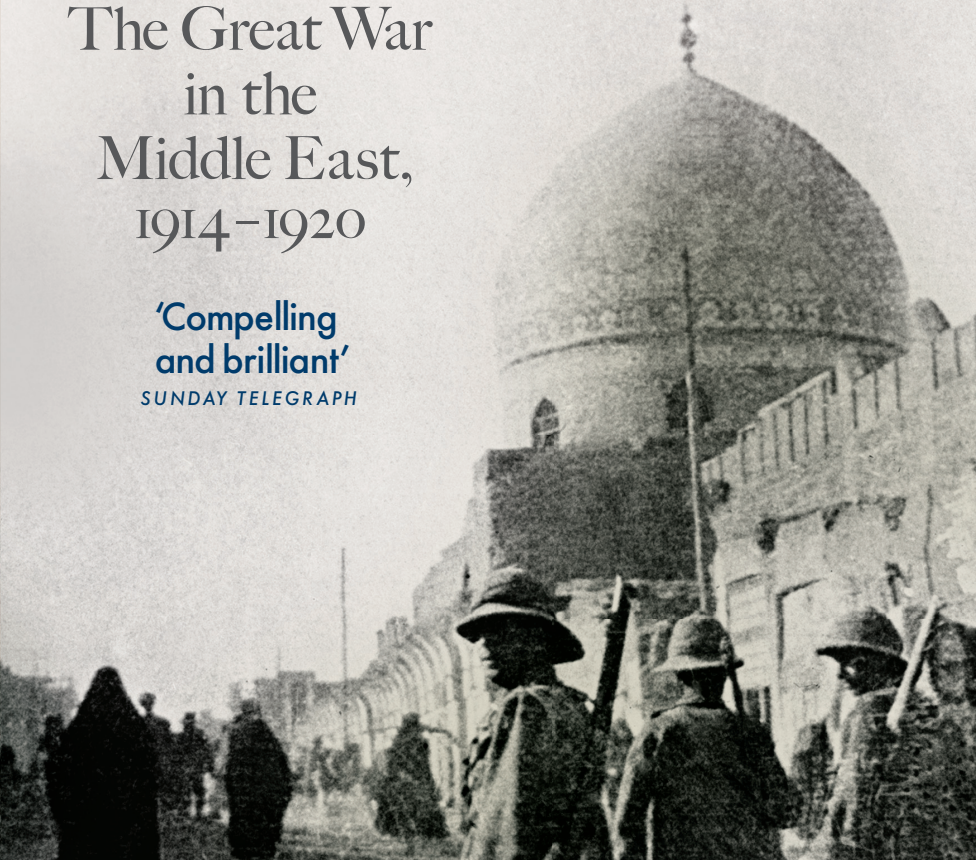
Eugene Rogan

The Fall of the Ottomans

The Great War in the Middle East, 1914–1920

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THE FALL OF THE OTTOMANS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Great War in the Middle East, 1914–1920



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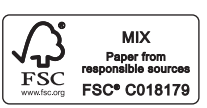
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Isabelle Tui Woods Rogan

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A Note on Nomenclature

It was standard practice by the early twentieth century to refer to the Ottoman Empire as Turkey. This usage neglected the ethnic and religious diversity of the Ottoman Empire, where Arabs, Kurds, Greeks, and Armenians had as much claim to an Ottoman identity as Turks did. Yet, to avoid the tedious repetition of the word "Ottoman" throughout the following pages, I have adopted this usage and frequently use "Ottoman" and "Turkish" interchangeably, particularly with reference to the army. Whenever I wish to distinguish a specific ethnic or religious community from the Turkish majority, I write of "Ottoman Arabs" or "Ottoman Armenians".

I have tended to refer to cities by their modern Turkish names rather than the classical European forms that were in common use in the early twentieth century. Thus, I refer to "Istanbul" rather than "Constantinople", "Izmir" rather than "Smyrna", and "Trabzon" rather than "Trebizond", in the hope that readers will find it easier to locate these cities on modern maps. I have used standard Western spellings for Arab cities—thus, Beirut, Damascus, Mecca, and Medina rather than Bayrut, Dimashq, Makka, and Madina—for the same reason.

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Foreword

Reflections on the Fall of the Ottomans, 1922

When you think of the fall of a great world empire, you imagine the event making some noise. Not so the Ottomans. After six centuries in power, the Ottomans fell in total silence.

On 1 November 1922, the elected members of Turkey's Grand National Assembly passed a motion to abolish the Sultanate by near acclamation. "One opposing voice only was heard to exclaim, 'I am against it.' But it was drowned out by cries of 'Silence!'"* Three days later, Grand Vezir Tevfik Pasha, the last Ottoman prime minister, tendered his resignation along with that of his cabinet. The whole running of government in Istanbul ceded power to the Nationalist government in Ankara without a soul raising their voice in protest. Finally, in the early morning hours of 17 November, the sultan, fearing revolutionary justice, slipped out of his palace with a small retinue. They crept over the rubble of the disused Malta Gate, at the perimeter of the palace grounds, to elude guards. Two British ambulances waited outside to convey the imperial fugitive to the coast, where a launch carried them to the British destroyer HMS *Malaya* and into exile . . . coincidentally, to Malta. No one heard the sultan leave.

The last Ottoman sultan, Mehmed VI Vahideddin, came to power aged 57 in July 1918 following the death of his half-brother Mehmed V Reşad (r. 1909—1918). The thirty-sixth sultan of the House of Osman, the dynasty that ruled Turkey since the 1290s, Mehmed VI inherited an empire under a reckless Young Turk government whose four-year gamble on a

* Patrick Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation* (London: Weidenfeld, 1993), p. 348.

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German victory in the First World War was about to end in total defeat. Three months after ascending the throne, on 30 October 1918, his government signed an armistice with the Entente Powers, bringing the Ottoman Great War to an end.

The sultanate, reduced to puppet status under the Young Turks, emerged from Ottoman defeat in the Great War with renewed powers. The Young Turk leadership fled the country in November 1918, shortly after the armistice was signed. Mehmed VI, no friend of the Young Turks, welcomed their departure. But they left him with a broken empire precariously dependent on the good will of the victorious Entente Powers. Son of the reforming Sultan Abdülmecid I (r. 1839—1861), and brother of both the autocratic Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876—1909) and his predecessor Mehmed V, there could be no doubting Vahideddin's commitment to his dynasty. However, it was a dangerous time to regain executive powers. The Young Turks left him with almost insurmountable problems to resolve, and failure could cost him his throne, his empire, even his life.

Most Ottomans had little sense of their new sultan. He had spent much of his life confined to the palace and had yet to build bonds with his subjects. Yet Vahideddin benefitted from the profound allegiance that even in defeat most Ottoman subjects showed their sultan. He also enjoyed the religious legitimacy that came with his role as caliph, or commander of the faithful, of Sunni Islam, a title held by his predecessors since the conquest of the Arab lands in 1517. Buoyed by popular support for the imperial institutions of state, Mehmed VI appointed a new government to try and clean up the mess left by the departing Young Turks in November 1918.

An Anglophile, Mehmed VI hoped to navigate the postwar settlement with England's support to preserve the empire his forefathers had founded. He showed goodwill towards the victorious powers by adhering to the terms of the Armistice of Mudros to the letter. Yet he found the British no less determined to dismember the defeated Ottoman Empire than its wartime allies France and Italy. Prime Minister David Lloyd George and his ministers Winston Churchill and Lord Curzon were committed supporters of Greece. In May 1919, the Allies gave the green light to a Greek occupation of the strategic port of Smyrna (modern Izmir) and its hinterlands as part of the postwar dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.

The Greek occupation of Smyrna provoked widespread outrage across the Ottoman Empire. Yet the sultan, determined to preserve the goodwill of the

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victorious powers, gave orders to Turkish troops in the occupied region to offer no resistance to the invaders. Instead, he called for the demobilization of Ottoman forces to continue, in line with the terms of the armistice. Among the commanders he dispatched to oversee demobilization was Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the hero of Gallipoli and a committed nationalist. Demobilization was far from his thoughts: Mustafa Kemal went to the Black Sea port of Samsun determined to *mobilize* resistance to foreign occupation of any part of Turkish territory.

Once in Turkish Anatolia, Mustafa Kemal was beyond the reach of the Ottoman government and the Allied powers in Istanbul. Over the course of 1919, he convened a series of meetings with fellow nationalists to hammer out an agenda for Turkey's national revival. The delegates wrote to Istanbul to reaffirm their loyalty to the sultan, but accused the Grand Vezir and his government of betrayal for their cooperation with the occupying powers and their plans to dismember the Turkish homeland. In September 1919, Mustafa Kemal and his partisans sent a telegram to Damad Ferid Pasha, the Grand Vezir, asserting: "The nation has no confidence left in any of you other than the Sultan."* In this way, the emerging nationalist movement, based in the central Anatolian town of Ankara, cast its actions as loyal to the sultan but in opposition to the Grand Vezir and his government.

Caught between his own government in Istanbul and the nationalist resistance in Ankara, the sultan chose Istanbul. The nationalist movement had provoked the victorious powers just as the Ottoman government was trying to soften the terms of the peace the Entente would impose. The emergence of the nationalist movement was putting Istanbul's bargaining position in jeopardy. And, to make matters worse, the British responded to the deteriorating security situation by placing the Ottoman capital under allied occupation. On 16 March 1920, British soldiers marched through the streets of Istanbul to seize control of the Ottoman capital. It was a clear reminder that if the Ottomans didn't play by the victorious powers' rules, they could face a yet more draconian partition in the peace treaty.

In a bid to regain the confidence of the British and the other victorious powers, the sultan and his government unleashed a barrage of measures against the nationalists in Ankara. On 11 April 1920, the Şeyhülislam, the highest religious authority in the government, issued a decree that made the

* Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey, Second Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 250.

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killing of nationalists a religious duty—in essence, state-sanctioned murder. In May, Mustafa Kemal and the other leaders of the nationalist movement were tried in absentia of treason and sentenced to death. Istanbul was sending a clear message to the victorious powers, still gathered in the Paris Peace Conference, that they were serious about clamping down on the nationalists in Ankara.

Ottoman efforts to blunt the severity of the peace treaty were ultimately unsuccessful. The terms of the Treaty of Sèvres, presented to the Ottoman government in the summer of 1920, could hardly have been more draconian. Not only were all of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire to be severed and placed under British and French mandates, but the Turkish heartland in Asia Minor, or Anatolia, was also subject to extensive partition. In the east, the Treaty called for autonomous territories for both the Armenians and the Kurds. Along the Mediterranean coastline, whole stretches were awarded to France and Italy. The Treaty confirmed Greek autonomy in the Smyrna region and in Eastern Thrace. The Straits were placed under an international administration, and Istanbul was conceded to the Ottomans on condition they adhere to the spirit and letter of every article of the treaty.

The Treaty placed the Ottoman government in Istanbul and the nationalist assembly in Ankara on a collision course. The sultan and his government hoped that through compliance and good citizenship they might regain territory lost in the peace treaty. With no army to speak of, they believed resistance was not only impossible but could cost the Ottomans further punishment—even the loss of their ancient capital city. Thus the nationalist resistance in Ankara posed a clear threat to the Ottoman state. The nationalists for their part believed that whatever the Ottomans conceded at the negotiating table would be lost forever, and rejected ceding a single inch of territory in Thrace or Anatolia—the Turkish heartland they vowed to preserve for Turkish rule. The nationalists believed it treasonous of the Ottoman government to sign the Treaty of Sèvres and vowed to fight any settlement based on the peace treaty.

When the Ottoman delegates to Paris signed the Treaty on 10 August 1920, it provoked the final split between the Ottoman government in Istanbul and the nationalist movement in Ankara. In Ankara, the nationalists continued to declare their loyalty to the sultan and vowed to liberate him from both foreign occupation and his collaborationist government. By the

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spring of 1920, however, Istanbul was a second-order priority for the nationalists. Mustafa Kemal and his partisans turned their attention to the ever-expanding Greek invasion of their country.

From the enclave in Smyrna conceded in the immediate aftermath of the war, Greek forces had extended the area under their control west to the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmara, and north as far as the cities of Bursa and Izmit, within striking distance of Istanbul. They also occupied the last territories of Turkey in Europe, in Eastern Thrace, effectively surrounding the Ottoman capital. The nationalists mobilized their forces and in 1920 they launched a war to drive the Greeks from their country.

The war started badly for the Turkish nationalists. They found themselves outnumbered and unable to contain Greek advances. It wasn't until the spring of 1921 that the Turks were able to hold the Greek forces in the Battle of Inönü (31 March—1 April 1921), and began to drive the invaders back on the Sakarya River (24 August 1921). These victories served not just to break Greek morale, but to rally Turkish public opinion to support Mustafa Kemal and the nationalist forces.

Gaining the initiative on the battlefield, the nationalists turned next to secure international support for their effort. In March 1921 the Ankara government concluded a treaty with the Soviet Union that gained both international recognition for the nationalist movement and a supply of funds and war materiel "to help the nationalist government fight Western imperialism."* The funds and arms counter-balanced British assistance to Greek forces and shifted the balance of power in the Turco-Greek war to the nationalists' advantage.

The Treaty of Moscow was followed in October 1921 by the Ankara Accord concluded with France. Through the treaty they secured France's agreement to abandon all claims on Ottoman territory in Anatolia and French support for the proposed Armenian autonomous zone. In return, Mustafa Kemal and his government agreed to recognize the French mandate in Syria and to respect French interests in Turkey. The nationalist government gained further international recognition, and divided British and French policies in Turkey to the nationalists' advantage.

With arms and funds from Russia, and growing international recognition of their government in Ankara, the nationalists launched the final phase

* M Sukru Hanioglu, *Ataturk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 120–21.

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of their war against the Greeks in the summer of 1922. Turkish victory in the Battle of Dumlupinar led to a full Greek retreat to Smyrna, where, amid a terrible fire that levelled whole quarters of the city, soldiers and civilians were loaded onto British ships for safe passage to Greece. Kemalist forces retook Smyrna on 9 September 1922, completing the re-conquest of Turkish Anatolia. Ironically, the Ottoman government sent Mustafa Kemal a telegram of congratulations after the liberation of Smyrna for "one of the greatest victories in Ottoman history."* It was not a victory the nationalists wished to share with the Istanbul government, that had done all it could to undermine the Kemalist war effort.

Mustafa Kemal advanced onto the Allied-occupied zone in the Dardanelles and faced down British threats of hostilities to conclude an armistice on 11 October 1922. The nationalists, having gained as much as they could on the battlefield, would secure their gains through diplomacy. Britain, France and Italy agreed to hold a peace conference in the Swiss city of Lausanne in November 1922. But who would speak for Turkey? The sultan, the internationally-recognized head of state? Or Mustafa Kemal, the nationalist leader who had led his country to victory against the Allies?

The Allies provoked a crisis on 27 October 1922 when they extended invitations to both the Ottoman government in Istanbul and the nationalist government in Ankara to attend the Lausanne Conference. While many in the nationalist camp were still loyal to the sultan, they dismissed the grand vezir and his cabinet as traitors and collaborators. Moreover, they saw the Allied invitations as a strategy to divide the Turkish negotiating position between rival governments. Mustafa Kemal had long since lost his loyalty to the sultanate and waited for the right moment to eliminate the Ottoman government, made redundant by the dynamic Ankara government and its elected parliament, the Grand National Assembly. The invitations to Lausanne provided the perfect pretext for him to act.

Upon receiving his invitation to Lausanne, the Grand Vezir, Tevfik Pasha, contacted Mustafa Kemal to confirm his acceptance and to suggest the two governments cooperate in sending a joint delegation to Lausanne. The nationalists were outraged by the suggestion. How dare the Grand Vezir presume to speak on behalf of the nation he had betrayed? Mustafa Kemal seized the opportunity and on 1 November 1922 submitted a motion

* Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 363.

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to the Grand National Assembly to strip the sultan and his government of all political power. The Assembly separated the sovereign's dual roles as sultan and caliph and retroactively abolished the sultanate from the date of the Allied occupation of Istanbul on 16 March 1920. Henceforth, Mehmed VI Vahideddin would be recognized as caliph alone. The state of Turkey would replace the Ottoman Empire. And Turkey would have only one government, based in Ankara. As Mustafa Kemal recorded: "In this way, gentlemen, the final obsequies of the decline and fall of the Ottoman Sultanate were completed!"*

The Ottoman dynasty lingered for another year. Mehmed VI was succeeded in the caliphate by his cousin Abdülmecid II, but his reign was cut short when the Grand National Assembly voted to declare Turkey a republic (29 October 1923) and Mustafa Kemal was elected the first president of the republic. Ever unwilling to share power with the house of Osman, Mustafa Kemal completed the break with Turkey's Ottoman past by abolishing the caliphate on 3 March 1924. All members of the former imperial family were banished from Turkish soil. This time the Turkish government accompanied the outgoing caliph to a suburban railway station to place him on a westbound Orient Express and into exile.

Turkey had been transformed by its experiences in the First World War, and in the turmoil of the post-war settlement. The Ottoman household, with its palaces and protocols, harem and eunuchs, traditions and conservatism, had been left behind, an anachronism in a fast-moving modern age. While Mustafa Kemal, who would later adopt the surname Atatürk, or "father of the Turks," has his critics, few would wish to revive an order that, like the Habsburgs and Romanovs before them, fell victim to the Great War.

Eugene Rogan, 2022

* Patrick Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation* (London: Weidenfeld, 1993), p. 348.

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Preface

Lance Corporal John McDonald died at Gallipoli on 28 June 1915. He was nineteen years old, and though he wasn't to know it, he was my great-uncle.

Nothing in his life would have prepared John McDonald for death in faraway lands. He was born in a small Scottish village near Perth and attended the Dollar Academy, where he met his best friend, Charles Beveridge. They left school together at fourteen to look for work. The two friends moved to Glasgow, where they found jobs with the North British Locomotive Company. When war broke out in Europe in the summer of 1914, Beveridge and McDonald enlisted together with the Scottish Rifles (also known as the Cameronians). The impatient recruits of the 8th Scottish Rifles spent the autumn months in training, envious of other battalions that preceded them to battle in France. Only in April 1915 was the 1/8th Battalion called into service—not in France but in Ottoman Turkey.

McDonald and Beveridge said their final farewells to friends and family on 17 May 1915, when their battalion set off for war. They sailed to the Greek island of Lemnos, which served as the staging post for British and Allied forces before deployment to Gallipoli. As they drew into the island's port of Moudros on 29 May—one month after the initial Gallipoli landings—they passed a vast armada of warships and transports lying at anchor. The young recruits would have been awestruck by the dreadnoughts and super-dreadnoughts—some of the greatest ships afloat. Many bore the marks of heavy fighting in the Dardanelles, their hulls and funnels holed by Turkish artillery and ground batteries.

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The Scots had two weeks to acclimatize to the eastern Mediterranean summer before going into battle. In mid-June, they sailed out of Moudros Harbour, cheered by soldiers and sailors from the decks of the ships at anchor. Only those who had been to Gallipoli and knew what lay before the fresh-faced young recruits refrained from cheering. "To a shipload of Australian sick and wounded," one Cameronian recalled, "some of our fellows yelled out the stock phrase at that time: 'Are we downhearted? No!' and when some Australian wag shouted back: 'Well, you damned soon will be', our chaps, though taken aback, were incredulous."[1]

On 14 June, the entire battalion was safely ashore. Four days later the 8th Scottish Rifles moved up Gully Ravine to the front line. Under the relentless machine-gun and artillery fire for which Gallipoli was already notorious, the Cameronians suffered their first casualties in the trenches. By the time the Scottish Rifles were given their orders to attack Turkish positions, the men had lost their boyish enthusiasm. As one officer reflected, "Whether it was premonition or merely the strain of newly acquired responsibility, I could not feel the buoyancy of success" among the soldiers.[2]

The British attack on 28 June was preceded by two hours of bombardment from the sea. Eyewitnesses dismissed the shelling as ineffectual—far too little to drive the determined Ottoman soldiers from their defensive positions. The British assault began on schedule at 1100 hours. As on the western front, the men climbed out of their trenches to the shrill signal of whistles. When the Cameronians went "over the top", they faced the full fire of Ottoman soldiers who held their positions, undeterred by the bombardment from British ships. Within five minutes, the 1/8th Scottish Rifles were practically wiped out. John McDonald died of his wounds in a camp hospital and was buried in the Lancaster Landing Cemetery. Charles Beveridge fell beyond the reach of stretcher-bearers. His remains were only recovered after the 1918 armistice, when his bones were indistinguishable from those of the men who had fallen around him. He lies in a mass grave, his name engraved on the great monument at Cape Helles.

The fate of the Cameronians brought shock and grief to their friends and families in Scotland. The Dollar Academy published obituaries for John McDonald and Charles Beveridge in the autumn issue of the school quarterly. The magazine described the two young men as the best of friends: "They worked together, lived together in rooms, enlisted together, and 'in their death they were not divided.' Both were young men of

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sterling character," the obituary concluded, "well worthy of the positions they held." The magazine expressed sympathy for the two boys' bereaved parents.

In fact, the grief proved more than my great-grandparents could bear. One year after the death of their only son, the McDonalds took the extraordinary step of leaving wartime Scotland to emigrate to the United States. In July 1916, during a pause in German U-boat attacks on Atlantic shipping, they boarded the poignantly named SS *Cameronia* with two of their daughters, headed for New York City. They never returned. The family ultimately settled in Oregon, where my maternal grandmother later married and gave birth to my mother and uncle. They and all of their descendants owe their lives to John McDonald's premature death.

My personal connection to the First World War is hardly unique. A 2013 poll conducted in the United Kingdom by the YouGov agency found that 46 percent of Britons knew of a family or community member who had served in the Great War. Such personal connections explain the enduring fascination the First World War holds over so many of us a century after its outbreak. The sheer scale of the mobilisation and the carnage left few families untouched in those countries caught up in the conflict.[3]

I came to learn my great-uncle's history while preparing for a trip to Gallipoli in 2005. My mother, Margaret, my son, Richard, and I, representatives of three generations, went to pay our respects, his first family visitors in over nine decades. As we made our way down the twisted lanes of the Gallipoli Peninsula towards the Lancashire Landing Cemetery, we took a wrong turn and chanced on the Nuri Yamut Monument, a memorial to the Turkish war dead of 28 June—the same battle in which John McDonald and Charles Beveridge had died.

The monument to the Turkish war dead of what they called the Battle of Zığındere, or Gully Ravine, came as a total revelation to me. While my great-uncle's unit had suffered 1,400 casualties—half its total strength—and British losses overall reached 3,800, as many as 14,000 Ottomans fell dead and wounded at Gully Ravine. The Nuri Yamut Monument is the mass grave of those Ottoman soldiers, interred under a common marble tombstone inscribed, simply, "Şehidlik (Martyrdom) 1915". All the books I had read on the Cameronians treated the terrible waste of British life on the day my great-uncle had died. None of the English sources had mentioned the thousands of Turkish war dead. It was sobering to realize that the number

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of bereaved Turkish families would have so surpassed the number of those grieving in Scotland.

I came away from Gallipoli struck by how little we in the West know about the Turkish and Arab experiences of the Great War. The scores of books published in English on the different Middle Eastern fronts reflect British or Allied experiences. Gallipoli was "Churchill's debacle"; Kut al-Amara was "Townshend's surrender"; the Arab Revolt was led by "Lawrence of Arabia"; it was "Maude's entry" to Baghdad and "Allenby's conquest" of Jerusalem. Social historians, keen to break with the official history's top-down approach, probed the experiences of the common soldier by reading the diaries and letters held in private paper archives in London's Imperial War Museum, Canberra's Australian War Memorial, and Wellington's Alexander Turnbull Library. After a century of research, we have a comprehensive view of the Allied side of the trenches. But we are only just beginning to come to terms with the other side—the experiences of Ottoman soldiers caught up in a desperate struggle for survival against powerful invaders.

It is actually quite difficult to approach the Ottoman front from the Turkish side of the trenches. While there are dozens of diaries and memoirs published in Turkey and the Arab world, few Western historians have the language skills to read them, and only a fraction of published primary sources are available in translation. Archival materials are even harder to access. The Turkish Military and Strategic Studies Archive in Ankara (Askeri Tarih ve Stratejic Etüt Başkanlığı Arşivi, or ATASE) holds the largest collection of primary materials on the First World War in the Middle East. Yet access to ATASE is strictly controlled, with researchers required to pass a security clearance that can take months—and is often denied. Large parts of the collection are closed to researchers, who face restrictions on copying materials. However, a number of Turkish and Western scholars have gained access to this collection and are beginning to publish important studies on the Ottoman experience of the Great War. Elsewhere in the Middle East, national archives, where they exist, were established well after the conflict and do not place particular emphasis on the Great War.[4]

Neglect of the First World War in Arab archives is reflected in Arab society at large. Unlike in Turkey, where the Gallipoli battlefield is punctuated with Turkish monuments and memorial celebrations are held each year, there are no war memorials in the towns and cities of the Arab world. Though nearly every modern Arab state was drawn into the Great War in

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one way or another, the conflict is remembered as someone else's war—a time of suffering inflicted on the Arab people by the failing Ottoman Empire and its rash Young Turk leadership. In the Arab world, the Great War left martyrs (especially Arab activists hanged in central squares of Beirut and Damascus that were subsequently renamed "Martyrs' Square" in both cities) but no heroes.

It is time to restore the Ottoman front to its rightful place in the history of both the Great War and the modern Middle East. For, more than any other event, the Ottoman entry into the war turned Europe's conflict into a world war. As opposed to the minor skirmishes in the Far East and East Africa, major battles were fought over the full four years of the war in the Middle East. Moreover, the Middle Eastern battlefields were often the most international of the war. Australians and New Zealanders, every ethnicity in South Asia, North Africans, Senegalese, and Sudanese made common cause with French, English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish soldiers against the Turkish, Arab, Kurdish, Armenian, and Circassian combatants in the Ottoman army and their German and Austrian allies. The Ottoman front was a veritable tower of Babel, an unprecedented conflict between international armies.

Most Entente war planners dismissed the fighting in the Ottoman Empire as a sideshow to the main theatres of the war on the western and eastern fronts. Influential Britons like Horatio Herbert Kitchener and Winston Churchill only lobbied to take the war to the Turks in the mistaken belief this would provide the Allies with a quick victory against the Central Powers that would hasten the end of the war. Having underestimated their opponents, the Allies found themselves embroiled in major campaigns—in the Caucasus, the Dardanelles, Mesopotamia, and Palestine—that diverted hundreds of thousands of troops from the western front and served to lengthen the Great War.

Allied failures on the Ottoman front provoked grave political crises at home. The foundering Dardanelles campaign forced British Liberal prime minister H. H. Asquith into a coalition government with the Conservatives in May 1915 and contributed to Asquith's downfall the following year. British wartime defeats in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia led to two separate parliamentary commissions of enquiry whose reports were equally damning of political and military decision-makers.

If the Ottomans turned Europe's conflict into a world war, it is equally true that the Great War transformed the modern Middle East. Virtually no

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part of the region was spared its ravages. Men were recruited from across Turkey and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire and from every colonial state in North Africa. Civilians too suffered from the economic hardship and epidemics unleashed by the war. Battles were fought in territory of the modern states of Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran. The majority of those countries emerged into statehood as a direct consequence of the fall of the Ottoman Empire following the end of the First World War.

The fall of the Ottomans was an epochal event. For over six centuries, theirs stood as the greatest Islamic empire in the world. Founded at the end of the thirteenth century by tribesmen from Central Asia, the Ottoman sultanate emerged as a dynasty to challenge the Byzantine Empire in both Asia Minor and the Balkans. Following Sultan Mehmed II's conquest of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, in 1453, the Ottomans emerged as the greatest power in the Mediterranean world.

With Constantinople (subsequently renamed Istanbul) as their capital, the Ottomans rapidly extended their conquests. In 1516, Selim I defeated the Cairo-based Mamluk Empire and added Syria, Egypt, and the Red Sea province of the Hijaz to Ottoman domains. In 1529, Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent was at the gates of Vienna, spreading fear across Europe. The Ottomans continued to expand until their final attempt on Vienna in 1683, by which time the empire spanned three continents, comprising the Balkans, Asia Minor (known to the Turks as Anatolia), the Black Sea, and most of the Arab lands from Iraq to the borders of Morocco.

Over the next two centuries, the Ottomans were overtaken by the dynamism of Europe. They began to lose wars to their neighbours—to the Russian Empire of Catherine the Great and to the Habsburg emperors whose capital, Vienna, they previously had menaced. Starting in 1699, Ottoman frontiers retreated in the face of external challenges. By the early nineteenth century, the Ottomans began to lose territory to new nationalist movements emerging within their Balkan provinces. Greece was the first to make a bid for independence, after an eight-year war against Istanbul's rule (1821–1829). Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro secured their independence in 1878, with Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Bulgaria gaining autonomy at the same time.

The Great Powers continued to seize Ottoman territory, with Britain claiming Cyprus and Egypt between 1878 and 1882, France occupying

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Tunisia in 1881, and Russia annexing three provinces in the Ottoman Caucasus in 1878. As it struggled against internal and external threats to its territory, by the early twentieth century, political analysts predicted the imminent demise of the Ottoman Empire. A group of patriotic young officers, calling themselves the Young Turks, held out the hope that the empire could be revived through constitutional reform. In 1908, they rose in rebellion against the autocratic reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) in a desperate bid to save their state. With the rise of the Young Turks to power, the Ottomans entered a period of unprecedented turbulence that would ultimately draw the empire into its last and greatest war.

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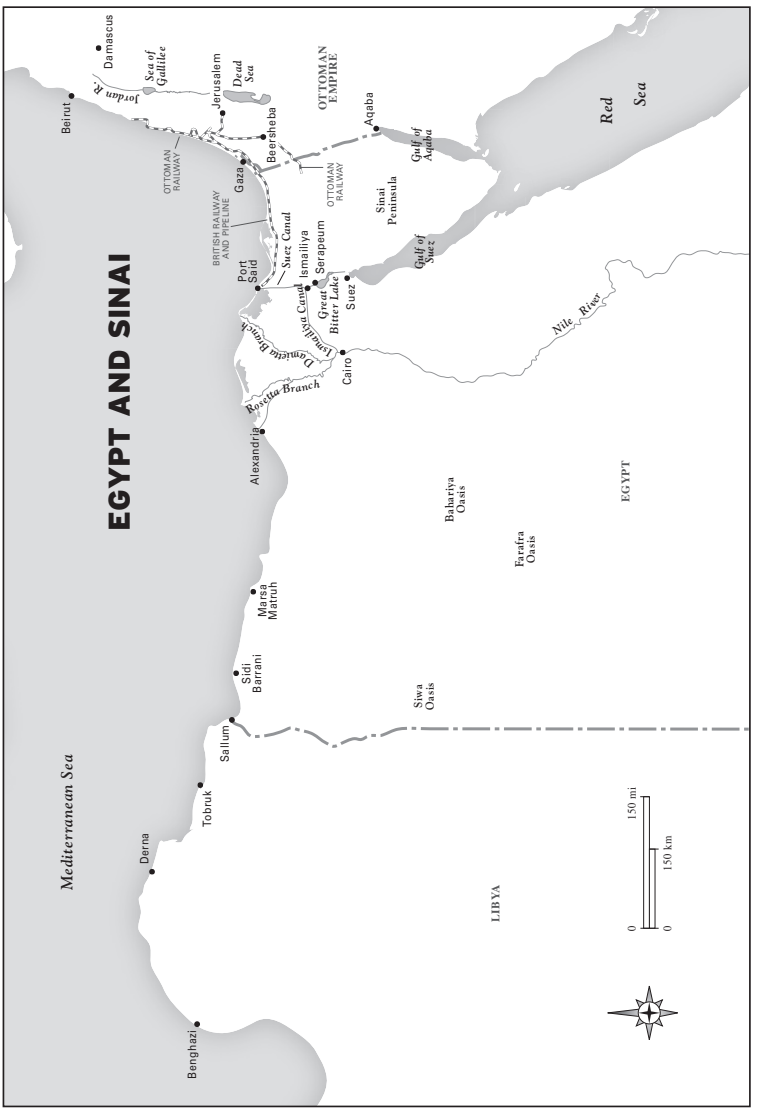
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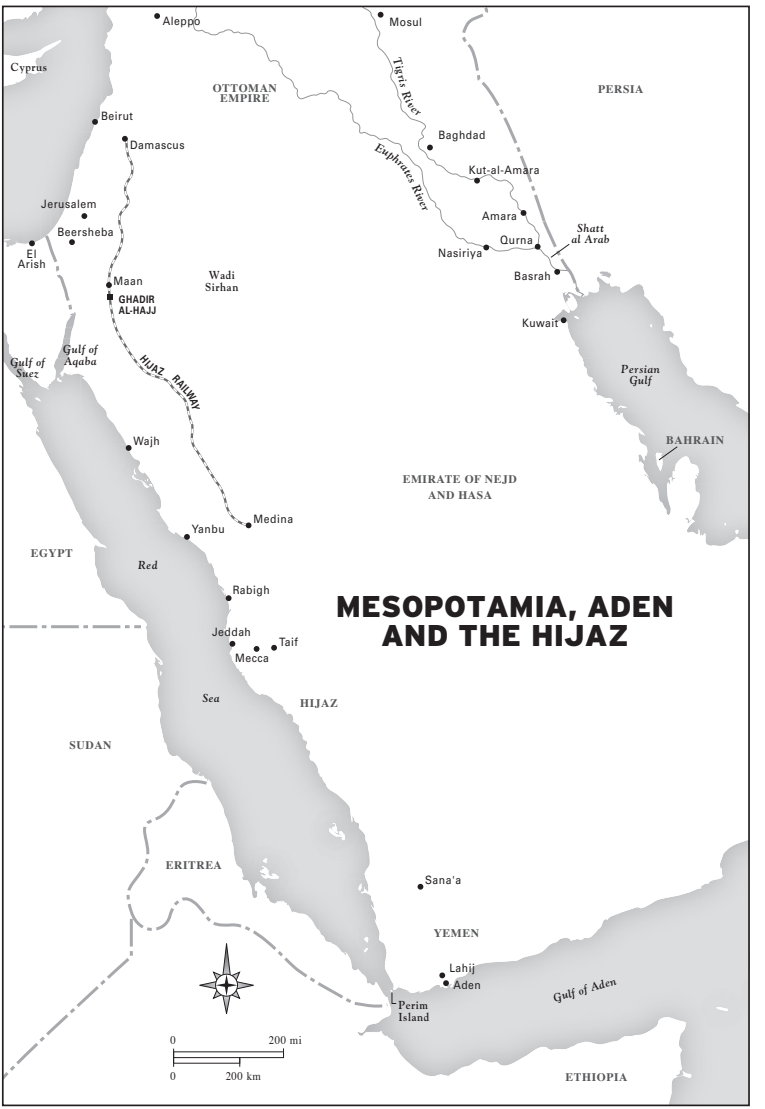
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ONE

A Revolution and Three Wars, 1908–1913

Between 1908 and 1913, the Ottoman Empire faced grave internal and external threats. Starting with the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, the political institutions of the centuries-old empire came under unprecedented strain. Domestic reformers sought to bring the empire into the twentieth century. European imperial powers and the newly emergent Balkan states went to war with the Turks in pursuit of Ottoman territory. Armenian and Arab activists sought greater autonomy from the weakened Turkish state. These issues, which dominated the Ottoman government's agenda in the years leading up to 1914, laid the foundations for the Ottoman Great War.

The aging sultan Abdülhamid II convened his cabinet in a crisis session on 23 July 1908. The autocratic monarch faced the greatest domestic threat to his rule in over three decades on the throne. The Ottoman army in Macedonia—that volatile Balkan region straddling the modern states of Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonia—had risen in rebellion, demanding the restoration of the 1876 constitution and a return to parliamentary rule. The sultan knew the contents of the constitution better than his opponents. One of his first measures on ascending the Ottoman throne in 1876 had been to promulgate the constitution as the culmination of four decades of government-led reforms known as the Tanzimat. In those days he was seen as an

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enlightened reformer. But the experience of ruling the Ottoman Empire had hardened Abdülhamid from reformer into absolutist.

The roots of Abdülhamid's absolutism can be traced to a series of crises the young sultan faced at the very start of his reign. The empire he inherited from his predecessors was in disarray. The Ottoman treasury had declared bankruptcy in 1875, and its European creditors were quick to impose economic sanctions on the sultan's government. The Ottomans faced growing hostility from European public opinion in 1876 for the violent suppression of Bulgarian separatists branded the "Bulgarian horrors" by the Western press. The Liberal leader William Gladstone led British condemnation of Turkey, and war was brewing with Russia. The pressure took its toll on the rulers of the empire. A powerful group of reformist officers deposed Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876), who, less than a week later, was found dead in his apartments, the veins of his wrist slashed, an apparent suicide. His successor, Murat V, collapsed in a nervous breakdown after only three months on the throne. Against this inauspicious background, the thirty-three-year-old Abdülhamid II ascended to power on 31 August 1876.

Powerful cabinet ministers pressed the new sultan to introduce a liberal constitution and an elected parliament with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish members as a means to prevent further European intervention in domestic Ottoman affairs. Abdülhamid conceded to the demands of the reformists in his government, more out of a sense of pragmatism than conviction. On 23 December 1876, he promulgated the Ottoman constitution, and on 19 March 1877, he opened the first session of the elected Ottoman parliament. Yet, no sooner had the parliament met than the empire was embroiled in a devastating war with Russia.

The Russian Empire saw itself as the successor to Byzantium and the spiritual head of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Russia also had expansionist aims. It coveted the Ottoman capital, Istanbul, which until 1453 had been the centre of Orthodox Christianity and the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. These were more than just cultural ambitions. Once in possession of Istanbul, the Russians would control the geostrategic straits of the Bosporus and the Dardanelles linking Russia's Black Sea ports to the Mediterranean. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, it suited Russia's European neighbours to confine the tsar's fleet to the Black Sea by preserving the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Frustrated in their aspirations to occupy Istanbul and the straits, the Russians exploited Balkan nationalist

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independence movements to interfere with Ottoman affairs while advancing their territorial aims through periodic wars with the Ottomans. By the end of 1876, troubles in Serbia and Bulgaria provided Russia the opportunity for another expansionist war. After securing Austrian neutrality and Romania's permission for Russian forces to march through its territory, Russia declared war on the Ottomans in April 1877.

The tsar's forces made rapid gains into Ottoman territory in the Balkans and, attacking through the Caucasus, into eastern Anatolia, massacring Turkish and Muslim peasants as they swept forward in their two-front assault. The Russian attack provoked public outrage in Ottoman domains. Sultan Abdülhamid II played on his Islamic credentials to secure popular support in the war against Russia. He took the banner of the Prophet Muhammad, which had been in Ottoman keeping since the empire occupied the Arab lands in the sixteenth century, and declared jihad, or holy war, against the Russians. The Ottoman public rallied to their warrior-sultan, volunteering for military service and contributing money to the war effort—and the armed forces managed to bring the Russian advances into Ottoman territory to a halt.

While Abdülhamid was gaining popular support for the war effort, members of parliament (MPs) were growing increasingly critical of the government's handling of the conflict. Despite the sultan's jihad, the Russians had resumed their forward progress by the end of 1877 and reached the outskirts of Istanbul in late January 1878. In February, the sultan convened a meeting with parliamentarians to consult on the conduct of the war. One MP, who was the head of the bakers' guild, chided the sultan: "You have asked for our opinions too late; you should have consulted us when it was still possible to avert disaster. The Chamber declines all responsibility for a situation for which it had nothing to do." The baker's intervention seems to have convinced the sultan that the parliament was more of a hindrance than a help to the national cause. The very next day, Abdülhamid suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, and placed some of the most critical MPs under house arrest. Abdülhamid then began to exercise direct control over the affairs of state. By that point, however, the military situation was beyond salvation, and the young sultan had to accept an armistice in January 1878 with Russian forces at the gates of his capital.[1]

In the aftermath of defeat to Russia in 1878, the Ottomans suffered tremendous territorial losses in the peace treaty concluded in the Congress of

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Berlin (June–July 1878). Hosted by Germany and attended by the European powers (Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, and Italy), the congress sought to resolve not just the Russo-Turkish War but the many conflicts in the Balkans as well. By the terms of the Treaty of Berlin, the Ottomans lost two-fifths of the empire's territory and one-fifth of its population in the Balkans and eastern Anatolia. Among the territories surrendered were three provinces in the Caucasus region of eastern Anatolia—Kars, Ardahan, and Batum—that, as Turkish Muslim heartlands they could not be reconciled to losing, would come to be the Ottomans' Alsace-Lorraine.

The Ottomans lost further territories to the European powers in addition to those surrendered in the Treaty of Berlin. Britain secured Cyprus as a colony in 1878, France occupied Tunisia in 1881, and after intervening in Egypt's 1882 crisis, Britain placed that autonomous Ottoman province under British colonial rule. These losses seemed to convince Sultan Abdülhamid II that he needed to rule the Ottoman Empire with a strong hand in order to protect it from further dismemberment by ambitious European powers. To his credit, between 1882 and 1908 Abdülhamid protected Ottoman domains from further dismemberment. Yet the territorial integrity of the state was preserved at the expense of its citizens' political rights.

Abdülhamid's autocratic style of rule eventually gave rise to an increasingly organized opposition movement. The Young Turks were a disparate coalition of parties bound by the common goals of constraining Abdülhamid's absolutism, restoring constitutional rule, and returning to parliamentary democracy. Among the most prominent parties under the Young Turk umbrella was the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), a secret society of civilians and military men founded in the early 1900s. Though the CUP had branches in all parts of the Ottoman Empire—the Arab lands, the Turkish provinces, and the Balkans—the movement had faced most repression in the Turkish and Arab provinces. By 1908, the CUP's centre of operations lay in the surviving Ottoman possessions in the Balkans—in Albania, Macedonia, and Thrace.[2]

In June 1908, spies working for the sultan uncovered a CUP cell in the Ottoman Third Army in Macedonia. Faced with imminent court-martial, the military men decided to take action. On 3 July 1908, a CUP cell leader named Adjutant Major Ahmed Niyazi led two hundred well-armed soldiers and their civilian supporters in a revolt, demanding that the sultan restore the 1876 constitution. They all fully expected to die in the attempt. However, the rebels captured the public's mood and their movement gained momentum

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as it drew increasing support from the population at large. Whole cities in Macedonia rose in rebellion and declared their adherence to the constitution. A Young Turk officer named Major Ismail Enver—who later rose to fame as just Enver—proclaimed the constitution in the Macedonian towns of Köprülü and Tikveş to popular acclaim. The Ottoman Third Army threatened to march on Istanbul to impose the constitution in the empire's capital.

Three weeks on, the revolutionary movement had grown so big that the sultan could no longer count on the loyalty of his military to contain the uprising in Macedonia. This was the emergency that drove the sultan to convene his cabinet on 23 July. They met in Yildiz Palace, perched on a hill overlooking the Bosporus Straits on the European side of Istanbul. Intimidated by the sixty-five-year-old sultan, the ministers avoided raising the crucial question of the restoration of constitutional rule. They spent hours deliberating about whom to blame rather than addressing the necessary solution to the crisis.

After a day spent listening to the tergiversations of his ministers, Abdülhamid brought the discussion to a close. "I will follow the current," he announced to the cabinet. "The constitution was first promulgated under my reign. I am the one who established it. For reasons of necessity, it was suspended. I now wish for the ministers to prepare a proclamation" restoring the constitution. The relieved ministers acted immediately on the sultan's instructions and dispatched telegrams to all of the provinces of the empire to announce the dawn of the second constitutional era. For their success in forcing the sultan to restore the constitution, the Young Turks were credited with having waged a revolution.[3]

It took a moment for the significance of the events to sink in. The newspapers ran the story without banner headlines and with no commentary: "Parliament has been reconvened in conformity with the terms of the constitution, by order of His Imperial Majesty." Perhaps it was a reflection of how few people bothered to read the heavily censored Ottoman press that it took a full twenty-four hours before the public reacted to the news. On 24 July, crowds gathered in the public spaces of Istanbul and provincial towns and cities across the empire to celebrate the return to constitutional life. Major Enver rode the train to Salonica (in modern Greece), the centre of the Young Turk movement, where the jubilant crowds greeted him as a "champion of freedom". On the platform to greet Enver were his colleagues Major Ahmet Cemal, military inspector of the Ottoman railways, and Mehmed Talat, a postal clerk. Both had risen through the hierarchy of the CUP and, like

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Enver, came to be known by their middle names, Cemal and Talat. "Enver," they cheered, "you are now Napoleon!"[4]

Over the following days, red-and-white banners emblazoned with the revolutionary slogan "Justice, Equality, and Fraternity" festooned city streets. Photographs of Niyazi, Enver, and the military's other "Freedom Heroes" were posted in town squares across the empire. Political activists gave public orations about the blessings of the constitution, sharing their hopes and aspirations with the general public.

The hopes raised by the constitutional revolution drew together all parts of the diverse Ottoman population in a moment of shared patriotism. Ottoman society comprised a wide range of ethnic groups, including Turks, Albanians, Arabs, and Kurds, as well as many different faith communities—the Sunni majority and Shiite Muslims, over a dozen different Christian denominations, and sizeable Jewish communities. Past attempts by the government to foster an Ottoman national identity had foundered on this diversity, until the constitutional revolution. As one political activist wrote, the Arabs "embraced the Turks wholeheartedly, in the belief that there were no longer Arabs or Turks or Armenians or Kurds in the state, but that everyone had become an Ottoman with equal rights and responsibilities".[5]

The joyful celebrations of newfound freedoms were marred by acts of retaliation against those suspected of taking part in Abdülhamid's repressive apparatus. The Ottoman Empire under the sultan had degenerated into a police state. Political activists were imprisoned and exiled, newspapers and magazines were heavily censored, and citizens looked over their shoulders before speaking, fearful of the ubiquitous spies working for the government. Muhammad Izzat Darwaza, a native of the Palestinian hill town of Nablus, described the "explosion of resentments in the first days of the Revolution against those government officials great and small known to be a spy or corrupt or oppressive".[6]

Yet, for most people, the Young Turk Revolution inspired a newfound sense of hope and freedom that was nothing short of intoxicating. The joys of the moment were captured in verse, as poets from across the Arab and Turkish lands composed odes to celebrate the Young Turks and their revolution.

> Today we rejoice in liberty thanks to you
> We go forth in the morning and return in the evening without concern or strain
> The free man has been set loose from prison where he was demeaned

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> And the beloved exile has returned to the homeland
> For there are no spies whose slanders he need fear
> And no newspapers we need fear to touch
> We sleep at night with no dreams that cause us anxiety
> And we rise in the morning without dread or terror[7]

Yet the revolution that raised so many hopes led only to disillusionment.

Those who had hoped for political transformation were disappointed when the revolution produced no major changes in the government of the Ottoman Empire. The CUP decided to leave Sultan Abdülhamid II on the throne. He had managed to take some credit for the restoration of the constitution and was revered by the Ottoman masses as both their sultan and the caliph, or spiritual head, of the Muslim world. Deposing Abdülhamid might have generated more problems than benefits for the Young Turks in 1908. Moreover, the CUP's leaders were indeed young Turks. Mostly junior officers and low-ranking bureaucrats in their late twenties and thirties, they lacked the confidence to take power into their own hands. Instead, they left the exercise of government to the grand vizier (prime minister), Said Pasha, and his cabinet and took on the role of oversight committee to ensure the sultan and his government upheld the constitution.

If Ottoman citizens believed the constitution would solve their economic problems, they were soon to be disappointed. The political instability provoked by the revolution undermined confidence in Turkish currency. Inflation soared to 20 percent in August and September 1908, putting the working classes under intense pressure. Ottoman workers organized demonstrations seeking better pay and work conditions, but the treasury was in no position to meet the workers' legitimate demands. Labour activists mounted over one hundred strikes in the first six months after the revolution, leading to severe laws and a government crackdown on workers.[8]

Crucially, those who believed the return to parliamentary democracy would gain Europe's support and respect for the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire were to be humiliated. Turkey's European neighbours seized on the instability created by the Young Turk Revolution to annex yet more Ottoman territory. On 5 October 1908, the former Ottoman province of Bulgaria declared its independence. The following day, the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire announced the annexation of the autonomous Ottoman

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provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also on 6 October, Crete announced its union with Greece. Turkey's democratic turn had not won it more support from the European powers and instead rendered the empire more vulnerable.

The Young Turks sought to regain control over the revolution through the Ottoman parliament. The CUP was one of only two parties to contest the election, held in late November and early December 1908, and the Unionists (as members of the CUP were called) won an overwhelming majority in the lower house, co-opting many independents into CUP ranks. On 17 December, the sultan opened the first session of parliament with a speech that asserted his commitment to the constitution. The leaders of both the elected lower chamber and the appointed upper chamber replied to the sultan's speech, praising Abdülhamid for the wisdom he showed in restoring constitutional government. The exchange created the illusion of harmony between the sultan and the CUP. Yet absolute monarchs do not change overnight, and Abdülhamid, unreconciled to constitutional constraints on his powers or parliamentary scrutiny, bided his time for the first opportunity to dispense with the Young Turks.

Once the enthusiasm for revolution had abated, the CUP came to face serious opposition within Ottoman political circles and from influential elements of civil society. The religion of state was Islam, and the religious establishment condemned what they saw as the secular culture of the Young Turks. Within the military, there were clear splits between the officers, who were graduates of the military academies and had liberal reformist leanings, and the ordinary soldiers, who placed a higher premium on the loyalty they had pledged to the sultan. Within the parliament, members of the liberal faction suspected the CUP of authoritarian tendencies and used their access to the press and to European officials—particularly in the British embassy—to undermine the CUP's position in the lower chamber. From his palace, Abdülhamid II quietly encouraged all elements that challenged the CUP.

On the night of 12–13 April 1909, the enemies of the CUP mounted a counter-revolution. Soldiers of the First Army Corps loyal to Sultan Abdülhamid II mutinied against their officers and made common cause with religious scholars from the capital's theological colleges. Together they marched on the parliament in a noisy demonstration that drew growing numbers of Islamic scholars and mutinous soldiers overnight. They demanded a new cabinet, banishment of a number of Unionist politicians, and restoration of Islamic law—even though the country had in fact been under a mixed set

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of legal codes for decades. The Unionist deputies fled the capital, fearing for their lives. The cabinet tendered its resignation. And the sultan opportunistically conceded to the demands of the mob, reasserting his control over the politics of the Ottoman Empire.

Abdülhamid's restoration proved short-lived. The Ottoman Third Army in Macedonia saw the counter-revolution in Istanbul as an assault on the constitution they believed essential for the empire's political future. Young Turk loyalists in Macedonia mobilized a campaign force called "the Action Army" to march on Istanbul under the command of Major Ahmed Niyazi, a hero of the Young Turk Revolution. This relief force set out from Salonica for the imperial capital on 17 April. In the early morning hours of 24 April, the Action Army occupied Istanbul, suppressed the revolt with little opposition, and imposed martial law. The two chambers of the Ottoman parliament reconvened as the General National Assembly and on 27 April voted to depose Sultan Abdülhamid II and to install his younger brother Mehmed Reşad as Sultan Mehmed V. With the return of the CUP to power, the counter-revolution was decisively defeated—all within two weeks.

The counter-revolution exposed deep divisions within Ottoman society—none more dangerous than the Turkish-Armenian antagonism. Immediately after the Action Army restored the CUP to power in Istanbul, Muslim crowds massacred thousands of Armenians in the south-eastern city of Adana. The roots of the pogrom dated back to the 1870s. In the course of the First World War, that hostility would metastasize into the first genocide of the twentieth century.

In 1909, many Ottoman Turks suspected the Armenians of being a minority community with a nationalist agenda, intent on seceding from the empire. Comprising a distinct ethnic group with its own language and Christian liturgy and centuries of communal organization under the Ottomans as a distinct *millet*, or faith community, the Armenians had all of the prerequisites for a nineteenth-century nationalist movement bar one: they were not concentrated in one geographic area. As a people they were dispersed between the Russian and Ottoman empires and within Ottoman domains across eastern Anatolia, the Mediterranean coastal regions, and the main trading cities of the empire. The largest concentration of Armenians resided in the capital city, Istanbul. Without a critical mass in one geographical location, the

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Armenians could never hope to achieve statehood—unless, of course, they could secure the support of a Great Power for their cause.

The Armenians made their first territorial claim at the 1878 Congress of Berlin. As part of the settlement of the Russo-Turkish War, the Ottomans were forced to cede three provinces with sizeable Armenian populations to Russia: Kars, Ardahan, and Batum. The transfer of hundreds of thousands of Armenians to Russian rule provided the context for Armenian demands for greater autonomy within Ottoman domains. The Armenian delegation set out their ambitions, claiming the Ottoman provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van as the "provinces inhabited by the Armenians". The delegation sought an autonomous region under a Christian governor on the model of Mount Lebanon, with its volatile mix of Christian and Muslim communities. The European powers responded by including an article in the Treaty of Berlin requiring the Ottoman government to implement immediately such "improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians" and to provide them with security from attack by the Muslim majority. The treaty required Istanbul to report periodically to the European powers on the measures it was taking on behalf of its Armenian citizens.[9]

European support for Christian nationalist movements in the Balkans had made the Ottomans understandably wary of foreign intentions in other strategic Ottoman domains. The new status accorded by the Treaty of Berlin to Armenian communal aspirations in the Turkish heartlands of Anatolia posed a distinct threat to the Ottoman Empire. Having just surrendered the three provinces of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum to Russia as a war indemnity, the Ottomans could not contemplate ceding further territory in eastern Anatolia. Consequently, Abdülhamid II's government did all it could to suppress the nascent Armenian movement and its ties to Britain and Russia. When, in the late 1880s, Armenian activists began to form political organizations to pursue their national aspirations, the Ottoman government treated them like any other domestic opposition group and responded with the full range of repressive action—surveillance, arrest, imprisonment, and exile.

Two distinct Armenian nationalist societies emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. A group of Armenian students in Switzerland and France created the Hunchak (Armenian for "bell") Society in Geneva in 1887. In 1890, a group of activists inside the Russian Empire launched the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, better known as the Dashnak (short for *dashnaksutiun*, or "federation" in Armenian). They were very different movements,

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with divergent ideologies and methods. The Hunchaks debated the relative merits of socialism and national liberation, while the Dashnaks promoted self-defence among Armenian communities in both Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Both societies espoused the use of violence to achieve Armenian political aims. They saw themselves as freedom fighters, but the Ottomans branded them terrorists. Activities by the Hunchaks and Dashnaks exacerbated tensions between Muslims and Christians in eastern Anatolia, which the Armenian activists hoped might provoke European intervention and the Ottomans exploited to try to quell what they saw as a nascent nationalist movement. The volatile situation inevitably led to bloodshed.[10]

Between 1894 and 1896, Ottoman Armenians were the target of a series of terrible massacres. The violence began in the Sasun region of south-eastern Anatolia in the summer of 1894, when Kurdish nomads attacked Armenian villagers for refusing to make the traditional protection payments on top of their tax payments to Ottoman officials. Armenian activists took up the cause of the overtaxed Armenian peasants and encouraged their revolt. British traveller and businessman H. F. B. Lynch, who journeyed through the Sasun region on the eve of the massacres, described the Armenian agitators: "The object of these men is to keep the Armenian cause alive by lighting a flame here and there and calling: Fire! The cry is taken up in the European press; and when people run to look there are sure to be some Turkish officials drawn into the trap and committing abominations." The Ottoman government dispatched the Fourth Army, reinforced by a Kurdish cavalry regiment, in a bid to restore order. Thousands of Armenians were killed as a result, provoking the European calls for intervention that the Hunchaks actively sought and the Ottomans most wanted to avoid.[11]

In September 1895, the Hunchaks organized a march in Istanbul to petition for reforms in the eastern Anatolian provinces that Europeans increasingly referred to as Turkish Armenia. They gave both the Ottoman government and all foreign embassies forty-eight-hours' advance notice and set out their demands, including the appointment of a Christian governor general to oversee reforms in eastern Anatolia and the right of Armenian villagers to bear arms to protect themselves against their well-armed Kurdish neighbours. The Ottomans surrounded the Sublime Porte, the walled compound housing the offices of the Ottoman prime minister and his cabinet (the term is also used to refer to the Ottoman government, in the same way that Whitehall is used for the British government), with a police cordon to

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drive back the crowd of Armenian protestors. A policeman was killed in the melee, setting off a riot in which a hostile Muslim crowd turned on the Armenians. Sixty protesters were killed outside the Porte alone. The European powers protested the killing of peaceful demonstrators. Faced with mounting international pressure, Sultan Abdülhamid issued a decree on 17 October promising reforms in the six provinces of eastern Anatolia with Armenian populations: Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Harput, and Sivas.

The sultan's reform decree served only to heighten the fears of Ottoman Muslims in the six provinces. They saw the measure as a prelude to Armenian independence in eastern Anatolia, which would force the Muslim majority either to live under a Christian authority or to abandon their homes and villages to resettle in Muslim lands—as thousands of Muslims from Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Balkans had already been forced to do when the Ottomans had relinquished those lands to Christian rule. Ottoman officials did little to dispel these fears, and within days of the sultan's decree, a new and far more lethal wave of massacres swept the towns and villages of central and eastern Anatolia. By February 1896, American missionaries estimated that no fewer than 37,000 Armenians had been killed and 300,000 left homeless. Other estimates put the casualty figures between 100,000 and 300,000 Armenian dead and wounded. Given the isolated nature of the region, we are unlikely to obtain a more precise figure for the casualties of the 1895 massacres. Yet the level of violence against the Armenians was clearly unprecedented in Ottoman history.[12]

A terrorist attack in Istanbul marked the third and final episode in the Armenian atrocities of 1894 to 1896. A group of twenty-six Dashnak activists, disguised as porters, carried weapons and explosives hidden in money bags into the headquarters of the Ottoman Bank in Istanbul on 26 August 1896. They killed two guards and took hostage 150 bank workers and clients, threatening to blow up the building and everyone in it unless their demands—the appointment of a European high commissioner to impose reforms in eastern Anatolia and a general amnesty for all Armenian political exiles—were met. Despite its name, the Ottoman Bank was a foreign-owned institution, with nearly all its shares held by British and French concerns. The bid to force the European powers to intervene in Ottoman-Armenian affairs backfired entirely. The terrorists were forced to abandon their occupation of the bank with their demands unmet, taking refuge on a French ship to escape Ottoman domains. Not only were the Dashnaks' actions condemned

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by the European powers, but the attack on the bank set off pogroms against Armenians in Istanbul in which as many as 8,000 were killed. The European powers, divided in their policies on the Armenian question, forced no changes on the Ottoman Empire. For the Armenian movement, the bloody events of 1894 to 1896 proved nothing short of a catastrophe.

Over the following years, the Armenian movement changed tactics and worked with the liberal parties seeking the reform of the Ottoman Empire. The Dashnaks attended the Second Congress of Ottoman Opposition Parties in Paris in 1907, alongside the Committee of Union and Progress. They were enthusiastic supporters of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and emerged from it as a legally recognized group for the first time. The Armenian community fielded a number of candidates for the Ottoman parliament later that year, and fourteen were elected to the lower chamber. Many hoped that Armenian political objectives could be realized within the context of the Ottoman constitution, the citizenship rights it promised, and the prospect of administrative decentralization. Those hopes were dashed in the aftermath of the 1909 counter-revolution when, between 25 and 28 April 1909, some 20,000 Armenians were killed in a frenzy of bloodletting.[13]



Minaret from which Turks fired on Christians. In April 1909, Muslim mobs destroyed Christian homes and shops in Adana and its environs and killed some 20,000 Armenians. Bain News Service, an American photo agency, captured the ruins of the Christian quarters in the aftermath of the Adana massacre.

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Zabel Essayan, one of the most prominent Armenian literary figures at the start of the twentieth century, travelled to Adana shortly after the massacres to assist in the relief efforts. She found a city in ruins, inhabited by widows, orphans, and elderly men and women traumatized by what they had witnessed. "One cannot take in the abominable reality in one sweep: it remains well beyond the limits of human imagination," she recounted of the horror. "Even those who lived the experience are incapable of giving the whole picture. They stutter, sigh, cry, and in the end can only tell you about isolated events." Influential public figures like Essayan drew international attention to the massacres and condemnation of the Ottoman Empire.[14]

The Young Turks moved quickly and dispatched Cemal Pasha to restore peace in Adana after the violence had run its course. The Unionists needed to regain the confidence of the Dashnaks, to prevent them seeking European intervention on behalf of Armenian aspirations. The Dashnaks agreed to preserve cooperation with the CUP on condition that the government arrest and punish all those responsible for the Adana massacres, restore property to Armenian survivors, relieve their tax burdens, and provide funds for the destitute. In his memoirs, Cemal claimed to have rebuilt every damaged house in Adana within four months and to have executed "not less than thirty Mohammedans" in Adana and seventeen in nearby Erzine, "members of the oldest and highest families" among them. These measures were taken as much to reassure the Armenians as to forestall European interventions, and for the moment they bought the Young Turks time on the Armenian question.[15]

While the Ottomans struggled to preserve their territorial integrity in eastern Anatolia, they faced a fresh crisis in the Mediterranean. The provinces of Benghazi and Tripoli in the modern state of Libya were the Ottomans' last possessions in North Africa, after the French occupation of Algeria (1830) and Tunisia (1881) and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. Italy was a new state—its unification into a single kingdom was only completed in 1871—and aspired to an empire in Africa. The government of King Victor Emmanuel III turned to Libya to satisfy its imperial ambitions.

The Ottomans had done nothing to provoke war with Italy in 1911. Yet with British and French neutrality assured in advance, Rome knew that nothing stood in the way of its pursuing its imperial ambitions in North

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Africa by military means. Seizing on the pretext of an Ottoman arms shipment to its garrisons in Libya as a threat to the safety of Italian citizens living in Tripoli and Benghazi, Rome declared war on 29 September and launched a full-scale invasion of the Libyan coastal cities.[16]

The Ottoman position in Libya was completely untenable. Some 4,200 Turkish soldiers were posted in garrisons with virtually no naval support to protect them from the invading Italian army of more than 34,000 men. The Ottoman minister of war admitted freely to his own officers that Libya could not be defended. In the first weeks of October 1911, the coastal towns of the Ottoman provinces of Tripoli (Western Libya) and Benghazi (Eastern Libya, also known as Cyrenaica) fell to the triumphant Italian army.[17]

The Ottoman government and the Young Turks took radically different positions on the invasion. The grand vizier and his government did not believe they could save Libya and so preferred to write off the marginal North African territory rather than embroil their armed forces in a fight they could not win. The ultranationalist Young Turks could not accept the loss of Ottoman territory without a fight.

In early October 1911, Major Enver travelled to Salonica to address the Central Committee of the CUP. In a five-hour meeting, he persuaded his colleagues to raise a guerrilla war against the Italians in Libya. He outlined the plan in a letter to his childhood friend and foster brother, German naval attaché Hans Humann: "We will gather our forces in the [Libyan] interior. Mounted bands of Arabs, citizens of the country, commanded by young [Ottoman] officers, will stay close to the Italians and harass them night and day. Each [Italian] soldier or small detachment will be surprised and annihilated. When the enemy is too strong, the bands will withdraw into the open country and continue to harry the enemy at every occasion."[18]

On securing CUP approval for his plan, Enver set off for Istanbul, where he boarded ship incognito for Alexandria. Dozens of patriotic young officers followed in his wake, using Egypt as the launching pad for their guerrilla war against Italy—among them a young adjutant major named Mustafa Kemal, the future Atatürk. Others entered through Tunisia. Officially, these young officers were disowned by their government as "adventurers acting against the wishes of the Ottoman government" (though in fact the Ottoman treasury made monthly payments to their commanders serving in Libya). They called themselves *fedaî* officers, fighters willing to sacrifice their lives for their cause.[19]

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From the moment he entered the country at the end of October, Enver threw himself into the Libyan conflict with passion and commitment. He donned Arab robes and rode on camelback into the Libyan interior. He revelled in the austerity and hardships of desert life and admired the courage of the Bedouin, with whom he had to communicate through a translator as he spoke no Arabic. The tribesmen, for their part, showed Enver great respect. Enver's fiancée was the niece of Sultan Mehmed V, Princess Emine Naciye Sultan. Though she was only thirteen at the time (they married in 1914, when she was seventeen), the connection to the imperial household greatly enhanced Enver's standing among the Libyans. "Here I am the son-in-law of the Sultan, the envoy of the Caliph who is giving orders," he wrote, "and it is this tie alone that helps me."[20]

Enver confined his movements to the eastern province of Benghazi. Italian troops were concentrated in the three port cities of Cyrenaica—Benghazi, Derna, and Tobruk. Stubborn resistance by Libyan tribesmen had prevented the Italian troops from moving beyond the coastal plain into the Libyan interior. After surveying Italian positions, Enver made his camp on the plateau overlooking the port of Derna. The 10,000 inhabitants of Derna were unwilling hosts to an invasion army of some 15,000 Italian infantry, who became the primary target of Enver's war. He rallied the demoralized Ottoman soldiers who had escaped capture, he recruited tribesmen and members of the powerful Sanussi brotherhood (a mystical religious confraternity whose network of lodges extended across urban and rural Libya), and he received other Young Turk *fedaî* officers at his base camp in Ayn al-Mansur. Through his work in Libya—recruiting local fighters under Ottoman officers, deploying Islamic hostility to foreign rule to subvert European enemies, and creating an effective intelligence network—Enver laid the foundations for a new secret service that would prove highly influential in the Ottoman Great War: the Teşkilât-i Mahsusa (Special Organization).

Judging by Enver's accounts, many of the Arab tribes of Libya rallied to the Ottoman volunteers. They appreciated the way the Young Turks threw themselves into the Libyan people's cause and risked their lives for the tribesmen's freedom from foreign rule. Though they did not share a common language, the bond of Islam proved very strong between the Turkish-speaking Young Turks and the Arabic-speaking Libyan tribesmen. Enver described the Arab fighters in Libya as "fanatical Muslims who see death before the enemy as a gift from God". This was particularly true of

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the powerful Sanussi Sufi order whose devotion to the Ottoman sultan was linked to his role as the caliph of Islam. Nor did Enver, the secular Young Turk, disavow this devotion to Islam. Rather, he saw religion as a strong mobilizing force to rally Muslims behind the Ottoman sultan-as-caliph to defeat their enemies—in the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim world beyond. Reflecting on the power of Islam, Enver wrote, "There is no nationality in Islamism. Just take a look at what is going on around the Islamic world." Whatever else Enver took from his time in Libya, he came away with a firm belief in the Ottoman Empire's power to deploy Islam against its enemies at home and abroad.[21]

Between October 1911 and November 1912, the Young Turk officers and Arab tribesmen prosecuted a remarkably successful guerrilla war against the Italians. Despite superiority in numbers and modern weapons, the Italians were unable to break out of their fortified positions in the coastal plain to occupy the Libyan interior. Arab bands inflicted high casualties on the Italians, killing 3,400 and wounding over 4,000 in the course of the year. The war also took a toll on the Italian treasury, whereas the Ottomans were spending as little as 25,000 Turkish pounds (the Turkish pound was worth approximately £0.90 or $4.40) a month to support Enver in his siege of Derna. For a moment, it looked as though the Young Turks' gamble in Libya might succeed and the Italians would be driven back to the sea.[22]

Unable to win in Libya, the Italians expanded the conflict to other fronts. They knew the war would only end when the Ottoman government relinquished Libya to Italian control in a formal peace treaty. To pressure Istanbul to sue for peace, Italian naval vessels attacked Ottoman territory across the eastern Mediterranean. They bombarded the Lebanese port of Beirut in March 1912, and Italian soldiers occupied the Dodecanese (an Aegean archipelago dominated by Rhodes and today part of Greece) in May of that year. In July, the Italian navy dispatched torpedo boats into the Dardanelles. Finally, the Italians played the Balkan card. Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria had entered into alliances against their former Ottoman suzerain. Each had territorial ambitions in the remaining Ottoman territory in the Balkans—in Albania, Macedonia, and Thrace. The Italian Crown was related by marriage to King Nicholas I of Montenegro, and the Italians encouraged the Montenegrins to declare war on the Ottoman Empire on 8 October 1912. It was only a matter of time before the other Balkan states followed suit.

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The imminent threat of war in the Balkans provoked a crisis reaching from Istanbul to Libya. By defending remote provinces like Tripoli and Benghazi, the Ottoman government had left the empire's Balkan heartland exposed. Idealism quickly gave way to a new realism. Ten days after Montenegro declared war, the Ottoman Empire concluded a peace treaty with Italy in which it relinquished the Libyan provinces to Italian rule. The *fedaî* officers, though ashamed to abandon their Libyan comrades, left the Sanussi brotherhood to carry on the guerrilla war unassisted and made haste back to Istanbul to join in the national struggle for survival that became known as the First Balkan War.

The Balkan states had all once been part of the Ottoman Empire. In the course of the nineteenth century, nationalism took hold among the diverse ethnic and religious communities of south-eastern Europe. The European powers actively encouraged these nationalist movements as they sought to secede from the Ottoman Empire, creating volatile client states. The Kingdom of Greece was the first to secure full independence in 1830 after a decade of war. Serbia gained international recognition as a principality under Ottoman suzerainty in 1829 and secured full independence in the 1878 Congress of Berlin. Also at Berlin, Montenegro gained its independence, and Bulgaria secured its autonomy under Ottoman rule, achieving full independence in September 1908. None of the independent Balkan states was satisfied with the territory under its control—each aspired to lands still under Ottoman rule in Albania, Macedonia, and Thrace. The Ottomans, for their part, had grown dismissive of their former Balkan subject peoples' claims and underestimated the danger they posed to Ottoman rule in the empire's last remaining European provinces.

Ottoman complacency was shattered as the Balkan states seized the opportunity that the Italian-Turkish War presented to satisfy their territorial ambitions. In October 1912, Montenegro, Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria declared war on the Ottoman Empire in quick succession. From the outset the Balkan allies enjoyed numerical and strategic superiority over their former Ottoman overlords. The combined forces of the Balkan states totalled 715,000 men, compared to only 320,000 Ottoman soldiers in the field.[23]

The Greeks used their maritime supremacy over the Ottomans to advantage. Not only did they annex Crete and occupy a number of Aegean

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