

## THE BALKAN WARS IN PERSPECTIVE: THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR TURKEY

### *After Fifty Years*

It is now fifty years, a half century, since the outbreak of the First Balkan War on October 18, 1912, between Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro,<sup>1</sup> on the one hand, and the Ottoman Empire on the other. This was the very day on which the Treaty of Lausanne, ending the Tripolitan War, resulting in the loss of Libya to Italy, was signed. Forgotten are the battles of Kirk Kilissé, Kumanovo, Lulé Burgas, Monastir and Janina, as are the Russian warnings to the Bulgarians (November 3 - 5, 1912) against an occupation of Constantinople, save by the few remaining veterans, the school children of the area, or the serious students of Balkan history. In the long, sad story of human conflict, the Balkan wars, however bloody by the standards of the time, may not seem especially important in the perspective of the years which have now passed. In the period since 1912, two great world conflicts have been fought, profound revolutionary changes have occurred, and the Balkan wars themselves now fall within the larger context on the much greater stage of world politics.

Forgotten, too, no doubt, are the terms of the Treaty of London, which ended the First Balkan War on May 30, 1913 and symbolized the Ottoman defeat. By that treaty the Ottoman Empire was forced to cede all territory in Thrace west of Enos on the Aegean Sea and Midia on the Black Sea and abandon all claim to the island of Crete, while the status of Albania, a creation of the exigencies of international politics at the time, and that of the Aegean Islands was left to the decision of the Great Powers.

But the First Balkan War was followed by a second, when on June 29, 1913, the Bulgarian forces attacked those of Greece and Serbia in Macedonia. Rumania entered the fray on July 10, and on July 21, Enver Bey, who had seized power in Constantinople during the previous January, marched with his troops into Adrianople (Edirné). Despite all the protests of the Great Powers, the Turk had returned to stay.

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1. Motenegro actually declared war on October 8, 1912.

The Second Balkan War was a very short one and came formally to an end with the signature of the Treaty of Bucharest on August 10, 1913. The territorial features are familiar to all students of recent Balkan history. The Rumanians received northern Dobrudja, from Turtukaia on the Danube to Ekrene on the Black Sea, while Greece and Serbia retained the portions of Macedonia which they had occupied during the wars. Bulgaria received only a small portion of Macedonia, however, having lost Monastir and Ochrid to Serbia and the port city of Thessaloniki and Kavala to Greece. On the Aegean seaboard, Bulgaria kept only the stretch between the Mesta and Maritza Rivers, and the second-rate port of Dedeagatch. Under the Treaty of Constantinople, of September 29, 1913, between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, the latter recovered Adrianople and the line of the Maritza River.<sup>2</sup>

One must not, of course, read into the past developments which seem evident only in the perspective of half a century. But even at the time, it appeared clear that the balance of power in the Balkans had been upset, and that all sense of Balkan "unity" had been destroyed. A greater Serbia had emerged and would soon become an object of an aggressive Habsburg policy. Rumania would now dream of an even greater Rumania and the dream could be realized only at the expense of Austria-Hungary. While the territorial changes may not seem to have been the most significant results of the Balkan Wars, they do point to some of the more important developments which were to follow, especially insofar as the Ottoman Empire was concerned. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Balkan territories of the Ottoman Empire had been steadily reduced, beginning with the Serbian revolt of 1804, and continuing through the Greek war of Independence (1821-1829), the Crimean War (1854-1856), the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, with Serbia, Rumania and Montenegro achieving independence in the Treaty of Berlin; and Bulgaria had achieved its independence in October 1908. The Balkan Wars had now carried this process almost to completion, reducing the Ottoman Empire in Europe to the small Thracian enclave (about 10,000 square miles) around the imperial capital of Constantinople and the highly strategic region of the Turkish Straits. With that exception, the Empire was once more an Asiatic State, hardly European. Anatolia remained the heartland of the Turkish people, soon now to emerge into nationhood. To the south were the Arab peoples, still subject to and, evidently, still loyal to the Empire.

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2. In general see E. C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913* (Cambridge, Harvard, 1938), *passim*.

### *The First World War*

The Balkan Wars shifted the European balance of power during the critical months preceding the outbreak of the so-called First World War in August 1914. It was, perhaps, «inevitable», in view of the results of the Balkan Wars, that the Ottoman Empire would be drawn into the great conflict on the side of the Central Powers, particularly with Imperial Russia aligned with France and Great Britain. It may be observed, however, that while the “guns of August” thundered on both the western and the eastern fronts in Europe, there may yet have been a possibility that the Empire might have turned in the direction of the Allied Powers.<sup>3</sup> But the trimvirate of Enver, Talaat and Kemal Pashas, on August 2, 1914, made their secret alliance with Germany and the Empire was precipitated into the world conflict when the German-Ottoman fleet, under Admiral *von Souchon*, attacked Russian Black Sea ports on October 28-29, 1914.

For the purposes of this brief article, it may be noted that the war added the finishing touches to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire which, like the Habsburg Empire and others since, had been unable to adjust to the rising tide of nationalism. Essentially, the results of the Balkan Wars—with a few changes in various boundary lines—were confirmed. Thanks to the Allied victory in the war, the secret inter-Allied agreements,<sup>4</sup> and the Arab revolt, the Arab portions of the Empire were also to go the way of all imperial flesh. The Empire itself was completely exhausted and ready for the historical scrap heap; and the Turkish nation itself was now to emerge into independence, the last of the Ottoman “subject” peoples, as it were, to achieve it.

The problem of what to do with the Ottoman estate—of the disposition of the lands and peoples of the old Empire—was one of the most delicate, intricate and perplexing of all the issues which confronted the statesmen assembled at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919-1920. As the King-Crane Commission pointed out in 1919, “no territorial spoils so large and valuable as the Turkish Empire” had “ever in our time been divided up by treaty”,<sup>5</sup> a fact which did, indeed, render the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire extremely difficult. Ultimately the Paris Peace Con-

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3. Harry N. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History, 1913-1923* (Norman, University of Oklahoma, 1931), Ch. III.

4. *Ibid.*, Ch. V; Zeine N. Zeine, *The Struggle for Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy and the Rise and Fall of Feisal's Kingdom in Syria* (Beirut, Khayats, 1960), Ch. I.

5. See especially *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference 1919* (Washington, U.S.G.P.O., 1947), XII, 745-863.

ference was unable to settle the complicated issues. The Turkish Nationalists utterly rejected the Treaty of Sèvres (August 10, 1920), although the feeble and helpless government of the Sultan, with an international force in occupation of Constantinople, felt impelled to do so. A tragic Greco-Turkish war was fought during May 1919 - October 1922, and it was not until the Lausanne Conference (November 1922 - July 1923) that a general treaty brought a semblance of peace to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near and Middle East.

Leaving aside the details of the treaty settlement, the primary fact was that, with the emergence of the Turkish Nationalist movement, under the leadership of Mustapha Kemal, the Turkish people, whatever their differences and their reservations, foreswore imperial dreams, and settled down to the business of attempting to put their own house in order, under the symbols of Independence, Republicanism, and Secularism.<sup>6</sup> As Mustapha Kemal saw the problem, in 1919, there were three alternatives which the Turks were putting forward to determine the future status of their country. The first of these was acceptance of British protection, the second unity under an American mandate, and the third a kind of autonomy under which each district might go its own way. For Mustapha Kemal, hardheaded realist that he was, there was only one possible solution, and that was "to create a New Turkish State, the sovereignty and independence of which would be unreservedly recognized by the whole world".<sup>7</sup> The Turkish leader not only rejected an American mandate over the entire Empire, however attractive that was to some, but eschewed the retention of non-Turkish territories—already gone, in any event—and concentrated his attention on making Turkish Anatolia a free and independent country. He was not distracted by the Pan-Turanian dream of the ambitious and deluded Enver Pasha, who had led the Empire to its doom, and abandoned the dream of dominating the Arabs or expanding beyond Eastern Thrace in Europe. Insofar as he and the dominant section of the Turkish Nationalists were concerned, this was the great lesson to be drawn from the Balkan Wars and the First World War. The National Pact of January-

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6. See, for example, Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, RIIA, 1961), Ch. VIII; Elaine D. Smith, *Turkey: Origins of the Kemalist Movement and the Government of the Grand National Assembly, 1919 - 1923* (Washington 1959), Ch. IV.

7. See especially Mustapha Kemal Pasha, *Speech. October 15 - 20, 1927. Official Translation* (Leipzig, Koehler, 1929), 13 - 14; Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha, *Die Dokumente Zur Rede* (Leipzig, Koehler 1929), *passim*.

April 1920<sup>8</sup> was but the formal affirmation of these principles, and the acquisition of Alexandretta from France in July 1939 represented no basic departure from the essential policy, which was to dominate sober Turkish political thought in the years to come.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Inter - War Period*

Whatever its shortcomings, the Treaty of Lausanne, of July 24, 1923, laid the groundwork for a sound relationship between the new Turkish Republic, on the one hand, and Greece and The Balkan States, on the other.<sup>10</sup> Under Article 16 of the Lausanne Treaty, Turkey renounced "all rights and title whatsoever over or respecting the territories situated outside the frontiers laid down" in the treaty "and the islands other than those over which her sovereignty" was "recognized by the said treaty, the future of these territories and islands being settled or to be settled by the parties concerned". While the new Republic gave up all claim to non-Turkish territories lost during the great war, it did recover Eastern Thrace to the Maritza River, with Karagach. Turkey received Imbros and Tenedos, off the Dardanelles, the other Aegean Islands going to Greece. Italy retained the Dodecanese Islands, and Great Britain the island of Cyprus which it had held since 1878. In return for a promise of judicial reforms, the capitulatory régime was abolished, and Turkey accepted the principle of the protection of minorities, which still remained on its territory, but it was to pay no reparations. The Straits were to be demilitarized, with a zone on both the European and Asiatic shores, and placed under the control of an International Commission of the Straits. They were to be opened to the ships of all nations in time of peace and in time of war, Turkey being neutral. If Turkey were at war, enemy ships, but not neutral, might be excluded.

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8. The origins of the National Pact, adopted by the Ottoman Parliament on January 28, and by the Grand National Assembly in Ankara on April 23, 1920, go back to the Declarations of the Erzerum and Sivas Congresses in August and September 1919.

9. On September 2, 1938 the Republic of Hatay (Alexandretta) came into being and on June 23, 1939, France and Turkey concluded a nonaggression agreement and France agreed to the incorporation of Hatay into Turkey.

10. The proceedings of the Lausanne Conference may be followed conveniently in United Kingdom, Turkey No. 1 (1923), *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922 - 1923*. Cmd. 1814; Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. République française. *Documents diplomatiques. Conférence de Lausanne sur les affaires du proche-orient (1922 - 1923)*. Recueil des actes de la conférence (Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1923), 6 vols. The treaty may be found conveniently in Cmd. 1929, Treaty Series No. 16.

A separate Greco-Turkish agreement provided for compulsory exchange of populations, particularly of Greek ethnic elements from Turkey (Izmir, for example) and Turkish ethnic elements from Western Thrace<sup>11</sup>. The exchange of populations, under the supervision of Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, proved to be a necessary surgical operation, however painful at the time, both to the countries involved and to the people directly affected.

Meanwhile, in the period immediately prior to the Lausanne Conference and in the years which followed, the newly independent Turkish Republic underwent one of the great transformations of modern history. It is not meant here to suggest that the reforms and changes which were now to occur were postulated on or implied in the results of the Balkan Wars or of the First World War. But it is to say that, without the dissolution of the old Empire, to which these conflicts certainly contributed, the Turkish nation might not have emerged, when it did or the transformation have taken place. The obstacle of Empire, with all its outworn trappings, had to be removed. A Fundamental Law of January 20, 1921 proclaimed popular sovereignty, while the Sultanate was abolished on November 1, 1922, and establishment of the Republic proclaimed on October 29, 1923, to be followed by abolition of the Caliphate in March 1924. In the next few years, new Western legal codes replaced the Sheriat, the Latin alphabet was introduced, and still other changes carried on the great revolution.

The transformation from Empire to Republic, brought about as a result of the Balkan Wars and the First World War, also produced great changes in the field of foreign policy, especially between Turkey and its neighbors. In view of the long period of conflict, beginning in 1912, which had preceded, it is not strange that some years were to pass before this was evident. Nor is it surprising that serious difficulties were to arise in the years to come.

During the inter-war years between 1923 and 1929, Turkey and the Balkan States appeared to enter into an era of better relations, if not precisely one of "good feeling", with the long and sometimes painful past completely forgotten.<sup>12</sup> On March 6, 1929, a Turco-Bulgarian treaty set-

11. See especially S. P. Ladas, *Exchange of Minorities* (Cambridge, Harvard 1932), *passim*.

12. It may be observed that it was not until 1927 that the United States sent Mr. Joseph C. Grew as Ambassador to Turkey, while an ordinary treaty of friendship and commerce was not signed until 1931. Meanwhile, Mustapha Kemal had signed a treaty with Soviet Russia on March 16, 1921, during the Greco-Turkish war, under which Turkey was to retrocede Batum and in return Soviet Russia

tled a number of outstanding questions. Following a visit by Premier Eleutherios Venizelos, the distinguished Greek statesman, the Treaty of Ankara between Greece and Turkey was signed on October 30, 1930. Under its terms, property claims of repatriated populations and other outstanding issues were settled, and the Greek and Turkish Government recognized the territorial *status quo* and agreed to naval equality in the eastern Mediterranean. In the same general period, Turkey concluded treaties with Rumania and Yugoslavia, but the treaty with Greece was particularly significant, for obvious reasons.

During the years 1930 - 1935, moreover Greece and Turkey assumed the leadership of the semi-official Balkan Conferences which, in their way, attempted to lay the broad foundations of a confederative, or even federative, structure in the Balkan region.<sup>13</sup> On September 14, 1933, Greece and Turkey signed a ten-year pact, under which they not only mutually guaranteed their common frontiers, but agreed that in certain conferences of limited representation, the delegation of one of them might defend the common and special interests of both countries. Of more general interest was the signature, on February 9, 1934, of the Pact of the Balkan Entente, by Greece, Rumania, Turkey and Yugoslavia, which led to the Statute of Organization of the Balkan Entente during October 30 - November 2, 1934 and the establishment of an Advisory Economic Council.<sup>14</sup> Among other things, the attitude and the position of the members of the Balkan Entente, despite a certain reluctance and some reservation, proved very helpful when Turkey sought and achieved revision of the Lausanne Convention of the Straits at the Montreux Conference on July 20, 1936.<sup>15</sup> If these developments proved illusory and ultimately failed to achieve their realistic ideals - as they did - it is well to recall that there were even more dismal failures among the greater Powers on the larger stage of world politics, within and outside the more ambitious League of Nations. In any

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recognized Turkish possession of Kars and Ardahan. Under the Treaty of Kars (October 13, 1921), Turkey recognized the Armenian SSR, and on December 17, 1925, following the award of Mosul to Iraq by the Council of the League of Nations, Turkey established close political and economic collaboration with the USSR.

13. See especially Robert J. Kerner and Harry N. Howard, *The Balkan Conferences and the Balkan Entente, 1930 - 1935: A Study in the Recent History of the Balkan and Near Eastern Peoples* (Berkeley, University of California, 1936), 271 pp.

14. *Ibid.*, 232 - 233, 234 - 235.

15. See *Actes de la Conférence de Montreux concernant le régime des Détroits. 22 juin - 20 juillet 1936. Compte-rendus des séances plénières et de procès-verbal des débats du comité technique* (Liège, Belgium, 1936), 310 pp.

event, the coming of another great world struggle in September 1939 intervened to prevent the fruition of these ideals and to alter the context of the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean area.

### *The Second World War*

While Greece was attacked and invaded by Fascist Italy (October 1940) and Germany (April 1941), and Nazi Germany dominated the entire Balkan area almost until the end of the conflict, Turkey did not enter the war on the side of the United Nations until February 23, 1945. Although there were misunderstandings as a result of this situation,<sup>16</sup> it now appears clear that Turkish entrance earlier in the war would have been disastrous both to Greece and Turkey, to say nothing of the United Kingdom and its allies in the struggle against Germany and Italy. In the last analysis, neither the United Kingdom, nor the United States, nor even the Soviet Union, which talked much about it, really desired that Turkey enter the "shooting war". Certainly the Soviet Union, basically, did not want Turkey to enter a Balkan campaign, and the Turks, in turn, had no desire to be "liberated" by the Soviet Union.

### *The Post - War years*

The years following the Second World War were momentous in their implications, no less in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkan area than in the world at large. The Balkan area as a whole came under Soviet Communist control following the conflict, although Yugoslavia, unoccupied by Soviet Union, *was to break* away from Soviet domination in 1948.<sup>17</sup> Both Greece and Turkey came under constant Soviet threat, in an attempt to convert them into "people's democracies" similar to those in the Balkan region. The threat to Greece came in the use of a Communist-led guerrilla movement and other types of subversion and that to Turkey in the form of demands for control of the Turkish Straits and for Turkish territory (Kars - Ardahan), among other things. Ultimately, the Soviet program, which included demands for a trusteeship over Libya im-

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16. See, for example, Dimitrios G. Kousoulas, *The Price of Freedom: Greece in World Affairs, 1939 - 1953* (Syracuse, Syracuse University, 1953), Chs. III - VII; Harry N. Howard, "Germany, the Soviet Union, and Turkey During World War II", XIX Department of State *Bulletin* 472 (July 13, 1948), 63 - 78.

17. See particularly Robert Wolff, *The Balkans in Our Time* (Cambridge, Harvard, 1956), Chs. 9 - 13; R. V. Burks, *The Dynamics of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961), 237 pp.; R. J. Kerner (Ed), *Yugoslavia* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1949), Ch. XIX.



mediately after the war, looked toward domination of the entire Eastern Mediterranean area and the Near East, partly as sketched out during the Hitler-Molotov-Ribbentrop talks in November 1940.

One early response to the Soviet threat was the enunciation, on March 12, 1947, of the Truman doctrine for aid to Greece and Turkey. Another was the entry of Turkey and Greece, on February 15, 1952, into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.<sup>18</sup> A third was the signature, on February 28, 1953, of a Treaty of Friendship and Collaboration among Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia, which ultimately led to the Treaty of Alliance, Political Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of August 9, 1954.<sup>19</sup> While the new Balkan Entente, reminiscent of 1934, gave some promise of further development, granted the continued Soviet pressures, it did not fructify into genuine political significance except insofar as it represented a *détente* between Greece and Turkey, on the one hand, and Yugoslavia, on the other.

The above is not to suggest that all the developments during the past fifty years have stemmed from the Balkan Wars, or even from the First and Second World Wars, for that matter. *Post hoc* is not necessarily *ergo propter hoc*, whether in the realm of science or in that of international affairs. The Soviet position in the Balkan region was certainly not an inevitable postulate of the earlier period, nor necessary consequence of the victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, although it is a fact to be duly noted and taken into account as an element of primordial significance.

But one may suggest, as was done at the outset of this essay, that on the outcome of the Balkan Wars and of the First World War, in particular, the foundations of the Greco-Turkish relationship, at least, have rested despite very natural misunderstandings and outright conflicts of interest. Turkey became a genuine nation-state as a result of these conflicts and developed a highly sensitive nationalism. The Ottoman Empire passed into history. Subsequently, Greece and Turkey have either settled many of their basic problems, or worked toward processes of mutual adjustment. Strained and tested though their relationship was during the Cyprus crisis of 1954-1959, mutual interests have continued to bind the two countries together, essentially within the larger context of NATO, although events in Turkey after May 1960 led to a degree of uncertainty.

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18. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents* (Washington, U.S.G.P.O., 1957), I, 853-871.

19. *Ibid.*, I, 1235-1239.

The smoothness in official relations between the two Governments has not too often been reflected at the grass roots level. But the roots may grow deeply, if the statesmen-gardeners do not pull up the plant to find out whether the plant is growing. Old habits of thought—old prejudices from the more ancient and the more recent past—like old soldiers, perhaps, do not die, but simply fade away with the passage of time. Despite the frictions which become manifest from time to time, the basic mutual interest appears to endure in the Greco-Turkish relationship.

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