



War and Peace in Europe from Napoleon to the Kaiser The Russo-Turkish War, 1875-1878

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We've seen in the first four lectures in this series how Russia played a central part in the history of war and peace in nineteenth-century Europe, from the defeat of Napoleon through the suppression of the 1848 Revolution to the Crimean War of 1854-56. One constant of Russian foreign policy throughout this period was expansion across Central Asia to the Pacific, which provided an outlet for Tsarist ambitions after the setback of the Crimean War. Russian forces moved gradually eastwards, conquering Tashkent in 1865 and Samarkand in 1868. By the 1870s the Russians were expanding into what is now Turkmenistan.

At the same time, the Russians had completed their conquest of the Caucasus in the 1860s. And in 1870, the Russian foreign minister Gorchakov was able to exploit for his own purposes the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War, in which Russia had effectively backed Bismarck by guaranteeing its benevolent neutrality and potentially threatening Austria and so preventing the Austrians from moving to support the French. On 15 November, he repudiated the clauses in the peace settlement after the Crimean War that established the neutrality of the Black Sea. The British objected but had no support, and a conference in London on 17 January 1871 allowed the Russians to send warships into the Black Sea once more. One of the constants of Russian foreign policy through the century had also been the drive to secure a warm-water port in the Mediterranean. This drive had been in abeyance in the years after the defeat of 1856. Now it was under way again.

Russia's chances of achieving this aim grew as the Ottoman Empire declined. The major reason for the decline was financial. It was not until 1840 that the first bank was opened in Constantinople, and the first banknotes were not numbered and thus extremely easy to forge. There was no state budget until the 1840s either; the Ministry of Finance was only set up in 1839. Though things improved a little by the mid-1850s, the finances of the Empire were utterly unable to cope with the huge costs of the Ottoman participation in the Crimean War.

So Ottoman administrators arranged a large loan from the British and French, and soon they became accustomed to asking for more in order to cover the expenses of running the Empire. With a return of 10 per cent, private banks in western Europe were only too happy to lend. At the same time, the Ottoman government tried to raise money by imposing internal trade tariffs and imposing an export tax of 12 per cent. International agreements negotiated to facilitate the loans prevented the Empire from levying more than 5 per cent on imports. So it was flooded with European industrial goods. All of this provided rich pickings for corrupt Ottoman administrators. "Corruption", a British observer noted, "is the rule from the highest to the lowest". The first thought of modern Turkish statesmen is to amass money. They know their tenure of office is insecure and they seize the opportunity... The British banks began to exert enormous influence in Istanbul; their representative brought about the fall of one Grand Vizier who refused to take out another state loan, getting him replaced by another who would. By the early 1870s the state finances were in a condition of acute crisis; by 1875 interest payments on the state debt ate up 44 per cent of total government revenues.

In this situation, the Ottoman state looked desperately around for ways of raising new revenues. In fact, the creation of a state bank, budgets, and a Finance Ministry had been part of a wide-ranging series of reforms that went on through the 1850s and 1860s. They included the guarantee of basic civil rights, the reform of the army, the introduction of civil and criminal law codes, the establishment of western-style universities, the construction of railways, the opening of a stock exchange, and much more. Central to these was the introduction of equal rights for all religious groups, and the creation of an Ottoman national identity, bolstered by the introduction of a national flag and a national anthem.

But these reforms were undermined by a massive influx of more than a million Muslim refugees who were fleeing the Russians as they invaded the Caucasus. Many of these found their way into Christian areas in the Balkans, where religious tensions grew rapidly. In many cases the Ottoman regime forcibly evicted Christians from their homes to make room for them. Then, in 1873, a major financial and economic collapse across Europe following the euphoric but brief boom of the early 1870s brought disaster. The loans dried up. A drought in 1872 led to massive crop failures across the Empire. Locust swarms denuded Cyprus of crops. A harsh winter led to widespread starvation. Dead bodies were seen on the streets of Istanbul and packs of wolves were observed attacking people in the suburbs. Flooding caused by the spring thaw made matters worse. By early 1874, 90 per cent of the livestock in Anatolia and the southern Balkans had been slaughtered for food. The local and regional administration was completely unable to cope. The transport infrastructure was inadequate to ferry supplies to stricken areas. And crucially, the Ottoman government, rather than cutting expenditure, urged tax-collecting agencies - mostly tax farmers, independent entrepreneurs who had bought the right to collect taxes - on to ever greater efforts in an attempt to meet the state's overwhelming tax obligations. As the peasants fled, the collectors and the gendarmes who accompanied them looted the villages and took away contributions in kind. Resistance quickly spread, above all in Christian areas in the Balkans. Of course, Muslim peasants, labourers and landowners were as badly affected as their Christian counterparts, but the tax-farmers and the gendarmes who accompanied them were Muslim, so in Christian areas, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, religious conflict was added to the explosive mixture.

What completed it was the new factor of Pan-Slavism, which emerged in Russia in the 1870s and spread to the Balkans, as Orthodox Christian intellectuals and students began to argue that the smaller Slav nationalities belonged to a large family of nations headed by Russia. Such ideas were increasingly influential in the autonomous states of Serbia, Montenegro, and Moldavia/Wallachia (what we now know as Romania), still nominally under Ottoman rule but strongly sympathetic to the rebels in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Serbian radicals infiltrated Bosnia to support the peasant uprising, while in Bulgaria in 1876 a poorly prepared revolt led by nationalist revolutionaries was put down by the Ottoman army within a few weeks. The consequences of the Bulgarian revolt, however, were momentous; after the rebels had massacred a number of Muslim civilians, the irregulars who accompanied the Ottoman forces, the bashi-bazouks, slaughtered any Bulgarians they found as they suppressed the rebellion. Arriving in the town of Batak some weeks after the bashi-bazouks had retaken it, the Daily News correspondent, John MacGahan, reported:

We...all suddenly drew rein with an exclamation of horror, for right before us, almost beneath our horses' feet, was a sight that made us shudder. It was a heap of skulls, intermingled with bones from all parts of the human body, skeletons, nearly entire, rotting, clothing, human hair, and putrid flesh lying there in one foul heap...[The skeletons] were all small, and...the articles of clothing, intermingled with them and lying about, were all parts of women's apparel. These, then, were women and girls.

He estimated that 8,000 people had been killed by the irregulars altogether, though others put the number much higher. Bulgaria was relatively advanced; its produce accounted for a fifth of all Ottoman exports, and the rapid growth of towns, with an educated middle class, led to the emergence of a nationalist movement stronger than anywhere else in the Balkans at this time, apart from in Greece. They were able to publicize the massacres and arouse widespread public sympathy in western Europe. While governments, like that of Disraeli in England, were reluctant to intervene, since further weakening of the Ottoman Empire would

open the way to further advances by the Russians, popular sentiment, led in England by William Ewart Gladstone, who made his political comeback on the strength of a huge public campaign against what he called the "Bulgarian horrors", demanded action.

Yet action came in the first place from the Russians. Cartoonists in Britain portrayed Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina as "dogs of war" held on a leash by Russia, but in fact the extent to which Russia could control them was extremely limited. Nationalist sentiment was boiling up in Serbia. When an attempt at mediation by Austria, Russia and Germany in May 1876, based on a plan of reform in the Balkan provinces was rejected by the Sultan, the Serbs declared war on 30 June 1876. This aroused widespread sympathy in the political class in Russia, and Alexander had to yield to Pan-Slav pressure to allow volunteers to go and fight with the Serbs. On 11 November 1876, indeed, he praised "our volunteers, many of whom have paid with their blood for the cause of Slavdom".

The Serbs did not do well. They had done little to train their forces, and they only had 460 officers, augmented by 700 Russian volunteer officers, to command a rabble of 125,000 peasants. They were poorly armed, with weapons that were either obsolete or home-made, and relied on numbers rather than equipment. The Ottoman army reforms, by contrast, had created an effective force, armed with Martini-Henry and Snider rifles and Krupp field artillery. Led by a Russian general, 68,000 Serbs attacked the Ottoman fort of Nis, and were soundly defeated, with 5,000 dead and 9,500 wounded. At this point, the Russians stepped in, and threatened war on the Ottomans unless peace was concluded on the basis of the status quo ante, which it was on 17 February 1877.

These events had major repercussions in Istanbul. Sultan Abdulaziz was deposed in a military coup led by the so-called Young Ottomans, most of whom had been educated in western European universities, on 30 May 1876 and murdered a few days later. His successor, Murad V, was not a strong character; on hearing the news of his brother's death, he fainted, and on coming round is said to have vomited for a day and a half before recovering from the shock. The Young Ottomans had wanted him to grant a Constitution, but he failed to do anything, so they deposed him on grounds of insanity on 31 August 1876 in favour of another brother, Abdulhamid II. Realising the need to keep in with the Young Ottomans, he granted a Constitution almost immediately. Together with the defeat of the Serbian army, this made him for the moment extremely popular. This made him feel strong enough to reject another attempt at international mediation in the London Protocol, agreed by all the major powers on 31 March 1877, which contained a demand for further reforms in the Balkan provinces. The inevitable result was that on 24 April 1877, yielding finally to Pan-Slav pressure, Alexander II of Russia declared war, having previously secured the support of the Austrians by promising them Bosnia, and the Romanians by promising to defend their territorial integrity if they allowed Russian armies safe passage.

During the spring of 1877, Russian forces moved southwards, crossed the Danube, and in July arrived at the well-defended Bulgarian town of Plevna, which had been reinforced by a large Ottoman army under Osman Pasha. Failing twice to take the city, the Tsar agreed to accept Romanian support, but a third major assault failed as well, with the loss of 18,000 Russian and Romanian lives. In desperation, the Tsar ordered in the engineer General Totleben, who had organized the defence of Sebastopol in the Crimean War. Increasing the Russian and Romanian armies' strength to 100,000, Totleben successfully cut off Plevna, captured outlying positions, and repulsed an attempt to break out. On 9 December 1877 Osman Pasha surrendered, taking 2,000 officers and 44,000 men into Russian captivity.

In the Caucasus, the Turks fomented rebellions among the Muslims who were in areas ruled by the Russians, causing the Russians to weaken their forces and halting their progress. However, in the autumn of 1877 fierce fighting in a series of battles ended with the capture of the town of Kars by the Russians on 17 November 1877, leading to a headlong Turkish retreat, in which 17,000 of the fleeing troops were taken prisoner. It was in the Balkans, however, that the decisive actions took place. A force of 71,000 troops took the Bulgarian city of Sofia on 3 January 1878 and then defeated a Turkish army at the Battle of Plovdiv. Another Russian force of 50,000 led by the dashing General Skobelev destroyed a Turkish Army in a three-

day battle, from 7 to 9 January 1878, at the Shipka Pass, forcing the surrender of 22,000 Turkish troops. This was the last straw for the Ottomans, who gave up, and shortly after the Russians entered Adrianople, an armistice was signed on 31 January 1878.

The Russians lost no time in signing a formal treaty, at the town of San Stefano, where negotiations were completed on 3 March. The treaty created an independent, and large Bulgaria, which included the whole of Macedonia except Salonica, and, crucially, gave it access to the Aegean via western Thrace. This was clearly going to be a Russian client state. It thoroughly alarmed the British, who had already sent a fleet to the Sea of Marmara on 13 February 1878. And it ignored the Austrians by leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina in Ottoman hands. Together with Russian gains in the Caucasus, it looked as if the Ottoman Empire was going to be broken up, and the main beneficiary would be the Tsar.

And indeed, things looked very black for the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s. Unable to finance its military operations in view of the massive public debt with which it was burdened, amounting by this time to more than half the state's revenue every year, the Ottoman government declared bankruptcy in 1875. In 1881 an international agreement created the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, which soon had a staff of more than 5,000 officials. It was run by the Empire's creditors, effectively on behalf of the British and French banks to which most of the money was owed, and it had the right to collect taxes and customs dues and finance profitable ventures such as railway construction. This humiliating situation continued until after the First World War, and severely undermined the legitimacy of the Ottoman government.

The new Sultan, Abdulhamid II, granted a constitution under pressure shortly after his accession in 1876, but with the outbreak of war in 1877 he saw no need to continue with it, and suspended it indefinitely. Narrowly suspicious, perhaps not without reason in the light of the fate of his two immediate predecessors, Abdulhamid not only effectively locked himself away in his palace, but also kept the large and arguably effective Ottoman battle fleet inside the Golden Horn because he thought that the navy officers were liberals who would conspire against him if they were allowed out of his sight. This made it difficult for the Empire to do anything to stop the further loss of territory in the longer run, most notably Egypt and the Sudan, where the British took over in 1882 ostensibly to secure public order, in fact in order to provide in-depth security for the Suez Canal. In 1897, Ottoman forces defeated a Greek invasion of Crete, but the great powers intervened and in effect given to Greece anyway.

In the immediate aftermath of the Treaty of San Stefano, however, with the British and Austrians in the lead, the Concert of Europe was revived, and the Russians were forced to agree to an international conference, to be held in Berlin in June. After frantic behind-the-scenes negotiations, the Russians managed to get most of what they wanted. Bulgaria was cut down to size, depriving it of access to the Aegean. The province of Eastern Rumelia returned to the Ottoman Empire. Despite promises to its Romanian ally, Russia annexed Bessarabia, in the north-east corner of Romania, which received some territorial compensation in northern Dobrudja. In the Caucasus, Russia annexed Batum and Kars. Serbian independence was recognized along with Romanian and Montenegrin, and all three states gained territory from the Ottoman Empire in addition. Bosnia, Herzegovina and Novi Bazar were nominally still under Ottoman rule but under the Treaty administered by Austria. In effect, the Treaty created two spheres of influence in the Balkans; the Austrian in the west, including Serbia - much to the annoyance of the Serbs - and the Russian in the east. Despite all these gains, Russian public opinion was outraged, since the comparison it made was not with the situation before the war but with the situation created by the Treaty of San Stefano.

Pan-Slavism grew in vehemence as a result, and its obvious hostility to Germany, the host of the conference, led Bismarck to conclude an alliance with Austria the following year, expanding it with the inclusion of Italy in 1882 into the Triple Alliance. After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, Bismarck put another layer onto his diplomatic house of cards by creating the Three Emperors' League between Russia, Austria and Germany. In the long run, however, this was bound to fall apart because of growing Austro-Russian antagonism in the Balkans. But for the moment, it papered over the crack more or less

successfully. As a by-product of the negotiations, the British occupied Cyprus, another Ottoman possession, in exchange for agreeing to defend Turkish territories in Asia against further Russian aggression. For the rest of the century, indeed, the British were in a continual state of anxiety about Russian ambitions in Afghanistan and on the north-west frontier of India.

The effect of dividing the Balkans into Austrian and Russian spheres of influence was to prove disastrous in the long run. It tied the unstable Balkan states and territories to the interests and prestige of two great powers, and at the same time fomented resentments and ambitions amongst these states that would eventually create major conflicts. None of them was satisfied with the territorial settlement it received. All of them resented the Congress's insistence that they insert into their constitutions the guarantee of freedom of religion - mainly for Muslims in Serbia and Montenegro, and for Jews in Romania. Montenegro was given access to the sea but told it was not allowed to have armed vessels and that all its merchant ships had to fly the Habsburg flag. As the British consul in Istanbul remarked: "Those who think themselves strong enough to support their aspirations by arms will be ready to rebel against the authority under which they believe they have been placed in violation of justice and of the principle of "nationality". Those who cannot recur to force will have recourse to intrigue and conspiracy. Both processes have already begun."

Conflicts began almost immediately with an ethnic Albanian rebellion against Montenegro, and a Macedonian uprising against the Ottomans. Muslims in Bosnia, as in Albania, rebelled against the Christian rule imposed by the Treaty. There was a peasant revolt in Serbia, and in 1885 a mass revolt backed by the German prince who had been appointed King of Bulgaria by popular acclaim brought Eastern Rumelia back under Bulgarian control despite a Serbian invasion, which was easily defeated by the regular Bulgarian army. The Russians conspired to oust him in favour of yet another German prince the following year, who had little real legitimacy in the country.

This had little effect except to deliver the country into the hands of the ruthless Stefan Stambulov, who tried to deal with continuing Russian hostility, and the chronic economic problems that plagued the country, by establishing a police state. In 1893, Macedonian refugees, of whom there were many thousands in Belgrade, formed a terrorist group eventually called the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, or IMRO, dedicated to using violence to free Macedonia from Ottoman rule. Stambulov was trying to counter Russian hostility by a rapprochement with the Ottomans, thus arousing the violent hatred of the Macedonians. In 1894 King Ferdinand dismissed him, and some months later Stambulov was attacked in the street by a crowd of Macedonians who tore his hands off his arms and left him to die. Macedonian jeers at his public funeral a few days later were only stopped when his widow held up two jars containing his pickled hands.

The violence of the Macedonian revolutionaries, both the IMRO and other terrorist groups, whose aim was to prod Bulgaria into a war with the Ottomans, bordered on simple criminality as they used extortion and intimidation to raise funds. Within Ottoman Macedonia, they attacked and killed Ottoman officials and confiscated their funds. In 1897 one such incident led to a massive Turkish crackdown in which huge quantities of weapons and ammunition were seized. This only increased the radicalism of the revolutionaries, and in 1903 they took over 28 villages near the Bulgarian border, killing more than 500 Turkish troops. As the Turkish army poured in reinforcements, murders and bomb attacks spread, until they merged into a general uprising, eventually put down by regular Turkish troops and bashi-bazouks, who burned 119 villages to the ground, razed 8,400 houses and drove 50,000 refugees into the mountains. This effectively crushed the revolutionary movement. But it seriously alienated international opinion.

For, alarmed by these events, the Austrians and Russians tried a joint intervention, sending in an international police force, which was accepted by the Sultan. Behind the scenes, Abdulhamid now turned to Germany for help, and soon German officers were training Ottoman troops, and German engineers building a new railway to Baghdad financed by German banks. All of this increasingly undermined the Sultan's authority within the Empire, as growing foreign intervention, increasing repression, and the refusal to reintroduce the 1876 Constitution, led to the emergence of conspiracies to try and oust him.

Shortly after his accession, Abdulhamid had abandoned the previous policy of trying to create an Ottoman national identity, and, perhaps reacting to the loss of a very large proportion of the Empire's Christian population in the Balkans, and the migration of hundreds of thousands of Muslims from the new Balkan states to Anatolia, substituted a new ideology of pan-Islamism. From now on, the Sultan's religious status as the Caliph was emphasized as the basis for allegiance. Abdulhamid put the Empire's troubles down to an international conspiracy of the Christian world, and in particular to the Christian Armenian minority in Anatolia, mostly well-off traders and merchants, whom the Treaty of Berlin had ostensibly obliged him to protect. Increasingly the Armenians demanded the implementation of these measures, including the constitution of 1876 and the extension to them of voting rights as well as the ending of punitive taxation on the Christian minority. Tensions in Anatolia were increased by the influx since 1878 of hundreds of thousands of Christian immigrants from the lost Balkan provinces.

In 1892-3, Muslim crowds, egged on by officials who claimed the Armenians were trying to destroy Islam, began massacring the area's Armenian population. When Armenian nationalist groups retaliated, they were crushed by an Ottoman army, after which local and regional officials encouraged further violence against them, aided by Kurdish irregulars sent in by the Sultan. The worst atrocity occurred with the burning alive of 3,000 Armenians in the cathedral of Urfa. A protest demonstration of Armenians in Istanbul was suppressed and followed by widespread killings of Armenians in the capital. Foreign intervention, again urged by Gladstone, never became a reality. The massacres continued until 1897, when the nationalists had all been killed or forced into exile.

After this, Armenian political activities were effectively banned. Between 100,000 and 300,000 had been killed. Another 30,000 died in the town of Adana in 1909 when a reactionary movement to suppress calls for the return of the 1876 constitution degenerated into a series of pogroms. The scene was already set for the massive genocide of 1915, in which at least half a million Armenians were slaughtered, most probably more, leaving only 100,000 or so still alive in the territory of the Empire.

Already by the end of the 1890s the Armenian massacres had lost Abdulhamid any sympathy he still enjoyed in the international community. By 1908 he had lost support particularly in the army, reorganized and built up since the middle of the century and now trained by effective Prussian officers. Suspicious of the younger officers, many of whom had visited western Europe and imbibed western ideas, the Sultan starved the army of funds. Corruption also meant that often officers did not get paid. In 1907-8 conspirators organized in a self-styled clandestine Committee for Union and Progress assassinated many of the police agents who had infiltrated the army, then moved into action. Garrison after garrison now openly declared their support for the Committee. Abdulhamid, afraid for his life, declared he would reintroduce the 1876 Constitution. This was the Young Turk Revolution.

Remarkably, in declaring its support for freedom and democracy, it had the support of minority nationalist groups including the Macedonians. But the Young Turks had little idea of how to put their ideas into action beyond getting rid of Abdulhamid, which they did by deposing him the following year. All over the region, however, the revolution was seen as the signal for action. Bulgaria declared itself fully independent, while the Habsburg Monarchy formally annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina. These actions seemed even to the Young Turks a sign that Christian powers were exploiting the situation, and they now resisted any further concessions to the Christian minority. So the Macedonian terrorist movement resumed its activities.

Meanwhile, in the period since the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885, all the Balkan powers had been arming to the teeth, buying up the latest weaponry from Europe's leading arms manufacturers with loans supplied by the British, French and German governments, keen to support their arms industries in these ways. Urged on by Macedonian officers in the army, Bulgaria spent so much money that by the mid-1890s a third of the state budget was being spent on the army and in 1902, unable to pay the interest due on all the loans, the country had to declare state bankruptcy.

Similarly, the Serbs devoted massive resources to building up their army, which became so powerful that when King Alexander Obrenovic attempted to purge it in 1903, a group of young officers led by Dragutin Dimitrievic, known as Apis, charged into the palace, shot the king and queen in their bedroom and mutilated their corpses before throwing them out of the window. Installing a leading member of the rival Karadjordjevic family as King Peter, the army now had free rein to order whatever weaponry it wanted, building up a state debt to the French of nearly 400 million francs by the end of 1906. In Greece, young army officers frustrated by the defeat by Turkey over Crete in 1908 and fired up by the example of the Young Turks, overthrew the government in a coup d'état in August 1909, eventually handing over power to a skilled nationalist politician, Eleftherios Venizelos, who immediately began to reform the state finances and begin a rapid programme of rearmament.

The purpose of all this arms build-up was to take advantage of the collapse of Turkey, the disintegration of its armed forces, and its loss of international support, and annex more territory. The threat posed by the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 was met by the construction of a series of mutual alliances, encouraged by Russia, as well as the mounting of a campaign of subversion within the annexed provinces. The Balkan tinder-box was lit, however, not by any of these countries, but by Italy, which, seeking compensation for its ignominious failure to conquer Ethiopia, invaded the Ottoman province of Libya, or Tripoli, in 1911.

The Ottomans declared war, and the Italian fleet appeared in the Aegean and annexed the Dodecanese islands the following year. Meanwhile, in 1909, the Albanians, denied the use of their language and deprived of any kind of education system by the centralizing Young Turk regime in Istanbul, even though they were Muslims, rose up in a confused but violent rebellion, fuelled by electoral manipulation that stopped any Albanian deputies being elected to the Istanbul parliament in 1912. The Turks were powerless to prevent 20,000 poorly organized Albanian tribesmen occupying the Macedonian town of Skopje in 1912. This convinced Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia that the moment had come to attack. Thus began the First Balkan War.

The region rapidly descended into chaos as the Bulgarians invaded Thrace, the Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs Macedonia, the Montenegrins and Serbs northern Albania and Kosovo, and the Greeks southern Albania. A war on so many fronts proved impossible for the already demoralized and disorganized Ottoman forces to cope with. Within days, the Serbs defeated a Turkish army at Kumanovo and entered Skopje. An eyewitness in the town of Kumanovo reported how the "Turk divisions ran amok through the town in chaotic retreat. They had no guns, open wounds without tourniquet, maimed, blood-soaked and barefoot'serbian shrapnel began falling on the station, and the railway personnel scattered as if being shot at like sparrows."

Serb forces moved through the area, largely populated by Albanian Muslims, setting light to villages and massacring their inhabitants. A Serbian socialist in the army reported how the people of Skopje woke up "every morning to the sight,...in the very centre of the town...of heaps of Albanian corpses with severed heads....[It was] clear that these headless men had not been killed in battle." The lead in the massacres was taken by the Black Hand, led by Colonel Apis, an ultra-nationalist paramilitary organization that aimed to create a Greater Serbia including Bosnia, Croatia and Macedonia. It soon controlled the occupied areas of Macedonia. Following the defeat of a Greek army at Bitola, the Serb forces, 110,000 strong, attacked 90,000 Turkish troops in a three-day battle that left 12,000 Serbs and 17,000 Turkish soldiers dead; the Ottoman general finally surrendered, leading 45,000 of his troops into captivity while another 30,000 fled to the nearby hills. Meanwhile, a Greek force raced to Salonika, occupying the city just before the Bulgarians arrived; relations between the two small states soon began to deteriorate as a result.

Elsewhere, however, the Bulgarians had more luck, taking possession of the key fortress of Lozengrad in Thrace and driving the Ottoman forces out of the region in disorder; while the retreating Turks massacred civilians on their way out, the incoming Bulgarians burned down every mosque they found. At the fortress of Çatalca the Bulgarians unleashed a massive bombardment from 900 field guns; the noise could be

heard in Istanbul more than 20 miles away, and the smoke obscured visibility along a 30-mile front. The Turks dug in, casualties began to mount, and the two armies fought each other to a standstill. The Ottomans had lost almost all that remained of their territories in Europe.

The conflict was largely over by the end of 1912, but Bulgarian-Turkish hostilities resumed in February 1913 at Adrianople, sparked by the Turkish refusal to cede the town to the Bulgarians as agreed in the peace negotiations. When the liberal administration in Istanbul agreed to the cession, it was overthrown by the Committee for Union and Progress, accompanied by demonstrations of religious students in the streets shouting "Death rather than dishonourable peace!". Eventually the city fell on 26 March 1913, leaving nearly 60,000 dead, many of them from cholera. On entering the city, the Bulgarians found the streets littered with decomposing corpses. Further attacks at Çatalca and Gallipoli failed to achieve their aims, and on 30 May 1913 the Bulgarians and Turks, along with the other states in the conflict, finally signed the Treaty of London, brokered by the Great Powers. It ratified the removal of the Ottomans from almost the entire region, and sealed the creation of an independent Albania.

This was not the end, however. Bulgaria was now seriously weakened by the conflict, and the Serbs now threatened to annex the Macedonian territories they occupied, on which Bulgaria had a claim, while the Romanians demanded the cession of north-eastern Bulgaria (the south-eastern Dobrudja) while the Greeks began to menace the area around Salonika. Disastrously, the Bulgarian general Savov, instructed by the King but without sanction by the government, launched a pre-emptive attack on the Serbs on 28 June 1913, prompted partly by mutinies and desertions amongst the battle-weary troops. The Greeks inflicted a heavy defeat on the main Bulgarian army, while the Serbs repulsed the Bulgarian attack, the Romanians marched into the southern Dobrudja and even the Ottomans took the opportunity to reoccupy part of eastern Thrace, retaking Adrianople in the process. When the Romanian forces were within 7 miles of the Bulgarian capital of Sofia, the Bulgarians brought the month-long conflict to an end.

By the end of the Second Balkan War some of the combatants had lost a good deal of what they had gained in the First, but nevertheless, in the Treaties of Bucharest and Constantinople, Bulgaria enlarged its territory by 16 percent compared to what it was before the First Balkan War, and increased its population from 4.3 to 4.7 million people. Romania enlarged its territory by 5 percent and Montenegro by 62 percent. Greece increased its population from 2.7 to 4.4 million and its territory by 68 percent. Serbia almost doubled its territory and expanded its population from 2.9 to 4.5 million. The Ottomans had managed to recapture eastern Thrace, and at the end of the conflict clung on to the small part of Europe that still belongs to Turkey today.

The Balkan Wars were a catastrophe for Russia. Its carefully constructed system of Balkan alliances had collapsed in the most spectacular possible way. The most powerful state in the region, Bulgaria, was dissatisfied, and angry at the Russians' failure to support it, and now looked to Germany as an ally. The only ally left was Serbia, which Russia could not now afford to antagonize, and this gave the Serbians enormous leverage which they were to use to the full in 1914. The Russian aim of gaining access to the Mediterranean had been completely frustrated. Serbia now looked to Bosnia-Herzegovina to increase its territory, having gained more or less what it wanted in other directions from the two Balkan Wars.

The Balkan Wars were remarkable for the sheer scale of the mobilization. Serbia had a population of less than three million but put into the field an army larger than any the first Napoleon had mustered. Bulgaria mobilized half a million men, a good quarter of its entire male population. Armies dug trenches and subjected their enemy to ruthless bombardment by artillery. Troops were now all dressed in camouflaged khaki or field-grey uniforms. Cavalry only played a subordinate part. All those involved except Romania and Montenegro put combat planes into the air and used them for bombing, though only on a small scale. Searchlights bore down on the enemy lines allowing 24-hour combat. Though the wars were brief, they involved the almost total mobilization of the combatant economies.

All observers commented on the fervent nationalism of the Serbs and Bulgarians in particular, and their desire to liberate their Christian co-religionists and regain what they regarded as their historic lands long under Ottoman, Muslim rule. At the same time, the territorial ambitions of the combatants went well beyond annexing areas that could be argued to belong to their respective nation-states by culture, language or history. The invasion of Albania by the Montenegrins, for example, or the Greater Serbia programme of the Black Hand, were effectively examples of imperialism, now turned in towards Europe, in which conquest was pursued for reasons of prestige, economic gain, or power politics. This was total war, this was popular war, this was war to the death, this was war between peoples as well as between states and armies. The massacres of civilians prefigured the genocides that were to occur later in the 20th century, as people who were seen as alien were killed in the supposed interests of the racial or religious integrity of the nation-state; Bulgarians burnt mosques as they advanced, and in Macedonia, the occupying powers, notably Serbia, began a ruthless programme of assimilation to their own language and culture, attempting to obliterate minority cultures in the process.

Although they were brief in duration, the Balkan Wars led directly to the death of 200,000 troops on all sides, and the chaos they spread caused the deaths of scores of thousands of civilians from disease, especially cholera and typhus. In many ways they were a portent of things to come. And yet, these were brief wars, in which all the combatant nations had clearly defined and limited aims and achieved them to a sufficient degree to allow them to agree to a ceasefire. It was not the purpose of any of the combatants to achieve the total destruction of their opponents. Territorial gains were what was at stake, and once these were more or less achieved, the belligerents drew the conflict to a close.

At the same time, however, it was clear that the Great Powers were becoming increasingly drawn in to such conflicts. In the First Balkan War, for example, when Montenegro in alliance with Serbia attacked northern Albania, where there were virtually no Serbs or Montenegrins amongst the inhabitants, Italy and Austria-Hungary demanded their withdrawal, Russia began to mobilize in support of the Serbs, and France declared its support for the Russians. The situation was only defused by a British intervention resulting in a general international conference that guaranteed independence for Albania. The Montenegrins captured Skutari while the Russians and Austro-Hungarians squabbled about the precise borders of the new state, and their refusal to withdraw threatened to escalate the situation again, until the powers paid a huge bribe to the Montenegrin monarch King Nikola that persuaded him to withdraw. The whole episode was an ominous foretaste of what was to happen in August 1914, and that will be the subject of my next, and final lecture in this series, on April 22nd.

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