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GREAT BRITAIN, THE ALBANIAN QUESTION AND
THE CONCERT OF EUROPE, 1911-1914

The years between the 1911 Agadir crisis and the onset of war in August of 1914 have been viewed as crucial to the evolution of the outbreak of the First World War. Some historians such as A.J.P. Taylor, perceived a certain détente in Anglo-German relations in 1914, a détente which may have avoided a war. No war is supposedly inevitable until it happens. More recently, articles and books written by the British historian, R. J. Crampton, who has worked on the Balkans in general and Bulgaria in particular, have remarked on the "hollow" nature of the détente. Other historians such as Paul Kennedy in his work on Anglo-German antagonism before 1914 and the Fischer School in general have also noted that the Concert of Europe was under increasing strain in 1914.

The Albanian Question during this period is interesting for a number of reasons. Despite minimal economic or political interests there, British political leaders viewed this almost insignificant province of "Sick Man" Turkey as yet another complicated aspect of the problem of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to be resolved. Indeed, as a region of intense international rivalry among the Great and small Powers alike, antagonisms which threatened to escalate into widespread military conflict, Albania assumed an increasingly important role in the calculations of the British Foreign Office and the foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey. Most importantly, the Albanian Question became the classic case of whether a détente based on the notion of Concert of Europe was achievable and workable.

Like the Macedonian problem, the Albanian Question developed into a complicated maze of Turkish internal and international issues intimately connected. After 1878 resentment at centuries of Turkish hegemony and subjection and anger over the cession of territory accorded to the Slavic nationalities by the Treaty of San Stefano combined to produce more virulent sentiments of nationalism among many Albanians and more pragmatic enterprising attempts to assert autonomy¹. Societies such as the League of Priz-

1. *Accounts and Papers*, 1878, Vol. LXXXIII, Turkey, pp. 60-61.

ren were constituted after the Congress of Berlin to work for this but the difficulties encountered were too numerous to overcome. Sectionalism was particularly rife and local jealousies were not easily subdued. Geographical, linguistic, ethnic and tribal differences tended to negate the early achievements of Albanian patriots whose aims were severely restricted by their inability to forge a central authority out of the myriad of regional congresses².

In addition, internal difficulties were exacerbated by the fact that Albania remained the focus of intense international rivalry, and as such, constantly offered the prospect of a general European conflagration. Montenegro, for example, relished the demise of the Ottoman Empire in Europe, naturally ambitious for substantial amounts of Albanian territory³. To this extent it encouraged local revolts, camouflaging its real intentions by acting alternately as the 'honest broker' between Albania and Turkey on the one hand, and the mouthpiece of Albanian aspirations on the other⁴. Serbia and Bulgaria, too, undoubtedly intrigued towards the dissolution of the Empire in Macedonia and Albania, seeking commercial outlets either on the Aegean or the Adriatic seas.

Greece, especially, had a particular interest in the question of Albania for a number of reasons. Firstly, as the question of Albanian autonomy became prominent, especially after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, the delimitation of Albanian-Greek frontiers in a future autonomous or independent Albania came to the fore⁵. In the next few years both were to claim what was termed South Albania or Northern Epirus. Athens justified her claim by pointing out that Southern Albania was mostly Greek Orthodox. For their part the Albanian nationalists viewed northern Epirus as their own, justifying their arguments with declarations that the territory was occupied by Albanian speaking Orthodox and Moslems⁶. In reality vilayets in the area were an incredible mixture of races, religious and social customs. The problem was much more difficult than drawing delimitation lines on a map⁷.

2. S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, (New York, 1967), p. 451. For a recent view of the Balkan Question see R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria, 1878-1918: A History*, (New York, 1983).

3. *Osterreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch, 1914*, Ed. L. Bittner, Vienna, 1930, III, 2857. (Cited hereafter as *O.U.A.*).

4. M. E. Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*, (London, 1920), pp. 217-8.

5. B. Kondis, *Greece and Albania, 1908-14*, (The Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1976) No. 167, p. 11.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

As well, a component of the Greek policy towards Albania was the concept of 'Megali'. In essence, Athens adopted an expansionary policy into territories occupied by Greek Orthodox persuasion but still under Turkish domination. This did not embrace a forward policy in areas which were clearly not Greek orthodox⁸.

Finally, the establishment of frontiers had strategic implications. If the mainland next to the Greek Island of Corfu in the Adriatic was Albanian, there existed a future potential threat to Greek interests. If the adjacent area was Greek, then Greece could establish a reasonably strong naval presence in the area, and control the straits of Otranto. Both Italy and Austria-Hungary rejected such a presence as a threat, not necessarily by Greece alone, but if Greece joined with another sea power⁹.

Despite the difficulties Greece and Albania encountered over the delimitation of eventual frontiers, Professor B. Kondis is justified in asserting that Greek policy was not hostile to the notion of an autonomous or independent Albania 'per se'. Clearly, a reasonably strong Albania would act as a buffer zone between Greece on the one hand and Serbia and Bulgaria on the other. Equally, it would minimise any Italian pretensions in Albania. Kondis makes a timely revision of the work of some previous authors who took a harsh view of Greek policy, and he makes a re-evaluation of some other works which adopt an overly pro-Greek position¹⁰.

Despite considerable economic interests, Austrian involvement in Albanian affairs was largely motivated by the increasing apprehension of Serbian expansionism and the desire to curtail it¹¹. As early as 1897 the Ballhausplatz had drawn up substantial plans for the independence of Albania to become operative at the first real indication of Turkish collapse¹². Although it often deliberately created the impression that it nourished designs there, and especially in the Sandjak of Novibazar, Vienna's policy was mostly preventative. This threat of further annexation after 1908 was intended to maintain the status quo, not disrupt it, and to keep Russia out of the Balkan region¹³. To this extent Austria invoked the co-operation of Italy. Such col-

8. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 110.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 13. Kondis gives a thorough re-evaluation of books written earlier, which tend to demonstrate that Greek policy was either 'hostile' to the formation of Albania, or books which showed undue prejudice towards Greece.

11. Skendi, *National Awakening*, p. 238.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

13. F. R. Bridge, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, 1906-14: A Diplomatic History*, (London, 1976), pp. 168-172.

laboration, however, often foundered on mutual distrust and conflicting commercial interests¹⁴.

Although deliberations on the Albanian issue had been frequent in many European cabinets before 1908, it was not until the success of the Young Turk revolution that the problem achieved prominence. Despite sporadic revolts, the most powerful tribes had acquiesced in Abdul Hamid's regime because of the tangible pecuniary and political rewards: licence to plunder in Macedonia, liberal pay in Constantinople, and a *laissez-faire* policy in Albania¹⁵. The Young Turk's policy of centralisation and Ottomanisation (described by Lowther, the British Ambassador in Constantinople, as 'pounding the non-Turkish elements in a Turkish mortar')¹⁶ alienated those previously favourable to the Porte. As Skendi argues it was this dual process, rather than any other, which caused the Albanian national awakening¹⁷. The Law of Association of November 1909 divested Albanians of any national dignity. It declared subject to closure all societies constituted on the basis of national denomination and distinction. National societies could exist only as 'Ottoman' and only if engaged in non-political questions¹⁸. Furthermore, promised indemnities and privileges were rescinded. Taxes raised were spent outside the province, instead of being rechannelled into public works¹⁹. Troops were conscripted for service outside Albania and foreigners were placed in charge of important administrative posts²⁰. Moreover, the employment of the Albanian language was suppressed by the Porte as the vehicle of Albanian separatism²¹. Finally, despite the fact that the Turkish Government had sent out numerous commissions to ascertain Albanian opinion, nothing concrete had resulted²². The revolt of the Hoti, Grudi, Klementi and Kastrati tribes in March 1911 therefore came as no surprise and signalled the beginning of the dissolution of the Turkish Empire in Europe, and the reincarnation of the question of Great Power relations.

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14. Skendi, *National Awakening*, p. 256.

15. Diplomatist, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, (Oxford, 1915), p. 95.

16. *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, Eds. G. P. Gooch and H. Temperley, (London, 1927), IX, I, 207. (Cited hereafter as *B.D.*)

17. *Ibid.*, 524. Also Skendi, *National Awakening*, p. 437.

18. *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, Ed. S. Story, (London, 1920), p. 329.

19. E. C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars*, (New York, 1938), p. 45.

20. J. Swire, *Albania, The Rise of a Kingdom*, (London, 1929), pp. 105-6.

21. Skendi, *National Awakening*, p. 387.

22. *O.U.A.*, IV., 3677, Beilage.

Despite the voluminous correspondence of antagonists in the daily press, the British Government was reluctant to adopt any policy at all. Until the end of June it continually argued that the matter was primarily an internal problem of the Turkish regime and therefore of little consequence to Great Britain²³. It was up to the most interested Powers to effect a solution. Grey excused this passivity by stating that Great Britain had not as yet been officially requested to intervene and it could hardly do so as there was no legation at Cetinje, the Montenegrin capital²⁴. When this lame vindication of British inactivity was questioned in parliament, Grey and his parliamentary undersecretary, T. Mackinnon Wood, squashed debate with the argument that negotiations were at hand and that open discussion might well produce serious complications²⁵. Edith Durham, an acknowledged expert on Balkan affairs²⁶, did in fact represent London as an unofficial agent in the absence of accredited officials, and her reports of Turkish atrocities and human suffering were widely publicised in various newspapers²⁷. Nonetheless, although the foreign secretary was visibly impressed with the exactness and credibility of the reports, and sympathetic to her appeals for aid and support, his only response was that the 'situation was sad, but that Great Britain could do nothing'²⁸. His only concession was to establish official diplomatic relations with Montenegro and warn Nicola to maintain the status quo at all costs²⁹.

Certainly Albania did not loom large on the list of Grey's priorities, and he was hesitant to inaugurate a new era reminiscent of the Macedonian Reforms. Recollections of Austro-Russian manoeuvring lingered in the halls of the Foreign Office, and suspicions of Italo-Austrian encroachment in Albania were strengthened after Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908. Yet other factors were more prominent in explaining this passivity. Throughout May and June the dissension between the Lords and the Commons over the Parliament Bill was reaching its climax. Asquith's acceptance of the Unionist challenge by threatening to swamp the upper house

23. *Parliamentary Debates of Great Britain, House of Commons*, 1911, XXVII, Grey to James Hope, M.P., 29 June 1911, p. 558. (Cited hereafter as *H.C.D.*)

24. Bridge, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, p. 69.

25. *H.C.D.*, 1911, XXVII, 3 July, 1911, p. 779.

26. See her various books, M.E. Durham, *Twenty Years of the Balkan Tangle*, (London, 1920); *The Struggle for Scutari*, (London, 1914); *High Albania*, (London, 1909).

27. For example, *The Times*, 21, 31 July 1911.

28. Foreign Office (hereafter F.O.) 371/1288, minute, Spence to Dufferin, and enclosures, 5 June, 1911.

29. *B.D.*, IX, I, 488, Minutes on Akers-Douglas to Grey, 20 June 1911.

with Liberal peers had created widespread paralysis in the functioning of traditional party politics. Simultaneously, a seemingly endless series of railway and dock strikes, motivated by stationary wages and increasing prices, promised wholesale chaos. As it was the Government was already preoccupied with increasing criticism over the revamped Home Rule Bill and preparations for the coronation of George V. But existing difficulties were also magnified by the arrival of the German gunboat *Panther* at Agadir, thus activating yet another international crisis. Grey's curt remark that he could do nothing in Albania was, therefore, surely appropriate. Foreign responsibilities were already over-extended, and intervention in Albania would merely lead to a further degeneration of relations between the Great Powers. It was hardly the time to undertake an active policy despite the humanitarian questions involved.

London's policy of passivity was not, however, just the product of internal and international tensions. It was also motivated by the belief that intervention in Turkey's affairs was a total admission of the bankruptcy of the Young Turks³⁰. Grey's faith in the political rejuvenation of Turkey under the new regime was perhaps unique among contemporary European statesmen, exemplified the extent to which moral and humanitarian principles could influence, though not govern, British policy, and points to the 'unspoken assumptions' which Joll refers to in the connection between educational systems and decision making. It is not surprising, therefore, that the foreign secretary found widespread support from the press and the Balkan Committee under the presidency of Noel Buxton³¹. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, described the suppression of the rebellion as a 'slight setback'³². *The Times*, the most influential daily, continued to take a detached view, to treat Turkey gently and to rationalise its political delinquency by reference to the difficulties of any constitutionalist Government after centuries of despotism. The Balkan Committee, too, reinforced Grey's hope in the Young Turk regime despite the warnings by H. Nevinson and E. J. Dillon of the similitude of the 'old' and the 'new'³³. Nevertheless, Buxton, Pears and Brailsford counterbalanced such arguments by emphasising that decisive intervention would

30. *H.C.D.*, XXVII, p. 1863.

31. The Balkan Committee was set up in 1903 as a Balkan lobby group under Buxton who had travelled to Macedonia in 1899.

32. Quoted in A.J.A. Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, (London, 1972), p. 348.

33. For example, see *Contemporary Review*, July, 1911, articles by Dillon, Pears, and Brailsford.

endanger the regeneration of the regime³⁴. Although Great Britain should associate itself with the remonstrances addressed to the Porte by St. Petersburg and Vienna, the Committee believed that this could be most effectively achieved as a friend³⁵.

Grey, however, seems to have been influenced more by the Petition of the Malissori to the British Government on June 24th than the advice of the Committee. His reaction to the modest requests for decentralisation, compensation for loss and damage and guarantees of Turkish integrity was indicative of that fine moral attitude which often characterised his stance over domestic reform³⁶. Although suspicious of the intentions of Nicola of Montenegro, he concurred with him that the return of the Malissori to Albania was inconceivable without effective guarantees by one or more of the interested Powers³⁷. The Porte's acquiescence in the language and school questions of the Petition, the improvement of communications and a general amnesty without exceptions, were also imperative³⁸. To implement these, Grey appealed for the combined influence of the Powers³⁹. By the end of June the revolt had been in progress for over three months, and London was apprehensive of the international ramifications. Not only would the situation prove more unmanageable if things were allowed to drift, but there also existed the very real possibility that Russia and Austria might embroil themselves inextricably⁴⁰.

Although the reply of the various Powers was not very encouraging, it was primarily the Wilhelmstrasse that opposed Grey's suggestions, claiming that such action constituted illegal interference in the internal affairs of the Porte⁴¹. Since the Powers seemed incapable of agreeing over a common policy, Grey relapsed into his 'wait and see' attitude⁴², by now disillusioned with Austro-Russian machinations⁴³. When St. Petersburg made a suggestion on July 7th that the Powers act as mediators between Turkey and Montenegro without reference to Albania, the foreign secretary held aloof, since 'it didn't',

34. *H.C.D.*, 1911, XXVII, p. 1837.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *B.D.*, IX, 1, 495.

37. *Ibid.*, 486.

38. *Ibid.*, 498.

39. *Ibid.*, 496.

40. *Ibid.*, 501.

41. *Ibid.*, 500, 504.

42. *Ibid.*, 508.

43. *Ibid.*, 511, Grey to Cartwright, 25 July 1911. Also 512, minute by Nicolson.

he informed Buchanan, British Ambassador in St. Petersburg, 'envisage any improvement in the lot of the Albanians', the only thing that really interested him⁴⁴.

After July 1911 and throughout 1912, Grey's policy was to withdraw from any commitment in Turkey's problem relating to Balkan minorities, merely encouraging moderate elements at the Porte. Although Nicolson often disagreed with Grey's pro-Turkish policy⁴⁵, he remained quick to admit that harsh language at Constantinople would be ill-advised⁴⁶. Grey was particularly conscious of the fact that senseless pressure on the Turks could lead to retaliation in many ways: Mussulman sentiments in the British Empire could be aroused⁴⁷; British interests and negotiations in the Persian Gulf jeopardised⁴⁸. Furthermore, the foreign secretary was unwilling to participate in the dissection of the Turkish Empire while the regime still had life. The replacement of the Young Turks in July 1912 with moderates offered at last the prospect of satisfaction for and the pacification of the Albanians. To have pursued a more energetic policy while the newly formed Government was attempting to consolidate its position would have meant the return of the now thoroughly discredited Young Turk regime, and its dependence on Germany.

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Montenegro's declaration of war upon the Porte in October 1912 and its expansion throughout the Balkans, shook London out of its passive attitude. No longer merely an internal problem for Turkey, the Albanian Question threatened to escalate into a major conflagration between the chief antagonists in the Balkans, Russia and Austria-Hungary, and it was this aspect of the issue rather than the legitimate interests of the Albanian nationalists which preoccupied the foreign secretary. To alleviate the often tense situation, Grey continually emphasised the Concert as a machinery in the maintenance of peace, in many cases favouring the Austrians as the greatest Power most intimately involved, often to the detriment of the Russians. His decisively more active policy was founded not only on the premise that Great Britain

44. F.O. 371/1299 minute on Buchanan to Grey, tel. 147, 7 July 1911.

45. Nicolson often warned Grey that 'we are raising up a Frankenstein', cf. Bridge, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, p. 169.

46. B.D. IX, II, 10, Nicolson to Hardinge, 9 October, 1912.

47. The French often noted Grey's apprehensions over this. Cf. *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, Ed. Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, 1929, 3rd Series, III, 436, 438.

48. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, p. 117.

had most to lose as a satiated power in any military conflict, but also and primarily on the belief that war was both immoral and irrational as an instrument of foreign policy. To this extent the basic character of British policy remained unique among the Great Powers.

Throughout most of 1912, Grey continued to reaffirm his faith in the capacity of the Porte to execute administrative and political reforms in Albania, especially after the deposition of the Committee of Union and Progress⁴⁹. However, by August, the Foreign Office was receiving consular reports which indicated that such confidence had clearly been misplaced⁵⁰. The idea of political or administrative decentralisation had either been shelved or totally abandoned by the new regime⁵¹. Indeed, whatever credibility existed in the Porte's intentions, vanished in the almost euphoric atmosphere in London at the disruption of the status quo in October⁵². Even Grey recognised the fact that the status quo was now untenable, and that autonomy under Turkish suzerainty was the minimum for which the Albanians and the Alliance Powers would settle⁵³.

Indeed the prospect of conflict between Russia and Austria over a few insignificant towns was precisely the major preoccupation of British policy throughout most of 1913⁵⁴, and accounts for the more energetic stance adopted by London⁵⁵. Cartwright and Buchanan's warnings about the magnitude of the situation were well noted in the Foreign Office, and Grey emphasised the expedience of the Concert of European Great Powers to alleviate immediate difficulties and avoid separate action on the part of the Ballhausplatz⁵⁶. The

49. *B.D.*, IX, I, 639. Minute by Grey on Marling to Grey, 20 August 1912.

50. *Ibid.*, 632, 612.

51. *Ibid.*

52. See Morris, *Radicalism*, p. 352. *The Times*, 11 November.

53. Pribram, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, p. 165.

54. *Die Grösse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914*, Eds. J. Lepsius, A. Mendelsson-Bartholdy, Fr. Thimme, Berlin, 1922-27, XXXIII, 12447. (Cited hereafter as *G.P.*).

55. See A. Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans, Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy 1908-14*, (Toronto, 1981); *B.D.*, IX, II, 719. For the general policies adopted during the Balkan wars by the Great Powers, see F. Fischer, *Griff Nach der Weltmacht*, (Dusseldorf, 1961) and *Krieg der Illusionen*, (Dusseldorf, 1969); V. R. Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914*, (London, 1973); R. J. B. Bosworth, *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy before the First World War*, (London, 1979); R. J. Crampton, *The Hollow Détente: Anglo-German Relations in the Balkans, 1911-14*, (London, 1981).

56. *B.D.*, IX, II, 297. The French government, equally disturbed by the turn of events in the Balkans seconded Grey's attempts. See Notes Journalières, *Bibliothèque Nationale*, March 1913, (N.A.F. 16024), Poincaré MSS; Poincaré to Louis, April 1912 A.E. (Affaires Etrangères), N.S. *Russie*, 41; Henri Cambon to J. Cambon, 31 October 1912, Louis Cambon

initiatives which Grey undertook in the following months indicated his desire to retain peace at almost any price. A Conference of Ambassadors was held from December 1912 onwards. While working within the security of the framework of the Entente, he nevertheless strove to build a bridge between the Entente and the Alliance Powers. Berlin was informed and consulted before any step was undertaken by London and Germany's friendly collaboration was largely due to the strict impartiality observed by Grey⁵⁷. Though he was certainly deluded, it seemed to the Kaiser that Grey often engaged in furthering the legitimate interests of the Alliance Powers to the detriment of his Entente colleagues⁵⁸.

Given the apparent strength of Social Darwinist theory, Britain's disposition for peace was perhaps unique among European states and largely explicable in the nature of Grey himself and the radical assumptions he shared with many of his countrymen. Certainly in 'realpolitik' terms Great Britain stood to lose most as a satiated power in any European conflagration and Grey's emphasis upon the speedy pacification of the Balkans was based on the realisation of the intimate connection between the territorial integrity of Turkey and the preservation of British interests in particular and Empire in general. Yet underlying the political premise was the rational and moralist rejection, unconscious but nevertheless important, of the employment of war as an instrument of foreign policy. Such exploitation to achieve specific ends was both morally repugnant and pragmatically inconceivable⁵⁹. Grey's undying faith in the ability of reason and compromise to succeed in domestic concerns carried through to the conduct of international affairs, thereby placing him close to many of the radical notions which affirmed the peace-making role of Great Britain.

Throughout the tension over the towns of Dibra, Djakova and Scutari, Grey proved quite unsympathetic to Serbian pretensions. The emphasis placed by Pasic, the Serbian Prime Minister, on the necessity of acquisition of land adjoining the Adriatic evoked hostile criticism from Grey⁶⁰. Indeed,

MSS (in private hands); P. Cambon to J. Cambon, 2, 5, 20 November, 1 December 1912, A.E. J. Cambon MSS, 25.

57. Pribram, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, p. 182.

58. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, p. 298.

59. C. Parry, "Foreign Policy and International Law", in *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, Ed. F. H. Hinsley, (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 89-110.

60. *The Times*, 25 November, 1912. Pasic was angry at Steel, the Balkan Correspondent, for publishing his name in the interview.

the foreign secretary found Serbia's language 'fatiguing and ridiculous' and felt that the Serbs had taken little account of the nature and the wishes of the population⁶¹. Vienna, on the other hand, had demonstrated remarkable calm and dignity in view of the fact that local disturbances continually flared up near its own borders. Reluctant to assent to a Serbian port on the Adriatic, Berchtold nonetheless raised no objections to a commercial outlet for Serbia on neutral Albanian territory, a concession which Asquith thought eminently laudable⁶². Even Nicolson, who at times appealed to Grey to make Albania the sacrificial lamb to keep the Russian connection, realised that Serbia's establishment on the Adriatic and the enhancement of the great Serb idea would have disastrous consequences for the stability of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He minuted to Grey that it was,

clear that Austria cannot, and from her point of view should not, permit Serbia to establish herself in any shape or form on the Adriatic⁶³.

Undoubtedly, the foreign secretary would have affirmed British support for Russia in the event of military conflict, but he repeatedly warned Sazonov, the Russian foreign minister, that the British were not merely at the beck and call of St. Petersburg:

It seems unreasonable and intolerable that the greater part of Europe should be involved in war for a dispute about one or two towns on the Albanian frontier⁶⁴.

It was therefore the foreign secretary's concern over the prospect of general conflict, rather than his sympathy for the plight of the Albanians and the interests of Austria, that motivated him into taking a more energetic interest and hand in Albania. As well as a moderating influence on Sazonov⁶⁵, Grey often assumed the leadership in proposing vital measures to remedy an increasingly dangerous situation; proposals that far transcended his legal responsibilities as host of the conference of ambassadors. Suggesting areas

61. *B.D.*, IX, II, 197.

62. *Ibid.*, 406, Minute by Asquith in Cartwright to Nicolson, 20 December, 1912.

63. *Ibid.*, 196, Minute by Nicolson on Paget to Grey, 26 November, 1912.

64. *Ibid.*, 636, Grey to Buchanan, 17 February, 1913. For similar French apprehensions over Russian involvement in the Balkans see J. F. V. Keiger, *France and the Origins of the First World War*, (London, 1983); M. B. Hayne, *The Quai d'Orsay and French Foreign Policy, 1898-1914*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Sydney, 1985, pp. 340, 344, 345, 368, 369.

65. *B.D.*, IX, II, 280, 283, 321.

of discussion, acting as chairman of the group, and providing the vital link between the Entente and the Alliance, Grey impartially guided the conference to agreement over the viability of a commercial outlet for Serbia and the principle of autonomy⁶⁶.

However, the establishment of an autonomous Albania created more problems than it solved since the very delimitation of the Albanian borderline was a contentious issue. Some justifiable Greek claims and counter-claims by other powers were extremely difficult to determine⁶⁷. Grey's proposal for a commission to ascertain the exact boundary lines of the various areas of dispute on the basis of ethnography, geography and local custom, met with a cool reception from St. Petersburg unless the commission was 'packed' to further Serbian Montenegrin interests, which Russia had largely accepted as its own in the Balkans⁶⁸. Grey was adamant however that British participation would not be forthcoming if this was the case and accused the Russians of attempting to take advantage of the situation, the very thing the Concert sought to avoid.

If anything, the foreign secretary was losing patience with St. Petersburg, blaming Montenegrin and Serb intransigence on Russian support. Paget, Ambassador in Belgrade, explained to the foreign secretary that it was not just Hartwig, the Russian ambassador in Belgrade, but the whole Russian Government which seemed intent on inciting trouble for Austria in the Balkans⁶⁹. Grey was certainly inclined to believe this, labelling Russia's procrastinating moods as 'very unfortunate'⁷⁰. This appeared even more apparent to the Foreign Office after the Ballhausplatz had finally assented to ceding Djakova to Serbia. Moreover, Russia had not refrained from supplying Montenegro with armaments and food supplies although it publicly announced its support for the Concert⁷¹. In fact Grey made it quite clear to the Russians that they ran the risk of sundering the Entente, already unsteady over the conflict in Persia:

I do not suppose that under any circumstances a war about the Albanian frontier would be regarded as a British interest involving action on our part⁷².

66. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, p. 251. For Mensdorff's report, see *O.U.A.*, VI, 7292, Mensdorff to Foreign Office, 6 June, 1913.

67. Kondis, *Greece and Albania*, pp. 93, 94.

68. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, p. 284.

69. *B.D.*, IX, II, 759, Paget to Grey, 28 March, 1913.

70. *Ibid.* 764.

71. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, p. 300.

72. *B.D.*, IX, II, 626, Grey to Buchanan, 17 March, 1913.

Although he had no real intention of relinquishing or weakening the partnership with Russia, he was undoubtedly applying pressure on St. Petersburg where it was the most vulnerable in the hope of restraining it from provoking a European conflict. British support for the Ballhausplatz was reasonable in view of the fact that Austria was the greatest Power most directly involved. Rumours were also rife that Austria would undertake military action unless Montenegro withdrew from the siege of Scutari. On March 14th, Asquith had received reliable information to the effect that Vienna had decided upon stern measures the following day⁷³. Although this did not eventuate, the tension was so substantial that Albania had clearly become the 'anchor' so Grey told Goschen, the ambassador in Berlin, 'by which we must hold in order to preserve the peace'⁷⁴.

Since the *démarche* of the Powers at Cettinje had clearly failed to produce any perceptible impression, Lichnowsky's suggestion on March 26th to accord to Austria and Italy a mandate to effect the wishes of the Concert came as no surprise⁷⁵. The dangers inherent in unilateral action were too apparent however, not only because it specifically excluded the Entente Powers but also because Italo-Austrian suspicions of each other might degenerate into open conflict. Indeed the Alliance provided the opportunity for both Italy and Austria to curtail each other's interests in Albania, rather than acting as a defensive safeguard against the possibility of external threats from Russia, France or Great Britain. Once more Grey came to the fore with a proposal for a joint naval demonstration against Montenegro, again to be met with procrastination on the part of St. Petersburg and reluctance from the Quai D'Orsay without formal Russian sanction⁷⁶. Russian dilatoriness threatened to render the Concert important since Grey recognised the impossibility of obtaining Cabinet approval for British action without French involvement. Such a move would indicate a 'rapprochement' between England and the Triple Alliance or at least a diversion of views among the Triple Entente Power⁷⁷. In the final analysis the unity of the latter claimed priority over the Concert despite Grey's hopes always to reconcile the two.

The cabinet fully realised the significance of Grey's attempts at a recon-

73. R. J. Crampton, "The Decline of the Concert of Europe in the Balkans, 1913-14"
The Slavonic and East European Review, LII, 1974, p. 395.

74. *F.O.*, 371/1770, Grey to Goschen, 12 April, 1913.

75. For details see *O.U.A.*, V, 6281, 6314, and *D.D.F.*, 3rd series, VI, 71.

76. *G.P.*, XXXIV, II, 13024, note, 13061.

77. *D.D.F.*, 3rd Series, VI, 181; *B.D.*, IX, II, 772, 779, 781, 789, 790.

ciliation since separate action by Vienna would merely precipitate war, and Montenegro's ability to hold the Great Powers to ransom would create dangerous precedents for the future. The foreign secretary's annoyance with his Entente partners was transmitted privately to Paris and St. Petersburg and also vented in public speeches in Parliament. Unless both 'came to the party' he threatened to suspend the Conference and raise no objections to Italo-Austrian measures undertaken without the consent or the participation of France or Russia. Grey's letter to Goschen on April 23rd firmly expressed the extent to which the Entente Powers were in disarray:

Powers who are parties to the agreement must, it seems to me, take part in steps necessary to make it respected or not object to steps taken by others⁷⁸.

Nor was Grey's attitude unique among the British leaders. Asquith, for example, informed George V that the cabinet considered France's refusal to participate without commission from Russia 'difficult to understand and still more difficult to defend'⁷⁹. In fact both men found as much error in France's tardiness as Russia's hesitancy⁸⁰. Addresses by them to the Commons in early April were clearly directed at France in the hope of obtaining a positive reaction⁸¹.

At any rate, Sazonov was rapidly losing patience with Montenegro, which had hitherto ignored Russian advice to abandon the siege, and his official communiqué to the press condemning Montenegrin brigandage ensured French participation and enabled London to order Admiral Burney to Antivari with the other Powers⁸². Grey's alignment with Alliance measures was nevertheless limited. Apart from the fact that Montenegro's cause was popular in the daily press, the cabinet was becoming 'disconcerted' at the extent to which Great Britain had drifted from its Entente mooring. Churchill had already privately warned Grey against drawing Britain 'into any position distinct from that of France and Russia, and still less into giving any kind of support to Austria in attacking Montenegro'⁸³. Although Grey did in fact suggest British military intervention on the mainland, the cabinet rejected

78. *B.D.*, IX, II, 790, Grey to Goschen, 2 April, 1913.

79. *Cabinet Papers*, Cabinet 41/34/12, Asquith to George V, 3 April, 1913.

80. *B.D.*, IX, II, 793.

81. *The Times*, 9, 12 April.

82. *D.D.F.*, 3rd Series, VI, 169, 172, 235, 246, 267.

83. Minute by Churchill, 2 April, 1913. *Lloyd George Papers*, c/3/15/21, House of Lords Library.

such approval as long as Scutari was in Montenegrin hands⁸⁴. Ultimately, Entente considerations took preference over Concert unity.

Members of the Foreign Office, too, felt that a far more pro-Russian and French stance was preferable to the careful balancing act which characterised the foreign secretary's position. At times, even Nicolson leaned mildly towards the Austrians praising Berchtold for the 'very great patience and forbearance' he had demonstrated⁸⁵. But he also feared that Grey's proclivity towards Vienna and the Concert was exactly what the Wilhelmstrasse had skilfully planned. His major preoccupation was the remorseless suspicion that the Germans were playing a double hand, attempting to secure British friendship on the one hand whilst secretly courting the Russians on the other⁸⁶. Concern for Russian encroachment into Persia and India, the difficulties attendant upon such expansionism, compounded by an obsessive fear of isolationism, forced him continually to urge Grey to be more deferential to Russian interests in the Balkans. To Maurice de Bunsen, he expressed his anguish:

The Russians could be exceedingly awkward in the mid and far east and could seriously shake the British opinion in India. This is such a nightmare to me that I would at almost any cost, keep Russia's friendship⁸⁷.

Crowe, on the other hand, was far more solicitous of the Germans, discerning in Germany's co-operation over the Albanian Question a deceptive manoeuvre to prise England away from the Entente. Such collaboration clearly provided further evidence of German insincerity since the espousal of an independent Albania would obviously jeopardise its position at the Porte⁸⁸.

* * *

From October 1913, Grey was again thinking in terms of the Balance of Power concept, not merely because the Balkan wars were over, but mostly because the Triple Alliance was rapidly showing how untrustworthy it was in the maintenance of the Concert. Grey retained an interest in Albania precisely because such action fulfilled Entente needs rather than Concert considera-

84. *Cabinet Papers*, Cabinet 41/34/15.

85. *B.D.*, IX, II, 972, Nicolson to Cartwright, 3 May, 1913.

86. Z. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge, 1969), p. 136.

87. Quoted in E.T.S. Dugdale, *Maurice de Bunsen*, (London, 1934). Nicolson to de Bunsen, 27 April, 1914.

88. Steiner, *Foreign Office*, p. 145.

tions. What proved basic after all, were the maintenance of Russian prestige and the furtherance of British interests in the Mediterranean.

Even before October, Grey was very much aware of the strong anxieties his pro-alliance tendencies had generated in the Cabinet and the Foreign Office and had at no stage intended to forsake England's allies at the most critical junctures. In fact, in a meeting with the French and Russian ambassadors on April 28th, Grey took great pains to co-ordinate closely Entente policy before the next ambassadorial meeting⁸⁹. Nevertheless, while conceding ultimate priority to the Entente, the foreign secretary still hoped to reconcile the two and thus avoid making a choice which might have had irrevocable consequences.

Throughout the summer months of 1913, British championing of most Italo-Austrian proposals continued to be strong while Entente, especially Russia's immediate and vital interests, were not affected. Indeed the exact form of the new Albanian state was largely due to British support of such recommendations. Grey was anxious for the Powers to settle upon at least a provisional administration hoping that this would 'contribute materially to the stability of the Great Powers in the face of the new complications arising out of the Balkan war'⁹⁰. London's concern was, as always, the matter of relations between the Great Powers rather than consideration for the Balkan allies of Albania. Such a desire for a rapid settlement naturally disposed Grey to consider Italo-Austrian suggestions in a favourable light; suggestions which had been formulated as early as December 1912⁹¹. Despite Nicolson's hostility to the notion of 'a foreign prince being established with a mock court' and his approbation of the French proposal for a High Commissioner⁹², Grey was impatient to effect some viable settlement while the Powers were achieving some measure of solidarity. Disregarding both French and Russian opposition to the notion of a permanent administration and the creation of a new Royal House, he stood firmly behind the Triple Alliance's proposals⁹³. Similarly, although both Paris and St. Petersburg would have preferred a system closely modelled on the international control of Macedonia, London's encouragement of a permanent administration illustrated the extent to which distrust of such control existed. Such rebuffs considerably strained relations between Britain and Russia, whose precuniary interests in the Balkans and

89. *F.O.*, 371/1493, Minute by Grey, 15 April, 1912.

90. *B.D.*, IX, II, 1141, 14 July, 1913.

91. For details see *O.U.A.*, V, 4944.

92. *B.D.*, IX, II, 972, Nicolson to Cartwright, 13 May, 1913.

93. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, pp. 331-333.

moral concern for Slav welfare were considerable. The subsequent decline of Russian prestige in its rather inconsistent handling of Montenegrin-Serbian affairs in Albania brought vehement abuse from the Russian press.

Notwithstanding the criticism, Grey continued to apply pressure on his Entente colleagues to arrive at a reasonable agreement without undue delay. The more the Conference was allowed to drag on the more, he felt, fresh complications would arise⁹⁴. On August 1st he proffered far-reaching suggestions as to the nature of the Delimitation Commissions, the neutralisation of the Corfu Channel, and the incorporation of Koritza and Stylos into Albania, towns to which Greece had laid claim. When the Entente ambassadors raised objections over such incorporation, Grey announced that the last meeting would take place on August 1st and that he would then have to make a statement to the House of Commons the following day, since the summer recess was approaching⁹⁵. Although he never made the warning explicit, the foreign secretary had visibly expressed his impatience with the continual obstruction he had found at the Quai D'Orsay and St. Petersburg by clearly supporting Italo-Austrian proposals on most occasion⁹⁶.

There were, however, many indications that the Vallhausplatz and the Consulta were merely using British leverage to attain their own specific ends. Grey displayed more than just a little annoyance and surprise over Austria's belligerent attitude about Stylos and Koritza⁹⁷, especially since he had gone to great lengths to ensure a settlement favourable to Vienna⁹⁸. Berchtold's desire for as large an Albania as possible was only natural, since the size of a non-Slavic fish in a Slavic pond was all important but his aggressive tones seemed unreasonable to Whitehall.

Nevertheless, London continued to work in the interests of the maintenance of the Concert. When the Delimitation Commission finally met at Monastir on October 4th, it was clear from the beginning that the British Delegate, Major Doughtie-Wylie, was more in 'concert' with his Alliance colleagues than with the French and Russian members. Grey adamantly informed Bertie, the British Ambassador in Paris, that the French had misconstrued Britain's purpose if they at all supposed that London's object was to obtain as much as possible for Greece and thereby register a prestigious

94. *B.D.*, IX, II, 141.

95. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, p. 338.

96. *G.P.*, XXXVI, 13990.

97. *B.D.*, IX, II, 1207, Grey to Cartwright, 6 August, 1913. Also *B.D.*, X, 2, Grey to Bertie, 7 September, 1913.

98. *O.U.A.*, VI, 7807.

gain for the Entente⁹⁹. French objections over the lack of enthusiasm by Doughtie-Wylie for Entente concerns were rebuffed by Grey with the argument that there had been a tacit agreement by the Great Powers not to seek political or financial capital out of the situation arising from the Balkans. In fact, since the British member was the chairman of the group, it was even more imperative, Grey informed Granville, Chargé d'Affaires in Paris, 'that in appearance no less in fact, he should preserve an attitude of independence and impartiality and deal with all proposals according to his judgement of their merits'¹⁰⁰.

It appeared to both the French and the Russians that Doughtie-Wylie was acting more in the interests of the Alliance than themselves. The French constantly complained of his supposedly anti-Greek stance and pointed to the fact that Greek delegations had been turned away without the slightest chance of presenting their cases¹⁰¹. Although Nicolson was concerned over the amount of disputes between the British and the French members, Doughtie-Wylie never exceeded his instructions to any great extent. When Belgrade sent a formal protest to London over the hostility of the British member to its own interests, it received a curt reply from the Foreign Office¹⁰². Undoubtedly Grey's consternation over Greek and Serbian rapacity was large but he was also correct in his estimation of how toilsome the Italians would be in matters more vital to Britain if Italo-Austrian wishes were not conceded in Albania. It was also another example of how Grey continued to favour the Great Powers over the minor states. The foreign secretary was also gratified at the way the Germans and the English were cooperating in taking surveys of various regions and drawing up more complete maps for the Commission's perusal¹⁰³. It was largely from their report that he was able to submit to the various Powers suggested frontiers, which came to be accepted in the Protocol of Florence in December¹⁰⁴. Nonetheless, it was rather the fulfillment of wider Italo-Austrian proposals and the main-

99. *F.O.*, 371-1803, Doughtie-Wylie to Grey, 6 October, 1913; *B.D.*, IX, II, 1187, Grey to Bertie, 30 July, 1913.

100. *F.O.*, 371/1804, Grey to Granville, Chargé d'Affaires, Paris, 29 November, 1913.

101. For example, see *D.D.F.*, 3rd Series, IX, 40, Annexe 1, 19 December, 1913. Also for a full discussion on the Commission of Delimitation and Greek claims, see Kondis, *Greece and Albania*, pp. 117-119.

102. The Germans especially took notice of Britain's favourable though impartial stance, *G.P.*, XXXVI, 1, 13971, 13994.

103. *Ibid.*, 13971, 13994.

104. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, pp. 430.

tenance of the Concert more than the sheer weight and the truth of Doughtie-Wylie's detailed recommendations that pre-disposed the foreign secretary to concur with the British delegate's reports¹⁰⁵.

* * *

Behind London's policy of retaining the essence of the Concert, safeguarding Austria's and Italy's legitimate interests and working closely with the Germans, there was however increasing impatience with Vienna. Grey found it difficult to understand the delay of Ballhausplatz in appointing a delegate to the Commission, especially since inaction merely created further problems¹⁰⁶. Although repeated instructions had been transmitted to Cartwright to ascertain the reason for the tardiness, the British ambassador's reply threw little light on Vienna's motives¹⁰⁷. Notwithstanding the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia in October demanding the immediate withdrawal of Serbian troops from Albania, Grey was having second thoughts about the worth of British involvement in any of the Commissions. The foreign secretary had spoken in strong terms to the French ambassador in London, Cambon, over the way Vienna was manipulating the international control of Albania for its own interests¹⁰⁸. Voices in the wilderness 'crying that this was folly' were certainly coming to the fore in the Foreign Office. Nicolson, almost always the prophet of pessimism and doom, had been sceptical of the success of the Commission from the very outset. In fact, he never placed much faith in the creation of Albania, frequently reminding Grey of the artificial nature of its structure¹⁰⁹. Indeed his pessimism was spreading considerably throughout the Office¹¹⁰.

An almost parallel cynicism was developing towards Italy's machinations in the Aegean. Throughout the summer of 1913, Greece had persistently made itself refractory over the borders of Southern Albania and Epirus. By linking the Questions of Southern Albania and the Dodecanese, occupied by Italy during its war with Turkey, London hoped to solve both problems. Grey's later disillusionment arose from the inability to obtain satisfaction in the Aegean Islands issue, the only aspect of the Albanian Question which

105. *Ibid.*

106. *B.D.*, X, 1, 2, Grey to Bertie, 7 September, 1913.

107. *Ibid.*, 14, Grey to Bertie, 22 September, 1913.

108. *Ibid.*, 58, Grey to Bertie, 29 October, 1913.

109. Pribram, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, p. 209.

110. For other attitudes, see *B.D.*, X, 174, minutes on O'Beirne to Grey, 5 November, 1913.

directly interested London¹¹¹. The basis of British policy in the Mediterranean had been to prevent the emergence of any hostile force in the region. A concise memorandum by the Foreign Office for the Cabinet's consideration argued against Italy's retention of the Dodecanese on strategic and economic grounds:

From the above considerations it may be confidently asserted that the possession by Italy of Naval bases in the Aegean Sea would imperil our position in Europe, would cause us to lose our control over the Black Sea and Levant trade at its source and would in war expose our route to the East via the Suez Canal to the operation of Italy and her allies¹¹².

When Grey stressed the interdependence of the Aegean Islands issue with the Albanian Question, it was a frank admission (perhaps unconscious) for the first time of factors other than the Concert which were coming to influence Britain's continued involvement in the Balkans. The acceptance of Italian demands in Southern Albania appeared the only way to secure its withdrawal from the islands, the neutralisation of the Corfu Channel, and the possession of Saseno, Koritza, Epirus and Stylos by Albania¹¹³. Not only would the southern border be finally settled but London would be able to offer the islands to Greece as a 'douceur' for the sacrifice of Epirus. In essence Greece accepted this 'compromise' and agreed to evacuate Southern Albania¹¹⁴. In view of London's integrity throughout the Albanian Question, there was a certain irony in the way San Giuliano, the Italian foreign minister, informed Rodd, the British ambassador in Rome, of the suspicions with which certain elements in his country had viewed British involvement in the past¹¹⁵. If anything, London had sadly misread Italian good faith in the matter as technicalities cropped up almost immediately after the agreement to forgo the possession of the islands¹¹⁶. By September the Foreign Office was becoming far more aware of the leverage the Italians could apply in Asia Minor and the Mediterranean if they played their cards skilfully. Grey's suspicions were expressed in a minute:

111. Crampton, "Decline of the Concert", p. 401. For the interdependence of question of Albania and the Aegean Islands, see R. J. B. Bosworth, "Britain and Italy's Acquisition of the Dodecanese, 1912-15", *Historical Journal*, XIII, 4, pp. 683-705.

112. *Cabinet*, 37/111/27, 20 June, 1912, Admiralty memorandum.

113. *B.D.*, IX, II, 982. Grey to Rodd, 13 May, 1913.

114. Kondis, *Greece and Albania*, p. 110.

115. Bosworth, "Aegean Islands", p. 694.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 695.

Apparently she now wishes to continue the discussions [for a Mediterranean Agreement] on the basis that besides Tripoli she should get something in the islands and in Asia Minor. We cannot encourage that. We need not oppose anything in Asia Minor that does not conflict with the rights of the Smyrna-Aidin Rly. Co. but we must oppose Italian projects in the islands¹¹⁷.

By October the machinations of Vienna and Rome were becoming more frequent as the topic of discussion in the Foreign Office. As early as May Nicolson had pointed out the obstacles of maintaining the Concert in Albania, and had been confirmed in his doubts by others¹¹⁸. Until the transmission of the ultimatum to Serbia on October 17th however, Grey's reliance upon Austrian goodwill remained. Indeed sympathy with Belgrade's interests was remarkably lacking in the Foreign Office. Reports from Crackenthorpe, minister in Belgrade, and from Cartwright in Vienna, reinforced Grey's opinions of the duplicity of Serbia. According to Crackenthorpe, 'the basis of Serbian policy is to establish the fact that the new principality cannot possibly become viable and to encourage centrifugal tendencies for this purpose'¹¹⁹. Both received information independently that Serbia and Montenegro had agreed upon an informal arrangement over the northern frontier, and that specific areas could be re-allocated by 'working up the situation'¹²⁰. This included not only boundary rectifications but the maintenance of a Government in Albania friendly to Serbian interests¹²¹. This would be achieved by furthering the designs of Essed Pasha¹²². A communication on September 19th from M. Guic of the Serbian legation in London, underlining the reasons for Serbia's reluctance to withdraw behind the Albanian border, received a cool response from Crowe:

it would require the clearest evidence to convince the powers that a pretext was not being sought for a Serbian occupation of Albania frontier districts¹²³.

* * *

117. *B.D.*, X, I, 151, Minute on Dering to Grey, 15 October, 1913.

118. *Ibid.*, IX, II, 972.

119. *Ibid.*, X, I, 13, 18.

120. *Ibid.*, X, I, 13.

121. Helmreich, *Balkan Wars*, p. 420.

122. *Ibid.*

123. *B.D.*, X, I, 12.

For months Grey had bemoaned the fact that not enough pressure had been brought to bear upon the Serbians to retire from Albania. Nonetheless, Vienna's *démarche* at Belgrade on October 17th produced a major change of attitude in his mind and confirmed the warning that had been repeated to him from several quarters. His disenchantment with the Austrians arose from the method rather than the content of the ultimatum. The Ballhausplatz had clearly acted without the prior consultation or agreement of the Great Powers and confirmed the now almost irrefutable evidence of those who had persistently warned of Vienna's intention to make Albania a private preserve. Had the foreign secretary known that neither Rome nor Berlin had been consulted, his reaction may not have been as harsh. As it was, his disappointment over the whole affair stemmed from the realisation that the Concert had failed as an instrument, albeit informal, to resolve the major problems of the Great Powers as well as to dictate peace to the minor belligerents of the Balkan Wars. Grey's disillusionment was apparent in a letter to Goschen on the 18th:

For Austria to present an ultimatum to Serbia and then demand the support of the other Powers is in essence to confront the Powers with an ultimatum¹²⁴.

Indeed his attitude towards Austria and Serbia was a complete 'volte face'. Only a couple of days after he had been lamenting Serbian obstructionism, Grey was emphasising to Goschen the legitimacy of Belgrade's grievances, laying the blame for the delay of the settlement of Albania clearly on Vienna's shoulders¹²⁵. To Cartwright he reiterated these sentiments, arguing that it was the Albanians who had first violated the 'London Frontier', not the Serbs¹²⁶. Although the foreign secretary remained lukewarm over Belgrade's aspirations and its 'provocative treatment of the Albanians', the dramatic transformation in his views was evident. Crowe's suggestion of total British retraction from the area certainly tempted Grey:

My own inclination is in accord with St. E. Crowe's minute and I would come to that decision at once and act upon it if Russia and France had not to be considered¹²⁷.

124. *Ibid.*, 43, Grey to Goschen, 18 October, 1913. It would seem from Grey's own memoirs that Concert connoted far more than just a formal reunion of delegates in which he was often reluctant to participate, because it tended to exacerbate difficulties.

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Ibid.*, 51, Grey to Cartwright, 22 October, 1913.

127. *Ibid.*, 100, Minute by Grey on de Bunsen to Grey, 24 December, 1913.

The foreign secretary's confidence in the Concert was severely damaged. British participation in Albania was to be continued more for specifically Entente reasons than the maintenance of the Concert of the Great Powers¹²⁸. He realised that such withdrawal would signify a loss of prestige for Russia. Undoubtedly the most significant aspect was the fact that he was now thinking again in Balance of Power terms where one alliance system counterbalanced the other to prevent the maximisation of power in the European system¹²⁹.

* * *

Although Grey had almost always been the decisive policy maker in the Albanian Question, the stark recognition of the imminent collapse of the Concert may have made him more prone to consider the advice of particular men in the Foreign Office, especially in the abandonment of the unrewarding role of 'honest broker'. Although Nicolson had been foremost in warning Grey of the consequences of his policy of bridging the gulf between the Entente and Alliance¹³⁰, his influence appears to have grown only slightly after October 1913. The main thrust seems to have come from Crowe, who assumed increasing importance in formulating both attitudes and policy after that time. He had always voiced his suspicions of the real intentions of the Alliance, and such fears had proved amply substantiated in Grey's mind after October. The sheer volume of minutes written in Crowe's hand suggests the extent to which the foreign secretary sought his advice. Very rarely after October was there a great divergence between what Crowe proposed and what was actually done. Consultations between the two men were frequent, and at times Crowe assumed the responsibility of sending letters to various embassies on Grey's behalf¹³¹. Moreover, he acted frequently as liaison officer between the foreign secretary and officials from other countries stationed in London. Grey's reliance on Crowe was perhaps partly due to the feeling of weariness after nine years of Liberal Government in a most turbulent period, partly because of Crowe's remarkable administrative skills, but mostly because Crowe's judgement of the real intentions of the Triple Alliance had been amply vindicated.

In view of Crowe's increasing sway, it was not surprising that the German aspect of the Albanian question entered far more into Foreign Office

128. Not only would Russia lose prestige, but Britain would abandon the only lever it had to force Italy out of the Aegean. E.g. *B.D.*, XI, 72.

129. *Ibid.*

130. See Steiner, *Foreign Office*, p. 145.

131. *B.D.*, X, I, 82, 102, 138.

calculations, since Crowe himself had been pre-occupied with the German menace for a long time. He had at first largely supported his chief in upholding the integrity of the Concert but there was always the suspicion that Germany was attempting to isolate England by prising it away from the Entente while at the same time secretly courting the Russians. The Austrian ultimatum in October confirmed the basically perfidious nature of the Alliance. Indeed Steiner suggests that the voluminous length and magnitude of Crowe's minutes gave the appearance of trying to highlight for the foreign secretary all the evidence of German unscrupulousness¹³². Even Austria's action appeared to be directed from Berlin. Although Crowe deplored Serbian chicanery, the Serbian ultimatum appeared to spell the end of the Concert. His play on words was entirely appropriate:

To remain in the Concert on these terms is neither useful nor dignified. If we were to retire it would not be so much laying down our flute, as calling attention to the fact that we are not admitted to the orchestra¹³³.

To what extent Grey was swayed by personalities rather than events remains a matter of conjecture, but it was not until the transmission of the note to Serbia in October that Grey's opinion of the Germans changed remarkably. In fact Whitehall had been impressed with the German plea for British assistance to enforce the Serbian evacuation of Albanian territory in October. Crowe, himself, repeatedly warned Grey before October 17th that the Germans were 'not playing quite straight' in the Albanian Question¹³⁴. He underlined certain basic inconsistencies in Berlin's behaviour: its failure to restrain the Austrians and the Italians despite profuse declarations of disapproval; deliberate misrepresentation to the Russians over the nature of the note sent to Belgrade; and the satisfaction expressed in Constantinople at the aid offered by the Germans in obstructing the wishes of the Concert¹³⁵. At that stage, however, Grey was not prepared to concur with Crowe's cry of 'wolf' and attempted to rationalise the incongruencies by suggesting that they were due to the personal whim of the Kaiser¹³⁶. Berlin had, after all, apologised for the unseemly behaviour of its ally and had resisted attempts

132. Steiner, *Foreign Office*, p. 145.

133. *B.D.*, X, I, 123.

134. *B.D.*, X, I, 38, Minute on Coschen to Grey, 16 October, 1913.

135. *Ibid.*, 54, Minute on Goschen to Grey, 24 October, 1913.

136. *Ibid.*, Minute by Grey.

early in 1914 to make the Albanian Bank merely a monopoly for its Italian and Austrian colleagues, though Crowe as usual thought the motives highly suspect¹³⁷.

Nonetheless, a certain amount of strain had arisen over Albania after October between Germany and England. The former's political and commercial interests in Turkey and its concern to retain the Alliance as an effective alternative to alleged encirclement were forcing it to abandon the Concert, even at the risk of jeopardising the prospect of future friendship with Britain¹³⁸. Both Crowe and Nicolson agreed that had the Germans really desired to pull their colleagues into line, they would have. Both men emphasised to Grey Berlin's unwillingness rather than its inability to do so, and the foreign secretary's eventual disappointment in Germany was fanned as much by his own Foreign Office as Berlin's own actions¹³⁹.

* * *

For the first time since the beginning of the Balkan Wars in October 1912, the lines of demarcation between the Alliance and the Entente were clearly drawn. Grey was still unwilling, however, to abandon the machinery of the Concert altogether. The Wilhelmstrasse had proposed to London a joint démarche at Athens in the hope of obtaining Greek withdrawal from Epirus. Yet again an Italo-Austrian ultimatum on October 30th, similar to the previous one, shattered any hope of common action. Then and there Grey felt like leaving Albania to its own devices, or joint Italo-Austrian control, as he cynically commented¹⁴⁰. To do this, however, would be to relinquish the only lever he had against the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese. He did, nevertheless, vent his anger upon Imperiali, the Italian ambassador in London, reminding him rather acidly that Italy had 'no business to be on such good terms with the Porte, while provisions of the treaty of Lausanne had remained unfulfilled'¹⁴¹! He even lectured him on the dangers of the British experience in Egypt and stressed the necessity of Concert action, rather than unilateral measures, to be directed at the Porte and Athens. Pressure applied by merely one Power would create senseless hostility to that country, placing

137. R. J. Crampton, "The Balkans as a Factor in German Foreign Policy", *Slavonic and Eastern European Review*, Vol. LV, 3, July 1977, p. 382.

138. *Ibid.*, pp. 385-390.

139. *Ibid.*, pp. 384-385. Steiner, *Foreign Office*, p. 146.

140. *B.D.*, X, I, 58, Grey to Bertie, 29 October, 1913.

141. *F.O.*, 800/54/Grey MSS, Grey to Bertie, 10 September, 1913.

it at a decided disadvantage¹⁴². Reports from Mallet, the newly-arrived ambassador in Constantinople, indicated that Germany and the Alliance Powers were certainly double-dealing¹⁴³. In a private letter to Buchanan on February 11th 1914, Grey expressed bitter disappointment especially in Germany whose profuse utterances of 'désintéressement' had been largely accepted¹⁴⁴. Although no official declaration was issued from Whitehall, he would certainly have agreed with the basis of one of Crowe's minutes calling for a formal announcement of the dissolution of the Concert and the right of Britain to withdraw 'unless all the Powers were going to act in real unison'¹⁴⁵. In fact he did despatch a note to Berlin requesting the Germans 'to dispel mistaken impressions prevailing at Constantinople', and urging them not to re-institute the senseless lobbying at the Porte, which allowed the Old Turkey to raise its head¹⁴⁶. Only by united action could the Great Powers hope to control events in the Balkans.

Another Italo-Austrian démarche at Athens on March 8th, 1914, shattered whatever illusions were remaining in the Foreign Office, since it was the third occasion in which the Concert had been so blatantly disregarded. Nicolson's mood of pessimism had changed little from 1911. He told de Bunsen privately that the whole affair seemed 'such fiction and unreality that I cannot take any interest in it, especially as what occurs to us, and we have no interest whatever there'¹⁴⁷. To Goschen he spoke in stronger terms, denigrating the Concert as a facade and a 'childish waste of time'¹⁴⁸.

Crowe, too, aligned himself with Nicolson in condemnation of the Alliance Powers. Explanations, he minuted, 'of a perfunctory and platitudinous nature' were useless¹⁴⁹. He also warned that Great Britain's reputation would be severely tarnished if it continued to associate itself with such objectionable measures and urged Grey to withdraw support of a policy which wished to make Albania 'a private preserve of their own and whose methods and dealings are strangely discordant with our views and practices'¹⁵⁰. As the Irish Crisis came to the fore in 1914 and especially after the Curragh incident,

142. Steiner, *Foreign Office*, p. 146.

143. Crampton, "Decline of the Concert", p. 410.

144. *F.O.* 800/74, Grey MSS, Grey to Buchanan, 11 February, 1914.

145. *B.D.*, X, I, 226.

146. *Ibid.*, 235.

147. *F.O.* 800/372, Nicolson to de Bunsen, 16 February, 1914.

148. *F.O.* 800/373, Nicolson to Goschen, 17 April, 1914.

149. *B.D.*, X, I, 121, Minute on Elliot to Grey, 8 March, 1914.

150. Quoted in Pribram, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, p. 210.

Crowe stressed the futility and the dangers inherent in remaining in Albania:

This is not the time or the occasion for a Quixotic crusade on our part on behalf of a conglomeration of noble bandits struggling to remain free. The general political situation counsels us to keep out of entanglements that might embarrass us when we are least able to afford such a luxury¹⁵¹.

Undoubtedly, 'luxury' was the operative word in the Foreign Office, especially at a time when the Alliance's duplicity was highlighted by the dubious appointment of the Prince of Wied to the Albanian throne at the end of 1913. Grey resented suggestions in November that he should act as the agent of the Concert in notifying Wied of his appointment and proffered the German foreign minister's name as the most suitable person to undertake this, particularly since Wied was an Austro-Italian nomination in the first place¹⁵². Moreover, Lamb, the new consul-general in Albania, reported to Grey that both the Albanian delegate on the Commission of Control, Mufid Bey, and the intimate advisers of the Prince, were in the pay of Vienna¹⁵³. When Wied informed only the Alliance of the conditions under which he would accept a proposed loan, Grey realistically remarked in a minute that it would be better 'to deal direct with the Powers who act on his behalf' than with the Prince himself¹⁵⁴. Perhaps an old-fashioned sense of British propriety restrained him from saying 'and on their own'. It seemed apparent however that this was exactly what the Triple Alliance was doing, particularly when both Rome and Vienna wanted to make their participation in the loan dependent on securing a monopoly on the Bank of Albania at the new state's expense. Indignant, the foreign secretary protested to Von Jagow that this virtually amounted to a 'mortgage'¹⁵⁵, and that anything less than equal participation in the Bank would make the international, financial control of Albania farcical¹⁵⁶. Though his public utterances and actions invoked the Concert, Grey's determination to remain active in Albania stemmed from the recognition of the role Albania played in containing the Alliance and reasserting confidence in the Entente.

151. Quoted in Z. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, (London, 1977), p. 117.

152. *B.D.*, X, I, 82.

153. *Ibid.*, 107, Lamb to Grey, Jan. 17, 1914.

154. *Ibid.*, 96, Minute by Grey on Goschen to Grey, 20 December, 1913.

155. *Ibid.*, 99.

156. *Ibid.*, 115, Grey to Bertie, 19 February, 1914.

As hard as Grey might endeavour to overlook the Triple Alliance's often inexcusable behaviour, the indications were clear that the mechanism of the Concert of Europe had failed to achieve what it had initially promised. Even relations with Germany, which had shown a marked improvement during the Balkan Wars, were again on the decline. The Saberne incident and the Liman Von Sander's affair accentuated basic differences of mentality and policy which appeared irreconcilable. Even the long-awaited agreements over the Portuguese Colonies and the Baghdad Railway had created more complications than they resolved¹⁵⁷. It was, however, Vienna's unilateral action in Albania, and especially its ultimatum to Belgrade on October 17th 1913, which undermined the notion of the Concert and Grey's continual support. After October London gradually but distinctly returned to the protection afforded by the Entente. By May 1914, naval discussions with the Russians were of such a serious nature as to bring bitter recriminations from the Wilhelmstrasse. Although the July crisis of 1914 appeared on the surface to be another dispute open to solution as the previous ones, there was a marked difference. At least on the British side, there was a strong determination at last to support its Entente colleagues despite traces of Concert utterances. If the Albanian Question underlines anything about relations between the Great Powers before the First World War, it is to suggest that affairs were far from being as cordial as some historians have hitherto indicated¹⁵⁸.

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157. See R. Langhorne, "Anglo-German Negotiations Concerning the Future of the Portuguese Colonies 1911-14", *Historical Journal*, 1973. For the most recent interpretation of the coming of the war, see J. Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, (London, 1984).

158. See, for example, A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, (Oxford 1954), p. 504.