THE REDUCTION OF TURKEY FROM AN EMPIRE TO A NATIONAL STATE

BY HARRY N. HOWARD

Miami University, Oxford Ohio

I.

The partition of the Ottoman Empire was the necessary prerequisite to the political, economic, and social reforms which have made possible the evolution of the modern Turkish republic. For it is almost inconceivable to think of fundamental modernization in an empire at the continental crossroads, with the religion of Islam at its basis and a population of such great diversity. Only in a national republic are the great basic reforms of a Mustapha Kemal Pasha possible—though more than a century of precedent had prepared the way even for the making of the republic.

The dissolution of the old empire immediately following the great war was one of the most important developments in recent world history. No less astounding has been the regeneration of the Turkish people and the advent of the new Near Eastern state. At its zenith the Turkish Empire was larger than the Roman Empire ever was. It included territory extending over three continents, contained more than 1,700,000 square miles of territory and had a polyglot population of almost 40,000,000. In the days of Suleiman the Magnificent the empire compared favorably in every respect with the states of western Europe, and in a day when dynasties conspired to produce outstanding sovereigns, Suleiman had no superior on a Western throne. Since the treaty of Karlowitz the empire had been on the decline, and had been preserved through the years as much by the existing balance among, and the conflicting interests of, the European powers, as by its own internal cohesion, unity, and strength. Dubbed the "sick man of Europe" by Nicholas I, throughout the nineteenth century the downfall of the Sublime Porte and the crumbling of the state had more than once been signaled. But it was not until the decade immediately preceding the Great War that the fate of the ancient empire finally was sealed.

The reasons for the decadence and the destruction of the Turkish Empire are not far to seek. Internally the state was made up of many diverse peoples, none of whom had been effectively assimilated under the military and sometimes corrupt rule of the government at Constantinople. The social, political, and legal or-
ganization of the state was based on the Sheriat, the sacred law of Islam, as founded upon or expounded from the Koran. It was therefore difficult and at times impossible to reorganize the state system in order to meet the demands of modern life. Economically the state became increasingly fettered by the capitulatory régime and was threatened with becoming the prey of world imperialism as represented by the great European powers. In 1875 it announced its bankruptcy, while a few years later its economic and financial life was placed under the control of the European bondholders. Moreover the geographical position of the Ottoman Empire made it ever subject to aggression on the part of the European powers, even as earlier it gave the Turkish rulers obvious advantages for world conquest. Turkey was at the great crossroads of the continents—a crossroads which is strewn with the wrecks of empires. Strategically and politically as well as economically the Great Powers were interested in the region. Great Britain desired not only economic penetration, but what is more, protection of several routes to India, whether through the Straits, the Suez canal and Egypt, or through Anatolia and into Mesopotamia. The Bagdad Railway system symbolized Germany’s prize in the imperial struggle in the Near East. France not only had the largest financial investment in Turkey, but long had been interested in the cultural and material development of Syria—ever since the days of Suleiman and Francis I, if not as far back as the crusades. In the year preceding the outbreak in 1914, Austria-Hungary and Italy reached out for a share of the expected spoils of empire. For Russia the dominating concern lay in the fact that fifty per cent of her export trade went through the narrow and strategic waters of the Straits—the “key of her house” was in other hands.

The first great step in the partition of the Ottoman Empire in recent years came in the early days of October 1908 when the Austro-Hungarian government formally proclaimed the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bulgaria announced her independence. And the abortive, centralizing, political reforms of the Young Turks, well intentioned as many of them were, but hastened the further decomposition of the empire. Following closely on the Bosnian episode, the European center of gravity seemed to shift toward the Near East, and in 1911-1912 came the Italo-Turkish war, in which the Turks finally lost not only Cyrenaica and Tripoli in North
Africa, but the islands of the Dodecanese as well. A modern Rome was retracing more ancient paths in a new imperialism.

But the Italo-Turkish struggle had far deeper consequences. Almost instantly the Balkan states, which hated the Turks only more than they did each other, saw the golden opportunity to settle accounts with the Sublime Porte, free their "brothers" in Macedonia, and solve the age-old Eastern Question. By their own efforts, and with the assistance of the diplomacy of tsarist Russia, they at last succeeded in constituting a Balkan league, composed of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro. The first Balkan war, which broke out on October 8, 1912—and which Austria and Russia tried to prevent—was of short duration, since Turkey soon was defeated by the allies. The conference of London achieved a treaty by May 30, 1913, but it did not bring peace. Serbia had been blocked from the Adriatic by both Austria and Italy, and now sought compensation in Macedonia, with the result that internecine war broke out between the allied Greeks and Serbs and the Bulgarians on June 29, 1913. Rumania participated in this second Balkan war, and peace finally was made at Bucharest on August 10, 1913. During the second struggle the Turks once more seized Adrianople from the Bulgarians, and with the signing of peace Serbia and Greece partitioned Macedonia. Greece received both Cavalla and Salonica, while the question of the Aegean islands, as provided in the treaty of London, was to remain at the disposition of the European concert. Rumania assumed control of the Black Sea outlet of the Danube through the annexation of the Silistria-Balchik district in Bulgarian Dobrudja. Thanks to Austria and Italy, Albania, never too dependent on the old empire, now became an independent state. Some six weeks later Bulgaria formally retroceded Adrianople, Kirk Kilissé and Dimotika to Turkey. At the end of the Balkan wars, Turkey still was mistress of the region of the Straits, but her territory in Europe was confined to the portion of Thrace from Adrianople east to the Black Sea and south to the Aegean.

The events of 1913 only presaged the storm which was ahead. Already the Ottoman Empire appeared to be crumbling to pieces. Without heroic efforts on the part of the government and people, Turkey could not be preserved. Moreover all the European powers would, and did, watch every move of Constantinople, no matter in what direction the Porte might turn, since general imperial interests were involved in the fate of the Turkish empire.
PRAYER RUG, CONSTANTINOPLE, XVI CENTURY
And numerous turns were possible. At last, perhaps, the "sick man" might make vigorous efforts at recovery, for he had yet much vitality. Turkey needed, and sought, reforms of a fundamental nature—in the realm of national defense, financial support and civil and economic reorganization. Britain sent a naval mission to Turkey as well as some administrators. Germany dispatched the military mission of Liman von Sanders, against which Russia made such grave protest. France supervised the gendarmerie and gave financial assistance in the form of a 500,000,000 franc loan. There were developments in civil reconstruction. But the fate of the empire was in other hands—in hands not so much interested in the rights of peoples as in the spoils of imperialism.

Then during the spring and summer of 1913 there began a series of manoeuvres on the diplomatic chessboard which prepared the way for the division of the Ottoman estate into spheres of influence and interest, a step toward political partition. In March, 1913, Great Britain and Turkey reached an agreement whereby Turkey recognized British interests in southern Mesopotamia. In July of that year the German government outlined its desiderata in a possible partition of Turkey to both Italy and Austria—all of which centered about the réseau of the Bagdad railway. Negotiations which had been carried on for a year finally culminated in the famous Bagdad railway agreements which Germany made with France and England in the winter and summer of 1914. In these arrangements France and Britain not only recognized the German "zone de travail" in the Bagdad system, but secured their own positions in Syria and southern Mesopotamia. The partition of an empire was being discounted in advance, and the powers were calculating both interest and principal together. Russia, it appears, did not favor the demise of the Turk, and was opposed to having such strong neighbors in close proximity to the Straits. The government of the tsar "struggled only to barricade eastern Anatolia from European concessionaires."

II.

If the question of of the breakup of the Turkish Empire was on the carpet when the World War came on, the great struggle itself, in which four great empires passed into history, was to bring about the final dissolution. On August 2, 1914, the ruling clique in Turkey signed an alliance with Germany, and from that time until her entry into action Turkey essentially was under the dominance of Ger-
man military and naval officers in the country. There was a chance, however, that with proper unity of policy and action, the Allies might have kept the Porte neutral, or even might have brought Turkey into the war on the side of the Entente. Russia appeared the only country among the Entente ready to make the necessary and proper concessions—including not only a guarantee of the German economic rights in Asia Minor, but Turkish sovereignty over the islands at the entrance of the Dardanelles, and abolition of the hated capitulations. But on October 28, 1914 the combined Turco-German fleet, now under the command of a German admiral, attacked the Russian ports on the Black Sea without a war declaration, and precipitated imperial Turkey into the struggle which was to seal her doom.

Plans already were evolving as to what should be done with the component parts of the old empire. As early as November 4, Great Britain formally announced the annexation of Cyprus and about six weeks later she proclaimed a protectorate over Egypt, but these regions long had been in the actual control of England. It was not until the opening of the Dardanelles campaign in February, 1915, however, that the serious schemes for the partitioning of the empire were thrown into sharp relief. There were now to be several claimants to the heritage. Among the Balkan states there were Bulgaria and Greece, whose aspirations in Thrace and Macedonia were so fundamentally opposed. And now Greece, under the direction of the imaginative and brilliant Venizeles, offered assistance to the Entente, providing proper guarantees against Bulgaria were offered and the Asiatic territory of Smyrna were accorded her. But Russia, fearing Greek entry into Constantinople as a British puppet, not only forbade Greek action in that region, but for the first time in March, 1915, made an outright demand for control of Constantinople and the Straits. On March 12, Great Britain assented to the Russian proposal, lest the Muscovite be driven out of the war, but Russia was to recognize British and French commercial interests, and Britain was to receive the neutral zone in Persia (as of the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907). It was not until one month later that France gave belated consent to the Russian demand, receiving in return assent to her own rights in Syria. At last the "historic task" would be achieved in Tsargrad.

The Constantinople issue, however, raised other problems involving the entire question of the future of the Turkish Empire.
When Italy signed the treaty of London of April 25, 1915, whereby she was to enter the war against Germany, she did so not only with the understanding that Austrian territory on the Adriatic should be hers, but that she would retain the Dodecanese islands and receive the district of Adalia on the coast of Asia Minor. At the same time both France and Great Britain were drawing the blue prints of their claims in Asiatic Turkey. The rights of peoples did not count when the great stakes of imperialism were at play, or when a world war was to be won or lost.

After more than a year of bargaining the famous tripartite agreement of April, 1916, between Great Britain, France, and Russia was worked out. Under this arrangement England was to obtain southern Mesopotamia with Bagdad and access to two ports on the Syrian coast, and an added zone of influence to the north and west of Bagdad. France was to have Syria and the Adana vilayet, western Kurdistan and Mosul, with a zone of influence in the desert east of Syria. Russia would receive Armenia and a part of southern Kurdistan. Palestine temporarily was to be placed under an international régime, and only later was designated to become a Jewish national "home" (November, 1917) under British control. France and Britain were to construct Arab states or confederations in their spheres of influence. Another document, known as the Sykes-Picot accord, May 9-16, 1916, embodied these terms. Such were the plans for the inheritance of the Ottoman estate. It did not matter that Britain already had made promises to two groups of Arabs which were in fundamental disagreement with the Franco-British schemes. The Arabs did not know this until the Bolsheviks published the documents, and the "independence" of the Arabs was little more than a division of Arab territory between France and Britain.

But the war did not go so well for the Allies. Bulgaria entered the struggle on the side of the Central powers in October, 1915, after being promised Macedonia, and access to the Aegean Sea through western Thrace. The Dardanelles campaign ended in failure and resulted in the evacuation of the Gallipoli peninsula in December, 1915-January, 1916. Greece finally entered the war against Turkey when there was not much left to be done, expecting to share in the spoils of victory on the coast of Asia Minor near Smyrna.

The year 1917 witnessed noteworthy events which had their effect on the future of the Turkish Empire. In March the tsarist
government gave way before the bourgeois revolution and a provisional government was established in Russia. And in April the United States entered the fray on the side of the Entente. Even under the provisional Russian government, the foreign ministry adhered to the secret treaties and to the policy of acquiring control over the Straits and Constantinople. The cabinet, however, under the hard pressure of the Petrograd Soviet, finally enunciated the doctrine of no annexations and no indemnities, and stated that Russia sought imperial domination over no foreign territory. President Wilson was known to be opposed to the policy framed within the secret agreements, but the Allies promised Italy additional territory in Asiatic Turkey through the treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne shortly after the American entry into the war.

When the Bolsheviks came into power in November, 1917, they denounced the entire edifice of the secret treaties and began to publish their contents to a rather startled and disillusioned world. The communist pronunciamento had much to do with the Lloyd George statement of January 5, 1918 that Britain would not molest the Turkish "homelands" in Anatolia and Thrace, but would insist on internationalization of the Straits, and would not return the liberated areas of the old empire—Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine—to the "execrated" rule of the Turk. This was a liberal commitment, but neither France nor Britain was giving up territory to which it aspired. Three days later President Wilson announced his "fourteen points" and declared that "the Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule" should be allowed an opportunity for autonomous development. The Straits, of course, were to be internationalized.

But the war went on, and despite increasingly liberal pronouncements, Britain and France reached an agreement in December, 1917, which bade fair to complete their schemes of partition, when France was given control of southern Russia, and Britain was assured control of the Caucasus, Armenia, Georgia and Kurdistan. This was accomplished almost at the very time that the treaty of Brest-Litovsk was being framed and forced on a beaten and distracted Russia! By the end of the war the Allies were almost in complete control of Asiatic Turkey. Bulgaria's surrender in September, 1918, prepared the way for the Turkish capitulation in the armistice of Mudros of October 30, under which the Allies were to occupy all the
WOOLEN RUG, ASIA MINOR, XVII CENTURY
forts of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, and Turkish troops throughout the empire were to be demobilized. Provision was even made for Allied occupation of almost any part of Turkey which they desired to seize.

Shortly after, and only four days before the world conflict came to an end, France and England announced the emancipation of Syria and Mesopotamia from the Turks as the rôle which "the two Allied Governments claim for themselves in the liberated territories." Then in December, on the eve of the Paris conference, Great Britain secured both Mosul and Palestine, the latter to become a Jewish "home," though it had been Arab and Moslem for 1300 years! France needed British support for her Rhenish and other aspirations, and was willing to make the trade. Britain no longer had to fear Russia on the north of Mosul in Kurdistan, and no doubt the London government felt that a British Palestine was a better safeguard for Egypt and the Suez canal than a Palestine under international control.

III.

No more important problem came before the Paris conference than that which the Turkish question raised. The powers were agreed that the Ottoman Empire should be partitioned, but so conflicting were their aims that a settlement was impossible for more than a year, and even then it proved abortive. The question of the Straits alone concerned all the European powers at the conference; and it involved the peace of the world as well. There were other issues: Thrace, the future of the "Turkish homelands," Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Kurdistan and Palestine. Nor should the struggle for economic rights in general, nor the contest for Mosul oil in particular be omitted from that chronicle. That there would be a future Turkish state was to be taken for granted. What should be done with it was a very different, as well as a very difficult question. In the end it was to be answered only by the miraculous rise of the Turkish nationalists themselves. As to the former subjugated peoples, Mr. Wilson favored the mandate system as the only solution whereby peoples not yet ready for freedom might be placed under political tutelage pending complete independence. It was under the mandate system eventually that the old empire finally was divided up at the San Remo Conferences of April and December, 1920. As the United States had frowned upon a mandate for the Constantinopolitan state in the region of the Straits, so now the
American government rejected the Armenian mandate. But France received control over Syria, while Britain took over the Palestine mandate, as well as the new Iraq kingdom which was created in the land of the two rivers. The American government, however, held up final action on the eastern mandates for more than two years until an adjustment could be made with reference to certain American economic claims in those regions.

The policy of partition reached its apogee at Sèvres on August 10, 1920. Now both the Hejaz and Armenia became "independent," and the British once more sought to detach Kurdistan from Turkey. Britain and France registered their control over the mandates already awarded, and promised Italy a sphere (which never materialized) in southern Anatolia. Greece, already detailed to "enforce" the peace against the Turks, was to receive not only Smyrna and the Dodecanese, but the islands at the entrance of the Dardanelles, Thrace and Gallipoli. In addition, the Straits were to be placed under such "international" control as to render them ever subject to the menace of British sea power. This was a threat not only to Turkey, but to Soviet Russia, the southern geography of which had not been altered by the revolution. Finally, through the continuance of the capitulatory régime and the insertion of very serious restrictive financial and economic clauses, what was left of Turkey would be deprived of all real independence. But the treaty of Sèvres miscarried, and brought not peace but the sword.

The treaty of Sèvres was broken before the ink of the signatures had dried. The Turks could not be pressed any farther. The grasping policy of the Allies drove them to violence and they now prepared for desperate resistance. The "sick man" was to rise from his bed and defeat his enemies. The landing of the Greeks at Smyrna on May 15, 1919, turned loose a destructive force which lit the burning torch of nationalism on the plateaus of Anatolia. In the far places of Erzerum and Sivas, Mustapha Kemal Pasha summoned his hosts to do battle for the defense of the fatherland. For the first time, perhaps, a national patriotism had been aroused. The story of what followed is one of the most amazing dramas of our recent history. On March 16, 1920, British troops took possession of Constantinople, adding more fuel to the fire. In the following month—April 23—the newly organized Grand National Assembly, led by Mustapha Kemal met at Ankara and adopted the "national pact," modern Turkey's declaration of independence. It
decreed freedom for Turkey, signed away the phantom of empire, stipulated commercial freedom for the Straits, and guaranteed the rights of the peoples of Turkey. But accept the old political, judicial, and economic capitulations which had bound the empire hand and foot, it would not. There were now two governments in Turkey: the one at Constantinople under definite British control; the other at Ankara engaged in a life and death struggle with the Greeks, which lasted from the fatal landing in May, 1919, to September, 1922.

Of that struggle we shall say but little. The adventurous policy of Venizelos and Lloyd George, now seeking dominance in the Near East through Greece, had produced the conflict. The Turk was fighting for the right to live; the Greek for empire. Both Greece and Turkey, as a matter of fact, were struggling to utter exhaustion, though the Greeks had the better of it throughout 1921. But in March, 1921, the Ankara government brought about a veritable diplomatic revolution in the East. After settling accounts with her neighbors, Turkey succeeded in making an agreement with France (March 9) and three days later with Italy, providing for the economic development of southern Anatolia. At odds with Britain ever since the Paris conference, the French were now alienated over the Rhenish policy, and almost literally at the point of the sword with Britain in the East. Great Britain would now have to achieve her Eastern policy without either French or Italian aid. Finally on March 16 Turkey and Soviet Russia, whose fundamental interests in the Turkish question did not differ from those of the tsarist régime, signed an agreement providing for regulation of the Straits and ceding Kars and Ardahan to Turkey. Once more a common danger brought the Turk and the Muscovite together, and it did not matter that the one was now nationalist, and the other in the vanguard of the communist revolution. In the fall of that year (October 13) the Kemalists signed the treaty of Kars with the Caucasus states. With the signature of the Franklin-Bouillon agreement with France in October the breach between France and Britain in the East became complete.

Little wonder is it that in the following year Turkey succeeded in driving the Greeks into the Mediterranean sea at Smyrna—in September, 1922. Fearful lest the victorious Turks might enter the
zones of the Straits, the British government rushed reinforcements to its troops at Chanak, and called on the dominions, the former allies, the Balkan states, and even the American government to help defend civilization at the Dardanelles. But the world did not answer the summons. On October 11, the armistice of Mudania put an end to the Greco-Turkish war, and a few days later the Lloyd George coalition came to an end. After eleven years of constant fighting, the Turks had won their war for independence. Thanks to their fighting capacity, their organizing ability, their moral vigor, and to the military genius of Mustapha Kemal winged victory perched on the Turkish standards.

The call was now issued for a peace conference which was to meet at Lausanne, and which was to consider all the ramifications of the Eastern question, provide a new régime for the straits and bring peace to the Orient. The conference was one of the most important diplomatic conclaves of the post-war period in Europe, and all the great powers, including the United States and Soviet Russia, were represented. Since the Allies invited representatives from both the Constantinople and Ankara governments, the Grand National Assembly, almost on the eve of the gathering—November 1, 1922—replied by abolishing the sultanate, and the Constantinople government came to an ignominious end. Henceforth Anatolia would rule in Turkey!

Having won independence on the battlefield, the Turks, led by the astute, shrewd Ismet Pasha, had yet to win their freedom at the conference table. But again peace was delayed, for the Turks were not to be browbeaten at Lausanne. And the great powers—Great Britain, the United States, France, and Soviet Russia in particular—were in such opposition that the first conference broke up on February 4, 1923, without reaching a settlement. Questions of imperialism, of territory, of concessions and oil (in which the United States was seriously interested) and of water routes were very difficult to settle—especially when selfish interests played the dominant note. Nor did the Turkish ratification of the American Chester project ease the situation. Finally, however, the conference reconvened in April, and after a bitter fight over concessions and the problem of the capitulations, it produced a treaty on July 24, 1923. By the new treaty Turkey surrendered all claims to practically all the territory which the war had torn from her, though she disputed Britain’s pretentions to the Mosul vilayet and its riches.
But the new republic received all of Anatolia and in Europe, not only Constantinople but eastern Thrace with Adrianople and Gallipoli. Greek inhabitants were to be exchanged for Turkish inhabitants of Greece, a cruel but perhaps necessary solution of that issue. Non-Moslem minorities were to be protected, but the Greek
patriarchate in Constantinople was to be shorn of its political power. War indemnities were renounced mutually. Finally, in return for the abolition of financial, economic, judicial, and political capitulations, in existence since the days of Suleiman—which alone would enable them to live in independence and freedom—the Turks agreed to the internationalization, freedom, and demilitarization of the Straits. These waters were to be placed under an international commission responsible to the League of Nations. Alone among the Central powers, the Turks had made a negotiated peace, and they had done it well.

Lausanne had sounded the death knell of an ancient empire, but announced the birth of a new Turkish republic! By 1923 the old polygot empire, with its antiquated political and social structure, which had failed to solve its national problems, had given way to a national republic, which already had set its sails toward the West. Torn from a time-honored anchorage, some 14,000,000 people, most of whom lived on the Anatolian plateau, now set out on the difficult seas of modernization. Unwittingly the process of partition of the empire became a part of the development of the national state which was becoming modern under the guidance of the republican dictatorship of Mustapha Kemal.

Whether Lausanne means complete peace to the Orient remains for the future to tell. The strategic geography of the Near East remains unaltered. The problem of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus continues, though the region has been "internationalized" and demilitarized. Nor has all been tranquil in the "liberated" regions which France and Britain took over from the old empire, as Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt bear ample witness. But modern Turkey is free from the corrupting influences of a worn-out empire. Out of the crucible of the most terrible war in history a new Turkey has emerged—a new Turkey in a new Orient, a modern state which may teach many lessons in that new Orient. The epic of war and carnage has given way to the epic of modernization. But the story of the modernization of this old Moslem land remains yet to be told.