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Some Issues of Turkey's Entry into the First World War

Abstract: The paper seeks to clarify some circumstances surrounding Turkey's entry into the First World War, focusing on the events that took place between 5 and 10 August 1914 including the negotiations between Enver Pasha and the Russian military attachée M. N. Leontiev.

Keywords: First World War, Turkey, Enver Pasha, Russian diplomacy, M. N. Girs, M. N. Leontiev

The issues surrounding Turkey's "sliding" into the war with the Entente after 10 August 1914 have been studied well enough in the historical literature.¹ But there still remains a lacuna as regards the events that took place between 5 and 10 August. As far as this "five-day" issue is concerned, Russian historiography has not yet overcome sensationalism in presenting facts and simplification in drawing conclusions from their analysis. Western historiography has not given an unambiguous answer to these questions

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¹ H. N. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History, 1912–1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1931); U. Trumpener, "Turkey's Entry Into World War I: An Assessment of Responsibilities", *Journal of Modern History* 32.4 (1962), as well as his "Liman von Sanders and the Ottoman-German Alliance", *Journal of Contemporary History* 1.4 (1966), *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), "Germany and the End of the Ottoman Empire", in M. Kent, ed., *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); F. G. Weber, *Eagles on the Crescent: Germany, Austria, and the Diplomacy of the Turkish Alliance, 1914–1918* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1970); G. Miller, *Straits. British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire and the Origins of the Dardanelles Campaign* (University of Hull Press, 1997); A. Emin, *Turkey in the world war* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930); Y. T. Kurat, "How Turkey Drifted into World War I", in K. Bourne and D. C. Watt, eds., *Studies in International History* (London: Longman, 1967); F. A. K. Yasamee, "Ottoman Empire", in K. M. Wilson, ed., *Decisions for War, 1914* (London: UCL Press, 1995); K. Karpat, "Entry of the Ottoman Empire into World War I", in *Türk Tarih Kurumu Belleten* 68/253 (2004); M. Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); A. F. Miller, "Vstuplenie Turtsii v Pervuiu mirovuiu voinu", *Izvestiia Akademii nauk SSSR, Serii istorii i filosofii* 3.4 (1946); F. I. Notovich, *Diplomaticheskaia bor'ba v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSR, 1947); E. F. Ludshuveit, *Turtsia v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Moscow University, 1966).

either. So U. Trumpener, in his account of the facts and their analysis, makes an error strange for a scholar of his stature. M. Aksakal takes an approach which is quite reminiscent of the “figure of omission”. Other authors either mention this issue in passing or skip it over completely.

What happened between 5 and 10 August 1914? In those few days the Turkish leadership presented the Russian diplomatic representatives in Constantinople with proposals for a military alliance, which were eventually rejected by the Russian Foreign Ministry despite persistent urgings from the Russian Embassy. On 10 August the German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* entered the Dardanelles and the situation radically changed, and even though the change was not in Russia’s favour, things were still far from being hopeless.

Interpretations of these events in Russian historiography have been following a uniform pattern. Firstly, the Turks were deeply insincere when making their proposals because they had already, on 2 August, concluded a secret treaty of alliance with Germany. Secondly, the purpose of the Turkish initiatives was simply to buy the time needed to carry through the mobilisation ordered upon the outbreak of war in Europe. Thirdly, there can simply be no other explanation for those events given the Turkish war minister Enver Pasha’s Germanophilia and Turkey’s complete dependence on Germany at the time the war broke out. Fourthly, Russia was not even in a position to accept the Turkish offers of alliance because of her complete dependence on the Entente allies which would not have allowed her to pursue such an arrangement. Let us try to look into this tangle of events and circumstances.

Firstly, they were much more complex, multifaceted, contradictory and short-lived than most historians seem to think. Thus Trumpener, who is the main expert on the subject, is focused on refuting the thesis about Germany’s overriding influence on Turkey, and indeed convincingly argues against it. But that is only one aspect of this multifaceted problem.

Secondly, Russian historiography has developed so strong a prejudice with regard to Turkey that it cannot help affecting the validity of scholarly conclusions. That pattern has arisen in consequence of an interweaving of approaches during the period of Russia’s alliance with the Entente and the period of quite contradictory relations between the former USSR and Turkey: from a close friendship and alliance with the Kemalist regime to a new and open enmity culminating in 1947, when Turkey joined NATO. As a result, all that is accepted as being quite natural in the politics of other countries, such as pragmatism, patriotism, professionalism, is resolutely denied to Turkey. The Turks are still perceived as cunning and cruel, and the Young Turk regime of 1913–1918 also as “unrestrained adventurism”.

Thirdly, analyses of the actions of Russian diplomacy continue to suffer from the “fascination of power” syndrome. Despite a good deal of direct

evidence in the sources and literature, historians often find it difficult to accept that the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry can turn out to have been unprofessional. As far as his "master", Nicholas II, is concerned, the long-proposed thesis about his intellectual limitations, lack of principle and weakness of will remains unrefuted despite all the efforts to the contrary made in recent years.

F. Notovich purportedly sought to disprove the views of M. Pokrovskii, accusing him of oversimplification, even of falsifying the facts.² But his own considerable effort suffered from the same flaws: an arbitrary presentation of the facts in favour of a preconceived view. Both authors represent the official Soviet historiography of different political eras, the former of the late 1940s, the latter of the 1920s and 30s. E. Ludshuveit's interesting book, regrettably, barely touched upon the question of Turkey's entry into the war, and when it did, it beat a well-trodden path. What remains the worthiest of the old works regardless of the author's interpretation of events from a political rather than a scholarly perspective is a short article of A. Miller.

In the period between the end of the Balkan Wars and the beginning of the First World War Turkey faced several serious challenges on the resolution of which directly depended her survival as a state (even if of limited sovereignty): 1) the need to conclude an alliance with a great power to counteract the evident tendency towards the empire's further fragmentation, including the partition of Asia Minor; 2) the need to procure a large loan on the European financial market to rescue herself from looming bankruptcy the consequences of which would have been unpredictable; the urgent need for a loan was caused, apart from the ever weak Ottoman financial system, by the enormous costs of the Balkan War and, especially, by the Empire's loss of its most developed, European provinces; the loss of territory was accompanied by a mass exodus of Muslim population from Rumelia to Anatolia; this led to a huge decline in tax revenue on the one hand, and required huge financial resources for their resettlement in Asia Minor on the other; 3) the need for further internal reforms and modernisation, interrupted by the acute political crises of 1911–12 and the Balkan Wars. In that respect, Turkey's most important task, along with that of building her national economy which would not be based on ethnic minorities (Greeks, Armenians, Jews), was the abolition of the regime of capitulations.

A second level of problems involved: 1) the resolution of the Greek-Turkish conflict over the Aegean islands, the possession of which by Greece was not recognised by Turkey; the proximity of these islands to the Greek-

² Notovich, *Diplomaticheskaiia bor'ba*, 286; M. N. Pokrovskii, *Imperialisticheskaiia voina* (Moscow 1931), 158.

inhabited coast of Asia Minor created a danger that the “armed propaganda” of the type carried out in Macedonia in 1903–12 might be resumed there; 2) the settlement, with Russia and other powers, of the issue of reform in the “six Armenian vilayets”, which produced another “Macedonian” version of gradual withdrawal of Turkey’s sovereignty and partition of her territory, this time in Eastern Anatolia;³ 3) the strengthening of naval forces necessary for resolving the Greek-Turkish conflict over the islands, as well as the reorganisation of the army; 4) the conclusion of an alliance or a treaty of benevolent neutrality with Bulgaria for the same purpose; 5) the strengthening of ties with Arabs, the second largest Muslim ethnic group in the Empire, with whom relations had been aggravated in previous years.

Turkey devoted the entire first half of 1914 to these foreign and domestic policy goals. She made attempts to conclude an alliance with any one of the great powers: Britain, France, Russia and Germany. All of them ended in failure.⁴ It should be noted that in her choice of ally Turkey definitely gave preference to Germany over Russia. To Turkey, Russia posed a direct threat, Germany only an indirect one. Germany had never taken part in the concerted actions of the powers against Turkey and never encroached on her sovereignty. What she had done was to allow her allies, Austro-Hungary and Italy, to bite off a chunk of the Empire’s territory, Bosnia in 1908 and Libya in 1911.

Before the July Crisis, Germany had not been interested in concluding an alliance with Turkey. The main opponents of such an arrangement were the German ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Wangenheim and the head of the German military mission General Liman von Sanders. Their reports described Turkey as completely unfit for alliance (*nichtbündnisfähig*) and expressed their belief that, due to her military weakness, she would not only be unable to engage Russian forces in the Caucasus on her own but would have to be supported there by the German army.⁵

³ J. Heller, “Britain and the Armenian Question, 1912–1914: A Study in Realpolitik”, *Middle Eastern Studies* XVI (1980), 3–26.

⁴ On Turkey’s attempts to conclude an alliance with Great Britain see F. Ahmad, “Great Britain’s Relations with the Young Turks, 1908–1914”, *Middle Eastern Studies* II (1966), 321–324; F. Ahmad, “The Late Ottoman Empire”, in Kent, ed., *Great Powers*, 11–13; M. Kent, “Great Britain and the End of the Ottoman Empire 1900–23”, in Kent, ed., *Great Powers*, 191; with France: Djemal Pasha, *Memoirs of a Turkish Statesman 1913–1919* (New York 1922), 104–107; with Germany: Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 15–19; with Russia: Aksakal, *Ottoman Road to War*, 45; S. D. Sazonov, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1991 [1927]), 160–165.

⁵ Jagow to German Ambassadors, Vienna and Constantinople, 14 July 1914, quoted in E. Jackh, *The Rising Crescent* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1944), 10.

The initiative to conclude an alliance with Turkey came from Austria-Hungary and was put forward by her ambassador in Constantinople Marquis Pallavicini. Austria-Hungary was interested in the anti-Serbian character of an alliance with Turkey (and Bulgaria) for defeating Serbia, revising the Bucharest Peace Treaty of 1913, and creating an autonomous Macedonia. From Vienna, a new Balkan alliance was seen as the alliance of Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey aimed firstly against Serbia and only secondly, on account of Turkish interests, against Greece as Serbia's ally.

The Turkish vision of a Balkan alliance was somewhat different. The Turks sought either an offensive alliance with Bulgaria aimed firstly against Greece and only secondly, on account of Bulgarian (and Austrian) interests, against Serbia, or a defensive alliance with Romania and, again, Greece for the purpose of maintaining neutrality under the auspices of Germany, and aimed against Russia and Bulgaria in case the latter should go to the side of the Entente. But the Turks did not look at an alliance with Austria-Hungary as a great power from a strategic perspective but rather in regional terms.

It was Wilhelm II's change of mind on the idea of Germany's alliance with Turkey that proved to be decisive. Under new circumstances the Kaiser believed that "every gun in the Balkans must be kept ready to be fired at the Slavs for Austria", and instructed the Foreign Ministry and the German Military Mission accordingly.⁶ The initiative group of Young Turk supporters of an alliance with Germany (in fact, with a great power), which included war minister Enver, grand vizier Said Halim, interior minister Talaat and justice minister Halil, promptly jumped at the opportunity. By 1 August Enver and Talaat had already been aware of the confiscation of two Turkish dreadnoughts by the British, and used it as an argument to win over the hesitant ministers, primarily marine minister Djemal and finance minister Djauid.

An alliance with Germany could give Turkey safeguards against the expected Russian landing on the Bosphorus. But it could not help her to solve the problems of the Aegean islands, Western Thrace, autonomous Macedonia, not to mention the abolition of the capitulations and the procurement of a loan. Therefore, her best option was to declare neutrality.⁷

The issue of a Turkish-Bulgarian alliance was closely connected with the Greek-Turkish conflict. The vicissitudes of its conclusion are quite well known. But the oft-overlooked fact is that, after the outbreak of war in Europe, the Turks, while trying to conclude an alliance with the Bulgarians,

⁶ Wangenheim to Foreign Ministry, no. 362, 22 July 1914; K. Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War. German Documents collected by Karl Kautsky and edited by Max Montgelas and Walther Schücking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924), 156-158.

⁷ Miller, *Vstuplenie Turtsii*, 325.

also feared the possibility of their thrust towards Constantinople in order to reach the Enos-Midia line (and perhaps even beyond). Those very concerns were the main reason for the Turks to order mobilisation and concentration of troops in Thrace. Still, on 22 July, Enver revealed to Wangenheim another reason for Turkey's seeking alliance with a great power: to provide protection to her until she had an alliance concluded with one of the regional countries, either Bulgaria or Greece. The majority of the Cabinet leant towards Bulgaria, but negotiations with Greece about a defensive alliance based on a compromise on the islands issue were also to begin in Brussels, brokered by the British journalist E. Dillon. If both Bulgaria and Turkey, Enver stated, joined the German bloc, Turkey would reject the Greek proposal.⁸ The Balkan puzzle was intricate indeed.

The Turkish pre-war attempts to procure a large loan in Europe and to get the issue of the abolition of the capitulatory system to the table had been equally unsuccessful. The latter intention faced strong opposition both from the European powers and from the USA. The only power that was tolerantly disposed to the issue was Russia, though primarily due to her weak position in the Turkish economy and her correspondingly weak role in legal regulation of commercial and other disputes.⁹ In analysing the Turkish leadership's consideration of the "Russian option", this factor, underestimated in historiography, should be counted among the crucial ones.

The Greek-Turkish conflict was the acutest diplomatic crisis in Europe since the end of the one produced by the Liman von Sanders affair. It is believed that, had the shots not been fired in Sarajevo in June 1914, the shots that would have started a "third Balkan war", likely to escalate into a European one, would inevitably have been fired in the Aegean in July or August the same year. The conflict over the islands was only the tip of the iceberg that was a much broader Greek-Turkish conflict over supremacy in the Aegean, including the straits and Constantinople. Moreover, it was closely linked with Turkey's internal problems, namely the situation and destiny of national-religious minorities and the resettlement of huge numbers of refugees from Macedonia and Thrace expelled after the Balkan Wars. The utmost importance Turkey attached to the islands question may be seen from her offer to cede them to Serbia (!) and to transfer ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Christians of Asia Minor from the Greek Patriarchate of

⁸ Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War*, 156–158, doc. no. 117.

⁹ *Mezdunarodnyie otnosheniia v epokhu imperializma. Dokumenty iz arkhivov tsarskogo i vremennogo pravitel'stv (hereafter MOEI)*, ser. 3, vol. VI, 1 (Moscow-Leningrad 1935), 141–143, 155–156.

Constantinople to the Serbian Church. Driven into a corner, Turkey was ready to try the most incredible diplomatic combinations.¹⁰

The naval arms race that had begun there before the Balkan Wars was rapidly gaining pace. In intensity it did not lag behind the arms race between England and Germany in the North Sea. After the onset of the July Crisis the interrelatedness of those two arms races proved to be fatal for the destiny of the Turkish navy and a very important factor in the decision making process in Constantinople in late July 1914, ending in the seizure by Britain of two Turkish dreadnoughts built in her shipyards.

This issue has been extensively described in the literature.¹¹ The funds for the procurement of the ships had been raised by national subscription, and not only in Turkey but across the Islamic world. Donations came even from India and Morocco. Turkish women would cut and sell their hair and their jewellery, schoolchildren gave up their pocket money to contribute to the national Navy League, army officers and state officials contributed a monthly salary. The building of the dreadnoughts was not perceived merely as the strengthening of the navy but also as a symbol of the country's renewal and further modernisation. To think of the seizure of the ships merely in terms of a convenient excuse for the Young Turks' campaigning against the Entente is clearly inadequate.¹² It was a deep shock for the nation, once again made aware of its humiliatingly unequal position in the contemporary world.

It is evident that the British confiscation of the Turkish dreadnoughts on 31 July and the escape through the Dardanelles of the German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* on 10 August 1914 were closely linked in the political deliberations of the Turkish leadership in early August.¹³ To some extent (albeit very limited), the Turks could consider the German ships as a kind of compensation for their confiscated dreadnoughts.

But between those two dates something else that immensely outweighed the two "purely naval" factors occurred. On 4 August Great Britain entered the war. This factor upset all Turkish calculations on which their decision to conclude an alliance with Germany on 2 August had been based. Besides an abrupt change in the relative strength of the opposing sides, between 4 and 10 August there could be no guarantees that the *Goeben* and *Breslau* would manage to escape into the Dardanelles without being intercepted by the British fleet. All of that complicated the situation greatly and

¹⁰ V. N. Shtrandtman, *Balkanskie vospominaniia* (Moscow: Knizhnitsa, 2014), 330.

¹¹ R. Hough, *The Big Battleship* (London: Michael Joseph, 1966), 120; W. S. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911–1914* (London: T. Butterworth, 1923), 209.

¹² Miller, *Vstuplenie Turtsii*, 326; Ludshuveit, *Turtsia v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny*, 38.

¹³ Churchill, *World Crisis*, 482.

led the Turks to improvise in anticipation of possible adverse developments. The Entente turned out to be much stronger than Enver and his group had expected, and Germany's victory did not seem so certain.

On the other hand, since 4 August, a new tune could be heard in German-Turkish relations. It was on that day that the *Goeben* and *Breslau* received instructions to head for Constantinople. So, was the fact that Enver was acquainted with the ships' destination in contradiction to his decision to slow down the German tune and start playing a Russian one instead? Not at all. It only meant that he kept his options open until making the final decision. Just as the offer of alliance made to Russia on 5 August was not in contradiction to exacting from Germany the following day, 6 August, much more favourable alliance terms than those agreed on 2 August. In those days Great Britain's entry into the war was a factor that played a decisive role not only for the Turks but also for the Germans. It led to the renegotiation, on 6 August, of the German-Turkish alliance because now Turkey became a much more useful ally to Germany not only against Russia but also against Britain.

In Russian historiography, much of which is obviously obsolete, it is taken as self-evident that the complex of domestic and foreign policy challenges with which Turkey had been faced in the first half of 1914 suddenly vanished after the outbreak of the war, and that it was replaced by one simple idea, that of entering into a war with Russia on the side of Germany. This point of view, inherited from the First World War military propaganda, cannot be considered scholarly acceptable now, a hundred years after the events studied. The complex of problems did not disappear. Moreover, their context became much more complicated with the ambiguous Greek and Bulgarian position on their own neutrality, Russia's fears that the straits might be closed, as well as her military incapacity to carry out an amphibious operation against the Bosphorus. To be able to interpret all of them properly, one should bear in mind that the political and diplomatic situation in the Aegean, in the straits area, and in the Balkans as a whole in the August and September of 1914 was changing dramatically on a daily basis. The decision-makers were often unable to respond with insight and resolve to this kaleidoscopic sequence of developments.

On 5 August war minister Enver Pasha met with the Russian military attaché General Leontiev to clarify the actual purpose of the Turkish mobilisation, but he also made an unexpected offer of alliance. Enver offered Russia to use the Turkish army "to neutralise the army of any one Balkan country that should act against Russia, to facilitate the actions of the Balkan states' armies against Austria should Russia manage to reconcile the Balkan states and Turkey on the basis of mutual concessions". The diplomatic combination of mutual concessions envisaged the cession of the Aegean islands

and Western Thrace to Turkey with compensations for Greece in Epirus, for Bulgaria in Macedonia, and for Serbia in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁴

In Enver's view, such a "combination" would be accepted gladly by both the Turkish government and the people. If it materialised, the same day Enver would say to the Germans: "Now you are our enemies and I am asking you to leave." During his meeting with Leontiev, Enver repeatedly assured him that Turkey was guided only by her own interests.

Whom was the Turkish army supposed to "neutralise"? Taking into account the specific diplomatic circumstances of August 1914, there could have been two possibilities. One was an alliance of Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia against Austria-Hungary under the auspices of Russia. The other was a Turkish-Russian alliance to neutralise Bulgaria either in the event of her attack on Serbia or her encroachment on the Russian sphere of interest in Eastern Thrace and the straits. At the next meeting between Enver and Leontiev, on 9 August, things were made clear: "by order of Russia" the Turkish army could be moved against any of the Balkan countries, including Bulgaria, or together with them against Austria.¹⁵ A ten-year alliance treaty with Russia was supposed to turn her away as an immediate threat to Turkey.

On 5 August the Russian ambassador Girs sent five telegrams to Sazonov. Stating his position, Girs allowed for the possibility both of an alliance with Turkey and of a war against her, Germany and Bulgaria. Sazonov instructed him to continue contacts with Enver.¹⁶ Aksakal claims that Girs's telegram of 6 August (!) was intercepted by the Turks. Would that mean that the Turks read the other telegrams from the Russian Embassy too? Aksakal does not say. Moreover, he argues that the content of this telegram relating to Russia's ambition to finally assert herself in the straits made the Turks aware of Russia's insincerity and hostile intent against the very existence of the empire. This was, in his opinion, the motive behind their opting for an alliance with Germany.¹⁷ The Turks hardly needed to intercept telegrams to know the real intentions of Russia towards their country. This is certainly the weakest point in Aksakal's otherwise very good book, which does not make any further reference to the issue of Russo-Turkish negotiations of 5–9 August.

Trumpener, in line with Russian historiography, believes that "there can no longer be any doubt that these curious overtures by Enver [...] were insincere. Quite aside from the fact that Enver's proposals provided

¹⁴ *MOEI*, 3, VI, 1, 8–9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 42–43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 9, 19.

¹⁷ Aksakal, *Ottoman Road to War*, 92.

a perfect cover story for the intended concentration of Ottoman troops in Thrace, it is now also clear that he kept the German Embassy informed about his talks with the Russians.”¹⁸ To prove his thesis, Trumpener refers to Wangenheim’s two telegrams to the German Foreign Ministry, of 10 and 18 August respectively. But early in the morning of 10 August the *Goeben* and *Breslau* had already appeared off the entrance to the Dardanelles! Had Wangenheim’s first telegram been sent on 9 August, or at least in the night of 9/10 August, Trumpener’s argument would have some weight. But it was not, and the argument falls apart. And Enver could have been “sincere” both on 5 and on 9 August.

After all, what kind of “sincerity” can there be in diplomacy? One can only speak of professionalism and competence or lack thereof. And why would Enver’s “cunning and insincerity” have been necessarily directed only against the Russians? Since scores of recent works, including those by Trumpener himself, have refuted the view about Turkey’s dependence on Germany and debunked the legend of Enver’s being merely a “German protégé”, such views do not seem too credible. Enver was a calculating and cynical pragmatist.

Sazonov at last replied to Girs on 10 August. The content and style of, and corrections to, his telegram raise doubts about his adequate understanding of what was happening and his psychological condition. It seems that by then Sazonov had not yet realised on the edge of what an abyss Russia was standing. Nor did Tsar Nikolas II make things any clearer. His only comment on Girs’s main telegram of 5 August was: “Curious.”¹⁹

We know now that the closing of the straits by Turkey after she joined the Central Powers was one of the main causes of Russia’s defeat in the First World War and of the collapse of the Russian Empire. Some astute observers understood that as early as January 1915:

It should now be evident that there is much to be said for the view that the key to the present situation is Constantinople. We are dealing with world politics, with a world war which is being fought on the battlefields of Europe; but we are dealing with a world war whose results are not expected to develop in Europe proper. The key to this situation lies in Constantinople, and the Turk holds it.²⁰

Express instructions to Girs required a delay until a reply was received from Sofia. It turns out that it was Russian and not Turkish diplomacy that

¹⁸ Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 25.

¹⁹ Quoted in Miller, *Vstuplenie Turtsii*, 328.

²⁰ R. G. Usher, “Why Turkey Entered the War”, in F. J. Reynolds and A. L. Churchill, eds., *World’s War Events*, vol. I (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Comp., 1919), 140. Usher’s chapter was originally published in the monthly *World’s Work*, January 1915.

was stalling on the matter or that, at least, both of them were. Sazonov wrote:

Until we get a response from Sofia [crossed out: "I ask you to sustain Enver's hope of obtaining a favourable response from P[e]t[ers]b[ur]g"], keep in mind the need for buying time in the course of negotiations with Enver. Keep in mind that we do not fear Turkey's direct actions against us. However, while maintaining quite friendly communication with the Turks, try to make them aware that, if they should act without our sanction they will risk all of Asia Minor because they are not able to harm us while we, and in alliance with France and England, can jeopardise their very existence.²¹

In the first days of August Bulgaria figured as an important factor in diplomatic calculations of not only Turkey but also of Russia and her allies, mainly in connection with the Austro-Serbian conflict and her potential involvement in it. For Sazonov, as we can see, the Bulgarian factor outweighed the Turkish one. It was a miscalculation which was impossible to correct.

We do not know when exactly Girs received this document but we know that the German ships *Goeben* and *Breslau* appeared off the entrance to the Dardanelles in the early morning of 10 August and, after the dramatic events in the building of the Turkish Ministry of War, entered the straits in the evening. Although the admission of the ships had been agreed between Germany and Turkey earlier, there arose some unexpected difficulties. The American historian B. Tuchman believes that Enver "was more than willing to give permission for entrance but he had to play a complicated game vis-à-vis his more nervous colleagues." In my opinion, it was Enver's nerves that gave in.

Later the same day an exchange took place between Enver and Lieutenant-Colonel Kress von Kressenstein of the German Military Mission. Kress von Kressenstein told Enver that the commander at Chanak requested instructions concerning the German ships. Enver replied that he was unable to grant permission without consulting the grand vizier. Kress von Kressenstein insisted that the Chanak fort requested an immediate reply. Enver was perfectly silent for a few minutes, and then said abruptly: "They are to be allowed to enter."

"If the English warships follow them in, are they to be fired at?" Kress von Kressenstein asked next. Again Enver refused to answer, claiming that the Cabinet had to be consulted; but Kress von Kressenstein insisted that

²¹ *MOEI*, VII, I, 44. See therein also the distortion of the document in the Russian "Orange book".

the fort should not be left without clear instructions. "Are the English to be fired at or not?" After a long pause, Enver finally said: "Yes."²²

Enver's indecisiveness seems quite strange for the Germanophile that historiography tends to make out of him, who should have been eagerly awaiting the arrival of the ships whose destination had been known to him since 4 August. Was it fear: did the ghost of Admiral Duckworth stand before him in the person of Admiral Milne? or calculation: did Enver expect until the last moment to receive St. Petersburg's positive reply to the offer of alliance and guarantees for the integrity of the Empire? We may never know.

It may seem that the choice that the Turks faced in the morning and afternoon of 10 August was the one between an alliance with Russia and the German warships. But things were more complicated than that. The Turks were not wrong in their assessment either of the chances for an alliance with Russia to last (not only on the basis of the intercepted telegram, of course) or of the future status of the *Goeben* in the Turkish navy in the event of their alliance with Germany. They also clearly understood the position of the Entente as regards their country's future. Their experience from the negotiations with the Entente's members in recent months had clearly showed them that it could not be trusted. But, at the same time, the strongest factor was Britain's entry into the war (and Italy's non-entry).

By 10 August Turkey could and should have made a choice (had Russian diplomacy been more professional) between Germany and Russia, and also between her entry into the war and neutrality. But Russian diplomacy was hopelessly belated in its actions, and naively self-assured of them.

After the entry of England into the war and the arrival of the *Goeben* and *Breslau*, the structure of factions in the Young Turk leadership became much more complicated. Apart from supporters of a "great" and a "small" war, now there were also supporters of a prompt and a delayed entry into the great war, and a weak faction of neutralists. The multiplicity of diplomatic motivations led to differing positions on war objectives amongst the Young Turk leaders. While before 4 August Enver had anticipated a general European war from which he believed the Central Powers would soon emerge victorious, grand vizier Said Halim was still thinking in terms of a limited Balkan conflict in which Turkey and Bulgaria would ally against Greece and Serbia. Thus, for Said Halim, anxious about Russian interference, an alliance with Germany seemed to guarantee the empire's territorial integrity; for Enver, it provided the opportunity to launch military operations in the Balkans combined with a call to jihad in the rest of the empire and beyond.

²² B. Tuchman, *Guns of August: The Outbreak of World War I* (New York 1994 [1962]), 186. It is noteworthy that chapter X where these events are described is omitted in both Russian editions of Tuchman's book.

The difference in views on war aims entailed different views on the timing of military intervention: while Enver wanted to enter the war immediately, the more circumspect Said Halim was not willing to commit to military intervention until the Central Powers' victory became certain.²³ After Britain entered the war, the rift between Enver and Said Halim diminished but did not disappear. Some General Staff officers from Enver's inner circle, such as Ali İhsan Sabis, Hafız Hakki and Kazım Karabekir, also preferred to delay Turkey's entry into the war until the spring of 1915.²⁴

The question of the timing of the entry into the war determined the choice of ally – it was to be the victorious side. In this respect Turkey's stance was not any different from that of Italy, Romania and Bulgaria.

After 10 August every diplomatic action the warring sides undertook towards Turkey weakened or strengthened the position of one or another Young Turk faction. Since Germany, however reluctantly, did meet Turkey's wishes, whereas the Entente powers continued to hold her under the sword of Damocles of partition, it is not surprising that the scales had been slowly but surely tipping to the German side over almost three months. But German-Turkish relations were far from idyllic even after 10 August. They experienced two acute crises, first on 19–22 August, and then on 14–22 October. Yet, five weeks intervened between the resolution of the latter and Turkey's actual entry into the war. Aksakal correctly assesses these developments: "This was a classic deadlock: while the Germans demanded intervention to achieve military victory, the Ottomans demanded German military victory before they were willing to commit to intervention."²⁵ Yet, during the October crisis the Turks had to make the final choice.

Acting on instructions from Berlin, Wangenheim had made the German position absolutely clear at the meeting with the grand vizier on 19 September. By continuing to stall intervention, he stated, the Ottoman Empire was increasingly losing any claim to spoils. If the empire waited for victory to be ensured before it intervened, the German government would hardly reward the Turks for their participation.²⁶

²³ Yasamee, "Ottoman Empire", 238–239.

²⁴ Ali İhsan Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, vol II (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Yayınları, 1992), 59–60, 63; Kazım Karabekir, *Birinci Cihan Harbine Nasıl Girdik*, vol. II (Istanbul: Emre Yayınları, 1995), 316–317.

²⁵ Aksakal, *Ottoman Road to War*, 138; on the two crises see pp. 137–141 and 156–163 therein.

²⁶ F. Ahmad, "Ottoman Armed Neutrality and Intervention. Aug. – Nov. 1914", *Studies on Ottoman Diplomatic History* 4 (1990), 68–69; Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 40–41.

This date should be considered a turning point for the Turkish leadership's decision to enter the war on Germany's side. Now it was just a matter of time. The decisive factor was the prospect of a German loan of 100 million francs. Turkey had by then already resolved the capitulations issue unilaterally. On 9 September she had sent a note to the great powers notifying them of the abolition of the capitulations without any conditions or reservations with effect from 1 October. Germany's decision to extend a loan was the final argument that irrevocably tipped the scales to her side. However, the position of the moderate faction of ministers and military interested in postponing military intervention was not yet hopeless, for Enver and Admiral Souchon needed a provocation to finally draw Turkey into the war. All those issues are also very well known.²⁷ On 29 October naval hostilities commenced and a few days later war was declared.

The conclusion is that Turkey entered the war guided primarily by her own interests and pursuing her own political and economic goals. That she finally made a choice in favour of Germany was as much a fault of the Entente as it was of Turkey herself.

An alliance with Russia was nothing more than one of the options in the Young Turk leadership's bid to solve the general and regional problems the country was facing. Turkish diplomacy used every opportunity and kept open every alternative. That was pragmatic, patriotic and professional. As for cynicism, there is always some in diplomacy.

As for the Young Turk leaders' capacity for making strategic decisions, the notion of the "Young Turk triumvirate", Enver, Talaat and Djemal, as being the ruling core of Turkish politics should be revised. In fact, the governing body of the Young Turk regime was a narrow circle of about thirty people, both active and former members of the Central Committee of the Party of Union and Progress.²⁸ The highest-ranking leaders acting in the foreground could take very bold actions ("adventurous", according to historiography), and they did, but they nonetheless needed approval from the veiled collective leadership of the Young Turks.

Given the presently available sources, it is very difficult to unravel the motives of Russian diplomacy. There is no doubt that there was some cynicism in it too. Whether Russia's unwillingness to assume treaty obligations towards Turkey stemmed from the fear of the inevitable internationalisation of such a treaty (as it had already been the case in 1833–41), or from the desire to keep Turkey in uncertainty until the expected rapid victory over the Central Powers with the view to dividing her territory, or, quite the opposite, from the fear that such an alliance might strengthen Turkey in the

²⁷ Karpat, "Entry", 27–30; Aksakal, *Ottoman Road to War*, 178–182.

²⁸ Trumpener, *Turkey's Entry*, 371, n. 12.

course of a new Balkan war – is yet to be established. But in any case, Turkey did not want to be dismembered.

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