the Dardanelles. The Dardanelles Expedition intended to force the straights and capture Constantinople, and its naval phase of the operations started on 19 February 1915 and was unsuccessfully pursued until March. This Anglo-French naval offensive failed but did not dissuade

⁵⁵³ Pingaud, *Histoire diplomatique de la France pendant la Grande Guerre*, 213; Albert Pingaud, "Le second ministère Venizelos (24 août-5 octobre 1915) et les origines de l'expédition de Salonique," *Revue d'Histoire de la Guerre Mondiale* (April 1934): 133.

⁵⁵⁴ This agreement was signed between Romanian Prime Minister Ion Brătianu and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov. Albert Pingaud, *Histoire diplomatique de la France pendant la Grande Guerre*, vol. 2, *Les alliances et les interventions* (Paris: Éditions Alsatia, 1940), 343.

⁵⁵⁵ Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient*, 15.

the two governments from persisting with this risky endeavor. On 25 April 1915, Anglo-French forces commanded by General Sir Ian Hamilton landed on the ANZAC and Cape Helles beaches. Rapidly and similarly to the Western Front, warfare on the Gallipoli Peninsula became static. Just like in Flanders and Northern France, soldiers from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACS), as well as their British and French comrades, started to dig. At Gallipoli, the Turks fought with great courage and tenacity and proved formidable foes for their Allies. Well-advised and supplied by their German allies, Ottoman soldiers fought the Allies to a ten-months standstill. This inextricable situation eventually convinced Allied planners to cut their losses, and in early January 1916, Allied forces discreetly evacuated Gallipoli. The Dardanelles Expedition had been rashly conceived, inadequately supplied, and truly mismanaged. It was an ambitious strategic operation that failed dramatically and was forever remembered as an abject *fasco*.

Before the inception of the Macedonian Campaign, the three Allies presented a severely disjointed diplomatic policy toward the regional powers. The British believed that no actions should be undertaken if Bulgaria was not first attached to the Entente. On the other hand, the French preferred to focus their efforts on Greece and Romania. The Russians played their hand freely and only thought of one objective: Constantinople. In March 1915, the Russians even secretly obtained from the British the promise that the city would become theirs after the war, thus presenting the French government with a *fait accompli*.⁵⁵⁶ The secret Treaty of London then officialized this *fait accompli* signed on 26 April 1915. This treaty recognized that Constantinople would become Russian and promised the cession of Dalmatia to Italy, which in exchange accepted to join the Entente and declare war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁵⁵⁷ The Treaty of London

⁵⁵⁶ Ribot, *Lettres à un ami*, 130.

⁵⁵⁷ Regarding Italian demands to enter the conflict on the Allies' side, see chapter 3, *La Dalmatie: le prix d'une alliance. Janvier-avril 1915* in Frédéric Le Moal, *La France et l'Italie dans les Balkans 1914-1919. Le contentieux adriatique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 67-93.

also highlighted the inconsistencies of Anglo-French diplomacy, especially when gaining Italian support for the Entente contradicted all the previous promises made to the Balkan nations in general and Serbia in particular. As C.J. Lowe confirmed,

The double necessity of conceding Constantinople to Russia in order to eliminate Sazonov's objections to Greek and Italian participation in a Balkan campaign and conceding Dalmatia to Italy to persuade her to come in, all but completely alienated the Balkan states.⁵⁵⁸

During the spring and summer of 1915, the British still endeavored to win Bulgaria over, even if it meant disregarding previous commitments made to the region's other countries. In July 1915, the British and French governments demanded that Greece and Serbia agree to cede all the territories that had been originally promised to Bulgaria before the beginning of the Balkan Wars. This less than adequate diplomatic *démarche* instantly alarmed Athens and Belgrade, as the Greeks and the Serbs became increasingly distrustful of the Western Allies. Simultaneously, the Russians also worked feverishly to convince Romania to commit itself to the Entente. By that time, the Russians who had suffered several defeats in Galicia against the German armies led by Field Marshal Mackensen could no longer extract a firm commitment from Bucharest. Desperate to rally the Romanians, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov caved to their demands and agreed to cede a large portion of the Bukovina (which at the time was a Russian province populated by a large Romanian community) as well as the whole Banat of Temesvar against the promise that within five weeks of the agreement between the two countries, the Romanians would enter the war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁵⁵⁹ Unfortunately for the Entente, the poor military outlook

⁵⁵⁸ C.J. Lowe, "The Failure of British Diplomacy in the Balkans," *Canadian Journal of History* 4, no.1 (March 1969): 83.

⁵⁵⁹ Regarding the long, acrimonious (and overall unfruitful) diplomatic negotiations that took place between Romanian and Russian diplomats, see, Glenn E. Torrey, "Rumania and the Belligerents 1914-1916," *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 3, 1914 (July 1966): 171-191; V. N. Vinogradov, "Romania in the First World War: The Years of Neutrality, 1914-1916," *The International History Review* 14, no. 3 (August 1992): 452-461.

for the Russian armies on the Eastern Front provided some additional excuses for Ion Brătianu to refuse to commit Romania in the war. Brătianu argued that the damaging delays in Allied arms and ammunition deliveries precluded his country from participating in the conflict. Hence why he could not fix a date for Romania's entry into the war.⁵⁶⁰ On 4 May 1915, the Greek government, through its ambassadors in London, Paris, and St. Petersburg, sent a *memorandum* to the Allied chancelleries that confirmed,

Greece had to retain her armed forces to protect herself against a possible attack from Bulgaria, but for now, she could put at the Allies' disposal, her war fleet and reserve them all amenities concerning the use of her ports and her territory.⁵⁶¹

For many historians, this declaration represents the famous blank check authorizing the Allied landing that took place only five months later. In September 1915, the idea for a Balkan expedition came back to the fore, as Allied statesmen became increasingly worried that their numerous efforts to attract Sofia had all but failed. They were proved correct when on 22 September 1915, Bulgaria declared general mobilization. The Bulgarian mobilization represented an abject failure for the Allied chancelleries, especially since Whitehall had desperately attempted to attract Bulgaria to the Entente for over a year. The French government, which since the beginning of negotiations with the various Balkan governments had accepted willy-nilly the British lead, decided that it was now time to free itself from this ineffective British *tutelage* and impose its views on the strategic direction of the Entente. Venizelos, who was brought back to power a few weeks before, feared an imminent Bulgarian attack. To bypass King Constantine's expected refusal to allow Greece to join the Entente, Venizelos secretly proposed to the Allies to send an expeditionary corps of 150,000 men to Salonica to force his monarch's hand.⁵⁶² This time around, the French government

⁵⁶⁰ Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient*, 17.

⁵⁶¹ Jacques Ancel, "L'Entente et la Grèce pendant la guerre mondiale: Les origines de l'expédition de Salonique," *Revue d'Histoire de la Guerre Mondiale* 9 (July 1931): 232.

⁵⁶² Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient*, 17.

acquiesced and pressured its British counterpart to accept the expedition's launch by withdrawing troops based in the Dardanelles.

However, on 29 September 1915, in an ill-advised speech at the House of Commons, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey reiterated that Great Britain held no unfriendly intentions toward Bulgaria. This speech immediately revived the Greek and Serbian mistrust of the Allies and again revealed the undeniable influence that a 'pro-Bulgarian lobby' exerted within Whitehall.⁵⁶³ The Greeks and the Serbs unmistakably believed that the British Foreign Office would not hesitate to sacrifice their national interests if it could rally Bulgaria. In France, some isolated cabinet members were still convinced that Sofia had to be appeased at all costs. Delcassé was ready to accept any Bulgarian demands, even if it meant sacrificing Greek and Serbian national stakes in the process. The French President Poincaré also confirmed that just like Joffre and Millerand, "Delcassé preferred that we renounce a diversion in the East and that we should seek a decision on the Western Front."⁵⁶⁴ By echoing this Westerner's opinion, Delcassé simply acted as Joffre's mouthpiece. Naturally, GQG and Joffre were strictly opposed to withdrawing any French divisions from the Western Front to supply troops for the Balkans.

On 4 October 1915, Eleftherios Venizelos convinced the Greek parliament to apply the Greek-Serbian Convention of 1 June 1913, which had ratified mutual military assistance between Greece and Serbia in case of Bulgarian aggression against any of the two countries. The next day, Bulgaria officially declared war on Serbia. When the first soldiers of the French Second Division of the Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient (CEO) commanded by General Maurice Bailloud landed in

⁵⁶³ It must be noted that when Grey tried another time to 'play nice' to the Bulgarians, the latter had already started their general mobilization for an entire week.

⁵⁶⁴ Raymond Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège, 1915* (Paris: Plon, 1931), 158.

Salonica, King Constantine fired Venizelos.⁵⁶⁵ This type of incident was just one of the many twists and turns that characterized the Macedonian Campaign's origins. At the same time, when the Serbian army was trying to fend off a convergent offensive from the Austro-Hungarians, the Germans, and the Bulgarians (which collectively held a decisive numerical superiority), the first Allied contingents arrived in Macedonia. The military crisis that befell the Serbian army epitomized the Allied diplomacy's dysfunctional nature in the Balkans. For most of 1915, the Serbian diplomats and soldiers had repeatedly warned London and Paris of the grave military threat that Bulgaria posed to Serbia. They mentioned several times the likelihood of Sofia's imminent intervention alongside the Central Powers but to no avail. Overall, the Entente's diplomacy followed an inefficient policy that attempted to attract all the regional powers that were not yet committed to hostilities but eventually gained none, thus heavily impacting the war's progress.⁵⁶⁶

The Entente's first fundamental error was to believe that Bulgaria, supposedly linked to Russia by ties of Slavonic solidarity, would join the Entente and repudiate its avowed and well-advertised war aims, which were to reconquer Macedonia.⁵⁶⁷ The Allied chancelleries' second essential error was to ignore all the warnings that throughout 1915, Belgrade repeatedly sent to London and Paris about Bulgaria's dubious neutrality and the threat its armies exerted against Serbia. Bizarrely, a great number of Allied diplomats and decision-makers completely missed Serbia's overall strategic importance within the war's general context. They did not foresee that a

⁵⁶⁵ General Maurice Bailloud commanded the *Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient* (CEO) in the Dardanelles between 1 July and 4 October 1915, when the first French troops landed in Salonica. He was then replaced by Sarraïl who became the new commander-in-chief of the Armée d'Orient (AO). Bailloud's military record is held at the Château de Vincennes by the Service historique de la Défense, SHD, 9 YD 336.

⁵⁶⁶ General Fernand Gambiez and Colonel Maurice Jean Suire, *Histoire de la Première Guerre Mondiale*, vol. 1 (Paris: Fayard, 1968), 355.

⁵⁶⁷ Regarding the bungled Allied diplomatic efforts in the Balkans, especially toward Bulgaria and Greece, see, Gabriel Deville, *L'Entente, la Grèce et la Bulgarie. Notes d'histoire et souvenirs* (Paris: Eugène Figuière, 1919).

Serbian defeat would open the vital corridor between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. “Delcassé’s resignation on 13 October 1915 represented the symptomatic conclusion for these abysmal failures and led to a radical modification of French policy in the region.”⁵⁶⁸ Finally, the Macedonian Campaign started precipitously, without any serious examination of its potential success and any sufficient preparation. Here one must be forgiven for thinking that the Allies had learned nothing from Gallipoli and simply repeated the very same mistake in Salonica. The Macedonian Campaign started upon the insistence of the French government to provide military assistance to Serbia. Still, in this instance, the French government did not even consider the reluctance expressed by GQG, which at the same time was completely absorbed by the French army’s offensive that had started in September 1915 in Champagne. In any case, GQG did not entertain any serious hopes for this far-away venture, which it considered not only pointless but also wasteful of precious military manpower and material. However, the belated decision to send French troops to Macedonia was not only based on military imperatives. Undeniable French political considerations played a considerable role in the campaign’s inception, more precisely, an incident that has been since remembered as *l’affaire Sarrail*.

⁵⁶⁸ Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient*, 18.

CHAPTER 8

L'AFFAIRE SARRAIL

Sarrail is a wrong'un I should say. Too much of the politician about him.

General Sir William Robertson
to Lieutenant-General Sir Bryan Thomas Mahon,
6 March 1916.

In the first days of October 1915, as the British and French leaders hurriedly dispatched Allied troops to rescue the Serbian army under attack from the Central Powers, a powerful French general also set sail from Marseille to Salonica to command this Allied contingent. This man was without a doubt one of the most controversial and intriguing French military figures of the Great War, the mercurial Maurice Sarrail. His nomination as the new Commander-in-Chief (CIC) of the Anglo-French troops that were slowly arriving in Macedonia constitutes one of the main reasons why this campaign started in the first place. To untangle the web of this French political episode, it is necessary to go back to the Western Front during the first half of 1915. Here, a description of the events that led General Joseph Joffre to dismiss General Maurice Sarrail from his Third Army command illuminate the *affaire* Sarrail's complexity in the French political landscape while illustrating its crucial consequences on the Macedonian Campaign.

Therefore, it is imperative to replace Sarrail's command within the early stalemate that had gripped the Western Front. Sarrail commanded the French Third Army, which was part of the Groupe d'armées de l'Est (GAE), or Eastern Army Group under General Augustin Dubail. Sarrail's Third Army held the line between the Aisne and the Meuse and was centered on the Argonne Forest, specifically around the villages of Vauquois, Boureuilles, Le Four de Paris, and La Harazée. In 1915, this section of the Western Front saw some of the most savage combat between the French and German armies. Even by Western Front's standards, this sector gained the unenviable reputation of being a real killing ground. Hence why Sarrail had rapidly "recognized

the futility of undertaking an offensive in the impassable Argonne, he only initiated an offensive when ordered to do so by the Grand Quartier Général (GQG) or when it was necessary to respond to an unusually severe enemy attack.”⁵⁶⁹ In February-March 1915, the 15th Colonial Division attacked northward and, in ferocious hand-to-hand combats, captured most of Vauquois.⁵⁷⁰ Eliminating German defenses in Vauquois was a sound operational decision, as it allowed the French army to control the crucial Sainte-Ménehould-Verdun railroad. Because from that moment on, the town could no longer be used as a concentration zone for German reserves directed toward the Champagne region.

However, this operational success did not last long. On 20 June 1915, Sarrail’s direct opponent, the Crown Prince Wilhelm, and his Fifth German Army directed a very intense artillery bombardment on the positions held by General Émile Duchêsne’s XXXII Corps d’armée (CA). Ten days later, German troops captured the first French defensive positions at La Harazée and inflicted heavy casualties on Duchêsne’s corps.⁵⁷¹ Sarrail responded to this German gain by planning a counter-offensive asking Duchêsne’s XXXII CA to attack north of Le Four de Paris. At the same time, V CA in the Eastern Argonne and 15th Colonial Division and XV CA in the Western Argonne would also support Duchêsne’s men. Sarrail’s objective was to reconquer the crests located east of the Binarville-La Harazée road, which offered excellent observation points of the enemy lines. On 13 July, a day before Sarrail’s offensive was about to start, the Germans

⁵⁶⁹ Jan Karl Tanenbaum, *General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929: The French Army and Left-Wing Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), 51.

⁵⁷⁰ For first-hand testimonies describing the ferocious fighting that took place at Vauquois in 1914-1915, see the memoirs from two officers, Sous-lieutenant Georges Boucheron, *L'Assaut: l'Argonne et Vauquois avec la 10e division, 1914-1915* (Paris: Perrin, 1917); and Lieutenant André Pézard, *Nous autres à Vauquois, 1915-1916, 46e R.I.* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1918).

⁵⁷¹ Tanenbaum, *General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929*, 51. Here it is important to not mistake General Émile Duchêsne (1869-1946), with the highly unpopular, brutal, and ineffective General Denis Duchêsne (1862-1950), who during the 1918 Spring German Offensives, and following his disastrous performance on the Chemin des Dames was rapidly sacked by Pétain. For Émile Duchêsne’s personal military record, see SHD, 13 YD 1071, for Denis Duchêsne, see SHD, 9 YD 659.

again seized the initiative and attacked V CA. The German attack's violence and speed surprised the French troops, and V Corps lost 400 yards of trenches along a 2,500-yard front while incurring severe casualties in the process. The German troops gained a valuable operational success as they took Hill 286, which was situated two miles southwest of Boureuilles. The following day, V and XXXII CA attempted to regain Hill 286 but failed in their endeavor and only sustained more heavy casualties. Hill 286 was still firmly in German hands.⁵⁷²

Sarrail's failure to retake the hill, and regain the lost ground, constitutes the spark for this whole *règlement de comptes* [settling of accounts] between him and Joffre. On 16 July 1915, Joffre ordered Sarrail's superior, General Dubail, to immediately investigate the Third Army's unsuccessful offensives of 30 June and 13-14 July. Here, one can certainly appreciate Joffre's political flair as he chose Dubail, who was known to be "a staunch Republican and a favorite of the Political Left in very much the same way that Sarrail was."⁵⁷³ As George Cassar remarked, "Joffre calculated that in case Dubail made an unfavorable report against Sarrail, the radical and socialist elements in the French Parliament could not claim that his removal was due to political pressure."⁵⁷⁴ On 20 July, Dubail forwarded his report to Joffre, and crucially for our understanding of this affair, his report was excessively equivocal. In it, Dubail disapproved of Sarrail's use of second-line troops on 30 June and 14 July and explained that on 30 June, if five or six reserve battalions would have bolstered the XXXII CA, "the consequences might have been very great."⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷² For more details about the French Third Army operations in 1915, see Chapter V in Ministère de la Guerre, État-major de l'armée, Service historique, *Les armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre*, Tome III, *Les offensives de 1915. L'hiver 1915-1916 (1er mai 1915 - 21 février 1916)* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1928), 196-207. [hereafter abbreviated to AFGG]; also, see Sarrail's recollections in General Maurice Sarrail, "Souvenirs de 1914-1915," *Revue politique et parlementaire* 108, no. 321 (August 1921): 221-247; and Alfred Tannant, *La Troisième Armée dans la bataille: souvenirs d'un chef d'état-major* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1922), 172-196.

⁵⁷³ David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 37.

⁵⁷⁴ George H. Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles. A Study of Failure in the Conduct of War* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 155.

⁵⁷⁵ Tanenbaum, *General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929*, 52.

However, Dubail also confirmed that the German attack on 13 July was stopped because Sarrail had promptly provided reinforcements to the V CA with a reserve brigade. Until this point, Dubail's report does not seem to warrant the punishment that Joffre later meted on Sarrail. The second part of Dubail's report dealt with the prevailing morale of the Third Army. Dubail recognized that as an army commander Sarrail was respected by most of his corps and division subalterns. However, Dubail also pointed out that some tensions persisted between Sarrail and some of his generals. These existing tensions led Dubail to recommend that Sarrail be relieved of his army command and demoted to a lower rank.⁵⁷⁶

On Tuesday 20 July, during a Council of Ministers, Viviani read a long letter that Alfred Margaine, deputy of the Marne, had sent him. In this letter, Margaine complained bitterly that Sarrail the 'Republican General' was molested by GQG and that the troops that Sarrail had required for an offensive action had been denied to him."⁵⁷⁷ On 22 July 1915, despite Margaine's fervent plea, Joffre did not waste any time and followed Dubail's recommendations to remove Sarrail from his Third Army command. Joffre also indicated that he was prepared to give Sarrail an army corps command unless the government had other projects it would like to entrust to Sarrail. Joffre's pronouncement makes us believe that he was not averse to the idea of seeing Sarrail being exiled to some distant theater.⁵⁷⁸ In his memoirs, Joffre later claimed that the decision to relieve Sarrail of his command "was taken uniquely for military reasons."⁵⁷⁹ Despite Joffre's

⁵⁷⁶ Marshal Joseph Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre (1910-1917)*, vol. 2 (Paris: Plon, 1932), 109-120; the reader must know that the version of Dubail's report reproduced in Joffre's Memoirs is *conspicuously* [italics added by the author] more accusatory than the version which can be found in the French army archives in the Fonds Joffre 14N 1. After carefully reviewing both versions, very little doubt subsists that the version presented in Joffre's Memoirs had been altered to pursue his personal Vendetta against Sarrail. Finally, it is also worthy to mention that although Joffre professed to not be affected by the *affaire* Sarrail, he nevertheless dedicated a whole chapter to give 'his own version.'

⁵⁷⁷ No doubt, who informed Margaine of GQG's heavy-handed tactics toward Sarrail. Raymond Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 6, *Les tranchées, 1915* (Paris: Plon, 1930), 332.

⁵⁷⁸ Émile Herbillon, *Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison pendant la guerre mondiale*, vol. 1, *Du général en chef au gouvernement* (Paris: Tallandier, 1930), 170.

⁵⁷⁹ Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre (1910-1917)*, 121.

paltry excuse, it is extremely difficult to believe in his good faith and to accept that Sarrail's removal was based solely on military motives, as he so disingenuously pretends. Abel Ferry, one of the most informed and vocal critics of GQG, remarked that "Joffre's decision was simply a manifestation of spite and that his original letter to Dubail had already dictated the response he expected."⁵⁸⁰ Ferry's opinion was echoed by Marcel Sembat, who, during the Council of Ministers of 22 July 1915, commented that "there was a discrepancy between Dubail's report and the severe conclusions that Joffre had formulated from it."⁵⁸¹ Finance Minister Alexandre Ribot seconded Sembat's opinion when he declared that it "was unfair to get Sarrail sacked for his latest reverse in the Argonne when no other generals had been punished for similar failures to break through around Arras."⁵⁸² However, during the following heated discussions, the cabinet members ultimately refrained from challenging Joffre since they knew too well that the latter always used the ultimate threat of his resignation to nip in the bud any vocal opposition that might prove dangerous to his position as CIC of the French armies. During this cabinet meeting, Dubail's idea to provide a command to Sarrail in Lorraine was mentioned. Briand shot it down immediately by stating that providing such a command to an angry Sarrail would only worsen the already explosive situation and create a center of renewed agitation around him.⁵⁸³ Several cabinet members believed that Joffre probably desired to see Sarrail gone to the Dardanelles and therefore decided to ask the former for his opinion on the idea. Their suggestion was motivated by the serious injury that General Henri Gouraud, CIC of the Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient (CEO) at Gallipoli, had recently sustained, and which called for his rapid replacement.⁵⁸⁴ These serious discussions in the

⁵⁸⁰ Abel Ferry, *Carnets secrets, 1914-1918* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1957), 100.

⁵⁸¹ Ferry, *Carnets secrets, 1914-1918*, 100.

⁵⁸² Martin E. Schmidt, *Alexandre Ribot: Odyssey of a Liberal in the Third Republic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 142.

⁵⁸³ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 6, *Les tranchées, 1915*, 336-337.

⁵⁸⁴ On 30 June 1915, as Gouraud was visiting wounded French soldiers, he was hit by a Turkish shell. Gouraud was severely wounded and became one of the 3, 595,000 French officers and soldiers counted as casualties during World

French Cabinet outline the interconnection between military and political factors in high-ranking army command nominations. Abel Ferry mentioned that from of all the persons at this meeting, only Poincaré remained above this partisan pettiness.⁵⁸⁵ Two days after this tense cabinet meeting, the British were already informed of the infighting taking place at the highest level of the French government. The Chief of the British Military Mission to GQG, Lieutenant-Colonel John Yarde-Buller, reported to Kitchener that Briand only tried to support Sarrail to gain the Radical Socialists' sympathies and take over René Viviani's job to become France's new Prime Minister.⁵⁸⁶ Notwithstanding Dubail's recent report, GQG was aware that in Sarrail's Third Army, his relationships toward his subordinates were predicated upon dubious personal practices. Émile Herbillon, who personally knew most of the high-ranking French commanders, noted that "Sarrail seemed to assess a man's value less on the basis of his military prowess than on the radicalism of his politics."⁵⁸⁷ In line with Sarrail's apparent failures, it is useful to review the official casualty list closer for the period of 20 June to 20 July 1915:

Table 4: Losses suffered by the Third Army between 20 June and 20 July 1915.

Army Corps	Officers			Soldiers			Totals
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Killed	Wounded	Missing	
32e CA	80	199	50	1,552	10,020	4,040	15,941
5e CA	36	74	118	921	3,723	5,608	10,480
15e CA	17	64	15	668	3,459	1,761	5,984
Totals	133	337	183	3,141	17,202	11,409	32,405

Source: AFGG, Tome III, *Les offensives de 1915. L'hiver 1915-1916*, 206.

War I. François Cochet and Rémy Porte, eds., *Dictionnaire de la Grande Guerre 1914-1918* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2008), 139-140; Gouraud was among the 60, 873 Allied soldiers and 2,161 officers who were wounded during the *fiasco* of the Dardanelles between 25 April and 1 July 1915. MAE, PA AP 399, C35—D2, quoted in Julie Dandurain, "Le général Gouraud, chef du Corps Expéditionnaire des Dardanelles en 1915," *Revue historique des armées* 258 (2010): 50; also, Marie-Alphonse Desmazes, *L'expédition des Dardanelles* (Paris: École Supérieure de Guerre, 1925), 137; On the morning of 2 July 1915, on board of the French Hospital ship *Tchad*, Gouraud was amputated of his right arm. Julie Dandurain, "Le général Gouraud, un colonial dans la Grande Guerre," (PhD diss., Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 2009), 239-250.

⁵⁸⁵ Ferry, *Carnets secrets, 1914-1918*, 101; about President Raymond Poincaré, and his leadership during the entire conflict, see two great biographies by John F. Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); François Roth, *Raymond Poincaré: un homme d'état républicain* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

⁵⁸⁶ TNA, WO 159/11/12, Yarde-Buller to Kitchener, 24 July 1915.

⁵⁸⁷ Herbillon, *Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison pendant la guerre mondiale*, vol. 1, 166.

When Third Army's 32,000 total casualties (3,274 killed, 17,539 wounded, and 11,592 missing) are reviewed, they were much lower than the losses that General Ferdinand Foch, who commanded the Groupe Provisoire du Nord (GPN) [Provisional Army Group North], and Tenth Army Commander General Victor d'Urbal, suffered in May-June 1915 during the Second Battle of Artois. In Artois, and during a grueling slugfest with the German army, Foch and d'Urbal lost over 100,000 total casualties.⁵⁸⁸ In the winter of 1914, during the First Champagne Offensive (December 1914-March 1915), or during the Second Battle of Artois, French losses of human life had been much higher than Sarrail's in Argonne. Hence why it is exceedingly difficult to fathom why Joffre went after Sarrail with so much fury. Furthermore, when one studies the summary presented in the French official history, Sarrail's failures appear in a completely different light. Thus, it is useful to relate this summary's findings, not to exonerate Sarrail, who indeed had committed some faults (principally his reliance on poorly built defensive positions) but rather to highlight that his failures were not so much different from the ones that other French army commanders also experienced on different sectors of the Western Front. Here is what the official history concluded regarding Third Army Operations in June-July 1915,

Our material losses are also noticeable: two 65-mm guns, one 37-mm gun, fifty machine-guns, many mortars and grenade-launchers, and a great quantity of ammunition. During this month of non-stop fighting, our divisions, although already very tired before the beginning of this large-scale German attack, have fought with the greatest courage and an absolutely selfless spirit of sacrifice. In the Third Army Commander's opinion, everyone did his duty. Nevertheless, the Germans have won some serious local successes, which have provoked, in turn, a considerable weariness in our troops and sapped their morale.⁵⁸⁹

The second part of the official history's conclusion about the mid-1915's operations in the

⁵⁸⁸ The *Groupe Provisoire du Nord* (GPN), later became the *Groupe d'Armées du Nord* (GAN), or Northern Army Group. Jonathan Krause, *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army. The Second Battle of Artois, May-June 1915* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 8; the French Official History confirms that for the Second Battle of Artois, Tenth Army losses were: 35,008 killed, 65,062 wounded, 2,430 POW. Chapter 2, *The Second Battle of Artois (9 May-18 June 1915)*, AFGG, Tome III, *Les offensives de 1915. L'hiver 1915-1916*, 101.

⁵⁸⁹ AFGG, Tome III, *Les offensives de 1915. L'hiver 1915-1916*, 207.

Argonne presents an even more revealing explanation on why Sarrail and his army had suffered local setbacks,

Our failures are due without any doubt, to the enormous superiority of material means put in place by our adversaries. Through some special projectiles that have been fired *en masse*, the Germans have produced some real patches of asphyxiating gases against which our means of protection are insufficient, which prevents us from positioning our troops within a 200 to 300 meters radius of the bombardment. The enemy's heavy artillery is far superior to ours; it is the same with trench artillery. Our 58-mm guns are "Toys compared with the latest Minenwerfer which fire 50 kilos of explosive, and whose fire is so precise that, in the latest moments that precede the attack, they systematically destroy whatever is left standing in our works." Besides, on 30 June, our artillery could not provide efficient support to the infantry due to a lack of ammunition. Finally, in the Argonne, our defensive organization was, to some extent, very insufficient.⁵⁹⁰

Except for the well-noted observation that highlighted the insufficient defensive positions, which were not always falling under Sarrail's direct responsibility (Army Corps and divisional commanders were primarily charged with supervising their own units' defensive works), it is thus difficult to attribute Sarrail such irrefutable motives for his supposed military incompetence. In our opinion, Sarrail had been simply overwhelmed by the German army's artillery superiority in heavy guns and its marked dominance in chemical warfare.⁵⁹¹ The Head of the British Military Mission at the French Headquarters reported to Kitchener that apparently, Sarrail had omitted to report the loss of a few trenches and that he did so because he hoped to regain them before his deception could be uncovered.⁵⁹² Some French authors argue that Sarrail's removal was motivated

⁵⁹⁰ AFGG, Tome III, *Les offensives de 1915. L'hiver 1915-1916*, 207; Elizabeth Greenhalgh indicated that the Germans had methodically obliterated French defenses by "using gas shells and Minenwerfer to destroy all French front-line defences and blew up Blockhouses with mines." Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014), 80.

⁵⁹¹ Regarding the use of chemical warfare, see, Olivier Lepick, *La Grande Guerre chimique: 1914-1918* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998); Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1999); Albert Palazzo, *Seeking Victory on the Western Front: The British Army and Chemical Warfare in World War I* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Ludwig Fritz Haber, *The Poisonous Cloud: Chemical Warfare in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Michael Freemantle, *Gas! Gas! Quick Boys! How Chemistry Changed the First World War* (Stroud: The History Press, 2011).

⁵⁹² TNA, WO 159/11/18, Yarde-Buller to Kitchener, 26 July 1915.

by other subjective factors.⁵⁹³ It is true that between 2 August and 31 December 1914, General Joffre fired (or as the French said at the time, *limoger*) 162 generals or colonels acting as Brigadier-Generals. However, in July 1915, Sarrail's dismissal responded to very different motivations.⁵⁹⁴ Joffre's controversial decision was not motivated by military factors but rather by political reasons.

Without any doubt, these political reasons are responsible for Sarrail's nomination as the future Allied commander in Salonica and provide the rationale why the campaign had to begin in earnest without any serious considerations of its potential impact on the strategic conduct of the war. On 22 July 1915, when Joffre decided to get rid of Sarrail and replace him with General Georges Humbert, he initiated a series of events that took an unprecedented turn for him, Sarrail, and the Allied conduct of the war. Sarrail's fall from grace instantly provoked a profound political crisis. This crisis must be reviewed against the backdrop of Joffre and Sarrail's mutual antipathy. Sarrail was despised by 'the Young Turks' who worked at GQG, and in turn, he certainly reciprocated. In 1921, Sarrail unambiguously explained what he thought of GQG, "The GQG and its followers on the corps' staffs knew what I thought of their way of doing things and of their

⁵⁹³ Paul Allard, *L'oreille fendue: les généraux limogés pendant la guerre* (Paris: Les éditions de France, 1939), 97-100; Colonel Alexandre who at the end of 1915 was sent by GQG as a liaison officer to the *Armée d'Orient's* headquarters observed that Sarrail's hatred for Joffre continued unabated. General Georges-René Alexandre, *Avec Joffre d'Agadir à Verdun* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1932), 230.

⁵⁹⁴ The word *limogeage* and the adjective *limogé* both find their origins during the first months of the war in 1914, especially during the Battle of the Frontiers and the Battle of the Marne, when Joffre suddenly fired many 'incompetent generals' and sent them to the 12th military region which was based on the city of Limoges. Curiously, this word which was invented in 1914, is still part of the modern French lexicon. For more details about Joffre's numerous *limogeages*, see the contemporary critique presented by General Alexandre Percin, *1914, les erreurs du haut commandement* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1920); also, Pierre Rocolle, *L'hécatombe des généraux* (Paris: Lavauzelle, 1980); Pierre Miquel implies that some of Joffre's *limogeages* were not always fair, nor justified and were based more on personal preferences or enmities, than on a purely logic and impartial military assessment, Pierre Miquel, *Le gâchis des généraux: les erreurs de commandement pendant la Guerre de 14-18* (Paris: Plon, 2001); similarly, and later during the war, General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-chief of the American expeditionary Force (AEF) also fired several generals that he deemed under-performing, they were subsequently sent to Blois. Or in an American version of the French word *limogé*, they were blooeyed. Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers who defeated Germany in World War I* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2018), 330/448; another historian also detailed what it meant to be 'Blooey,' see, Richard S. Faulkner, "Gone Blooey": Pershing's System for Addressing Officer Incompetence and Inefficiency," *Army History*, no. 95 (Spring 2015): 6-25.

military capabilities; they have no confidence in me...and for my part, could have no confidence in them.”⁵⁹⁵

The crisis ignited by Joffre’s decision was amplified by the French Left in Parliament, which essentially regarded Sarrail as their champion within the highest spheres of French military hierarchy. Therefore, any attack against him was perceived as an attack against them. As soon as the news of Sarrail’s dismissal was official, his political partisans immediately created unrest through the media and public opinion. The newspaper *Le Radical* promptly published an article criticizing GQG’s decision; however, the article was never printed due to ruthless press censorship.⁵⁹⁶ Joffre’s *liaison* officer at the War Ministry was rapidly appraised of how much furor Sarrail’s dismissal provoked. He commented, “Sarrail is a symbol...he shouldn’t have been touched. To deprive him of his command is to slap parliament in the face by striking out the only republican general.”⁵⁹⁷ Yarde-Buller informed Kitchener that “Sarrail is a dangerous man, and that it is likely that he would orchestrate a political campaign against Joffre and Millerand.”⁵⁹⁸ Yarde-Buller was right, and Millerand was subjected to very heavy criticism from the Radicals and Socialists. Sir Francis Bertie, British Ambassador to Paris, rejoined Yarde-Buller when he wrote in his diary that “The Left of the Chamber are “going for” Millerand. There is even a talk amongst the Rue de Valois lot of deputing a Commissary to watch the Army: a return to the days of the Convention.”⁵⁹⁹ Nevertheless, since Joffre had smartly selected Dubail to investigate Sarrail, the Radicals and Socialists were unable to get Millerand’s head.⁶⁰⁰ To appease the French Left that went after Joffre and Millerand, the government attempted to compensate Sarrail for the loss of

⁵⁹⁵ Tanenbaum, *General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929*, 53.

⁵⁹⁶ SHD, 5 N 364, article censuré.

⁵⁹⁷ Herbillon, *Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison pendant la guerre mondiale*, vol. 1, 170.

⁵⁹⁸ TNA, WO 159/11/13, Yarde-Buller to Kitchener, 26 July 1915.

⁵⁹⁹ Mayard Gordon-Lennox, *The Diary of Lord Bertie of Thame, 1914-1918*, vol. 1, 204.

⁶⁰⁰ TNA, FO 800/58, Bertie to Grey, 27 July 1915.

his army command and offered him a new position in the East.⁶⁰¹

On 23 July 1915, during an extremely tense interview with Millerand and Viviani, Sarrail categorically refused to accept what he considered a personal humiliation. Since he previously commanded an army, it was out of the question to be downgraded to an army corps command. He confirmed that he would rather retire from the army and enjoy his retirement in Montauban rather than serve in an inferior position.⁶⁰² Following this discussion, where Millerand and Viviani could not convince Sarrail to accept a lower-ranking command, the political crisis continued unabated. On 24 July 1915, “the Council of Ministers was informed that Joffre would not be against the idea of allowing Sarrail to take over the command of the CEO in the Dardanelles.”⁶⁰³ Yet, under heavy political pressure, the government (thus implicitly recognizing its weakness) requested Sarrail to attend another meeting on 3 August 1915. Before that meeting took place, Albert Sarrault, who was Minister of Public Instruction, and one of Sarrail’s political friends, was hurriedly dispatched to plead with the troublesome general to finally accommodate the government and accept the overall command in the Dardanelles.⁶⁰⁴ Sensing that desperation was now spreading in the cabinet’s ranks, Sarrail patiently waited for his next meeting with Millerand on 3 August.

On that day, Millerand, no doubt caving to the pressures that Sarrail’s political partisans had exerted upon him and the government, asked Sarrail what his wishes were to accept a new position in the East. Millerand also warned Sarrail that should he chose to turn down this last offer, he would be ‘retired’ to Montauban, where he was to remain quiet. Undeterred by Millerand’s ultimate threat, Sarrail posed three conditions: First, he asked to receive the command of an army

⁶⁰¹ Gérard Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient (Octobre 1915-novembre 1918)* (Paris: Economica, 2003), 19.

⁶⁰² On 30 August 1914, a few days before the gigantic Battle of the Marne began, Joffre personally visited Sarrail to ask him to take over Third Army command in the place of General Pierre Ruffey, who like many other generals in August-September 1914 had been *limogé* for his perceived military incompetence. General Maurice Sarrail, ‘‘Souvenirs de 1914-1915,’’ *Revue politique et parlementaire* 107, no. 318 (May 1921): 174-176.

⁶⁰³ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 6, *Les tranchées, 1915*, 341.

⁶⁰⁴ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 6, *Les tranchées, 1915*, 342.

whose official title he specifically requested to be l'Armée d'Orient (AO) [Army of the East].⁶⁰⁵ Second, he refused to serve under any British commanders as his previous colleagues Generals Albert d'Amade, Henri Gouraud, and Maurice Bailloud, had all been forced to do in Gallipoli. Sarrail insisted that IF [capitalization added by the author] he accepted to go to Gallipoli, his command had to be completely independent of General Sir Ian Hamilton. Third, he only accepted to sail to Gallipoli or Salonica with the new French divisions earmarked for this expedition.⁶⁰⁶

In his memoirs, Sarrail confirmed that his last two demands created new headaches for Millerand and Viviani, but he did not budge and eventually got his way. Sarrail also confirmed that he would have never received neither men nor material had he accepted to leave alone. Sarrail operated from a strong position where he more than held himself against Millerand and Joffre. By the end of this second meeting, an excessively irritated Millerand, who no doubt realized that Sarrail and his supporters were forcing him to accept a very hard bargain, could no longer hide his frustration, and exploded, he told Sarrail, "Si vous vous imaginez que je vais vous laisser à Paris jusqu'au 15 septembre!" [If you imagine that I am going to leave you in Paris until 15 September!].⁶⁰⁷ It is then relatively simple to understand why Millerand so desperately wanted to ship Sarrail to Gallipoli. Sarrail knew perfectly well that he commanded tremendous political backing, hence why he acted so defiantly with what must have been a stone-faced Millerand. Since Sarrail also obviously knew that Millerand acted as Joffre's henchman in the cabinet, he must have

⁶⁰⁵ The reason for Sarrail's choice, "can be traced back to two previous French Expeditionary Corps that fought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. General Napoleon Bonaparte created the first 'Army of the Orient' during the Egyptian Expedition of 1798-1801, the second 'Army of the Orient' represented the French forces sent to the Crimean War of 1853-1856." Kevin Broucke, "Perceptions and realities of the Mediterranean East: French soldiers and the Macedonian Campaign of the First World War," *British Journal for Military History* 7, no. 1 (March 2021): 120; for the French Expedition to Egypt, see, Juan Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt: The Greatest Glory* (London: J. Cape, 2007); Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *La campagne d'Égypte* (Paris: Belin, 2018).

⁶⁰⁶ General Maurice Sarrail, *Mon Commandement en Orient 1916-1918* (Paris: Flammarion, 1920), viii.

⁶⁰⁷ Sarrail, *Mon Commandement en Orient 1916-1918*, ix.

thoroughly enjoyed imposing his terms to Millerand, and by the same token, defying his greatest rival Joffre.

What remains quite shocking in this incredible military-political hodge-podge is that even in wartime, the French government was completely unable to assert its authority against the Assemblée nationale or the Sénat and had to compromise with both. The *Union Sacrée* [sacred union] that had been forged in the early hours of August 1914 had certainly ceased to exist.⁶⁰⁸ At the time of the *affaire* Sarrail, the French Cabinet faced tremendous pressure from the Left and was forced to accept the Sarrail's *ultimatum* and provide him with the position he wanted, on the terms he dictated.⁶⁰⁹ As a military observer stated, "Sarrail was the most politically powerful general in France and was certainly a contender for Joffre's position."⁶¹⁰ Joffre was perfectly aware that in March and June 1915, two anonymous *memorandum* chastised him for his lack of imagination and lackluster leadership and demanded that Sarrail replace him as the new Commander-in-chief of the French armies had been widely distributed within the most influential Socialists and Radicals in parliament.⁶¹¹

By the end of March 1915, Sarrail, who was in regular communication with President Poincaré, protested vehemently about Joffre and GQG, who drowned him under a deluge of orders and counter-orders.⁶¹² This war of attrition between Joffre and Sarrail persisted without respite. In

⁶⁰⁸ Regarding the *union sacrée*, see Jean-Jacques Becker, "L'union sacrée, l'exception qui confirme la règle," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 5 (January-March 1985): 111-122.

⁶⁰⁹ About the acrimonious relationships between the French Government, military commanders, and Parliament, see Pierre Renouvin, *Les formes du gouvernement de guerre* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1927); Fabienne Bock, *Un parlementarisme de guerre : 1914-1919* (Paris : Belin, 2002); for a detailed overview of the French army's high-level promotion system, see, Guy Pedroncini, "Remarques sur la décision militaire en France pendant la Grande Guerre," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 20, no. 1 (January - March 1973): 139-152.

⁶¹⁰ Émile Mayer, *Nos chefs de 1914 : souvenirs personnels et essais de psychologie militaire* (Paris: Stock, 1930), 278-279.

⁶¹¹ Gabriel Terrail, *Joffre. La première crise du commandement (novembre 1915 - décembre 1916)* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1919), 48-59; Jere Clemens King, *Generals and Politicians: Conflict between France's High Command, Parliament and Government, 1914-1918* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1951), 68-69.

⁶¹² Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 6, *Les tranchées, 1915*, 137.

June 1915, Deputy for the Marne, Alfred Margaine (one of Sarrail's parliamentary pals) pleaded with President Poincaré to remove Joffre as CIC of the French armies and replace him with Sarrail.⁶¹³ Finally, Joffre certainly did not ignore that during the first six months of 1915, several prominent left-wing politicians often visited Third Army Headquarters in Sainte-Ménéhould.⁶¹⁴ Once all these political events are considered, it is no longer a mystery why Joffre surely felt threatened by Sarrail and why he and Millerand took an active part in 'the Sarrail conspiracy.' Reflecting on what has been described above, Sarrail's removal no longer appears as a military necessity but rather as the result of high-level political intrigue, to which Sarrail himself was no stranger.

Appraising the *affaire* Sarrail obliges us to take a closer look at the man himself. Here opinions about Sarrail's personality are completely contradictory. Indeed, attempting to review Sarrail's military tenure proves to be quite a challenging task, as the man was hated by legions of lifelong detractors and revered by an army of ardent admirers.⁶¹⁵ Sarrail left nobody indifferent. However, the truth is far more complex, as his multifaceted personality requires a careful analysis that provides a more balanced assessment of the first Allied CIC in Macedonia. In Gérard Fassy's words, Maurice Sarrail was, "Of a fiercely individualistic disposition, an uncompromising patriot

⁶¹³ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 6, *Les tranchées, 1915*, 254.

⁶¹⁴ Joffre was very well-informed by his liaison officers such as Majors Férreol Bel or Renouard, who constantly reported on Sarrail's activities. Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre (1910-1917)*, vol. 2, 104-105; Sarrail contemptuously called them Joffre's *Missi Dominici*, or the emissaries from the Camarilla of Chantilly! Men who would vouch for anybody "who was affiliated with the Holy Chapel of G.Q.G.!" General Maurice Sarrail, "Souvenirs de 1914-1915," *Revue politique et parlementaire* 108, no. 320 (July 1921): 87.

⁶¹⁵ Some of the lower-ranking French officers who served under Sarrail retained fond memory about him, Jean-José Frappa, *Makédonia. Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison en Orient* (Paris: Flammarion, 1921); Édouard Helsey, *Les aventures de l'armée d'Orient* (Paris: La renaissance du livre, 1920); among Sarrail's critics, Henri Mélot, *La vérité sur la guerre de 1914-1918* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1930); during World War I, there were few impartial opinions about him. Here is a sample: Jérôme Carcopino, *Souvenirs de la guerre en Orient (1915-1917)* (Paris: Hachette, 1970); Robert de Billy, "Missions en Grèce de Salonique à Athènes (1917 et 1920)," *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique*, no. 3-4 (1985): 207-256; De Billy was the French ambassador in Athens from August 1917 to 1921. Miranda Stavrinou, "Gustave Fougères, l'École française d'Athènes et la propagande en Grèce durant les années 1917-1918," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 120, no. 1 (1996): 83.

who was penetrated of profound philosophical and political convictions, Sarrail is not a man of compromise.”⁶¹⁶ Before the war, Sarrail never hesitated to publicly display his left-leaning political proclivities and had no qualms to throw personal discretion through the window. For example, when he was the Director of the École militaire d’infanterie (EMI), the French army Infantry School based at Saint-Maixent, Sarrail decided the future promotions of young officers based on their apparent political affiliations as much as on their military accomplishments.⁶¹⁷ Sarrail’s policies at Saint-Maixent and his unequivocal political leanings created life-long enmities in both the État-Major de l’armée (EMA) [the French General Staff] and the political class of the time. The simple fact that as a French superior officer, Sarrail disregarded his primary duty of remaining politically neutral in the public eye confirms why his reputation has always been marred in controversy and intrigue. Did Sarrail use the politicians to advance his career, or did they use him to promote their political agenda? A little bit of both, as Sarrail was a personal friend of several Left-Wing politicians: Paul Painlevé, Léon Bourgeois, Léon Accambray, Alfred Margaine, or Albert Thomas, to name just a few. ⁶¹⁸ Sarrail was their political conduit within the French army High-Command, and in return, when Sarrail needed political back-up (as was the case during the summer of 1915), he could always count on all of them.

However, describing Sarrail as just a political creature of the French Left would not do him much justice. Sarrail was definitely not the only political soldier in the French army. General Pierre Roques (War Minister during the 1916’s Briand Cabinet) was also not shy to court favors in high places and equally engaged in disreputable politicking of his own. Besides, opposing Sarrail, ‘the Anti-Clerical Republican’ to some of his ‘Conservative and Catholic’ counterparts in the French

⁶¹⁶ Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient*, 20.

⁶¹⁷ Tanenbaum, *General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929*, 142.

⁶¹⁸ Tanenbaum, *General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929*, 142.

army is simply too reductive in scope, as some other ‘Right-Wing’ generals who did not endorse Sarrail’s political views were actually on good terms with him.⁶¹⁹ Moreover, some generals who shared Sarrail’s political views (like Joffre) became his bitter opponent. Thus, it is necessary to look beyond political allegiances or religious beliefs to discern what caused such epidemic reactions toward the French army’s *enfant terrible*.

Maurice Paul Emmanuel Sarrail was born on 6 April 1856 in the picturesque medieval city of Carcassone, located in southwest France. Sarrail came from a middle-class family, and in 1875, at the age of nineteen, he took the competitive entrance examination at the prestigious *École spéciale militaire* (ESM) of Saint-Cyr, where to everybody’s surprise, Sarrail who did not even undergo the preparatory schools that most of his cohort colleagues attended, finished 79th out of 350.⁶²⁰ Between 1877 and 1900, Sarrail distinguished himself in the infantry and served with honor in Algeria and Tunisia. In 1883, he entered Staff College, and two years later, he finished twenty-sixth out of sixty-six.⁶²¹ As can be seen from his military record, Sarrail was absolutely not a military mediocrity that only rose through political patronage. Some of the characteristics that struck many of Sarrail’s contemporaries were his determination and stature. Tall, handsome, with magnetic blue eyes and silver hair, Sarrail certainly cut an impressive figure, especially compared to the ‘Gallic peasant look’ of other French generals such as Foch, Franchet, or Guillaumat, who were all short, stocky, and did not possess his dominating physical presence.⁶²² Maurice Hankey commented that “Sarrail was a good-looking man — a bit of a *poseur*.”⁶²³ Most observers recalled

⁶¹⁹ This is the case for Louis Franchet d’Espérey who was Sarrail’s colleague at the *École de guerre*, (EG) and who in June 1918 became the third and last Allied Commander-in-chief at Salonica. For Franchet’s opinion about Sarrail, see, SHD, 1K mi 44, Maréchal Louis Franchet d’Espérey, *Carnets*, XI, 4-5.

⁶²⁰ Tanenbaum, *General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929*, 12.

⁶²¹ Personal military record for General Maurice Sarrail, SHD, 9 YD 517.

⁶²² Sarrail’s physical description comes from the article written by Jérôme Carcopino, “Le Général Sarrail,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Mai 1970): 378.

⁶²³ Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918*, 411.

that Sarrail exulted self-confidence and possessed a fiery and unpredictable personality that sometimes surprised even his closest collaborators. Depicted as human and sentimental, Sarrail could also be ruthless and sometimes lost his temper to explode in memorable fits of rage.⁶²⁴ In his relations with his subordinates, Sarrail demanded total obedience and did not allow any contradictions. Sarrail was self-righteous and frequently refused to accept suggestions that contradicted his beliefs.

In a position such as CIC of all Allied armies in Macedonia, the latter trait was excessively detrimental to Sarrail. On many occasions, it harmed him grievously in his dealings with commanders of other national contingents who did not appreciate one bit to receive a full dress-down and be treated like a young Second-Lieutenant. Sarrail found himself out of his depth in a role that required as much diplomatic as military skills. He lacked the patience, and flexibility, that later contributed to the success of his successors Generals Adolphe Guillaumat and Louis Franchet d'Espèrey, men who like Marshal Ferdinand Foch on the Western Front, both understood the great complexity of effectively managing such an incongruous coalition. Sarrail was extremely distrustful, and to some extent, one can easily understand why. He often believed that some sinister plots were hatched behind his back. Sarrail was also described as narcissistic, a flaw reflected in his collaborators' selection when he often chose submissive characters that he could easily dominate with his towering personality. However, Sarrail's most evident attribute was his drive to reach the French army's pinnacle. In this author's opinion, Sarrail's burning ambition was the principal reason for the deep-seated antagonism between him and Joffre. Both men aspired to sit

⁶²⁴ About Sarrail's softer side, one author mentioned that before launching an offensive in Macedonia, Sarrail meditated close to a French soldier's tombstone, André Ducasse, *Balkans 14-18 ou le chaudron du diable* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1964), 260; for Sarrail's unforgiving temper, de Billy, "Missions en Grèce de Salonique à Athènes (1917 et 1920)," 228; one author described an infamous incident during which Sarrail lost his temper toward one of his divisional commanders, General Émilien Cordonnier. Gabriel Terrail, *Le commandement unique*, vol. 2, *Sarrail et les armées d'Orient* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1920), 98-101.

at the top of the French military hierarchy; however, at this rarified altitude, there was only enough room for one man, and between 1911 and 1916, that man was Joffre.

After having ‘conditionally approved’ his new posting, Sarrail was invited by the War Ministry to offer his opinion on what should be France’s next strategic option in the Eastern Mediterranean. On 11 August, Sarrail drafted a note detailing what French arms could reasonably accomplish in the East. He provided some options for continuing Allied efforts in Gallipoli and suggested a new intervention in either Smyrna, Alexandretta, or Salonica. From all these choices, he much preferred Salonica. Predictably, when GQG received Sarrail’s plan, Joffre immediately dismissed it as insubstantial. A few days later, when Joffre was again hard-pressed by Poincaré for a clear-cut answer about an enlarged French commitment to the Dardanelles, he forcefully argued against it. Joffre then scornfully replied to Poincaré, “What do we want to do in the Dardanelles? To prepare an expedition for a factious general? And Joffre kept ranting about Sarrail.”⁶²⁵ Poincaré, no doubt irritated with Joffre’s haughtiness and tone, coldly reminded him that an extension in the number of French troops allocated for the Dardanelles was not only Sarrail’s idea but one that both Generals Gouraud and Bailloud had previously recommended.⁶²⁶ Again, it is easy to discern the root causes for Joffre’s attitude: First, he wanted to retain the exclusive use of French divisions on the Western Front, and second, he was keen to get back at Sarrail. Joffre’s main goal was to rush Sarrail to the East without providing him all the divisions he was supposed to receive. However, the cabinet kept pressing Joffre for reinforcements to be sent as soon as possible. Unenthusiastically, and under strong pressure from Poincaré himself, Joffre agreed to dispatch two army corps to the Dardanelles for September. In this instance, Poincaré had to accept

⁶²⁵ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège*, 1915, 37.

⁶²⁶ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège*, 1915, 37.

Joffre's word and commented bitterly that had he attempted to press the matter forward, Joffre would have probably again threatened to resign.⁶²⁷

On 17 August 1915, Sarrail was one more time asked to provide a specific scheme on how the Straits could be forced. Sarrail studied the Dardanelles' deadlock and prepared operational plans for the war ministry. He proposed a different approach than the one currently pursued by the British and favored an increased French offensive aimed at Asia Minor's coasts.⁶²⁸ One week later, and following Sarrail's suggestion, the government informed Joffre that it was urgent to dispatch four French divisions to Gallipoli.⁶²⁹ Joffre, evidently knowing that Sarrail had requested an increase in the number of French divisions in the Dardanelles, immediately countered by stating that he could not agree to it until 20/22 September. Only then would he know if his Second Champagne Offensive had succeeded.⁶³⁰ On 1 September, in a letter to Millerand, Joffre discussed the recommendations that Sarrail prepared on 24 August and criticized Sarrail's plan for amounting to nothing more than 'basic discussions' about the possibilities of Allied landings in either the Straits or the Near East. Joffre castigated Sarrail for not providing the exact number of troops needed for such an ambitious scheme and not outlining a realistic outcome for it.⁶³¹

To impose his views upon the cabinet, Joffre requested that his own office at GQG, La section d'études de la Défense Nationale (SEDN) [The National Defense Study Section], proposes another plan for French military action in the East. Predictably, this section's findings categorically rejected restarting any offensive operations in the Dardanelles based upon Sarrail's recommendations.⁶³² Furthermore, Joffre stated that if French operations should continue in the

⁶²⁷ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège, 1915*, 37.

⁶²⁸ For Sarrail's operational project, see, SHD, 16 N 3266-2, "Note sur les Opérations dans la région des Dardanelles," 24 August 1915.

⁶²⁹ Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 42.

⁶³⁰ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège, 1915*, 42.

⁶³¹ SHD, 16 N 1678, Joffre to Millerand, 1 September 1915.

⁶³² SHD, 16 N 1678, "Note au sujet des Dardanelles."

Dardanelles, the divisions that had been originally earmarked for departure should remain in France until the beginning of October. Finally, Joffre asked that Sarrail immediately departs for Gallipoli to review the operational needs by himself.⁶³³ Ironically, Joffre attempted to keep all the divisions promised to Sarrail in the Métropole while demanding that Sarrail should go ahead to Gallipoli without them.

On 28 August 1915, contending that the Allied Expedition to Gallipoli had been nothing but a failure until this point, Millerand wrote to Delcassé that the resolution of the Dardanelles logjam demanded a whole different approach.⁶³⁴ Three days later, after another round of discussions, the cabinet concluded that the four divisions already allocated for the Dardanelles should be ready to leave France on 20 September.⁶³⁵ The French Cabinet rapidly informed London and demanded that the British replace the two departing French divisions commanded by General Bailloud with their troops. The French wanted to regain their strategic freedom and deploy their forces where they now saw fit.⁶³⁶ When Joffre discussed the strategic situation with the various cabinet members, he reiterated what he said before. Namely, that Sarrail must go immediately to Gallipoli to evaluate the situation and go alone, as no troops could accompany him until the beginning of October. When questioned again on the wisdom to send Sarrail to the East without the troops he had been promised, Joffre confirmed that he would rather resign than letting these divisions leave with Sarrail.

One more time, faced with the imminent threat of Joffre's resignation (who was of course supported by his Praetorians Delcassé and Millerand), Viviani, and Poincaré, were forced to back down and for the third time, requested Sarrail to study the feasibility of reinforcing the

⁶³³ SHD, 16 N 1678, Joffre to Millerand, 1 September 1915.

⁶³⁴ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1065, Millerand to Delcassé, 28 August 1915.

⁶³⁵ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège, 1915*, 73.

⁶³⁶ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1065, Millerand to Delcassé, 31 August 1915.

expedition.⁶³⁷ In retrospect, it is no wonder that so much time-wasting, political prevarications, administrative inertia, and a total lack of high-level leadership completely hindered French strategy in the war. Nonetheless, Sarrail, who smelled a rat, declined one more time to leave France without the troops he had been promised. In this battle of will, one was hard-pressed to guess who between Joffre and Sarrail would blink first. Curiously, Joffre complained that Sarrail was using delaying tactics to receive another command in France and that the government was too scared of him to force him to leave the country. On 7 September, Millerand informed Joffre that he should have the four divisions ready to leave Marseille at the beginning of October. By that time, Joffre must have been beside himself and replied to Millerand that he would not authorize them to depart with their full complements of artillery, cavalry, and infantry. Again, Joffre counseled the cabinet to consider his recommendations against reinforcing the French forces in the Dardanelles.⁶³⁸

At the inter-allied conference taking place at the Hôtel Terminus in Calais, on 11 September 1915, Joffre announced that the French troops earmarked for the East would only leave on 10 October and that consequently, a renewal of operations in the Dardanelles could only be contemplated for mid-November. However, Joffre's decision to release the troops from France was contingent upon his offensives' success on the Western Front. If these offensives proved successful, then the dispatch of French troops to the Dardanelles would immediately be canceled to conserve all available manpower and exploit the breakthrough.⁶³⁹ During this conference, Millerand attempted to impose Sarrail as the supreme commander in the East, a measure that Kitchener immediately rejected, as he argued first, that General Sir Ian Hamilton already had more

⁶³⁷ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège, 1915*, 79.

⁶³⁸ Herbillon, *Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison pendant la guerre mondiale*, vol. 1, 183; AFGG, Tome VIII, *La Campagne d'Orient*, vol. 1, *La Campagne d'Orient jusqu'à l'intervention de la Roumanie (février 1915-août 1916)* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1923), Annexes 1, annexe no. 348, for Millerand's request to Joffre, 559-560, annexe no. 350, for Joffre's answer to Millerand, 562-563.

⁶³⁹ TNA, CAB 28/1. Proceedings of the Anglo-French and Allied Conferences that took place between 11 September 1915 and 16 November 1916.

troops under his command, and second, he possessed more experience and a higher rank than Sarrail.⁶⁴⁰ Kitchener approached Joffre at the conference's end and told him that the newly proposed French scheme of attacking the Asiatic Shores was a bad idea. In any case, it would take more than six divisions to carry the day.⁶⁴¹ Finally, Kitchener told Joffre that "he had no confidence in Sarrail."⁶⁴² In the conference's aftermath and following Maurice Hankey's suggestion, Kitchener invited Sarrail to visit the Dardanelles for a few weeks. Unsurprisingly, Sarrail politely declined to do so since he mentioned that under no circumstances could he leave France at the moment.⁶⁴³

In truth, the repeated cancellation of renewed offensive operations in the Dardanelles made their fulfillment improbable. Conscious that following the Calais Conference, he had firmly imposed his strategic conception upon the British and French leaders alike, Joffre provided another strategic study conducted by his SEDN to the French government. This new study reaffirmed what Joffre had previously requested, to keep all French troops on the Western Front until he knew if his offensive had punctured the German lines.⁶⁴⁴ On 14 September, even Millerand (who by then must have been exhausted by the complications caused by the *affaire* Sarrail) became utterly frustrated with Joffre's obstinate refusal to implement the French government's decisions. In a very short and terse message, Millerand sternly reminded Joffre that the Calais Agreement was based upon the premises that he (Joffre) would get the four French divisions ready by 10 October and that they would then sail without any delay from Marseille to the East.⁶⁴⁵ Joffre replied that

⁶⁴⁰ Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles*, 191.

⁶⁴¹ Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles*, 191.

⁶⁴² Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918*, 411. Kitchener's first impression of Sarrail must have been music to Joffre's ears.

⁶⁴³ Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918*, 411.

⁶⁴⁴ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1066, "Note au sujet des Dardanelles," 15 September 1915.

⁶⁴⁵ Millerand to Joffre, 14 September 1915, AFGG, Tome VIII, *La campagne d'Orient*, vol. 1, *La Campagne d'Orient jusqu'à l'intervention de la Roumanie (février 1915-août 1916)*, Annexes 1, annexe no. 358, 580.

he could still not agree to release the troops promised during the conference. Doing so would endanger his offensives' success and ultimately bear grave consequences to the overall French war effort.⁶⁴⁶ Poincaré reminisced that by that time, Prime Minister René Viviani was flabbergasted by this military-political impasse and lamented that "The Dardanelles Operation will not take place. The GQG doesn't want it to, because it is General Sarrail who will command it."⁶⁴⁷ It is revealing that even a complete nonentity like Viviani was enraged to observe such a display of political paralysis.

To add insult to injury while surely pushing Viviani to his deathbed, Sarrail now upped the stakes and demanded a force of 100,000 men, the command of the entire Allied contingent at Gallipoli, as well as a guarantee of Italian military assistance.⁶⁴⁸ At the same time, and no doubt propagated by Sarrail's cronies, the political furor in Parliament now reached a *crescendo*. Many Radicals and Socialists demanded immediate action in the Eastern theater. At the Chamber of Deputies' Foreign Affairs Commission, Joseph Caillaux (one of Sarrail's linchpin) confirmed that a large-scale operation was now imperative for bringing any type of Allied success in the East. Supporting Caillaux's idea, the Catholic and Conservative Deputy Baron Denys Cochin further contended that military success was no longer possible in the Dardanelles but should urgently be sought elsewhere.⁶⁴⁹

While the French cabinet was struck by unqualified lethargy elsewhere in the Balkans, diplomatic developments continued apace to dramatically influence the course of events while also greatly simplifying the French decision-makers' choices. On the same day that Caillaux and

⁶⁴⁶ SHD, 5 N 132, Joffre to Millerand, 20 September 1915.

⁶⁴⁷ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège, 1915*, 111.

⁶⁴⁸ Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles*, 193.

⁶⁴⁹ Archives Nationales [hereafter abbreviated to AN], AN, Série C, C 7488, *Commission des affaires étrangères de la Chambre des Députés*, 22 September 1915.

Cochin were clamoring on the Palais Bourbon's floor for military action in the East, Bulgaria declared its general mobilization. For over twelve months, difficult diplomatic negotiations between Berlin, Vienna, and Sofia took place, and "Bulgaria's commitment to action was realized only after Germany and Austria met its demands for inordinate territorial concessions."⁶⁵⁰ The Bulgarians' decision to join the Central Powers was primarily dictated by their war aims to conquer Macedonia while also settling old scores with their Serbian archrivals. When Sofia finally mobilized against Belgrade, it considerably eased the British and French leaders' tasks, who no longer needed to send reinforcements to Gallipoli. Still, they now had to prepare a relief expedition to assist Serbia promptly.

The wheel had now spun full-circle, and after so many unproductive conferences between London and Paris that had debated sending Allied troops to the Balkans, the Bulgarians with one stroke of the pen had magically cut the Gordian Knot and relieved the Entente from its most embarrassing strategic failures. The Bulgarian intervention provided a valid basis for Paris and London to finally get their act together and come to their Serbian ally's rescue while also offering a convenient way out from this embarrassing political *farce* that had lasted for over two months. The rapidity with which the French Cabinet changed strategic course to decide upon military intervention in the Balkans confirms its determination to finally put a lid on the *affaire* Sarraill and expedite the 'Republican General' as far away from Paris, where it was hoped that he would no longer provoke political mayhem. As one observer noticed, "It is necessary to remove Sarraill – even at the price of an army."⁶⁵¹

⁶⁵⁰ Gerard E. Silberstein, "The Serbian Campaign of 1915: Its Diplomatic Background," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 73, no. 1 (October 1967): 51.

⁶⁵¹ AN, Fonds Painlevé, 313 AP 109.

Meanwhile, in Belgrade, the Serbian government rang the alarm and immediately called for help from its Western allies. Simultaneously, Venizelos also pleaded for immediate Allied assistance so that the Hellenic Kingdom could then fulfill its military alliance's commitments to Serbia. Before October 1915 and Bulgaria's mobilization, Venizelos had already discussed with the French Ambassador Jean Guillemin the eventuality of an Allied intervention to Salonica. Venizelos explained to Guillemin that for good measure, the Greek Monarch would find it necessary to make an official demonstration against the non-respect of the Greek neutrality, but that eventually, he would "allow his hand to be forced."⁶⁵² As soon as the news of the Bulgarian mobilization was known, Guillemin rapidly forwarded Venizelos' request to Paris for an Allied Expeditionary Force of 150,000 men. Guillemin also confirmed that Venizelos wished that the British and French replies would be made without any prior discussions between the Quai d'Orsay and Whitehall. Guillemin urged the acceptance of Venizelos' demands by highlighting that should the Allies not respond to the Greek appeal for military intervention, Greek armed collaboration would likely be lost for the rest of the war.⁶⁵³

On 23 September 1915, and despite late-minute tergiversations from the Foreign Affairs Minister Delcassé, who was always keen to attract Bulgaria rather than Greece, the French Cabinet ultimately confirmed to Venizelos that France would dispatch the forces that he had asked.⁶⁵⁴ As a result, the Macedonian Campaign "got under way with a total lack of strategic planning and forethought. Just as importantly, no attempt was made to co-ordinate a response with Britain."⁶⁵⁵ In England, the French Ambassador, Paul Cambon, unimpressed by this diplomatic helter-skelter,

⁶⁵² This was a tragic error that Venizelos committed, as King Constantine did not only protest for formal pretense, but rather because he strongly opposed the Allies landing in Salonica. MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 283, Guillemin to Delcassé, 19 September 1915.

⁶⁵³ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 283, Guillemin to Delcassé, 21 September 1915.

⁶⁵⁴ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1030, Delcassé to Guillemin, 23 September 1915.

⁶⁵⁵ Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 45.

observed that the French decision was rather untimely and lacked all mandatory decorum since no previous arrangement had been made with Lord Kitchener about dispatching Allied troops to the Balkans.⁶⁵⁶ Moreover, the French cabinet's decision to send a military expedition to Salonica had been rashly taken, under stress caused by the international situation, and without consultation with London, just like Venizelos had demanded. Throwing all standard diplomatic *étiquette* through the window, the French government first committed itself to accept Venizelos' offer, then instructed a less than pleased Cambon to communicate its decision to Whitehall with the hope that the British Government would also agree to Venizelos' appeal.⁶⁵⁷

Venizelos' overture to London and Paris did not provoke a great of enthusiasm in the British Cabinet. Hankey was not convinced that "the idea of committing the allies to yet another campaign in this part of the world...is most objectionable from a military point of view."⁶⁵⁸ Grey stated that, while Britain couldn't yet send troops to Greece, this option should not be disregarded later.⁶⁵⁹ In the meantime, since Kitchener was absent in the Dardanelles, other ministers felt rather uncomfortable to make such a crucial decision while he was away. Lloyd George naturally rejoiced to see his old Balkan theme resurrected and attempted to revive his deflated cabinet colleagues. In his typical manner, he provided grossly exaggerated military manpower estimates for all Balkan powers. He declared that if Britain could send 150,000 men to Salonica and attract 500,000 to 600,000 Romanians along the way, then the strategic rewards would far exceed the Allies' costs.⁶⁶⁰

On 24 September, the British Government was forced to accept this French *fait accompli*, and British ministers and officials evaluated the various considerations for this Allied adventure

⁶⁵⁶ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1030, (Military *attaché* of the French Embassy in England) Colonel Henri de la Panouse to Millerand, 24 September 1915.

⁶⁵⁷ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 283, Delcassé to Cambon, 23 September 1915.

⁶⁵⁸ TNA, CAB 24/1/23, note on the position in the Balkans.

⁶⁵⁹ TNA, FO 371/2266, Grey to Elliot, 22 September 1915.

⁶⁶⁰ TNA, CAB 42/3/2/13, Dardanelles Committee, 23 September 1915.

in the Balkans. The Dardanelles Committee concurred that the British Governments should support the French's pledge to Greece so that, in turn, the Hellenic Kingdom could fulfill its military commitments to Serbia. Asquith laconically commented that "The French at once agreed to comply and...it was impossible for us in the circumstances to hold back."⁶⁶¹ During the same meeting, Kitchener then read a *memorandum* written by the General Staff. This *memorandum* deserves closer examination. It reveals the British appreciation for the proposed Allied military expedition to the Balkans and stipulates the boundaries of British involvement in a secondary eastern theater. If these boundaries had been enforced, the British contingent would have rapidly reembarked after fulfilling its support role for the Greek army. Here is a short excerpt from this *memorandum*:

It must be clearly understood that the role of the 150,000 allied troops for which Greece has asked and which will, if necessary, be sent to Salonika will...be restricted to enabling and assisting the Greek army to protect the Serbian flank and the line of communication with Salonika.⁶⁶²

Just before the first Allied troops arrived at Salonica, Venizelos, who had literally 'twisted the arm of his monarch' to accept the Anglo-French contingent, was unceremoniously dismissed by King Constantine. As Allied troops were about to land in Greece to prop that country in honoring its military commitments to Serbia, they would encounter a Greek army, which at best would remain neutral, or at worst, might be openly hostile.⁶⁶³ In London, Paul Cambon acidly commented that,

We are now landing at Salonika to bring help to the Serbs who are in danger of being squashed between the Austro-Germans and the Bulgarians. Here we are with a new war front...It is in Champagne and Artois that matters will be decided and where the impact of events will determine the fate of the Balkans.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶¹ TNA, CAB 37/135/1. Asquith to George V, 2 October 1915.

⁶⁶² TNA, CAB 42/4/21. Committee of Imperial Defence, Précis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula from September 1 to 28, inclusive, 1915.

⁶⁶³ John Van der Kiste, *King of the Hellenes: The Greek Kings 1863-1974* (Dover, NH: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994), 90.

⁶⁶⁴ Paul Cambon, *Correspondance 1870-1924*, vol. 3, (1912-1924). *Les guerres balkaniques. La Grande Guerre. L'organisation de la paix* (Paris: Grasset, 1946), 83.

Following these latest developments, the principal protagonist, Maurice Sarrail, had not been kept abreast of what had recently unfolded in Whitehall and the Quai d'Orsay. On 25 September, Sarrail discovered from his friend, the eminent Sorbonne historian François Aulard, that the Council of Ministers had finally sent one of the Dardanelles' divisions to Salonica. Three days later, he was informed that the Armée d'Orient would go to Salonica instead of Asia Minor.⁶⁶⁵ Millerand then requested Sarrail to provide plans for the military rescue of Serbia. In an operational plan entitled *Note au sujet de l'intervention française dans les Balkans* that Sarrail conceived in early October, he considered the diverse roles that the Army of the East could play to respond to the current military situation in the Balkans.⁶⁶⁶ Sarrail also confirmed that "if the total of French troops directed to the Balkans would consist only of three brigades currently selected...this can have no real military impact."⁶⁶⁷ Sarrail stated that he needed three army corps for any French endeavor to succeed. He envisaged that in the first place, three infantry brigades would come ashore at Salonica. One full French division under General Bailloud would be transferred from the Dardanelles, and the 114th Infantry Brigade would sail from France with Sarrail.

Once in Macedonia, while waiting for further reinforcements to arrive, Sarrail planned to deploy his forces in the region of Strumitza, alongside the Vardar railroad, to prevent any potential Bulgarian attack coming from the East. From a strategic perspective, Sarrail judged it best to first defeat Bulgaria before concentrating against either the Ottoman Empire or the Habsburg Empire. Overall, in this *memorandum*, Sarrail appeared motivated and ready to impact the military situation in the Balkans. Sarrail's plan was ambitious, but to succeed, it needed to be propped by all the necessary manpower and material resources. The French Government rapidly drafted rudimentary

⁶⁶⁵ Sarrail, *Mon Commandement en Orient 1916-1918*, xiv.

⁶⁶⁶ The rest of this paragraph is based on Sarrail's note that can be found in SHD, 6 N 26-3, "Note au sujet de l'intervention française dans les Balkans," 2 October 1915.

⁶⁶⁷ SHD, 16 N 3275, Sarrail to Millerand, 2 October 1915.

instructions for Sarrail's action in Macedonia. His mission was to protect the communications between Salonica and Serbia against any potential Bulgarian attacks. Note that this was originally a role devoted to the Greek army, but since Greece had remained neutral, the French would have to do all the Greeks' work. Sarrail was also tasked to collaborate with the Serbian army in its combat operations against the enemy.⁶⁶⁸ On 5 and 6 October, Sarrail, dismayed by his instructions' appalling lack of details, met with Théophile Delcassé, and President Poincaré. He was not reassured as neither men could give him any guidance about his new posting, thus revealing the utter chaos in which this military campaign was launched.

At the same time, Sarrail started to assemble his headquarters' staff and forwarded the names of the subalterns he needed to the War Ministry. As chief of staff, he requested Lieutenant-Colonel Jacquemot, who had previously led the *élite* 152^e Régiment d'Infanterie (RI) in the Vosges and had distinguished himself during the vicious fighting on the Hartmannwillerkopf.⁶⁶⁹ To lead his cavalry, Sarrail asked for General Auguste Frotiée, who had commanded the 12^e Régiment de Chasseurs à cheval (RCAC) that was part of Sarrail's VI Army Corps before he became Commander of the Third Army. The choice of his closest collaborators reveals Sarrail's animosity toward GQG. Moreover, it displays his tendency to select men whom he believed had been unfairly treated by Joffre and the Camarilla of Chantilly. As a case in point, Sarrail explicitly asked Millerand to nominate General Paul Leblois, who had been previously relieved by Joffre of the Second Colonial Division's command at the beginning of 1915, to head the 57^e Division d'infanterie (DI) [Infantry Division] that included the 113th and 114th Infantry Brigades. Sarrail's

⁶⁶⁸ SHD, 7 N 1338, instructions by Millerand, 2 October 1915.

⁶⁶⁹ Jacquemot led the 152^e Régiment d'Infanterie (RI) which was nicknamed *Les Diables Rouges* [the Red Devils] by the Germans. The Hartmannwillerkopf (in German) or Le Vieil Armand (in French) is a little-known campaign of the Great War which between end of November 1914, to early 1916, opposed French and German troops in the rugged and mountainous terrain of the Vosges, it pitted the famous *Chasseurs Alpains*, known as *les Diables Bleus* [the Blue Devils] to German mountain troops which later became the elite Alpen Korps. For more details, see, Colonel Frédéric Guelton, "Le Vieil Armand," 14-18. *Le magazine de la Grande Guerre* 34, Hors-série (2006): 6-19.

request for Leblois to serve as one of his divisional commanders was, of course, not devoid of ulterior motives. Sarrail wanted to give his good chum Leblois (one of his Saint-Cyr Cohort's comrades) a second chance and prove to Joffre that he had made a mistake about Leblois.⁶⁷⁰ Finally, to lead his transport and logistics department, Sarrail requested Colonel Jean Sarda's services, who back in October 1914 had also been relieved of his 134^e Régiment d'Infanterie's command.

Sarrail's tendency to nominate the army's scraps to serve in his HQ was not surprising for some of his famous colleagues. Franchet noted that "Sarrail was haunted by the idea of repairing injustices. This is why he gave some divisions of l'armée d'Orient to some outcasts from France."⁶⁷¹ The rest of Sarrail's HQ was made of officers who had previously served on the staff of the CEO in the Dardanelles. Many of these men who came from France or Gallipoli were reserve officers. Some of them were specialists in Eastern Civilizations and Languages and were needed to help Sarrail's staff coping with the unique Balkans' environment. Overall, when Sarrail's staff was assembled, it comprised "71 Officers, 385 NCO's and soldiers that included support services and units."⁶⁷² By Mid-November 1915, 94 Officers were present in Salonica."⁶⁷³ On 6 October 1914, just before he departed from Marseille, Sarrail expressed to the President his conviction that the war could no longer be won on the French Front.⁶⁷⁴ At the time, Sarrail could not possibly know it, but he was wrong, as eventually, the war was won on the Western Front. What Sarrail could not know either was that this newly created theater in the Balkans would equally play a non-negligible part in the Central Powers' defeat that took place three years after he arrived in Salonica.

⁶⁷⁰ Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient*, 23.

⁶⁷¹ SHD, 1K mi 44, Maréchal Louis Franchet d'Espérey, *Carnets*, XI, 18-19.

⁶⁷² SHD, 7 N 336. "Armée d'Orient - Tableau de composition sommaire."

⁶⁷³ SHD, 16 N 2903-2, "Situations d'effectifs au 15 novembre 1915."

⁶⁷⁴ Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 7, *Guerre de siège, 1915*, 160.

CHAPTER 9

SERBIENS ENDE

The mission of Generalfeldmarschall von Mackensen is: to defeat the Serbian Army wherever he finds it and to open and secure land communications between Hungary and Bulgaria as quickly as possible.

The Macedonian Campaign began in October 1915, when at the eleventh hour, the British and French governments decided to rescue the Serbian Army, which was attacked by the Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, and German forces. The Entente's commitment of a sizeable expeditionary contingent to Salonica was a rapidly improvised response to the military operations already underway in the Balkans. General Erich von Falkenhayn and Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL), [the German army Supreme Command] initiated these operations and decided to commit top German forces to a large-scale military campaign that aimed to destroy the Serbian army. This military campaign and the importance of Serbia within the overall grand strategy of both the Central Powers and the Entente and its significance regarding the inception of the Macedonian Campaign constitute the crux of this chapter.

Falkenhayn's intention to eliminate the Serbian army once and for all must be analyzed within the global context of the war, and more specifically in connection with the relations that Imperial Germany maintained with its allies on the other theaters of war. Among these German allies, it is crucial to consider the importance of the Ottoman Empire in Germany's grand strategy and war aims. When World War I began out in late July 1914, the Sublime Porte's entry into the war was far from guaranteed. Constantinople's decision resulted from a deteriorating international standing. It was also precipitated by the sudden appearance of two German light cruisers, Goeben and Breslau, commanded by Rear-Admiral Wilhelm Souchon. These two warships were allowed

to cross the Straits and seek refuge in the Bosphorus.⁶⁷⁵ To ensure that the Ottomans would join the Central Powers, on 12 October 1914, Berlin “dispatched one million Turkish pounds in gold coins on a special train. Routed through Austria-Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, the shipment reached Istanbul on the evening of 16 October.”⁶⁷⁶ Later that month, on 25 October, Enver Pasha issued orders to Admiral Souchon “to gain command of the Black Sea and to seek out and attack the Russian Fleet...On 29 October, the Turkish fleet raided Sevastopol and Odessa and bombarded Theodosia and Novorossisk.”⁶⁷⁷ Following this unprovoked attack, “Russia duly declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 2 November 1914. The Ottomans followed suit, declaring war on Russia and its French and British allies (along with Belgium, Serbia, and Montenegro) eight days later.”⁶⁷⁸

Strategically, the Ottoman entry into the war offered interesting strategic prospects and more operational versatility for Germany, as the Ottomans could now attack the British Empire. Before the war, various German strategists had considered the possibility of the Ottoman Empire joining Germany in a conflict against England. More specifically, they appreciated that the Ottomans could directly threaten Egypt and the Suez Canal, which constituted the vital artery of the British Empire. Furthermore, this possibility accorded well with Falkenhayn’s strategic vision for the ongoing conflict.⁶⁷⁹ Nevertheless, any strategic advantages that the Ottoman Empire brought to the Central Powers were undermined by critical drawbacks such as its geographical

⁶⁷⁵ Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 111; the two German warships were ‘integrated’ in the Ottoman Navy, and were renamed Midilli and Yavuz Selim, while Admiral Souchon became Commander-in-chief of the Ottoman Navy. Ulrich Trumpener, “The Escape of the Goeben and Breslau: A Reassessment,” *Canadian Journal of History* 6 (1971): 171-186.

⁶⁷⁶ Ulrich Trumpener, Chapter 10, “The Ottoman Empire,” in *The Origins of World War I*, eds., Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 352.

⁶⁷⁷ Hew Strachan, *The First World War: Volume I: to Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 677-678.

⁶⁷⁸ Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 112.

⁶⁷⁹ For Falkenhayn’s understanding of how Turkey could affect the British Empire, see, General Erich von Falkenhayn, *The German General Staff and its Decisions, 1914-1916* (London: Hutchinson & CO., 1920), 50-52.

location and economic and industrial weaknesses. In early 1915, as Bulgaria was still non-aligned and Serbia had successfully resisted all Austro-Hungarian invasion attempts, the railroad communication between Berlin and Constantinople was still closed. Germany's inability to supply the Ottoman Empire across the Balkans and through Serbia was the primary reason why the elimination of this Entente's power ranked at the top of Falkenhayn's list of strategic priorities. Even if the ill-conceived Anglo-French naval offensive toward the Dardanelles on 18 March 1915 had been checked by a stout Ottoman defense relying on effective artillery and mines, this latest Allied attempt did not reassure Falkenhayn about the capability of the Ottomans to repulse another powerful Allied's attack against their capital. The Ottoman strategic situation was anything but promising. As Richard DiNardo confirms, "Although the Turkish army had adequate stocks of ammunition in early 1915, Tukey's isolation could place it in a dangerous situation if these stocks were consumed in a couple of major campaigns."⁶⁸⁰ Moreover, German military intelligence learned about "the danger of an attack upon the Bosphorus by the Russian Odessa Army."⁶⁸¹ Indeed, the Turks faced a serious strategic situation, and Falkenhayn understood that Germany urgently needed to open the road between Berlin and Constantinople to bolster the Ottoman Empire.

However, to establish this crucial communication between Imperial Germany and the Ottoman Empire, the German General Staff needed to coordinate its action with its primary ally, the Habsburg Empire and Armeoberkommando (AOK), the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, and promptly deal with Serbia. Throughout World War I, personal relations between the Austrian and the German high commands, particularly between General Erich von Falkenhayn and his Austrian

⁶⁸⁰ Richard L. DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 26.

⁶⁸¹ Falkenhayn, *The German General Staff and its Decisions, 1914-1916*, 104.

alter-ego Field Marshal Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, proved extremely problematic.⁶⁸² One historian commented that “Falkenhayn and Conrad were not well suited to work together to meet the demands of coalition warfare.”⁶⁸³ Despite these significant differences in working methods and personalities, and thanks largely to the conciliating efforts of General August von Cramon, the German *liaison* Officer at AOK, the two leaders hobbled along to maintain a difficult working collaboration where under German leadership, they tackled successfully several military issues confronting the Central Powers.⁶⁸⁴

Among the military issues that figured prominently on both the Austro-Hungarian and German agendas, the reduction of Serbia was seen as the top priority. However, in the early spring of 1915, the strategic importance of Serbia for the Central Powers was superseded by the most pressing situation on the Eastern Front, particularly as the Austro-Hungarian desperately tried to rescue their garrison trapped in the Fortress of Przemyśl.⁶⁸⁵ On three occasions, between January and March 1915, von Hötzendorf attempted to relieve the beleaguered Austrian forces that the Russian Eleventh Army had encircled. Each time, these Austro-Hungarian rescue efforts failed miserably. Finally, on 23 March 1915, the Austrian garrison capitulated, “Taken all together,

⁶⁸² For biographical outlooks about Falkenhayn, see Holger Afflerbach, *Falkenhayn: Politisches Denken und Handeln in Kaiserreich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1994); for von Hötzendorf, see, Lawrence Sondhaus, *Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf: Architect of the Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

⁶⁸³ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 27. Di Nardo confirms that notwithstanding the age difference, (von Hötzendorf was ten years older than Falkenhayn), “Conrad was a man of the nineteenth century. He generally preferred personal meetings. Whereas Falkenhayn divided his time between OHL headquarters on the Western Front at Mézières, Berlin and Allenstein (Ober Ost headquarters), and OHL’s Eastern Front headquarters at Pless. All this meant extensive travel by train and automobile.” For Falkenhayn, if a meeting could be conducted by phone, so much the better, however von Hötzendorf was never comfortable with this new technology. This proved to be a serious impediment in the working relationship between the two most important men in the Austro-Hungarian and German armies.

⁶⁸⁴ DiNardo mentions that “Cramon as OHL’s representative at AOK proved to be a felicitous choice. As the German liaison officer at AOK, Cramon was able to gain the trust of both Falkenhayn and Conrad. DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 29; For von Cramon’s recollections of his duty as a liaison officer, see his memoirs, General August von Cramon, *Unser Österreich-Ungarischer Bundesgenosse im Weltkrieg* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler un Sohn, 1920).

⁶⁸⁵ About the siege of Przemyśl, see Graydon Tunstall, *Written in Blood: The Battles for Fortress Przemyśl in WWI* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016); also, the riveting account written by Alexander Watson, *The Fortress: The Siege of Przemyśl and the Making of Europe’s Bloodlands* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020).

between Conrad's Carpathian campaigns and the fall of Przemyśl, the Austro-Hungarian army suffered almost a million casualties."⁶⁸⁶ The scale of these dreadful Austrian losses is put in perspective by Geoffrey Wawro, who confirmed that "the Second Army alone lost forty thousand men to frostbite in the first days of March."⁶⁸⁷ Therefore, and confronted with the dire situation of the Austrians, it was imperative for the Germans to alleviate their ally's military miseries and urgently take over command on the entire Eastern Front.

In the early spring of 1915, conscious that prompt action was urgently needed to improve the Central Powers' military situation on the Eastern Front, and well-informed by Cramon about the Austro-Hungarian forces' disastrous condition, Falkenhayn decided to launch a powerful offensive in the region of Gorlice-Tarnów. In a typical Schlieffen's fashion, Falkenhayn's plan envisioned to push back the Russians back to the San River and decisively envelop their forces in the Carpathians. On 14 April 1915, at a meeting in Berlin, the German presented their plan to von Hötendorf, who promptly accepted it.⁶⁸⁸ During this Campaign, the German Eleventh Army, which included about 130,000 combined German and Austrian soldiers, led by Generaloberst August von Mackensen and his Chief of Staff, Generalmajor Hans von Seeckt, and well supplied with over 1,000 guns unleashed hell on the Russians.⁶⁸⁹

On 2 May 1915, in a series of well-coordinated attacks, the German Eleventh Army broke

⁶⁸⁶ Regarding these desperate efforts, as well as the enormous casualties suffered by the Austro-Hungarian army, see, Richard DiNardo, *Breakthrough: The Gorlice-Tarnow Campaign, 1915* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 25; and Graydon Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow: The Carpathian Winter War of 1915* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 212.

⁶⁸⁷ Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014), 358.

⁶⁸⁸ In this plan, the Germans committed four army corps which were supported by the Austrian Third and Fourth Armies. For a description of this plan, see the Austrian Official History, Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung, *Österreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg, 1914-1918, vol. 2, Das Kriegsjahr 1915* (Vienna: Verlag der Militärwissenschaftlichen mitteilungen, 1931), 306; for the German Official History's perspective, see, Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918, vol. 7, Die Operationen des Jahres 1915. Die Ereignisse im Winter und Frühjahr* (Berlin: Mittler und Sohn, 1931), 361-362.

⁶⁸⁹ DiNardo, *Breakthrough: The Gorlice-Tarnow Campaign, 1915*, 48.

through the Russian Third Army defensive perimeter and made considerable progress. By the end of May, the German forces led by Mackensen appeared in front of Przemyśl. Following a brief siege, “The Russian defense collapsed under a German infantry assault, and by 3 June 1915, Przemyśl was once again in the hands of Austro-Hungarian authorities.”⁶⁹⁰ These Austro-German successes did not end there, and by 22 June, Lemberg, the Austrian capital of Galicia, was reconquered by the Austro-Hungarian Second Army. This military campaign, planned by the Germans and executed by Austro-German forces, proved a much-needed tonic for the battered Habsburg Empire. Furthermore, and “as a result of the impressive military victories of the Central Powers and the shift to a war of movement on the eastern front: Romania felt compelled to further maintain its neutrality and not to enter the war against the Central Powers.”⁶⁹¹

As Austro-German forces had soundly defeated the Russians in Galicia, Generalmajor Hans von Seeckt was already contemplating Germany’s next move on the Eastern Front. His new target was Poland. Seeckt advised redirecting Mackensen’s army group (consisting of the German Eleventh Army and the Austro-Hungarian Second and Fourth Armies) northward toward the Russian-held Polish salient. Von Seeckt’s plan was rapidly approved by Falkenhayn, Mackensen, and von Hötzendorf. On 2 July 1915, Falkenhayn met the Kaiser and convinced the latter to endorse von Seeckt’s plan over the stringent protest of Ober Ost.⁶⁹² On 13 July 1915, a new major offensive that included most of Ober Ost’s armies and Mackensen’s army group started. In its initial phase, the going was slow; however, German’s overwhelming superiority in heavy artillery again decided the outcome of combat operations. Progressively, the Russian defenders started to

⁶⁹⁰ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 30.

⁶⁹¹ Manfred Rauchensteiner, *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1914 – 1918*, trans, Alex J. Kay and Anna Güttel-Bellert (Vienna: Böhlau, 2014), 315.

⁶⁹² Generalmajor Hans von Seeckt, *Aus meinem Leben, 1866-1917* (Leipzig: V. Hase & Koehler, 1938), 153; Wolfgang Foerster, *Mackensen: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen des Generalfeldmarschalls aus Krieg und Frieden* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1938), 183-184.

retreat, and by the first weeks of August, the Russian armies were ejected from Poland. By 5 August 1915, Warsaw was occupied by German forces, and “Russian fortresses such as Novogeorgievsk were crushed by German and Austro-Hungarian heavy artillery.”⁶⁹³ By 26 August, the last remaining Russian bastion in Poland, Brest-Litovsk, was captured by the Austro-Hungarian VI Corps.⁶⁹⁴

The military results of the Gorlice–Tarnów Offensive and the Polish Campaign paid tremendous dividends for the Central Powers. Nevertheless, and despite the impressive Austro-German victories on the Eastern Front, on 23 May 1915, Italy (lured by the Entente’s promise of territorial acquisitions on the Adriatic Coast) declared war on Austria-Hungary.⁶⁹⁵ Even though Italy’s entry into the war on the Entente’s side was an open secret, the Italian army and its Commander-in-chief, General Luigi Cadorna, took their leisurely time to mobilize and concentrate against the Austrians. This typical Italian dilatoriness perfectly played in the Austrians’ hands, and “When the Italian army arrived at the Isonzo, it found the Austrian army ready and waiting, ensconced in trenches protected by three belts of barbed wire and a mined zone 5 metres wide.”⁶⁹⁶ While the Italians progressed at snail’s pace, von Hötzendorf utilized this delay to organize Austro-Hungarian forces in the Carnic Alps and placed the Austrian Fifth Army under one of the most capable commanders of the Austro-Hungarian army, General Svetozar Boroević. Boroević methodically prepared the Austro-Hungarian defensive positions for the expected onslaught of the numerically superior Italian forces, and by July 1915, he had successfully managed to bring Cadorna’s divisions to a complete standstill.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹³ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 32.

⁶⁹⁴ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918*, vol. 7, *Die Operationen des Jahres 1915*, 390.

⁶⁹⁵ John Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 94; John R. Schindler, *Isonzo: The Forgotten Sacrifice of the Great War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 45.

⁶⁹⁶ Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War*, 96.

⁶⁹⁷ Gunther Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1998), 190.

If these latest Austro-German successes on the Eastern Front did not deter Italy from joining the Entente, they, on the other hand, provided an unmistakable warning to the Romanians and their Prime Minister Ion Brătianu. Bucharest perfectly understood its vulnerable situation when OHL, as a clear warning, decided to forward a few German divisions to Southern Hungary. Confronted by German military might, Romania prudently opted to maintain its advantageous neutrality. This Romanian's decision was also motivated by a crucial geographic predicament, as Richard C. Hall confirmed,

Fealty to the Austro-Hungarian alliance would ensure the hostility of Russia on Romania's eastern frontier; a tilt towards the Entente could incur the wrath of Austria-Hungary on its western borders. To minimize this cruel choice, Bucharest waited and tried to determine who would win.⁶⁹⁸

However, within the crucial Balkan diplomatic background, Romania was not the only regional power still uncommitted. Sofia, which still negotiated with both the Central Powers and the Entente, bid its time. However, the latest military developments on the Eastern Front and, in particular, the Austro-German victory at Gorlice–Tarnów considerably influenced Sofia's course of action. Throughout the year 1915, the Bulgarians oscillated between the Central Powers and the Entente. When on 23 March, the Russians captured Przemyśl, Bulgarian Prime Minister Vasil Radoslavov instigated preliminary discussions with the Entente Powers. However, in the late spring and early summer of 1915, the resounding German victories over Russia and the bloody failures of the Anglo-French Expeditionary Force at Gallipoli certainly struck a chord with many politicians and generals in Sofia who, in any case, already had pro-German sympathies. Finally, with Serbia already fighting alongside Britain and France, it would have proved extremely difficult for Bulgaria to enforce its expansionist war aims in Macedonia from within the Entente. Therefore,

⁶⁹⁸ Richard C. Hall, Chapter 9: *Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece*, in *Decisions for War, 1914*, ed., Keith Wilson (London: Routledge, 1995), 176.

by the late summer of 1915, it became increasingly clear that the only option left for Sofia was to join the Central Powers.⁶⁹⁹

The latest Austro-German successes on the Eastern Front allowed Falkenhayn to regain much-needed operational flexibility. The removal of the Russian bulge in Poland massively reduced the German frontline, which in turn allowed Falkenhayn to transfer some German divisions from Poland southward against Serbia. Falkenhayn also reinforced the German forces on the Western Front as he was informed that the British and French were preparing a large-scale fall offensive.⁷⁰⁰ There was, however, one major predicament that played against Falkenhayn: time. He knew that to undertake a major offensive against Serbia, he needed to proceed before the inclement fall weather conditions seriously altered operational planning. In April 1915, Falkenhayn already forewarned von Hötendorf that once the Gorlice–Tarnów Campaign was successfully concluded, Austro-German forces had to prepare promptly for their next major offensive against Serbia. Von Hötendorf agreed and replied that as a prerequisite, any military operations against Serbia necessitated the Bulgarian intervention.⁷⁰¹ Falkenhayn wanted to act as quickly as possible against Serbia, as the overall situation of the Ottoman Empire still gave him concern. Indeed, by mid-summer 1915, even though the stubborn Turkish defenders had parried all Allied efforts at Gallipoli, Falkenhayn was increasingly worried by the large consumption of ammunition and the ever-growing casualties suffered by the Ottoman army. Falkenhayn's concerns were based on the alarming reports that General Liman von Sanders sent from Gallipoli and the dearth of artillery shells.⁷⁰² Crucially, the seesaw fighting at Gallipoli reinforced

⁶⁹⁹ Richard C. Hall, *Bulgaria's Road to the First World War* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1996), 302-303; regarding the lengthy negotiations between Berlin, Vienna, and Sofia, see, Wolfgang Uwe Friedrich, *Bulgarien und die Mächte 1913-1915. Ein Beitrag zur Weltkriegs und Imperialismusgeschichte* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1985).

⁷⁰⁰ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 32.

⁷⁰¹ General Hermann von Kuhl, *Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Verlag Tradition, 1929), 119.

⁷⁰² Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2010), 136-138.

Falkenhayn's decision to reopen the Danube shipping to the Ottoman Empire rapidly. More than ever, Serbia remained a thorn in the Central Powers' side. As long as the Serbs controlled the waterways to the Iron Gates, there was nothing that Falkenhayn could do to alleviate the Ottomans' desperate plea for material assistance.⁷⁰³

Both the Austrian and German General Staffs grasped the military importance and the crucial role that the Bulgarian army could play to bolster the Central Powers' prospects of defeating Serbia. By the early summer, Bulgaria already initiated contacts with both Germany and Austria-Hungary. By late July, Lieutenant-Colonel Petur Ganchev left for Berlin. Ganchev was the right man for the job, as he had been Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria's adjutant and had previously been a military *attaché* in Belgrade and Berlin.⁷⁰⁴ Before Ganchev's arrival, Falkenhayn had already laid out a plan in which he wanted the Bulgarian army to participate in the forthcoming offensive against Serbia; Falkenhayn also wanted Sofia to pressure Bucharest so that Romania either entered the war on the Central Powers' side or allowed German material supplies to flow through Romania freely. Accordingly, Falkenhayn informed the Bulgarians that six weeks after the signature of a military agreement, Imperial Germany and the Habsburg Monarchy would bring six infantry divisions. At the same time, Bulgaria would provide five divisions for the invasion of Serbia. Falkenhayn imposed Mackensen as the overall commander, then dispatched his plan to AOK.⁷⁰⁵

Meanwhile, in Teschen, once von Hötendorf was appraised of Falkenhayn's plan, he demurred that a German commander would again be in charge of overall Austro-German forces. Von Hötendorf's reaction stemmed from the fact that the Austrians essentially regarded the

⁷⁰³ About the importance of riverine communications for the belligerents, see, Charles Fryer, *The Royal Navy on the Danube* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1988).

⁷⁰⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Napier, *Experiences of a Military Attaché in the Balkans* (London: Drane's, 1924), 176.

⁷⁰⁵ Afflerbach, *Falkenhayn: Politisches Denken und Handeln in Kaiserreich*, 338.

Balkans as their preserve and despised what they saw as another German encroachment. Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza (who ignored the precarious condition of the Austro-Hungarian army) was perturbed by the overall German control over the Serbian Expedition. He made it clear that he only wanted Habsburg troops to take the field against the Serbs. He declared, “Austria-Hungary’s influence in the Balkans is destroyed forever if we call on the Germans for help.”⁷⁰⁶ What Tisza ignored was that Austria-Hungary’s influence in the Balkans had already been ‘destroyed’ in the early months of the war when General Oskar Potiorek uselessly squandered the Habsburg troops in his ill-conceived offensives against the Serbs.⁷⁰⁷ In Berlin, Kurt Riezler, one of the Reich Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg’s advisors, quipped at the incessant “ups and downs in Vienna between bravado and despair.”⁷⁰⁸ Even more humiliating for von Hötzendorf was the command organization, where Mackensen received his orders from both OHL and AOK. Still, any orders issued by AOK had to be first vetted by OHL. Despite von Hötzendorf’s bawling at Falkenhayn’s instructions, this Austro-German command structure had already been enforced successfully during the reduction of the Polish salient. Eventually, von Hötzendorf had no option but to accept the arrangement.⁷⁰⁹ Finally, as the last straw,

Conrad’s plan for a broad battle of envelopment in Serbia yielded to Falkenhayn’s more

⁷⁰⁶ Gary W. Shanafelt, *The Secret Enemy: Austria-Hungary and the German Alliance: 1914-1918* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985), 69.

⁷⁰⁷ The Serbian military successes of 1914 are covered by Gunther E. Rothenberg, “The Austro-Hungarian Campaign against Serbia in 1914,” *The Journal of Military History* 53 (1989): 127-146; also, John R. Schindler, “Disaster on the Drina: The Austro-Hungarian Army in Serbia, 1914,” *War in History* 9 (2002): 159-195. In Potiorek’s three poorly planned offensives, Austro-Hungarian forces (amounting to 450,000 men), lost 28,000 dead and 122,000 wounded. Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung, *Österreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, vol. 1, *Das Kriegsjahr 1914* (Vienna: Verlag der Militärwissenschaftlichen mitteilungen, 1931), 759; for a biographical outlook on Potiorek’s less than stellar performance in the events leading to Franz Ferdinand’s assassination in Sarajevo, and his abysmal performance against the Serbian armies, see, Rudolf Jeřábek, *Potiorek: General im Schatten von Sarajevo* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1991).

⁷⁰⁸ Karl Dietrich Erdmann, ed., *Kurt Riezler, Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 271.

⁷⁰⁹ Afflerbach, *Falkenhayn: Politisches Denken und Handelln in Kaiserreich*, 338; Sondhaus, *Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf*, 182. For an insider’s recollection of the difficult Austrian acceptance of German leadership, see Cramon, *Unser Österreich-Ungarischer Bundesgenosse im Weltkrieg*, 31-33; Gerard E. Silberstein, *The Troubled Alliance: German-Austrian Relations, 1914-1917* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 291-293.

modest strategy of using Habsburg troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgarian units in the south to tie down Serbian forces while Mackensen drove straight down the major valleys to Belgrade.⁷¹⁰

When on 3 August 1915, Colonel Ganchev arrived at Pless, he informed the Germans that Prime Minister Radoslavov requested a 200,000,000 Francs loan and the promise of German armed protection against any Greek or Romanian attack directed at Bulgaria. Sofia wanted to avoid a *bis repetita* of the Second Balkan War in which all its neighbors had invaded the country. Finally, the Bulgarian Government demanded German naval support to protect the Black Sea Coast against any Russian offensive.⁷¹¹

By the time Ganchev returned to Sofia (on 10 August), Radoslavov's Government had moved ever closer to joining the Central Powers. Meanwhile, Warsaw had fallen to German troops, and in the Dardanelles, Britain's second attempt at Suvla Bay had also failed. For Radoslavov, it was now time for Bulgaria to commit, settle the score with Serbia, and seize all Macedonian lands of which Bulgaria had been deprived in the Balkan Wars. In the end, the German guarantee to participate in the offensive against Serbia was enough to convince Tsar Ferdinand and Prime Minister Radoslavov to enter the fray on the Central Powers' side.⁷¹² Furthermore, the Bulgarians confirmed emphatically that they would never accept to see their troops being led by an Austrian commander against Serbia. Worse, still, von Hötendorf infuriated Falkenhayn when belatedly, he again insisted that an Austro-Hungarian commander be given command of the invasion, even though German forces would account for at least fifty percent of the available manpower.

On 6 September 1915, after some lengthy negotiations, von Hötendorf, Ganchev, and

⁷¹⁰ Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 157.

⁷¹¹ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 33.

⁷¹² Hall, *Bulgaria's Road to the First World War*, 302; Richard C. Hall, Chapter 12, "Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece," in *The Origins of World War I*, eds., Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 398.

Falkenhayn finally signed the military convention at Pless.⁷¹³ Austria-Hungary and Germany promised to attack Serbia within 30 days of the convention's signature, while Bulgaria would launch its offensive within 35 days. Germany and Austria-Hungary earmarked six divisions each, while Bulgaria prepared at least four divisions. The overall German objective was to enjoy a numerical superiority of two to one against the Serbs.⁷¹⁴ Finally, and over von Hötendorf's complaints, Mackensen was confirmed as the supreme commander and empowered to issue orders to all Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, and German forces participating in the invasion of Serbia. More importantly for the Bulgarians, Sofia would receive its 200,000,000 Francs loan from Austria-Hungary and Germany. Lastly, once Serbia was defeated and communications to Bulgaria were reopened, two German Brigades would be posted in the coastal towns of Burgas and Varna, and the feasibility of utilizing German U-Boats in the Black Sea to defend Bulgarian shores would be explored.⁷¹⁵

The signing of the military convention between Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Germany and the preponderance exerted by Falkenhayn on the Central Powers' overall strategy reveals the absence of collaboration between the military and diplomatic branches of Imperial Germany.⁷¹⁶ However, Imperial Germany was not the only power where diplomats and military leaders did not coordinate their efforts. There was also an appalling lack of interaction between AOK in Teschen and the Austrian Foreign Office at the Ballhausplatz in Vienna. Foreign Minister Baron Stephan Burián

⁷¹³ Anne C. Holden, "Bulgaria's Entry in the First World War: A Diplomatic Study, 1913-1915," (PhD Diss., University of Illinois, 1976), 165; Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918*, 157; Falkenhayn, *The German General Staff and its Decisions, 1914-1916*, 160.

⁷¹⁴ Falkenhayn, *The German General Staff and its Decisions, 1914-1916*, 160. It must be noted that although the Bulgarians had fewer infantry divisions committed to the operations against the Serbian army, their divisions were twice larger than a German division.

⁷¹⁵ Falkenhayn, *The German General Staff and its Decisions, 1914-1916*, 161.

⁷¹⁶ Volker Ullrich, *Die nervöse Großmacht Aufstieg und Untergang des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871 - 1918* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1997), 413; Holger H. Herwig, "Strategic Uncertainties of a Nation-State: Prussia-Germany, 1871-1918," in *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*, eds., Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 277.

naively requested that only Austro-Hungarian troops should be used in the attack against Serbia. Burián's abysmal lack of knowledge about the true Austro-Hungarian military conditions prompted von Hötendorf to retort sarcastically, "But with what?"⁷¹⁷ The recent negotiations between AOK and OHL to attract Bulgaria to the Central Powers unmistakably confirmed the economic, industrial, and military disparity between Imperial Germany and the Habsburg Empire while displaying the total dependence of the latter to the former. The Bulgarians knew perfectly well that in the Central Powers, the real nexus was in Berlin, not Vienna. They were also rather content to entrust the command of their armies to a capable commander such as August von Mackensen.⁷¹⁸ The Central Powers had decisively seized the strategic initiative one more time, and the Entente was again forced to react. The fate of Serbia and the course of the war in the Balkans were now in the balance...The Central Powers assembled between 300,000 and 330,000 men for the invasion of Serbia.⁷¹⁹ The Central Powers forces comprised the German Eleventh Army, the Austro-Hungarian Third Army, and the Bulgarian First and Second Armies. (See Table 5). It is notable that during the Invasion of Serbia, even if the Bulgarian infantry divisions were far fewer than their German counterparts, the number of rifles per Bulgarian division was two and a half times the size of a German division that already comprised 17,000 men.⁷²⁰ When Bulgaria mobilized in September 1915, the normal Bulgarian infantry division consisted of 45,280 men (860 officers, 44,420 NCOs, and enlisted men).⁷²¹

⁷¹⁷ Quoted in Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, 190.

⁷¹⁸ Shanafelt, *The Secret Enemy: Austria-Hungary and the German Alliance: 1914-1918*, 77; Sondhaus, *Franz Conrad von Hötendorf*, 176.

⁷¹⁹ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 39; Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918*, 157.

⁷²⁰ Nigel Thomas, *The German Army in World War I*, vol. 1, *1914-15* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 7.

⁷²¹ Hall, *Balkan Breakthrough. The Battle of Dobro Pole, 1918*, 41.

Table 5: Order of Battle of the Central Powers for the Invasion of Serbia.

	Operational Command Army Group Temesvár Commanded by Generalfeldmarschall August von Mackensen. Chief of Staff, Generalmajor Hans von Seeckt.		
German Eleventh Army. Commanded by General Max von Gallwitz. Chief of Staff, Colonel Gottfried Marquard	Austrian Third Army. Commanded by General Hermann Kövess Chief of Staff, Generalmajor Theodor Konopicky (VIII Corps) Commanded by Feldzeugmeister Viktor von Scheuchenstuel	Bulgarian First Army Commanded by General Kliment Boyadzhiev	Bulgarian Second Army Commanded by General Georgi Todorov
(III Corps) Commanded by General Ewald von Lochow	57th Infantry Division Commanded by Feldmarschalleutnant Heinrich Goiginger	1st Sofia Division	3rd Balkan Division
6th Infantry Division Commanded by Generalmajor Richard Herhudt von Rohden	59th Infantry Division Commanded by Feldmarschalleutnant Lukas Snjarić	6th Vidin Division	7th Rila Division
25th Infantry Division Commanded by Generalmajor Thaddäus von Jarotzky	(XIX Corps) Commanded by Feldmarschalleutnant Ignaz Trollman	8th Tundzha Division	Cavalry Division
(IV Reserve Corps) Commanded by Generalleutnant Arnold von Winckler	53rd Infantry Division Commanded by Generalmajor Heinrich von Pongrácz	9th Pleven Division	
11th Infantry Division Commanded by Generalleutnant Paul Ritter von Kneussl	Independent Units:		
105th Infantry Division Commanded by Generalmajor Adolf von der Esch	62nd Infantry Division Commanded by Feldmarschalleutnant Franz von Kalser		
	Group Streith (Division-size unit) Commanded by Generalmajor Rudolf Streith		
(X Reserve Corps) Commanded by Generalleutnant Robert Kosch	Group Sorsich (Division-size unit) Commanded by Feldmarschalleutnant Bela Sorsich von Severin		
101st Infantry Division Commanded by Generalleutnant Richard von Kraewel	(XXII Reserve Corps) Commanded by General Eugen von Falkenhayn		
103rd Infantry Division Commanded by Generalmajor Ludwig von Estorff	German 26th Infantry Division. Commanded by Generalleutnant Wilhelm von Urach		
107th Infantry Division. Commanded by Generalmajor Otto von Mauser	German 43rd Reserve Infantry Division. Commanded by Generalmajor Hermann von Runckel		
Group Fülöpp (Division-size unit) Commanded by Feldmarschalleutnant Artur Fülöpp	German 44th Reserve Infantry Division. Commanded by Generalleutnant Eugen von Dorrer		
Alpine Korps			

Source: DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 37-47; Richard C. Hall, *Balkan Breakthrough. The Battle of Dobro Pole, 1918* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 44-45.

Before the invasion of Serbia, the Central Powers, notwithstanding their numerical superiority, held a decisive advantage in two critical aspects: artillery and aviation. The Austro-Hungarian Third Army and the German Eleventh Army disposed of about 1,200 guns that comprised thirty-six heavy gun batteries.⁷²² Moreover, the Austro-German forces possessed unchallenged control over the Serbian skies. The German Luftstreitkräfte [Air Force] dispatched six German Jagdstaffeln [fighter squadrons]. These were the First, Twenty-Eighth, Thirtieth, Fifty-Seventh, Sixty-Sixth, Sixty-Ninth; these six squadrons were managed by an air force headquarter and supported by the Thirteenth Army Aircraft Park. The Austro-Hungarian Third Army received aerial support with its Third, Sixth, Ninth, and Fifteenth Fliegerkompanien [flying companies].⁷²³ For his invasion, Mackensen also held naval superiority against the Serbs. He had at his disposal the Austro-Hungarian navy's Danube flotilla and ten monitors, which could provide artillery support when Austro-German forces would have to cross the Danube.⁷²⁴

Opposing the Central Powers, in the fall of 1915, the Serbian army strength was estimated between 250,000 and 270,000 rifles distributed among eleven infantry divisions, one cavalry division, and various small-size detachments. Furthermore, there were many irregulars known as *Komitadjis* that the Austro-Hungarians both dreaded and reviled.⁷²⁵ However, manpower was a crippling issue for the Serbian army, as the victories of 1914 against the Austro-Hungarians came at the terrible price of “22,000 dead, 91,000 wounded, and 19,000 captured or missing.”⁷²⁶ The

⁷²² Oskar Regele, *Feldmarschall Conrad. Auftrag und Erfüllung 1906-1918* (Vienna: Verlag Herold, 1955), 309; General Max von Gallwitz, *Meine Führertätigkeit im Weltkriege 1914/1916. Belgien - Osten - Balkan* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1929), 380.

⁷²³ Georg Paul Neumann, *Die Deutschen Luftstreitkräfte im Weltkriege* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1920), 488-489.

⁷²⁴ Lawrence Sondhaus, *The Naval Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1867-1918 Navalism, Industrial Development, and the Politics of Dualism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1990), 264.

⁷²⁵ Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War: 1914-1918* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007), 106-107; Jonathan E. Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 43.

⁷²⁶ Bundesministerium, *Österreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, vol. 1, *Das Kriegsjahr 1914*, 762.

Germans held the Serbian army in the highest esteem, and unlike the Austro-Hungarians, they certainly did not commit the mistake of underestimating their opponents. In January 1915, German agent Albin Kutschbach reported from Niš that “Serbian officers are militarily irreproachable.”⁷²⁷ Although the average Serbian soldier was generally a farmer, he was well-recognized for withstanding the hardships of the tough Balkan weather and was imbued with a high sense of patriotism. Already battle-hardened by the Balkan Wars and the 1914’s fighting, the average Serbian soldier was disciplined and excelled in defense. In terms of artillery, in summer 1915, the Serbian army possessed 768 guns.⁷²⁸ This number of guns was largely insufficient to protect the northern border against Austro-German forces and the eastern frontier against Bulgarian armies.

Just like their Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian and German opponents, Serbian commanders had been battle-tested and were resourceful and well-versed in the art of modern warfare. At the top of the Serbian army sat Vojvoda [Field Marshal] Radomir Putnik, and just like French General Joseph Joffre on the Western Front after the victory of the Marne, Putnik reached great fame for his victories of the Cer and Kolubara against the Austro-Hungarians. Nevertheless, during the brutal contest about to start, Putnik, already an aged man, was “terminally ill from emphysema and fighting for each breath of his paralysed lungs.”⁷²⁹ Due to his deteriorating medical condition, Putnik could not lead his army as he did in the opening months of the war; however, during the Serbian Campaign of 1915, Putnik relied on two very capable subordinates, Vojvoda Živojin Mišić and Vojvoda Stepan Stepanović. The German Military Intelligence had gathered very detailed information about the two main Serbian commanders. Vojvoda Mišić was described as a very well-

⁷²⁷ Quoted in Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War: 1914-1918*, 103.

⁷²⁸ Part I. *Military Notes on the Balkan States*, in General Staff, War Office, *Armies of the Balkan States, 1914-1918: The Military Forces of Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, Rumania, and Serbia* (London: Imperial War Museum, Department of Printed Books. In association with Battery Press, Nashville, TN: 1996), 51.

⁷²⁹ Dimitrije Djordjević, “Radomir Putnik,” in *The Serbs and their Leaders in the Twentieth Century*, eds., Peter Radan and Aleksandar Pavković (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997), 131.

trained military leader – the heart and soul of Serbia’s Supreme Command – and certainly the most competent Serbian officer and the most capable Serbian leader. Equally, Vojvoda Stepanović was highly regarded and considered “one of the most capable leaders of the Serbian army...calm, resolute, extremely forceful and possessed of an exceptional understanding of matters necessary for supreme command.”⁷³⁰

As the Serbian General Staff was well informed of the Central Powers’ impending offensive, it deployed three armies to counter it. In the north, facing the Austro-Hungarian Third Army and the German Eleventh Army were the Serbian First and Third Armies commanded by Vojvoda Mišić and General Pavle Jurišić Šturm. Altogether these two armies amounted to 150,000 men and 362 guns.⁷³¹ On the eastern border with Bulgaria, the Serbs positioned their Second Army under Vojvoda Stepanović; this army was supported by the Timok Group commanded by General Ilja Gojković and the majority of Serbian cavalry. In total, 100,000 men and 238 guns.⁷³² One of the advantages that the Serbian army enjoyed in the coming campaign was the difficulty of the terrain and the natural obstacles constituted by two wide rivers, the Danube and Sava. “The average width of the Save was 300 to 700 yards, whereas that of the Danube could be over a mile in places.”⁷³³ Furthermore, in the fall, the current was strong, and at this time of the year, both rivers were high, making their crossing even more complicated. Once these rivers were forded, the Serbs could hide and seek shelter in the mountains, where they would also have excellent observation points and artillery firing positions. The Austro-German forces were not the only ones confronted by an abrupt and mountainous terrain. In the southeast of Serbia, the Bulgarians would have to

⁷³⁰ Austro-Hungarian Military Intelligence Reports, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna [hereafter abbreviated to KA], Carton no. 9848, not dated; also, Savo Skoko and Petar Opačić, *Vojvoda Stepa Stepanović u ratovima Srbije 1876-1918* [Vojvoda Stepa Stepanović in the wars of Serbia 1876-1918] (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1985), 1-2.

⁷³¹ Bundesministerium, *Österreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, vol. 2, *Das Kriegsjahr 1915*, 35.

⁷³² Bundesministerium, *Österreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, vol. 2, *Das Kriegsjahr 1915*, 35.

⁷³³ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 57.

advance over the rugged passes of the Rhodope Mountains before they could target the city of Niš. Finally, as the last impediment, all the Central Powers' armies were confronted by difficult communications, as the Serbian railroads were rather crude, and road transport was equally poor.⁷³⁴ Overall, in this campaign, German organization and logistics would be tested to their limits.

Nevertheless, the Central Powers' plan (hatched originally by the Austro-Hungarian General Staff's then revised and updated by Colonel Richard Hensch and General Hans von Seeckt) was rather simple, overwhelm the Serbian forces with a concentric attack carried out by superior numbers (390 battalions versus 230 Serbian battalions), and destroy them in the Kragujevać-Cuprija region.⁷³⁵ The mission of the Austro-German forces also relied on the effective progress of Bulgarian divisions in the southeast and their capture of the important towns of Niš and Kragujevać. Meanwhile, the plan also accounted for the expected arrival of Anglo-French forces that would go up the Vardar Valley. The Bulgarian had to secure the Vardar River banks to isolate any Allied attempts to link up with Serbian forces and cut down the railroad between Niš and Salonica.⁷³⁶

On 5-6 October 1915 (as the first Anglo-French troops arrived in Salonica), Mackensen Army Group attacked Serbia with an overwhelming artillery bombardment.⁷³⁷ This heavy and accurate artillery fire had been previously facilitated by German aerial reconnaissance and bombing attacks against Serbian defenses. In the north, General Hermann Kövess' Austrian Third Army and von Gallwitz's German Eleventh Army crossed the Danube and Sava Rivers. On 14-15

⁷³⁴ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 58.

⁷³⁵ Bundesministerium, *Österreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, vol. 2, *Das Kriegsjahr 1915*, 187.

⁷³⁶ Douglas W. Johnson, *Topography and Strategy in the War* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1917), 148-149; Rauchensteiner, *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1914 – 1918*, 467.

⁷³⁷ Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War: 1914-1918*, 144; DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 61.

October, the Bulgarian armies attacked from the east, hitting the Serbs with numerically superior formations. As the fighting went on uninterrupted, the Bulgarian First Army continued to advance directly toward Niš. After some heavy fighting, the Austro-German forces progressively pushed back the Serbs and overwhelmed their tenacious defense. Putnik and his commanders fought stubborn rearguard actions before retreating rapidly; this pattern was repeated throughout the campaign. However, due to inferior artillery and manpower, the Serbs had to retreat in front of the advancing Central Powers, and on 9 October, Mackensen and Austro-German forces captured Belgrade.⁷³⁸ Faced with such obvious inferiority in men and materiel, the Serbs' last hope was that the Entente Expeditionary Force under General Sarrail would promptly join hands with their armies that found themselves in an extremely precarious position.

Unfortunately for the Serbs, the Entente forces recently landed in Salonica, arrived too late, and in insufficient numbers to have a decisive impact on the military operations underway. The French Armée d'Orient under Sarrail (with its three divisions that had arrived between 5 and 16 October) rapidly advanced north but was immediately involved in vicious fighting with the leading Bulgarian units that had already seized the higher ground.⁷³⁹ Between October and December, the British and French forces that had attempted to liaise with the retreating Serbian armies were themselves forced to fight a ferocious rearguard action against determined Bulgarian attacks that pushed them back steadily.

By 12 December all French and British troops had left Serbian territory; one in ten of the Allied force was listed as a casualty, killed or wounded or missing. It was a heavy price for taking pressure off the Serbs, and few people back in France and Britain appreciated what had been done.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁸ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918*, vol. 7, *Die Operationen des Jahres 1915*, 211-213.

⁷³⁹ Gérard Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient (Octobre 1915-novembre 1918)* (Paris: Economica, 2003), 25-28; These three French divisions were the 1st Infantry Division commanded by General Maurice Bailloud, the 57th Infantry Division under General Paul Leblois, and the 122nd Infantry Division led by General Charles de Lardemelle. SHD, 7 N 336, Armée d'Orient - Tableau de composition sommaire.

⁷⁴⁰ Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika: The Macedonian Campaign 1915-1918* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 43.

By mid-November 1915, the Serbian army's situation was critical, and despite the extreme pressure from the Central Powers armies, the Serbs stubbornly refused to capitulate. They decided to preserve their last combat forces in the field and escape from their opponents. On 20 November, the Serbian authorities decided to withdraw toward Montenegro and Albania. On 25 November, Vojvoda Radomir Putnik, Commander-in-Chief of the Serbian army, issued his notorious order of retreat across Albania to reach the Adriatic ports. He exhorted the Serbian nation to keep fighting and believe in better days. Putnik wrote,

The moment has come when a combination of circumstances is forcing us to retreat through Montenegro and Albania...The state of the army is generally unfavourable...Capitulation would be the worst possible solution, as it would mean loss of the state...The only salvation from this grave situation lies in retreating to the Adriatic Coast. There our army will be reorganised, supplied with food, weapons, ammunitions, clothing and everything else necessary that is being sent by our Allies, and we shall once again be a factor for our enemies to reckon with. The state lives, it still exists albeit on foreign ground, wherever the ruler, the Government and the army are to be found, whatever its strength may be...In these difficult days our salvation [lies] in the endurance, patience and utter perseverance of us all, with faith in the ultimate success of our Allies.⁷⁴¹

This epic retreat has since then gone down in history as Serbia's Golgotha. A third of the Serbian army perished through extreme cold and diseases. Throughout December, the last Serbian civilians, soldiers, politicians, and the royal court all finally arrived in the ports of the Adriatic coast. The majority of them were cold, starving, and sick. Auguste Boppe, the French Ambassador to Serbia, related what he witnessed in the streets of the Albanian port of Scutari,

Exhausted, the soldiers entered Scutari, in isolation, in little groups, riders, and infantrymen pell-mell; sometimes a detachment kept its military appearance, but many of the men did not have their weapons anymore. All appeared extenuated, genuine walking skeletons; they advanced painfully, skinny, haggard...Their pathetic procession continued for days on, under the rain, in the mud. No complaint came from these men who suffered so much; just pushed by fate, they walked silently; sometimes we could hear them saying *lleba* (bread); it was the only word they could pronounce.⁷⁴²

⁷⁴¹ Quoted in Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War: 1914-1918*, 149.

⁷⁴² Auguste Boppe, *A la suite du gouvernement serbe de Nich à Corfou, 20 octobre 1915-19 janvier 1916* (Paris: Bossard, 1917), 106-107.

In the light of these terrible casualties, historians have pondered the numbers of Serbian soldiers who effectively survived the crossings through Albania and Montenegro. Richard DiNardo states, “The common view is that perhaps 140,000 soldiers reached the coast, although some recent scholarship suggests that the number was lower.”⁷⁴³ Andrej Mitrović cited lower figures, “According to supreme command records, there were nearly 110,000 soldiers and 2,350 officers on the Albanian coast at the end of December 1915.”⁷⁴⁴ The joint organization of the evacuation of the Serbian army proved to be an extremely arduous task for the Allies. On 1 December, the Italians complained to the French that they were the only ones taking risks to rescue the Serbs in the Adriatic.⁷⁴⁵ Indeed, the Allies had to contend with the risks presented by the Austro-Hungarian navy commanded by Admiral Anton Haus and based at Pola. The Austro-Hungarian submarines threatened Allied naval communications. The Italians were justified in their apprehensions as “On the night of November 22-23, light Austrian cruisers *Helgoland* and *Saida* sank two Italian ships (the motor schooner *Gallinara* and the small steamer *Palatino*) both carrying supplies for the Serbs.”⁷⁴⁶ The French equally complained about their transalpine partners. On 20 December, when Serbian soldiers were still arriving in Valona (Vlorë) and Durazzo (Durrës), French Lieutenant Gauchet criticized the Italian lack of effort and dilatoriness. He stated, “The Serbs are going to starve.”⁷⁴⁷ According to Andrej Mitrović, the relief of the Serbian army had not been easily conducted by the Allies. He stated, “The food sent by France and Britain had started to reach Brindisi, but its onward dispatch was slow because the Italian navy had not allocated enough ships,

⁷⁴³ DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915*, 122.

⁷⁴⁴ Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War*, 151-152.

⁷⁴⁵ Alexis Troude, “Les relations franco-serbes au sein de l’Armée d’Orient, 1915-1918,” *Balkanica* 37, (2007): 228.

⁷⁴⁶ Charles W. Koburger, Jr., *The Central Powers in the Adriatic, 1914-1918: War in a Narrow Sea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 48. About the Naval war in the Adriatic Sea, Paul G. Halpern, *The Battle of the Otranto Straits: Controlling the Gateway to the Adriatic in World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁷⁴⁷ Service Historique de la Marine [hereafter abbreviated to SHM], Château de Vincennes, SSZ 35, dossier H3-Affaires serbes, note du lieutenant Gauchet, 20 décembre 1915.

and those it had allocated were too small.”⁷⁴⁸ Despite the difficult circumstances, such as a short period to organize the relief effort, the difficulties of coordination with the Italians, and the ultimate submarine’s threat, the French military aid still arrived in Durazzo and delivered 1,700 wagons of wheat flour to feed the Serbs.⁷⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Entente managed to organize the relief of the Serbian forces. To alleviate frictions between the French and the Italians, the British Admiral Sir Ernest Charles Thomas Troubridge received the overall command of Allied naval operations. Charles Fryer confirms that “Having shared many of the hardships of the campaign, he was trusted by the Serbians, and Troubridge was fluent in both Serbian and French.”⁷⁵⁰

Alexis Troude indicates that “Between 15 January and 20 February 1916, more than 135,000 Serbian soldiers were evacuated to Corfu.”⁷⁵¹ Men of the 6th Régiment de Chasseurs Alpins (RCA) based in Corfu were shocked by the terrible health conditions of their Serbian comrades. One of them wrote in the unit’s journal, “The state of exhaustion of these sorrowful Serbian soldiers is extreme: forty of them die every day.”⁷⁵² At Corfu, the French army and its medical corps played a crucial role in providing health care to the Serbs. The French army refitted the Serbs with French uniforms, helmets, and weapons; it also assisted the Serbian army to get the necessary material support it needed and prepare to go back in the field. The French army supplied 75,000 rifles and eighteen batteries of 75 to the Serbs.⁷⁵³ The French medical corps opened two hospitals, and by the end of March 1916, no more epidemics occurred. In Corfu, the French and the Serbian soldiers had the opportunity to know each other better, and overall, the relations were

⁷⁴⁸ Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War*, 152.

⁷⁴⁹ SHM, SSZ 35, dossier H3-Affaires serbes: ravitaillement armée serbe.

⁷⁵⁰ Charles E. J. Fryer, *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1997), 77.

⁷⁵¹ Troude, “Les relations franco-serbes,” 228.

⁷⁵² SHD, 16 N 3057, GQG Armées de l'Est, 3^{ème} bureau (1916-1917), note no. 14, 5 février 1916.

⁷⁵³ SHM, SSZ 35, dossier H3-Affaires serbes: ravitaillement armée serbe. About the French contribution to the rebirth of the Serbian army, see Louis-Marie-Joseph Ripert d'Alauzier, *Un Drame historique. La résurrection de l'armée serbe, Albanie-Corfu 1915-1916* (Paris: Payot, 1923) ; as well as the memoirs left by General Jean Frédéric Lucien Piarron de Mondésir, *Souvenirs et pages de guerre* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1933).

friendly and positive. After he arrived at Corfu, Svetozar Aleksić, a farmer from central Serbia declared, “That they (the French) bless their motherland, France. They saved our lives.”⁷⁵⁴ In a letter dated 24 April 1916 and addressed to General Jean Frédéric Lucien Piarron de Mondésir, the Serbian minister of war affirmed that “The Chasseurs during their stay at Corfu, won the hearts of the soldiers and their chiefs through their unstinting devotion toward their Serbian comrades.”⁷⁵⁵ At the same period, Prince Regent Alexander declared to Auguste Boppe,

The Serbs know today what France is. Until now, they only knew Russia. Nowhere did they see the Russians, everywhere they found Frenchmen: at Salonica to offer their hands, in Albania to welcome them, at Corfu to save them.⁷⁵⁶

As Putnik prophetically foresaw, Serbia survived its ordeal of fall 1915 and reintegrated the Entente, where it contributed efficiently to the Allied war effort in Macedonia. However, the old Serbian Field Marshal never saw his country liberated from the Austro-Hungarian, and Bulgarian occupations, as he passed away in Nice, France, on 17 May 1917. However, despite the defeat of Serbia in 1915, within a matter of months, the Serbian army was back in the fight. In September 1918, the Serbian troops alongside the French forces broke through the Bulgarian lines during the critical Battle of Dobro Pole. Serbia’s role in the Allied victory provided it with the necessary diplomatic credentials to channel the energy from the nascent Yugoslav movement and reinforced its bargaining position *vis-à-vis* Italy in the Adriatic.⁷⁵⁷ As Frédéric Le Moal confirmed,

Serbia... with her army in tatters, crossing the Albanian mountains during an apocalyptic retreat, saved by the French and Italian fleets, and after a rest period in the island of Corfu, her soldiers went back to fight on the Macedonian Front. Serbia never surrendered, nor

⁷⁵⁴ Testimony of Svetozar Aleksić, quoted in Dragutin Paunić and Milija Đorđević eds., *Tri sile pritisle Srbijicu* [Three forces pressed Serbia] (Belgrade: Narodna knj, 1985), 8-12.

⁷⁵⁵ Milan M. Živanović, “Sur l’évacuation de l’armée serbe de l’Albanie et sa réorganisation à Corfou (1915-1916) d’après les documents français,” *Revue historique* XIV-XV (1966): 2.

⁷⁵⁶ Živanović, “Sur l’évacuation de l’armée serbe de l’Albanie et sa réorganisation à Corfou,” 4.

⁷⁵⁷ For the birth of the Yugoslav movement and the post-war settlement in the Adriatic, (especially in relation to Italy) please see Part I: *War and Armistice*, in Ivo J. Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference. A Study in Frontiersmaking* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 3-78.; also, Dimitrije Djordjević (ed.), *The Creation of Yugoslavia, 1914-1918* (Santa Barbara, CA: Clio Books, 1980).

signed any separate peace with the Central Powers, thus gaining considerable military prestige in the process.⁷⁵⁸

On the other hand, for the Central Powers, the successful Invasion of Serbia paid considerable strategic dividends. First, Berlin managed to attach Bulgaria to the Central Powers, thus harnessing Bulgarian military strength and ensuring that the Bulgarian soldiers tied down more than half a million Allied troops in the Balkans for the next three years. Second, Bulgaria achieved all its war aims and imposed its protectorate over Macedonia while also occupying parts of Serbia. Third, because of the Bulgarian military power and its threat against Greece, the Hellenic Kingdom was deterred from joining the fray. It was only in 1917, once the Allies had removed King Constantine from his throne, that the Hellenic Kingdom entered the war on the Entente's side.⁷⁵⁹ Fourth, for Germany, the very successful invasion of Serbia, which followed the earlier victories in Galicia and Poland, proved Falkenhayn's strategic vision to be on point. The threat of the Russian armies against East Prussia and the Habsburg Empire had been eliminated. Fifth, Mackensen's brilliant campaign in the Balkans had also reopened the communications between the Ottoman Empire and Imperial Germany. This crucial bloodline essentially allowed the Ottomans to receive precious German military material and ammunition and assisted them to outlast the Entente in the Dardanelles. In 1916, the Ottomans also inflicted a memorable defeat on the British in Mesopotamia during the siege of Kut-Al-Amara.⁷⁶⁰ Finally, the pattern established with the well-

⁷⁵⁸ Frédéric Le Moal, *La Serbie: du martyre à la victoire, 1914-1918* (Saint-Cloud: 14-18 Éditions, 2008), 9.

⁷⁵⁹ For the removal of the pro-German Greek monarch, see David Dutton, "The deposition of King Constantine of Greece June 1917: An Episode in the Anglo-French Diplomacy," *Canadian Journal of History* 12 (1978): 325-345; also, George B. Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers, 1914-1917* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1974); finally, about the political and military pressure exerted by French authorities toward the Greek Government, see, Rémy Porte, "Comment faire plier un neutre? L'action politique et militaire de la France en Grèce (1915-1917)," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 81 (2010): 45-62.

⁷⁶⁰ About the early Ottoman success against the British in Mesopotamia, especially at the siege of Kut, see, Nikolas Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara: At War in Mesopotamia, 1915-1916* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014); for the rest of this often-forgotten theater of World War I, see, A. J. Barker, *The First Iraq War, 1914-1918: Britain's Mesopotamian Campaign* (New York, NY: Enigma, 2009); Charles Townshend, *Desert Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

planned and executed invasion of Serbia in 1915 was again repeated in August 1916, when Romania, which had just entered the war on the Entente's side, was crushed within a few months.⁷⁶¹ This well-orchestrated offensive against Bucharest in 1916 was replicated a few months later by another successful German campaign in the Baltic in 1917 and against Italy during the Battle of Caporetto in October.⁷⁶² Ultimately, the Central Powers' military operations against Serbia belatedly convinced the Entente to launch the Macedonian Campaign. However, unlike the Central Powers, the Entente did not conclude it in a couple of months but took three long years to gain its own triumph in the Balkans.

⁷⁶¹ About another extremely successful military campaign planned by the Germans, and executed by Austro-German and Bulgarian forces, see, Glenn E. Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011); Michael B. Barrett, *Prelude to Blitzkrieg: The 1916 Austro-German Campaign in Romania* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).

⁷⁶² For the success of German arms in the Baltic, see, Richard L. DiNardo, "Huns with web-feet: Operation Albion, 1917," *War in History* 12, no. 4 (November 2005) 396-417; Michael B. Barrett, *Operation Albion: The German Conquest of the Baltic Islands* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008); Gary Staff, *Battle for the Baltic Islands 1917: Triumph of the Imperial German Navy* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2008); about the Central Powers' resounding military success against the Italian army at the Battle of Caporetto, see, John Macdonald and Željko Cimprić, *Caporetto and the Isonzo Campaign: The Italian Front 1915-1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2011).

CHAPTER 10

THE MACEDONIAN MASQUERADE

The whole thing is a French political rant.

Field Marshal Sir William Robertson
to General Sir Archibald Murray,
6 March 1916.

As described earlier, the origins of the Macedonian Campaign derive from four primary factors: military (attempting to rescue the Serbian army in its hour of crisis), diplomatic (gaining the support of the remaining neutral states in the Balkans, Greece, and Romania), and political (providing a high-ranking command to General Maurice Sarrail). The fourth set of reasons explored in this chapter was the French Government's motivations to transform this military operation into a commercial and imperial venture where Macedonia and Greece would fall under French domination. Between October 1915 and September 1918, France deployed a sizeable army in Salonica, which saw little action for most of the conflict and gained very few military successes. Meanwhile, as the French and Allied armies were dormant in the Balkans, the Germans still occupied half of the French coalfields and the iron ore of Briey and Longwy. The principal goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that unlike what has been generally described before, the French rationale for keeping this mostly unproductive Macedonian Campaign alive was primarily based on commercial and imperial motivations

During the Macedonian Campaign, several British decision-makers believed "that some sinister territorial, strategic, or economic motivation must underlie French persistence in the campaign."⁷⁶³ However, British suspicions about the hidden French motivations were vague and relied more on hunches than tangible facts. Since the start of the campaign, Chief of the Imperial

⁷⁶³ David Dutton, "The Balkan Campaign and French War Aims in the Great War," *The English Historical Review* 94, no. 370 (January 1979): 97.

General Staff (CIGS) Field Marshal Sir William Robertson had sensed that there was “a great deal of Finance as well as politics mixed up in this French enterprise.”⁷⁶⁴ Robertson’s opinion seems to confirm why the French did not withdraw from Macedonia following the rescue of the remnants of the Serbian army in late 1915, early 1916. In May 1917, Lord Robert Cecil informed the other members of the Imperial War Cabinet of his belief that there was “a section in France which aimed at utilising the war in order to secure for France some special political or financial position in Greece.”⁷⁶⁵ In July 1918, Sir Maurice Hankey admitted in his diary that “there are and always have been subtle influences, possibly of financial character, behind the French attitude towards the Salonica expedition.”⁷⁶⁶

In March 1917, Sir Francis Elliott, British Ambassador to Greece, relayed to the Foreign Office a *memorandum* that the British Intelligence Service Officer in Athens, Compton Mackenzie, had produced. In this *memorandum*, Mackenzie believed that he discovered the French logic for the continuation of the campaign.⁷⁶⁷ Mackenzie explained that it was not startling that once General Maurice Sarrail had ensured the security of Salonica and recognized that a military victory was no longer possible in Macedonia, the French rapidly sought to utilize this campaign for non-military objectives. Mackenzie noted that the usual suspicion of Sarrail being seen as a political general (which was indeed correct) vouched for the indolent English thinking that believed that he ‘was up to something’ without attempting to understand what it truly was. Mackenzie argued that Sarrail’s policy in Macedonia, following the English decision to not participate in any offensive actions against the Bulgarians, was driven solely by political motives.

⁷⁶⁴ Kings College London, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, [hereafter abbreviated to LHCMA], Robertson MSS 8/1/20, Robertson to Murray, 5 April 1916.

⁷⁶⁵ TNA, CAB 23/40/14, Imperial War Cabinet, 2 May 1917.

⁷⁶⁶ Maurice Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918*, vol. 2 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), 821.

⁷⁶⁷ TNA, FO 371/2865/60223, *Memorandum* written by Compton Mackenzie, 5 March 1917. The rest of this analysis presented in this paragraph is based on this *memorandum*.

Mackenzie was also convinced that Sarrail had been smart when disguising French political aspirations in the Balkans under the veneer of military necessity. In Mackenzie's mind, the measures Sarrail took to ensure the security of the Armée d'Orient were simply a pretext to enforce French political prerogatives in the Hellenic Kingdom. In his controversial memoirs, Mackenzie, who had no sympathy for Sarrail, wrote,

Sarrail, being deterred from any military operations of importance, occupied his energy with politics, and in doing so he created an impression that it was his own personal ambition which was responsible for everything the French did in Greece. As a member of the Financial Democratic Party he was accused of engineering a scheme for the French Jews to make money; as an individual he was accused of allowing his personal dislike of King Constantine to inspire his actions with petty spite; as a Frenchman he was accused of meditating a military *coup d'état* in France on the lines of Boulanger.⁷⁶⁸

If Mackenzie had some grounds to be critical toward Sarrail, some of his accusations lacked substance. If Sarrail meddled in Greek politics, he never intended to become a new Bonaparte and seize power through a *coup*. In that respect, Mackenzie's claim was ludicrous and simply the product of his fertile imagination and vagrant pen. There is, however, one other element in which Mackenzie's opinion about Sarrail's conduct in Greece is warranted: Sarrail was not the only French leader to dictate policy in Greece. He implemented his government's objectives in the region. Still, Sarrail facilitated the commercial interests of the many Chambers of Commerce across France that expanded their efforts toward Salonica and the Macedonian *hinterland*. As early as January 1916, Mackenzie also questioned the dispatch of a French naval mission led by the Commandant de Roquefeuil.⁷⁶⁹ In March and April 1916, as a striking example of French

⁷⁶⁸ Compton Mackenzie, *Greek Memories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1939), 75. It must be noted that this original version of Mackenzie's memoirs were published in 1932. However, Mackenzie made a serious mistake when he utilized secret letters and confidential documents where he revealed the identity of British Intelligence officers across Europe and described British Intelligence's methods and covert operations that took place during the war. Mackenzie was prosecuted at the Old Bailey under the *Official Secrets Act* for citing secret documents, and his book was banned, only to be published seven years later in 1939, after many controversial pages had finally been eliminated.

⁷⁶⁹ Mackenzie, *Greek Memories*, 74. For more details about de Roquefeuil's mission and the rather dubious methods he employed during his time in Greece, see the primary sources produced by Admiral Louis Dartige du Fournet, *Souvenirs de guerre d'un amiral (1914-1916)* (Paris: Plon, 1920); Commandant Emmanuel Clergeau, *Le commandant*

involvement in Greek politics, French Naval Intelligence had already contacted the Greek leader, Eleftherios Venizelos, intending to foment a revolution in Greece and assist the latter in gaining political control of the country.⁷⁷⁰ Mackenzie pointed out that it was only due to the tacit British acceptance of French diplomatic leadership in Salonica that the French government had effectively tightened its grip over the Greek political life. Mackenzie also hinted that the French wished to maintain their presence in Greece to thwart the Italian designs in the Adriatic and the Balkans. Mackenzie was convinced that the French takeover in Salonica was predicated upon their anxiety over Syria and the Near East.⁷⁷¹ In conclusion, Mackenzie believed that it was largely time for the British government to take action and no longer be the vehicle of “the ill-considered aspirations and unreasonable ambitions of two rival Latin nations.”⁷⁷²

It seems that this British distrust of French designs over Greece took shape at least a year before Mackenzie even wrote his report. On 21 March 1916, Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener declared to the Cabinet that “the French were following out part of a general scheme and were using the war for purposes of future development in the East.”⁷⁷³ On 29 March, after an inter-allied conference that he had attended in Paris, Lord Kitchener met Sir Douglas Haig and confided to him that “the French are aiming at a development of their dominions in the Eastern Mediterranean, and will not now fight actively to beat the Germans in France.”⁷⁷⁴ Robert Blake

de Roquefeuil en Grèce (Paris: Les Editions de France, 1934); and more recently, the articles written by Yanis Mourellos, “À l’ombre de l’Acropole: Espionnage et contrainte politique en Grèce pendant la Grande Guerre,” *Relations internationales*, no. 78 (1994): 175-184; and Nicolas Dujin, “Un attaché naval dans la Grande Guerre: Le Commandant de Roquefeuil à Athènes (1915-1917),” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, no. 224 (October 2006): 95-109.

⁷⁷⁰ Dujin, “Un attaché naval dans la Grande Guerre: Le Commandant de Roquefeuil à Athènes (1915-1917),” 104-105.

⁷⁷¹ Mackenzie, *Greek Memories*, 66-67.

⁷⁷² David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 147.

⁷⁷³ TNA, CAB 42/11/6, 7, Secretary’s Notes of a War Committee held at 10 Downing Street (secret), 21 March 1916.

⁷⁷⁴ Robert Blake, ed., *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952), 137.

(the editor of Haig's Private Papers) confirmed that,

Kitchener was wrong. The French refusal was based neither on strategy nor a subtle foreign policy; it was based on the character of General Sarrail who commanded at Salonika...Therefore, despite its normal reluctance to countenance Eastern diversions, the French government was most unwilling to withdraw the army from Salonika in case such attack would be interpreted as an attack on General Sarrail.⁷⁷⁵

However, it seems more logical that Kitchener came to this conclusion not because the French government refused to evacuate Salonica, but rather because he regularly received accurate information from the head of the British *liaison* service with the French War Ministry Lieutenant-Colonel John Yarde-Buller. In the first months of 1916, Yarde-Buller had informed Kitchener of a so-called 'Briand-Buonaparte intrigue' hatched by the French Premier to replace the Greek Royal Family. Still, in February, it seemed that the Russians also got involved in these back-door conspiracies and promoted the candidacy of Prince Nicholas of Greece in case of a development of the revolutionary scheme. Yarde-Buller, always well-informed, communicated to Kitchener that this latest Russian move could be a "serious obstacle to M. Briand's aims."⁷⁷⁶ It does not appear that Kitchener had indeed shared this highly sensitive information about French involvement in Greek political affairs with his Cabinet colleagues. Kitchener's secretive attitude was characteristic of his disdain toward politicians with whom he reluctantly collaborated. Back in September 1915, Sir Maurice Hankey had informed Kitchener about how strongly the other cabinet members felt about his lack of communication toward them, a habit that created much aggravation. Kitchener answered that he could not inform them about all he knew since they usually leaked so much confidential information, but he confirmed that "if they will only divorce their wives I will tell them everything!"⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁵ Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919*, 52.

⁷⁷⁶ TNA, WO 159/12, Yarde-Buller to Kitchener, 6 February 1916.

⁷⁷⁷ Maurice Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), 221.

These British suspicions of French imperial schemes in the Balkans and the East Mediterranean were substantiated. From October 1915 to March 1917, Aristide Briand was very aware of the potential benefits that an Allied military expedition to the Balkans could do to advance French diplomatic and strategic interests in the region. In February 1915, when David Lloyd George had visited France, he was already informed of the impetus fueling Briand's enthusiasm for an Allied expedition in the Balkans. More importantly, Briand was already busy scheming for this Balkan campaign long before the *affaire* Sarrail started to weigh on the overall decision taken by the French government. On 7 February 1915, Lloyd George confirmed to Sir Edward Grey that,

The French are very anxious to be represented in the expeditionary force. Briand thinks it desirable from the point of view of a final settlement that France and England should establish a right to a voice in the settlement of the Balkans by having a force there. He does not want Russia to feel that she alone is the arbiter of the fate of the Balkan peoples.⁷⁷⁸

From this last statement, it now becomes simpler to comprehend why the French government attached so much importance to the Balkans. Strategically, the French government aimed at carving a zone of influence and oppose any post-war Russian designs in the region. Once these strategic motivations are integrated within the Macedonian Campaign's largest scope, it becomes easier to understand why this campaign was continued despite becoming irrelevant from a military perspective. Furthermore, entrenching French position in the Balkans would also constitute a bulwark against a considerably reinforced Russia to whom the Treaty of London had promised the possession of Constantinople.

It is also evident that Briand was receptive to the appeals of the various French lobbies from outside Parliament, which were adamant that the government should safeguard French commercial and economic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Wolfram Gottlieb even declared

⁷⁷⁸ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. 1, 1914-1915 (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1933), 355-356.

that Aristide Briand envisioned the Salonica enterprise “predominantly as a French bid for power in the Near East.”⁷⁷⁹ If Briand believed that France should consolidate its position in the Balkans, he responded to some undeniable pressures from the *Chambre des députés* [Chamber of Deputies] urging the government to defend French commercial interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. On 26 April 1915, during a session in which the Italian involvement in the war was discussed, Georges Leygues reminded the Chamber about the crucial French concerns in the Mediterranean.⁷⁸⁰ During these discussions, it was stated that France would need time to rebuild its economy when the war would be over. This economic reconstruction could only be successful if France maintained its access to raw materials from its colonies and safeguard its colonial lines of communication. Therefore, these specific factors were of primary importance regarding the diplomatic negotiations with Italy about the Mediterranean.⁷⁸¹ Leygues voiced his concerns in the Foreign Affairs Commission and communicated directly with Briand to remind him of the vital importance of the Eastern Mediterranean to the French strategic position.⁷⁸² Furthermore, some Deputies expressed their anxiety about the potential damages to French interests in the Near and Middle East if Germany carried on its imperial expansion and strengthened its hold over an enormous economic area stretching from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf, through Constantinople, and from the North Sea to the Indian Ocean.⁷⁸³ Some of the Foreign Affairs Commission’s members were convinced that one of the crucial French war aims should be to see France replacing German economic

⁷⁷⁹ W. W. Gottlieb, *Studies in Secret Diplomacy During the First World War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), 82.

⁷⁸⁰ Regarding the importance of the year 1915 in the relations between Italy and France in the Balkans, see, Frédéric Le Moal, “L’année 1915 dans les relations franco-italiennes: L’année de la rupture?,” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 4, no. 220 (2005): 5-22.

⁷⁸¹ AN, Série C, C 7488, *Commission des affaires étrangères de la Chambre des Députés*, 26 April 1915.

⁷⁸² AN, Série C, C 7490, Leygues to Briand, 20 June 1916.

⁷⁸³ AN, Série C, C 7488, *Commission des affaires étrangères de la Chambre des Députés*, 20 July 1915.

dominance in Allied and neutral countries, hence why the Balkans were central to these larger war aims.⁷⁸⁴

It was not long before Briand disclosed that his diplomatic program was dictated by the various motives that preoccupied the Foreign Affairs Commission. In June 1916, during the first secret session of the war, he confirmed that the government had identified the Balkans as a crucial strategic area. The French diplomatic conduct was concerned with the current war and looked forward to Post-War Europe. Briand declared that states such as France could not allow seeing their standing diminished in the Near East countries and that French forces in Salonica had prevented such a calamity.⁷⁸⁵ In October 1916, as Briand again faced the Foreign Affairs Commission, which questioned him about the Salonica Expedition, he confirmed to its members the utmost significance that the area played within the overall French strategy. He also believed that once the war over, the Eastern Question would rapidly resurface and that the countries which controlled its outcome would be “the masters of the world.”⁷⁸⁶

As the war continued, Briand’s chef de cabinet [chief of staff] and the Quai d’Orsay’s *éminence grise*, Philippe Berthelot, created a propaganda service that focused its efforts on economic expansion in the Balkan Peninsula and Eastern Europe.⁷⁸⁷ In Bucharest, French propaganda bureau chief, Édouard Tavernier, explained that if Romania entered the war on the

⁷⁸⁴ AN, Série C, C 7488, *Commission des affaires étrangères de la Chambre des Députés*, Speech given by Charles Cruppi 17 November 1915. Regarding the French war aims, see some of the most important contributions by, Pierre Renouvin, “Les buts de guerre du gouvernement français, 1914-1918,” *Revue Historique* 235, no.1 (1966): 1-38; Georges-Henri Soutou, “La France et les marches de l’Est, 1914-1919,” *Revue Historique* 260, no. 528 (1978): 341-388; David Stevenson, *French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

⁷⁸⁵ AN, Série C, C 7647, Secret Session, 20 June 1916.

⁷⁸⁶ AN, Série C, C 7490, *Commission des affaires étrangères de la Chambre des Députés*, 26 October 1916.

⁷⁸⁷ Regarding the primacy of economic motivations in French war aims, it must be noted that very early in the war, investigations took place to establish how French industrial production could overcome German economic dominance in foreign markets, especially within Central and Eastern Europe. MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1499, Briand to Diplomatic, Consular, and Commercial Agents, 1 January 1916; also see, Georges-Henri Soutou, *L’or et le sang. Les buts de guerre économiques de la Première Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

Entente's side, French propaganda efforts should aim at replacing the control that the Central Powers had previously exercised on the Romanian markets. These efforts should not only take place during the war but, most importantly, after its conclusion.⁷⁸⁸ In October 1916, Tavernier confirmed that "In the future, our political influence must be based on our economic influence."⁷⁸⁹ In most French political circles, it was accepted that if France vanquished Germany militarily but found itself defeated economically, this war would have been fought in vain. At the Quai d'Orsay, Pierre de Margerie, Political Director of the French Foreign Office, also supported opening an economic and political propaganda campaign in Romania. This campaign would allow Romania to remain a bastion of Latin civilization that could be shielded from Germanic and Slavic influence while also counter-balancing an increasing Italian presence.⁷⁹⁰ This information confirms that the increase of French propaganda in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, propelled by parliamentary pressure, occupied a significant part in the reasons for the continuation of the Macedonian Campaign. These propaganda efforts confirm the French government's decision to prepare the post-war world as the fighting was still ongoing. Thus, it becomes apparent that military considerations were no longer paramount within French strategy in the Balkans.

This French interest in the Balkans and the Near East cannot be considered a novelty within a longer historical perspective, especially as France possessed enormous economic and financial interests within the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁹¹ Wolfram Gottlieb confirmed that "The Turkish capital housed the Ottoman Bank through which Parisian financiers, as majority holders, manipulated the railway, industrial loan issues of the Porte."⁷⁹² Furthermore, "Constantinople, in short, was the

⁷⁸⁸ MAE, 10PAAP, Carton 6, Tavernier to Perroy, 11 July 1916.

⁷⁸⁹ Tavernier wrote, "Notre influence politique doit être dans l'avenir fonction de notre influence économique." My own translation. MAE, 10PAAP, Carton 6, Report by Tavernier, 3 October 1916.

⁷⁹⁰ MAE, 10PAAP, Carton 6, undated note of a visit by M. Perroy to de Margerie.

⁷⁹¹ Regarding the enormous French financial interests in the Ottoman Empire, see Jacques Thobie, *Intérêts et impérialisme français dans l'Empire ottoman (1895-1914)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1977).

⁷⁹² Gottlieb, *Studies in Secret Diplomacy During the First World War*, 98.

heart of an empire enmeshed by immense French political interests and financial investments amounting to 3,000,000,000 Francs.”⁷⁹³ By 1914, French investment in the Ottoman Empire “was more than three times that of Germany, the next largest investor.”⁷⁹⁴ If the Ottoman Empire was of crucial interest to French finance, the French also possessed vested economic interests in Syria and Lebanon. The French commercial lobbies were always cautious that France’s influence in the Near East might be undermined, especially by the British or the Germans. This caution was the primary factor that drove Briand to endorse these French commercial and colonial organizations’ requests. At the beginning of the war, and within the larger Eastern Mediterranean backdrop, Greece did not occupy a predominant position within the French trading balance. From the end of the nineteenth century, French commerce with Greece had progressed continuously, and just before the war, it amounted to about 24 million Francs per year.⁷⁹⁵ Nevertheless, France was far from being Athens’ top trading partner. As the war progressed, Greece then gained a significance far out of proportion to its pre-war standing for the French economic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Greece was not the only country where France had economic ambitions; the Ottoman Empire also prominently figured within French designs in the Near East. By the secret treaty of March 1915, Britain and France had agreed for Russia to conquer Constantinople. This Anglo-French acquiescence to the Russian arrival on the Bosphorus represented the first major phase toward the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Russia’s future control of Constantinople and the Straits seemed to presage Russian control of the Near East and a surge in Saint-Petersburg’s naval dominance in the Mediterranean.⁷⁹⁶ Lord Bertie, the British Ambassador

⁷⁹³ Gottlieb, *Studies in Secret Diplomacy During the First World War*, 98.

⁷⁹⁴ Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War*, 152.

⁷⁹⁵ Dutton, “The Balkan Campaign and French War Aims in the Great War,” 103.

⁷⁹⁶ Gottlieb, *Studies in Secret Diplomacy During the First World War*, 65.

in Paris, remarked that the Quai d'Orsay and the French government were prepared to adopt a strong stand against Russian imperial expansion if the British Cabinet had supported this position, which unfortunately it did not, since it rushed to concede absolutely everything to Russia.⁷⁹⁷

Since the late nineteenth century, France had attempted to prevent the anticipated dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, especially as many influential political, colonial, and commercial leaders saw the preservation of Ottoman integrity as a guarantee to French economic preponderance in the Near East. Nevertheless, during World War I, even if the Ottoman Empire was an enemy of France, French policy (at least at the beginning of the war) was not predicated on destroying the empire. Surely, the potential Russian conquest of Constantinople would likely translate into a loss of Ottoman territory. However, French Foreign Office Minister Théophile Delcassé wished that even a reduced Ottoman Empire should survive the war, as the conservation of the Ottoman Empire was key to “the safeguard of French political and economic interests.”⁷⁹⁸ However, after the Treaty of March 1915 and some further negotiations between the three Allies, the disappearance of Turkish power became an accepted war aim for the Entente. When the Russian Foreign Office raised the subject of Constantinople, a rather displeased President Raymond Poincaré declared,

We know Russia's aspirations, and we wish them to be realized. The attribution to Russia of Constantinople, of Thrace, the Straits, and the Marmara Sea implies the division of the Ottoman Empire. We have no good reason to wish this division. If it is inevitable, we have no intention that this division takes place at our expense...But the possession of Constantinople and its surroundings would not only give Russia a kind of privilege to the succession of the Ottoman Empire. It would introduce her, through the Mediterranean into the concert of Western Nations, and would give her through the free sea, the possibility to become a great naval power. Everything would then be changed in the European equilibrium. Such aggrandizement and increase in strength would only be acceptable for

⁷⁹⁷ Lady Blanche Mayard Gordon-Lennox, ed., *The Diary of Lord Bertie of Thame, 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), 132.

⁷⁹⁸ SHD, 7 N 1344, Delcassé to Millerand, 28 April 1915.

us, if we could derive from the war equivalent advantages.⁷⁹⁹

Poincaré's statement implies that after France had grudgingly accepted for Russia to gain the Lion's share in the future dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, France was no longer going to stay idle in the Eastern Mediterranean, hence why Greece and the Balkans acquired a whole new significance in the French vision for the post-war world. The Grand Quartier Général (GQG) also came to similar conclusions. France's Eastern Mediterranean long-term plans relied increasingly on an independent and friendly Greece, which sat right in the middle of this crucial geostrategic space. Moreover, French diplomacy accepted that following the probable dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after the war, France had to consolidate its hold over Syria and Cilicia, especially if the Near and Middle East were going to be shared with the British, Italians, and Russians. To yield its influence, France needed another solid anchor point in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁸⁰⁰

Relations with Russia and the fate of the Ottoman Empire were not the only concerns for French leaders in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. Following the Treaty of London signed on 24 April 1915, Italy had decided to join the Entente. The Italian entry into the war markedly impacted the diplomatic balance of power, especially since Rome intended to become one of the Adriatic and Mediterranean's major players. Therefore, the French did not necessarily welcome this projected increase in Italian power, especially as the two Latin sisters' strategic interests intersected in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Camille Barrère, French Ambassador to Italy, warned Briand that Italy hoped to plant her flag in the Near East to claim new rights and compensations in proportion with her efforts in the war.⁸⁰¹ In Greece, the French Intelligence came to the same conclusions about these unabashed Italian ambitions in the Adriatic and the Balkans.

⁷⁹⁹ Raymond Poincaré, *Au service de la France: neuf années de souvenir*, vol. 6, *Les tranchées, 1915* (Paris: Plon, 1930), 94.

⁸⁰⁰ SHD, 16 N 3057, Note on French policy toward Greece, 31 August 1916.

⁸⁰¹ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1038, document # 560, Barrère to Briand, 9 August 1916.

From Salonica, Jules Lecoq, the Director of the Mission laïque de Salonique [the secular mission of Salonica], informed Léon Bourgeois that France must build Greece as a bulwark against Italian ambitions in the region.⁸⁰² In the Balkans, Greece appeared to be the ideal counterweight to Italian designs and had to be transformed into a reliable long-term French partner. Furthermore, since Serbia would need a lengthy period to complete its reconstruction, Greece became the queen on the French chessboard. Thus, the Balkans irremediably turned into the center stage for a clash of these undisguised French and Italian ambitions.⁸⁰³ This observation of Franco-Italian rivalry in the region annoyed the British who, through their Ambassador to Greece, Sir Francis Elliott, lamented that only Britain consented to all the necessary efforts to winning the war.⁸⁰⁴

Furthermore, the Balkans' central geographic location midway through Germany and the Ottoman Empire also predicated the French decision to launch the Macedonian Campaign. GQG remarked that the Berlin to Constantinople railroad was of the utmost importance to Germany. It was "the most precious guarantee that Germany might obtain for future negotiations. Once peace concluded, the railroad would become Germany's most powerful instrument of domination over Asian Turkey."⁸⁰⁵ Germany's dreams of domination in the Near East obliged France to bolster its position there too. Thus, if the Macedonian Campaign allegedly served the military purpose of defeating the Central Powers, it also fulfilled the diplomatic aims of drastically reducing German power in the Balkans and Near East. While the war continued, France had to act decisively to block Berlin's ambitions. Otherwise, once peace was signed, Germany would be in a position where it

⁸⁰² MAE, archives privées de Léon Bourgeois, 29PAAP, carton 9.

⁸⁰³ About this Franco-Italian rivalry in the Balkans, see, Vojislav Pavlović, "Le conflit franco-italien dans les Balkans. 1915-1935. Le rôle de la Yougoslavie," *Balkanica* no. 36 (2005): 163-201.

⁸⁰⁴ Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War*, 156.

⁸⁰⁵ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1040, note on the situation on the Eastern Front, 2 November 1916 ; About the role of the railroads in the strengthening of German influence within the Ottoman Empire, see, Murat Özyüksel, *The Berlin-Baghdad Railway and the Ottoman Empire: Industrialization, Imperial Germany and the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

could establish its economic domination over the Hellenic Kingdom.

The French government understood that post-war Europe and the Balkans would have nothing in common with what they were before the conflict began. With that last fact in mind, this was why Greece became the cornerstone of French diplomatic policy, and ultimately the Armée d'Orient was transformed into the instrument of this policy. General Maurice Sarrail was fully conscious of this reality. In his post-war memoirs, he falsely declared that “J'étais en Orient non pour édifier l'après-guerre mais pour arriver par la guerre à un résultat de guerre. » [I was in the East no to build the post-war but to arrive through war to a war result.].⁸⁰⁶ In truth, Sarrail's literary candor amounted to nothing more than a well-written apologia. If Sarrail was often criticized for his lack of military success, his endeavors to guide the French diplomatic and economic efforts in Macedonia and Greece were nothing but remarkable. Sarrail's use of the French army in the Balkans to promote the French interests against friends and foes alike became a major irritant for the other Allies in general and Britain in particular. The British bitterly resented this Macedonian Masquerade skillfully staged by Sarrail, which probably explains why from 1917 onward, they became increasingly determined to regain their strategic freedom and redirect their efforts to an area that ranked higher in their priorities, the Middle East.

On the other hand, if Sarrail was seen as an average military commander, he certainly proved to be a perfect Proconsul for the French *imperium* in Salonica. He immediately understood the considerable commercial and financial benefits that the French companies could derive from his army's control over Macedonia. The French CIC was very involved in the economic development of the Pearl of the Aegean and its *hinterland*, as Salonica represented the perfect entry point for the French commercial penetration of Macedonia and the whole Balkan Peninsula.

⁸⁰⁶ General Maurice Sarrail, *Mon Commandement en Orient 1916-1918* (Paris: Flammarion, 1920), 271.

Salonica, conveniently located on the Aegean, was the largest harbor in the region and connected the Balkans with the Near East and North Africa, where the French presence was deeply rooted. In Salonica itself, although nominally an Ottoman organization, the Society of the Port of Salonica was for all purposes a French company.⁸⁰⁷ Moreover, the Bank of Salonica was also a French financial institution with close links to the Parisian financial market. The French Consul in Salonica stated that “Its assistance will be precious for the commercial expansion which will undoubtedly happen following the current events.”⁸⁰⁸

Lecoq was pleased that Sarrail fully understood his army’s role in reinforcing French commercial and cultural control over the region. Lecoq found nothing wrong to see l’Armée d’Orient deeply involved in creating French schools, thus propagating the French language and influence all over Macedonia. In theory, the French army had a military mission to accomplish, namely fighting the Bulgarians; however, it spent a precious amount of time fulfilling non-military tasks that cemented French economic presence in Macedonia. In the summer of 1916, when Lecoq wrote to the French Foreign Office, the army was already busy creating commercial files that later allowed French and Macedonian merchant houses to increase their commercial activities. Still, in 1916, through its senator-mayor Edouard Herriot (who was politically close to Sarrail), the city of Lyon extended invitations to Macedonian industrialists to participate in the Lyon Trading Fair. In December 1916, Herriot expressed his opinion concerning the future of Macedonia. For him, the goal in the Balkans was simply to prolong the enterprise of French colonization. Herriot cited the names of Faidherbe, Galliéni, and Lyautey, these illustrious officers that had contributed to the renaissance of the French Empire in the nineteenth century and stated what France should undertake in Macedonia. He declared,

⁸⁰⁷ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1030, Delcassé to Millerand, 1 October 1915.

⁸⁰⁸ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 252, document # 24, Graillet to Briand, 19 February 1916.

This war is a war of merchants. It carries in it all the economic future of the world. Unless we consent in advance to an irremediable imbalance, we cannot renounce to a policy of commercial penetration and influence whose center is in Salonica, not anywhere else.⁸⁰⁹

Moreover, under the leadership of Intendant [Quartermaster] Bonnier, one of the most efficient administrators in the Army of the East, Sarrail officially endorsed a circular forwarded to commercial organizations all across France. Lecoq hoped that French companies would show interest in the Macedonian market, which in his view, presented good commercial returns.⁸¹⁰ Sarrail's confidence about French commercial growth in Macedonia was expressed in a letter he wrote to Briand. For him, it was evident what the Army of the East could achieve,

Here again... we will have to prepare the post-war through the immediate introduction of our products and brands in the areas reconquered by our armies. Therefore, we shall safeguard the interests of the populations which we must gain to French influence and the future of French commerce and industry whose expansion in the East, more than anywhere else must follow the victory of our arms.⁸¹¹

After reading such a statement, it seems rather incongruous that Sarrail later pretended that he was only in Macedonia to wage war. On 1 August 1916, Sarrail sent a *memorandum* to all Presidents of the Chambers of Commerce across France that confirmed that he had organized le bureau commercial des importations françaises, [the Commercial Bureau for French Imports]. Sarrail wrote, "To develop French exports at present is to prepare victory, thus assuring ourselves of its benefits."⁸¹² Sarrail pointed out the clear benefits that the Commercial Bureau could offer to the French exporters, especially as the Macedonian market was destitute, and consequently, the French companies willing to take this calculated risk would encounter no foreign competition. The French

⁸⁰⁹ Edouard Herriot, Preface to *La France en Macédoine* (Paris: Georges Crès, 1917), ix-x, quoted in Kevin Broucke, "Perceptions and realities of the Mediterranean East: French soldiers and the Macedonian Campaign of the First World War," *British Journal for Military History* 7, no.1 (March 2021), 131.

⁸¹⁰ MAE, archives privées de Léon Bourgeois, 29PAAP, carton 9.

⁸¹¹ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 302, document # 164, Sarrail to Briand, 3 August 1916.

⁸¹² Sarrail originally wrote, "Développer à l'heure présente l'exportation française, c'est préparer la victoire et s'en assurer d'avance tous les fruits." My own translation. MAE, Nouvelle série, carton 53, Sarrail to Presidents of French Chambers of Commerce, 1 August 1916.

industrialists would contact Sarrail and confirm their business' purposes, the products they sold, and their available inventories. Once the French companies had established contacts with their Macedonian counterparts, they would be free to carry on their activities directly. Sarrail's overall plan was to ensure French commercial predominance in Macedonia after the war. Philippe Berthelot annotated Sarrail's circular and confirmed that Sarrail was planning the economic conquest of Macedonia by benefiting from the extremely advantageous context created by the war and the French military occupation of the region.⁸¹³ Berthelot's words perfectly encapsulate why the French army stayed so long in Salonica. Nevertheless, at least economically, the French made steady progress. On 20 August, Lecoq reported that the last mailbag he received contained thirty letters from many French companies willing to do business in Macedonia.⁸¹⁴

Three months later, French commercial exports showed an increase of about 600,000 Francs. It was noted that the Commercial Bureau in Salonica was such a success that it represented a model to be emulated wherever the French commercial presence needed to be increased.⁸¹⁵ Quartermaster Bonnier found these results encouraging, as, within two weeks, he had received 300 letters from several French businessmen that he then put in touch with the trading houses in Salonica.⁸¹⁶ Bonnier also criticized the French authorities for sometimes not issuing the necessary export licenses. Bonnier wished to see these restrictions lifted rapidly for all non-war-related products. He also encouraged further efforts to cement the French dominance in the Balkans and the Near East and consolidate the economic expansion recently started.

In January 1917, Bonnier was pleased to learn that the Customs Office in Marseille had

⁸¹³ MAE, Nouvelle série, carton 53, Sarrail to Presidents of French Chambers of Commerce, 1 August 1916, marginalia by Berthelot.

⁸¹⁴ MAE, archives privées de Léon Bourgeois, 29PAAP, carton 9, Lecoq to Bourgeois, 20 August 1916.

⁸¹⁵ AN, Fonds Paul Painlevé, 313 AP, carton 109, report by the Deputy Charles Meunier-Surcouf, 25 October 1916.

⁸¹⁶ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 302, Bonnier to Péan, 7 September 1916.

started to issue these export licenses instead of the Derogation Commission in Paris, thus increasing the speed with which the French exports could now reach Salonica. Bonnier commented that this development reflected “The interest that the Government of the Republic demonstrates toward the development of relations...which unite France to the great port of the Aegean Sea.”⁸¹⁷ By 1917, Bonnier was glad that an enterprising spirit was now growing within French businessmen. Several Chambers of Commerce had enthusiastically responded to Sarrail’s circular and started to increase their activities toward Salonica. The Mayor of Lyon Edouard Herriot had already created a permanent Lyon-Macedonia Committee. Herriot’s initiative was then imitated by other French cities such as Dijon, Grenoble, and Marseille.⁸¹⁸ Furthermore, the Chambers of Commerce of Angoulême, Beauvais, Belfort, Besançon, Bordeaux, Limoges, Nancy, Orléans, Rouen, and Toulouse, started to set up regional committees that would be all based in Paris. By 1917, seventy-five percent of all goods arriving in Salonica harbor were French. This rapid increase undeniably showed promising results for French economic growth in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean.⁸¹⁹ Under Bonnier’s lead, the Commercial Bureau created a catalog of French products and a physical inventory of samples that local Macedonian merchants could consult before placing their orders with the French companies advertised in this catalog. Moreover, the Bureau had compiled a list of 1,200 firms in Macedonia ready to do business with French companies.⁸²⁰ Within three days, Bonnier guaranteed that he could offer information regarding any Macedonian firms established in Salonica for which he received an information request

⁸¹⁷ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 302, Bonnier to Péan, 30 January 1917.

⁸¹⁸ Here it is not surprising that cities like Lyon and Marseille were keen to embrace commercial opportunities in Macedonia, since as early as 1915, they were the leading voices demanding that Syria becomes a French protectorate. See, C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, “The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914-1918,” *The Historical Journal* 17, no. 1 (March 1974), 98.

⁸¹⁹ MAE, Nouvelle série, carton 53, note by Bonnier on circular of the National Association of Economic Expansion, 25 January 1917.

⁸²⁰ Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War*, 161.

coming from France. Indeed, this would have been an impeccable business efficiency if it was not conducted by an army originally supposed to be fighting the Bulgarians. This surprising military-commercial enterprise also published a monthly periodical that included studies inventorying Macedonia's natural resources and detailed the region's urgent needs in finished goods.⁸²¹

More than anyone else, Sarrail embodied these French endeavors of economic expansion in the Balkans, a rather unusual quality for a military commander but surely the hallmark of a great Chief Executive Officer of a powerful French multinational called l'Armée d'Orient. Sarrail signed every request for an export permit of Macedonian goods to France. As a British observer commented, it was "hardly the work for a Commander-in-Chief of allied armies in the field."⁸²² Acting as a *de facto* French Proconsul, Sarrail allegedly used French postal censorship to find out which local Macedonian firms sent their orders to France and which ones sent their orders to other countries. According to the Italian historian Luigi Villari, coercion was then used to convince these recalcitrant firms to terminate their existing business relationships and buy products made in France.⁸²³ In April 1917, Sarrail communicated with the War Minister Paul Painlevé that out of a monthly import value of twenty-two million Francs, sixteen million were French.⁸²⁴ Thus, in 1917, if in terms of military matters, the Allies had made very little progress against the Bulgarians; on the other hand, French commerce in the Balkans was booming.

After considering the facts presented above, it is difficult to deny that the Macedonian Campaign was not launched primarily to satisfy French commercial, economic, and political ambitions in the Balkans and Near East. It is thus obvious that the war provided a convenient

⁸²¹ SHD, 5 N 287, Note on the Commercial Bureau, 24 October 1917.

⁸²² UK Parliamentary Archives, The Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/55/3/1; Granville to Lloyd George, 6 February 1917.

⁸²³ Although Sarrail was far from being an irreproachable character, one must also be cautious in accepting Villari's accusations, as the Italians were also not devoid of any imperial ambitions in Albania and the Adriatic. Luigi Villari, *The Macedonian Campaign* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1922), 59-60.

⁸²⁴ SHD, 5 N 153, document # 657, Sarrail to Painlevé, 2 April 1917.

opportunity for the French government to fulfill these ambitions. In Salonica, the Armée d'Orient became the executant of those French ambitions and served more than just a military purpose. If within the war's strategic framework, France intended to defeat Germany militarily, this French victory also needed to include territorial acquisitions (the return of the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine), but also tangible economic gains and a consolidation of French political influence in southeastern Europe and the Near and Middle East. Thus, from a French perspective, and without any due consideration of the Allied war aims, the French government could no longer contemplate abandoning the Macedonian Campaign. As a French parliamentarian confirmed, "If we re-embark, we therefore lose our action in the East forever. The abandonment of Salonica... would be the end of France in the Eastern basin of the Mediterranean."⁸²⁵

The Macedonian Campaign's inception also illustrates the different dispositions of Britain and France on how to maintain the existing European balance of power. It appears rather clearly that Britain did not possess the same interests as France did in the Eastern Mediterranean. Even more so as British policy was primarily concerned with the Eastern Question, the control of the Straits, and the protection of its strategic imperial nodes in Egypt and India. Britain possessed an imperial and maritime outlook that was diametrically different from the more continental and land-based French strategy. Therefore in British eyes, Salonica never occupied as crucial a role as it did in French ones. For Britain, the defense of imperial communications and domains was always ensured by the Royal Navy. On the other hand, France saw the Macedonian Campaign as an opportunity to use its army to secure substantial strategic gains in Greece and actively prepare the post-war world in the Balkans and the Near East. France's Eastern ambitions clashed directly with other powers such as Italy, which also targeted the Adriatic, the Balkans, and the Near East as

⁸²⁵ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1042, Parliamentary Report on the Army of the East, Louis de Chappedelaine, 1 June 1917.

areas for its vital expansion. In that respect, Greece's control became a top priority well beyond the pre-war importance that this country possessed in French foreign policy. Thus Greece and Macedonia became the foundations for a reinvigorated French imperial policy.

Greece was also the central link halfway between southern Europe and the Near East, where France specifically targeted the acquisition of Syria and Cilicia. The future acquisition of Syria revealed the importance of this country within the French ambitions for the Eastern Mediterranean. In World War I, France had a dual strategy to win the war against Germany on the Western Front while winning the future peace in the East against France's wartime allies: Britain and Italy. In Salonica and Macedonia, the French remained attached to what they usually called "une politique des gages" [a policy of guarantees]. This policy was essentially designed for the post-war world, where the French economy would need to transform its industrial plants and manufactures to a new peacetime context. Consequently, the French government and its army saw Macedonia, Greece, and the Balkans as promising markets, requiring considerable agricultural machinery and finished articles produced by the French industry in the immediate war's aftermath.⁸²⁶ In Macedonia, the French army was not only involved in fighting the Bulgarians but as French deputy Louis de Chappedelaine declared, France was also embroiled in "a peaceful contest with our allies."⁸²⁷

With such existing divergences between Britain and France, it is unsurprising that the two countries had such a difficult time managing the Macedonian Campaign, particularly when many British leaders became convinced that the whole campaign was a prodigious waste of Allied time and resources. The campaign also illustrates that "France's underlying strategic motivation

⁸²⁶ SHD, 5 N 287, Note on commercial relations between France and Macedonia, 3 December 1917.

⁸²⁷ MAE, Série A, Guerre 1914-1918, carton 1042, Parliamentary Report on the Army of the East, Louis de Chappedelaine, 1 June 1917.

inevitably cut across British interests in the Mediterranean balance of power, while her commercial and political aspirations in Greece and Macedonia ran counter to British policy.”⁸²⁸ In wartime France, the only prime minister who did not have any interest in the Macedonian Campaign was George Clemenceau. As soon as he became prime minister, Sarrail was recalled, Guillaumat arrived, and suddenly the French no longer looked at the Macedonian Campaign as an enormous commercial venture but more appropriately as a military campaign that needed to be won on the battlefield. Under Guillaumat and later Franchet d’Espérey, this is exactly what they, and their British, Greek, Italian, and Serbian Allies did. On 14 September 1918, the Allied Armies of the East embarked on a large-scale offensive, and within two weeks, they defeated the Bulgarian army to conclude the first armistice of World War I. If from the beginning, French leaders had only looked at the strategic potential of the Macedonian Campaign, precious time and resources would not have been wasted, and greater military results could have been achieved. Ultimately this is the true tragedy of this Balkan Imbroglia.

⁸²⁸ Dutton, “The Balkan Campaign and French War Aims in the Great War,” 112.

CONCLUSION

We appear to be quite unteachable. With the object lesson of the Dardanelles in front of us, in which a force of about 250,000 men has dwindled down to about 110,000 without having achieved anything material, it would be incredible that we should be prepared to repeat the disaster on a larger scale in the same part of the world.

Leo Maxse to Austen Chamberlain,
13 October 1915.

The origins and subsequent continuation of the Macedonian Campaign undoubtedly constitute one of World War I's most controversial episodes. From its beginning, this military campaign was marred in polemic and intrigue. The military correspondent of *The Times*, Charles à Court Repington, recalled an animated discussion he had on Monday 3 July 1916 with Philippe Berthelot Chef de cabinet at the Quai d'Orsay. Repington told Berthelot, "The French must be jealous because we thought that we had made the greatest mistake possible at the Dardanelles, and now the French were trying to make a greater one at Salonika."⁸²⁹ When one reviews the manner in which the Macedonian Campaign originally started, it seems that Repington had a point. Other influential British politicians and generals shared Repington's opinion. Repington noted that in August 1917, Lord Hardinge, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, "agrees that the Salonika expedition is the worst fault that we have made during the war."⁸³⁰ During the Battle of the Somme, Field Marshal Douglas Haig, a convinced Westerner, and a well-known Francophobe wrote to Lord Esher that "military history would never forgive the French for bottling up so many troops at Salonika."⁸³¹

Therefore, it is easier to understand why the Macedonian Campaign started under the most

⁸²⁹ Charles à Court Repington, *The First World War, 1914-1918: Personal Experiences of Lieut.-Col. C. à Court Repington*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Houghton and Mifflin, 1920) 254.

⁸³⁰ Charles à Court Repington, *The First World War, 1914-1918: Personal Experiences of Lieut.-Col. C. à Court Repington*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Houghton and Mifflin, 1920) 14.

⁸³¹ Haig to Esher, 18 July 1916, quoted in James Lees-Milne, *The Enigmatic Edwardian: The Life of Reginald 2nd Viscount Esher* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1986), 291.

inauspicious of circumstances from day one. Especially when one recalls the bungled Anglo-French diplomatic endeavors toward the different Balkan neutral countries and the French political crisis known as the *affaire* Sarraïl, which presided over the campaign's inception in the late summer of 1915. In this atmosphere of diplomatic confusion and political chaos, the British Cabinet, for the sake of supporting its fragile French counterpart and maintaining the Entente's viability, got sucked into the campaign in an unintelligent manner. Furthermore, if the British led the French astray during the Dardanelles, the roles were reversed in the case of the Salonica Expedition. After the Dardanelles' debacle, the British Cabinet should have been infinitely more cautious and should have examined properly the potential of yet another military campaign in the Eastern Mediterranean. George Cassar was critical of the British when he wrote,

Yet, to drift into a new campaign without definite objectives, adequate preparations and a precise plan of action after the Dardanelles experience revealed a shocking lapse of judgment. The proposed drive to the Balkans was another example of politicians determining the benefits to be derived from successful action before considering the means to achieve that victory.⁸³²

In reality, when one considers the ultimate military objectives that motivated the dispatch of the Anglo-French contingent to Salonica (the attempted rescue of the Serbian army), it becomes apparent that the British and French Cabinets had rushed troops in a hurry, in insufficient numbers, and too late to provide significant assistance to the beleaguered Serbs. While General Maurice Sarraïl and a few rapidly gathered British and French divisions arrived at Salonica to help the Serbian army, the latter being unable to break the ring of the Bulgarian forces, was forced to retreat west toward Albania and Montenegro to reach the Adriatic Coast where the Allied navies waited to rescue them. Once the emaciated Serbian survivors arrived in the Albanian ports of Valona (Vlorë) and Durazzo (Durrës), they were transported to the Greek island of Corfu and the French

⁸³² George H. Cassar, *Kitchener: Architect of Victory* (London: William Kimber, 1977), 398.

North African Colony of Bizerte in Tunisia. Considering that the Serbian army (or what was left of it) had been evacuated from Albania, at that point, it would have been rather logical for the Allied troops to reembark from Salonica and return to the Western front. However, this is exactly at that precise juncture that the Macedonian Campaign earned its ever-lasting controversial reputation. Against expert-military advice that urged both Paris and London to immediately call an end to this military operation which was no longer warranted, the French Government persisted and maintained this expeditionary force in Salonica. Against the renewed advice of its General Staff, the British Cabinet chose to follow the French Government for the crucial sake of preserving the Entente.

Once ensured of British support, the French Government decided to stay in Salonica to accomplish two questionable objectives that had nothing to do with military necessity. The first objective was to rapidly find a high-ranking position for the contentious General Maurice Sarrail while appeasing his many parliamentary partisans who had created political havoc following his sacking from the French Third Army command in July 1915. Accordingly, the French Government provided Sarrail with the army command he demanded while also shipping him as far as possible from Paris and the political intrigues in which he was regularly enmeshed. This politically motivated decision was hardly a reason to launch such an extensive military expedition, but for the French Government, it sufficed anyhow. The second objective, which was implemented in the months following Sarrail's arrival in Salonica, was to maintain the French forces in Macedonia to use them for motivations that were anything but connected to military imperatives.

Between January 1916 and December 1917, the French Government embarked on nothing less than the full-scale economic exploitation of Salonica, Macedonia, and Greece. Here it is vital to note that World War I provided the opportunity that the French Government ruthlessly exploited

to launch an ambitious policy of economic penetration that was carried out through the auspices of the French army. David Dutton remarked that “Long before the removal of King Constantine, the Armée d'Orient had inevitably become as much an instrument of French strategic and diplomatic policy as of military policy.”⁸³³ This opinion is supported by the historical evidence presented in this study and which points out that the French military establishment promptly fathomed the other options that would be open for France besides military success. Following this line of thought, it is interesting to note that very early in the campaign (in December 1915), General Édouard de Castelnau, who was conducting a review of the French army based in Salonica and its defensive arrangements, confirmed to General Joseph Joffre that, “from a military point of view, its prospects were extremely limited. No one, he thought, could argue that the presence of 150,000 Allied troops had any effect on whether or not Greece and Roumania remained neutral.”⁸³⁴ Castelnau informed Joffre that in the current conditions, with the limited number of troops under Sarrail’s command, any offensive action should be disregarded. However, he remarked that if the campaign did not offer any enticing prospects from a military perspective, matters were altogether different when they were considered from a diplomatic and commercial standpoint.⁸³⁵ Castelnau also commented on Salonica, its harbor, and the backcountry behind it. Its economic development should not be entrusted to the Greeks but should be undertaken under French leadership. From the beginning of the Macedonian Campaign, little doubt subsisted about why the French presence in Northern Greece and Macedonia was continued for non-existing military results. The fact that the British Government and General Staff later became aware of the hidden motivations of the French Government in the Balkans makes it even more baffling. This reluctant British acquiescence can

⁸³³ David Dutton, “France and the Commercial Exploitation of Greece during the Great War,” *Canadian Journal of History* 14, no. 1 (Spring 19179): 69.

⁸³⁴ SHD, 16 N 3142-3, Castelnau to Joffre, “Rapport de mission à Salonique,” 31 December 1915.

⁸³⁵ SHD, 16 N 3142-3, Castelnau to Joffre, “Rapport de mission à Salonique,” 31 December 1915.

only be explained by the fact that the British Cabinet only agreed to keep the wartime alliance alive. Furthermore, these disguised French commercial diplomatic and economic motives, as well as the contentious personality of Sarrail, explain why the British forces and their commander General Sir George Milne, were so reluctant to participate in any large-scale military actions that they essentially saw as pointless compared to the overall results that could have been achieved.

As much as the decisive Western Front, the Macedonian Campaign became a staple of the World War I alliance between Britain and France. It could even be said that this campaign represented the barometer of their often-complex relationship. This Anglo-French Alliance was in many ways an imperfect entente, where various factors unnecessarily complicated the machinery of coalition warfare. These factors covered the existing schisms between their respective military and political establishments, especially within the war's strategic direction. These divisions sometimes obliged generals or politicians to form alliances with their cross-Channel counterparts to oppose the designs of either their political masters or national military commanders. If Joffre reluctantly approved the Macedonian Campaign, it must be remembered that he only did so after the French Government exerted considerable pressure on him.

Moreover, Joffre's motivations for sending French forces to Macedonia (as shown in this study) were only motivated by the pressing need to see Sarrail out of his sight and dispatched as far as possible from the Western Front. In a conversation that Joffre had with Repington in 1916 about Salonica and the various theaters where British forces were deployed, the former admitted to the latter (specifically about Salonica) that "it was a political and diplomatic question. He did not attempt to suggest, and in fact contemptuously denied, that there were any military grounds for the operation."⁸³⁶ Joffre's accurate assessment reveals the confines of military power regarding

⁸³⁶ Repington, *The First World War, 1914-1918*, vol. 1, 167.

the strategic leadership of the war. Joffre was not the only general who was forced to bow to the politicians' authority when it came to deciding how the war effort should be shaped. As shown in this work, Field Marshal Robertson was undoubtedly one of the most vocal and persistent opponents to the Macedonian Campaign. In November 1916, Robertson confirmed to Sir George Milne that,

My personal opinion on the matter is that we shall never win this war in the Balkans. We can only win it by defeating the German Army. We shall never find any great number of German troops in the Balkans, and therefore nothing can please the Germans better than to see us being killed by the Bulgars and our killing the Bulgars.⁸³⁷

Robertson was correct as the German always maintained a minimal presence in the Balkans and left the Bulgarians to do most of the fighting against the Allied forces in Macedonia. Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that even all-powerful military men such as Joffre and Robertson did not ultimately hold enough influence to bend the politicians to their will, but rather the other way around. In the case of the Macedonian Campaign, this study concurs that even if during World War I Allied military leaders were far from blameless in their high-level decisions, the politicians who ultimately had the final say over the strategic conduct of the war were also prone to make tragic mistakes which are now forever remembered as Gallipoli and Salonica. This was why ultimately, the Macedonian Campaign was launched against the strong opposition of military leaders who understood that without the required high level of manpower and material, this expedition in the Balkans would not be launched on the best premises. The fact that politicians often went against their military commanders' advice was one of the Macedonian Campaign's most troubling characteristics. If in England, the cabinet's political decision-making process was well-defined, in France, it was undoubtedly different. The French Politicians such as Prime

⁸³⁷ LHCMA, Robertson MSS 1/34/10, Robertson to Milne, 7 November 1916.

Minister Aristide Briand often had to compose not only with GQG but were also forced to deal with the turbulent and all-powerful *Chambre des députés*. Compared with the British House of Commons, the French parliament increasingly interfered within the sphere of diplomacy and military strategy. These attempts by French parliamentarians to exert some measure of control over the strategic conduct of the war display the willingness of the political class to reassert its prerogatives over the military command concerning the highest direction of the French war efforts. Furthermore, the extremely controversial personality of General Sarrail complicated the already complicated context of the Macedonian Campaign and the tense interactions between the British and French Governments. As discussed in chapter 8, Sarrail was the political soldier *par excellence*, his divisive figure only aggravated the already difficult relations between the two governments and the cooperation that London and Paris attempted to maintain with the other coalition forces in Macedonia. The struggle between the French authorities' military and political arms provides one of the most obvious reasons why the Macedonian Campaign was launched and continued without proper examination of its military merits and potential. These Franco-French internal dissensions ultimately contributed to making the collaboration with the British ally a rather problematic process. Despite these difficulties, the British political leaders always understood the imperious necessity to stand by their French partner to see the war to a successful conclusion. The Macedonian Campaign could have benefited from crisper decision-making, resolute leadership, and more efficient management. If these prerequisites had been in place, the course of the war, and not only in the Balkans, might have been drastically different. However, ultimately, its odd inception from a mixture of political, economic, and diplomatic motives -- often severed from military reality -- account for its dreary progress and delayed benefit to the Allied coalition that ultimately won the war.

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