

BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

AN ANALYSIS  
OF  
BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE:  
KEEPING THE OTTOMAN TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY  
AND  
POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE  
1870 - 1878

BY  
AYŞE KILIÇ YILMAZ

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

JANUARY 1998  
ANKARA

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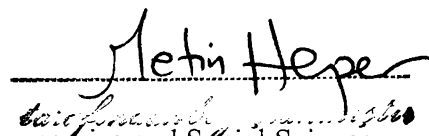
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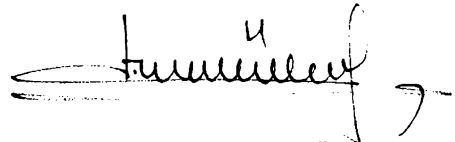
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Dr. Hasan Ünal

## ABSTRACT

One of the cardinal principles of the British foreign policy in the nineteenth century was to “maintain the Ottoman territorial integrity and independence”. The British had been assuming that, should Russia move into the Eastern Mediterranean it could have easily threatened not only the Imperial route and India but also the British mainland itself. For this reason, keeping the Ottoman independent existence on the Straits was formulated by Palmerston in 1833 as an integral part of British foreign policy. This interest was so vital for Britain that it not only fought Russia in the Crimean War for its achievement but also announced any attack on the Ottoman Empire casus belli in the Treaty of Paris of 1856. However, since 1870 the European balance created by the Treaty of Paris began to be shaken by the establishment of a united Germany. Britain, which had imposed the policy of isolationism from the Continent since 1865, remained completely isolated in Europe when the Three Emperors’ League was formed by Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia in 1873.

When a peasant revolt began in 1875 in Herzegovina, British guarantee for the Ottoman integrity and independence remained intact. However, spread of the revolt to Bulgaria and the Ottoman use of irregulars to suppress the Bulgarian revolt caused immense reaction in the British public. As a social phenomenon, the Bulgarian agitation had a deep impact on British foreign policy, and resulted in British refusal to fight for the Ottoman existence in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 despite its commitments in the international agreements declaring any attack on the Ottoman Empire casus belli. The purpose of this study is to analyze the emergence and evolution of this well-known British policy and to explain whether Britain abandoned its guarantee to the Ottoman Empire after the Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878.

## ÖZET

“Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun bağımsızlığını ve toprak bütünlüğünü korumak” ondokuzuncu yüzyıl İngiltere dış politikasının ana prensiplerindendi. İngilizler, Doğu Akdeniz’e inmiş bir Rusya’nın sadece Hindistan’ı ve sömürgelerle bağlantı yolunu tehdit etmekle kalmayıp İngiltere anakarası için de tehlike oluşturacağını düşünüyorlardı. Bu sebeple, İngiliz Dışişleri Bakanı Palmerston 1833’de Osmanlı bağımsızlığını koruma ilkesini İngiliz dış politikasına ilave etti. 1856’da İngiltere Osmanlı varlığını korumak için Rusya ile savaşmakla kalmadı; ayrıca Paris Antlaşmasına koydurduğu bir madde ile Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’na yapılacak herhangi bir saldırıyı savaş nedeni sayacağını açıkladı. Ancak, 1870’de Alman birliğinin tamamlanmasıyla Avrupa’da 1856 Paris Antlaşmasıyla kurulmuş olan güçler dengesi bozuldu. Zaten 1865’den beri Avrupa’da ‘tecrid’ politikası uygulayan İngiltere, 1873’de Almanya, Avusturya-Macaristan ve Rusya’nın ‘Üç İmparatorlar Ligi’nin diriltmesiyle tamamen yalnız kaldı.

1875 yılında Hersek’de bir Hıristiyan köylü ayaklanması başladığında İngiltere’nin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’na verdiği garanti devam etmekte idi. Fakat, ayaklanmanın Bulgaristan’a sıçraması ve Osmanlıların bu ayaklanmayı bastırmak için Başbozukları kullanmaları İngiliz kamuoyunda büyük tepkiye yol açtı. ‘Bulgar katliamı’ propagandası, sosyal bir fenomen olarak İngiliz dış politikasını ciddi şekilde etkiledi ve İngiltere’nin 1877’de Ruslar Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’na saldırdığı zaman, altına imza koyduğu uluslararası antlaşmalara rağmen, Osmanlı varlığı için savaşmayı reddetmesi sonucunu doğurdu. Bu çalışmanın amacı, İngiltere’nin yukarıda açıklanan Osmanlı politikasının doğuşunu ve evrimini irdelemek; 1875-1878 Doğu Sorununun bu politika üzerindeki etkilerini açıklamak ve İngilizlerin 1878’den sonra bu ünlü politikalarını terkedip etmedikleri sorusuna cevap bulmaktır.



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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

One of the cardinal principles of the British foreign policy in the nineteenth century was to “maintain the Ottoman independence and territorial integrity”. Various explanations have been advanced for Britain’s interest in prolonging the life of the Ottoman Empire. Although the British need for new markets and raw materials for its expanding industry have been listed as the reasons of this policy, the major underlying factor was something about the geopolitical position of the Ottoman Empire (1). Located on the Straits, the Ottoman Empire was the only power that could block any kind of Russian move into the Eastern Mediterranean. The British Foreign Office had been assuming that, should Russia move into the Mediterranean it could have easily threatened not only the Imperial Route and India but also the British mainland itself. For this reason, the independent existence of the Ottoman Empire on the Straits was *sine qua non* for British vital interests in the nineteenth century.

This study will explain the reasons for the shift of British foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire from 1870 up to 1878. The thesis question can be formulated as such:

Why did Britain refuse to fight for Ottoman existence against Russia in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 despite its reputation in the Crimean War and its commitments in the international agreements declaring an attack on the Ottoman Empire *casus belli*?

In this chapter, the emergence of British policy of keeping Ottoman independence, in 1833, and its evolution through the Crimean War in 1856, will be analyzed.

The next chapter will deal with the changes in British domestic conditions and in the foreign policy orientation which especially emerged after the death of the Viscount Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, in 1865, and also will discuss the changing conditions of the European balance of power system after 1870. There will be an evaluation of the results of these changes that occurred either in Britain itself or in the European system on Anglo-Ottoman relations.

The third chapter will concentrate on the Eastern Question of 1875-1878 and its repercussions on great power politics. In order to see the evolution of British foreign policy concerning the Ottoman Empire, the British attitude at the beginning of the crisis will be discussed and then, explain the shift and reasoning in this new British attitude will be explained.

The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 and the British reaction to this war will be analyzed in the fourth chapter. Especially, there will be an analysis of the dynamics of British domestic politics which mostly influenced its foreign policy direction.

The next chapter will be about the new official formulation of British policy in the Near East by Marquis of Salisbury, the Foreign Secretary. It will also explain how Salisbury gave a new direction to British foreign policy by ending 'isolationism'.

In the conclusion part, there will be a general evaluation of the evolution of British objectives concerning the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, whether the Palmerstonian principle of maintaining the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire continued or not after the Eastern crisis of 1875-1878 will be discussed.



## 1.1. BRITAIN'S NEW INTEREST IN THE NEAR EAST

When did the British formulate the policy of preserving the Ottoman integrity and independence as an integral part of their foreign policy? In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, British anxiety for the Ottoman existence was slight. The event which marks the beginning of this well-known British policy was the Eastern crisis of 1833, specifically, the signing of the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi between Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

By the early 1830s, Mehmet Ali Pasha, the governor of Egypt, was becoming a danger to the Porte. He had demanded Syria as a price for his assistance to the Ottomans in suppressing the Greek revolt of 1829. When his demand was refused, he revolted in 1831 and achieved a major victory over the Ottoman army at the battle of Konya in December 1832 (2). Faced with the danger of his empire's dissolution, Mahmud II, appealed both to Britain and France for maritime assistance but both states were so involved in the Belgian crisis that they did not respond to the Sultan. By February 1833, the Sultan was so alarmed by Mehmet Ali Pasha's advances that he had to appeal to his former adversary, Russia. Nicholas I, who was pursuing the policy of maintaining the legitimate order everywhere, including the Ottoman Empire, but with a strong Russian influence over its government (3), immediately dispatched seven ships of the line bearing, and a force of forty thousand men encamped on the Asiatic shores of the Bosphorus (4). The presence of the Russian forces so close to Constantinople and the Straits led to the involvement of Britain and France. Diplomatic efforts of these states, together with the Russian armed existence forced Mehmet Ali Pasha to sign the Peace of Kütahya which gave him Syria (5). Because of British insistence, the Russians began to withdraw their forces so the crisis seemed to have ended without a conflict between the great powers. However,

before the withdrawal of their forces the Russians signed the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi with the Porte on July 8, 1833.

On the surface, it was only a mutual-defence pact for an eight year duration (6). The treaty provided for mutual assistance in case the independence of either state was endangered. Its most important feature was a secret article that limited the Sultan's obligations to Russia, in case it was attacked, to close the Straits at Russia's command (7). The real meaning of the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi was a Russian protectorate over the Ottoman Empire. It simply placed the Sultan in the lap of the Tsar.

When this secret annex became known to Britain it caused immense reaction. In fact, the British Foreign Office had not been actively interested in Ottoman affairs since 1827. When the Russo-Ottoman Treaty was revealed, Palmerston was quick to perceive its real significance. This meant that the British Imperial Route and even India were faced with a direct Russian threat. Although he had previously looked upon the Near East as of no great importance, now, he began to consider it as the mainspring of his whole Mediterranean and Indian policy (8). In his opinion, the security of India and the Imperial Route could be guaranteed as far as Russia was kept away from the Eastern Mediterranean. With these considerations, the Foreign Secretary formulated Britain's new interest in the Near East with a two-fold aim: first to maintain the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire against foreign, that is, Russian aggression; second to encourage the internal development of the Ottomans in order to ensure that it would no more need foreign assistance to continue its existence. After defining his policy, Palmerston specified two stages to achieve these objectives: firstly, a strong British influence over the Porte should replace the recently increased Russian influence. By this way, Britain could easily motivate the Ottoman government to make

reforms which would strengthen the domestic and international position of the Porte. Secondly, the 'hated' Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi should be removed (9).

The suitable time for the application of British policy came when Mahmud II sent his army on Egypt in April 1839. Once again he was defeated by Mehmet Ali Pasha and once again the Ottoman Empire appeared to be at the point of dissolution (10). The Russian government realized that this time the great powers would not let Russia impose its own conditions to solve the crisis between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Nicholas I, the champion of the anti-revolutionary European campaign, had desired to isolate revolutionary France on the Continent. For this reason, he was anxious to gain British friendship and expressed his willingness to surrender the Treaty of 1833 (11).

As a result of this favourable international conjuncture, an understanding of Russia, Britain, the Habsburg Empire and Prussia, but not France, was achieved, in July 1840, on the Ottoman-Egyptian conflict and the status quo of the Straits. It was agreed that Mehmet Ali Pasha would have hereditary rule only in Egypt; and the Straits were to be closed when the Ottomans were not at war (12). At the end, on July 13, 1841, the Straits Convention was signed by the Ottoman Empire, Russia, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, France and Britain. It established the principle of closure of the Straits at peacetime as a European notion.

The Straits Convention was the first achievement of the Palmerstonian doctrine dealing with the Ottoman Empire since it removed Russian control over the Straits. On the other hand, since 1833 Britain had begun to give special importance to its relations with the Porte. But, as a result of Britain's late awakening, after 1833, with respect to the Near East, the British Foreign Office was faced with the very difficult task of strengthening the Ottoman Empire

without appearing to do so (13). Until 1854, though Britain refused to enter into a definite alliance with the Porte, as a complement to its policy of freeing the Ottoman Empire from Russian domination, Britain indirectly fostered the reform movement to an immeasurable degree in order to create a self-sufficient Ottoman Empire (14).

## **1.2. THE CRIMEAN WAR: BRITISH USE OF FORCE FOR OTTOMAN EXISTENCE**

By the end of 1852, the first signs of a new Eastern crisis appeared. Louis Napoleon, in his search for prestige, had earlier hit on the idea of supporting the claims of the Catholic Latin monks for control of the Holy Places in Palestine. When the Ottomans gave the privilege of making practical decisions to the Latins, the Tsar's prestige was challenged because he was much more genuinely the leader of the Orthodox church than Louis Napoleon was the protector of Catholic Latins (15). Furthermore, the French success was not only a challenge to the Tsar's religious prestige; it also threatened the Russian policy towards the Ottoman Empire as the Russian policy, since 1829, had been the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire as a buffer state securing the Black Sea. However, the essential condition for this policy was that the Porte should be under strong Russian influence whereas now the Ottomans had shown that they were under strong French influence (16).

In order to restore Russian influence at Constantinople, Nicholas I sent a special mission to Constantinople in February 1853. Even a demonstration of power -the massing of large bodies of Russian troops on the Ottoman frontier- was staged to support the diplomatic advances represented by Prince Alexander Menshikov (17). The Menshikov mission was not only to undo the French victory over the Holy Places, his instructions also called for guarantees for

the future in the form of a document, having the force of a treaty, that would clearly state Russian protectorship over the Orthodox subjects of the empire, a claim based on the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774, however misinterpreted (18). When the Porte refused all Russian demands, on 21 May the special Russian envoy broke off relations with the Porte and departed, taking the Russian diplomatic staff with him. The energetic opposition of Stratford Canning, the British ambassador at Constantinople, was one of the main cause of the failure of the Menshikov mission (19).

Before his departure Menshikov issued an ultimatum to the Porte and this provoked Britain and France. On 2 June, the British fleet was ordered to Besika Bay, outside the Dardanelles, and a few days later, it was joined by the French fleet. Upon the moves of the British and French fleets, the Tsar ordered occupation of the Danubian principalities and the Russian forces crossed the Pruth on July 2, 1853. Although the great powers had operated the diplomatic means, once again diplomacy had failed to prevent a Russo-Ottoman war. On 4 October, the Sultan under public pressure declared war on Russia (20).

Destruction of a squadron of the Ottoman fleet at Sinop on 30 November mobilized the British and French fleet into the Black Sea. The two fleets were to protect the Ottoman ships and to confine the Russian navy to its base at Sebastopol. These instructions were communicated to Russia on January 12, 1854. The next move was a declaration of war (21).

The Tsar's sole hope was to mobilize the Three Emperors' League of the Habsburg Empire, Prussia and Russia. He demanded both from the Habsburgs and Prussia armed neutrality. So, he would be secure on his western frontiers and be able to concentrate his forces on the Danube and in southern Russia. However, neither the Habsburg Empire, who did not want to

remain neutral in the Eastern question. nor Prussia, who intended to remain neutral at all costs accepted the Tsar's offer (22). This meant that Russia remained alone against a coalition of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France.

Since Russia refused the ultimatum of Britain and France for withdrawal from the Danubian principalities, on March 31, 1854 these two states declared war on Russia. On 20 April, Britain, France, Prussia and the Habsburg Empire concluded a formal alliance for the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire as an indispensable condition of peace (23). So, for the first time, the British policy of keeping Ottoman independence and integrity was defined as a European principle. After the fall of Sebastopol on September 1855, there was no alternative for the new Tsar, Alexander II, but to accept the Allies' 'four points' for peace: 1. Russia was to abolish its protectorate over Moldavia, Wallachia, and Serbia; 2. The navigation of the Danube was to be free to the commercial ships of all nations; 3. The Straits Convention of 1841 was to be revised in the sense of a limitation of the Russian maritime power in the Black Sea; and 4. The Tsar was to renounce the Russian claims of protectorate over the Orthodox subjects of the Sultan (24).

At the end of a long and bloody war which had cost the lives of nearly half a million men the peace congress met at Paris from February 25 till April 16, 1856. The Treaty of Paris which was signed on March 30, 1856 by Russia, Britain, France, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, Sardinia and the Ottoman Empire, imposed a solution to the problem of the relations between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in three ways:

1- The Sultan gave a voluntary promise to reform: In Article 4 of the Treaty he announced his new reform decree based on the assurance of the equal treatment of his Christian and Muslim subjects (25).

2- The Black Sea was neutralized: This was a *sine qua non* condition of the British for peace. By the neutralization of the Black Sea the Russian way to the Eastern Mediterranean was blocked.

3- The Danubian principalities were made free of Russia: This ultimately led to an independent Romania (26).

As far as the Straits were concerned the Paris Treaty approved the solution of the Straits Convention of 1841 (27). The most important feature of the Paris Treaty of 1856 was that the Ottoman Empire was admitted to the Concert of Europe; the signatory states promised that they would respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire (28). Moreover, Britain, France and the Habsburg Empire, on April 15, 1856, signed another agreement guaranteeing the Ottoman independence and integrity and declaring any attack on the Ottoman Empire as *casus belli* (29).

The Crimean War was one of the cornerstones of the Anglo-Ottoman relations. Britain had shown that preserving the Ottoman existence was a vital interest that had to be ensured even by the use of force. Furthermore, it achieved to provide European support in pursuing this well-known policy. By the Paris Treaty, British policy for the maintenance of the Ottoman independence gained a European character and was established as a European principle. For

this reason, the treaty was a prized achievement of the British Foreign Office in the nineteenth century.

From 1856 to 1870, the Ottoman Empire enjoyed a period of relative respite from foreign dangers since the conditions created the Paris Treaty of 1856 remained intact (30). However, in the summer of 1870 when the Franco-Prussian War broke out, these conditions began to shift at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. The events had unfolded in such a manner that after less than fifteen years from the Crimean War a shift occurred in the famous British policy of preserving the independence of the Ottoman Empire even by use of force. When the next Eastern crisis emerged in 1875 British policy dealing with the Ottomans was no longer on the same path with its Crimean War policy.



## **CHAPTER II. SHIFTS IN BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY AND IN THE EUROPEAN BALANCE OF POWER SYSTEM AFTER THE CRIMEAN WAR**

### **2.1. BRITISH POLICY OF ISOLATIONISM**

The British empire reached its true zenith, especially in industrial terms, in 1865. The country produced two-thirds of the world's coal, about half its iron, five-sevenths of its steel, two-fifths of its hardware, about half its commercial cotton cloth. More than 40 percent of the entire world output of traded manufactured goods were produced within this country (1). However, this so-called 'workshop of the world' position of Britain was also the main British problem and had very important repercussions on British foreign policy.

After Palmerston's death, in 1865, British foreign policy entered a new age of 'isolationism' as a response to this overextended position of the empire. About for a decade since 1865, the British governments adopted a strict policy of nonintervention and passivity in the Continental affairs. The reasons that created isolationist Britain can be explained as follows:

#### **2.1.1. The desire to preserve its overextended global position**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain was the sole power at the center of the global economic system which had been created by Britain itself. By abandoning its previous mercantilist policies in favour of free trade, Britain became a power importing raw materials and foodstuffs, exporting manufactured goods and coal, financing overseas developments, and providing services in shipping, insurance and commodity dealer (2).

However, this foremost position demanded a very expensive price. Because being at the center of the world economic system meant being a 'hostage' to the international boom more than any other country (3). As a mature state it had nothing to gain but much to lose from any change in the global order. For this reason, keeping the *status quo* became the most favoured British vital interest of the day. On the other hand, the British economy would be much more affected by any disruption of international trade, whether by a temporary slump or war than any other country. The British public and statesmen were well aware that war would mean a reduction in exports, an increase in imports, and loss of manpower. So, preservation of peace emerged as the other vital British interest in the second half of the nineteenth century (4).

In order to achieve these two objectives, preserving the status quo and peace, the British formulated the 'appeasement' policy meaning 'the policy of settling international quarrels by admitting and satisfying grievances through rational negotiation and compromise, thereby avoiding the resort to an armed conflict which would be expensive, bloody and possibly very dangerous' (5). Although the formulation of the policy brought a different meaning to mind, this policy was adhered to by British governments, especially after 1865, as nonintervention or isolation or passivity on the European Continent.

### **2.1.2. Imperial Entanglements**

British imperial considerations, which became problematic in the mid-century, were the other reasons resulting in the emergence of isolation in British foreign policy. One of the most important factors in the European balance of power in the early sixties was the American Civil War. Between 1861 and 1865 the British military resources were locked away in Canada and

when the British statesmen thought of war in these years, it was with the United States, and not with any Continental power (6).

Moreover, in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny, which broke out in July 1857, the British forces were still fully occupied in India; about 65,000 troops were needed to stiffen the now-suspect Indian Army. The British forces were also required in other Crown Colonies across the globe, or held in readiness to deal with possible problems with the Maoris, Ashantis, Abyssinians, and the Irish (7). Because of these Imperial responsibilities, British attention was far away from Europe and the policy of nonintervention, the outcome of either choice or conditions, became the policy of the day.

## **2.2. SHIFTS IN THE EUROPEAN BALANCE OF POWER SYSTEM**

### **2.2.1. A United Germany**

One of the most important historical events of the nineteenth century was German unification under Prussian leadership in 1870. Britain had a positive outlook towards the emergence of a united Germany in place of the traditional power vacuum at the center of Europe. When the Franco-Prussian War, the last stage of German unification, began in 1870, Britain had already been isolated from the Continent and never thought of changing this course for the time being. The final defeat of France at the battle of Sedan had much more important repercussions on the European balance than any power, especially Britain, had expected. France was eliminated and the traditional balance of Europe no longer existed. A new age began in European history under the leadership of Prince Otto von Bismarck who would reshape the European balance within a few years.

As mentioned above, Britain favoured the establishment of the German empire since it thought that a united and formidable Germany would help Britain to preserve the European balance by checking two powers on the circumferences, that is, France and Russia (8). It hoped that Germany would take Austria's place as its natural ally, controlling France and Russia while the British built prosperity and empire overseas (9). However, realities would be very different from what the British hoped. Bismarck hardly thought of preserving the British-made Concert of Europe. He planned to establish a power-blocs system instead of the old European Concert.

### **2.2.2. Russian Denunciation of Neutralization of the Black Sea**

The first serious repercussion of German unification on the European balance was the Russian denunciation of the Black Sea clauses of the Paris Treaty of 1856. The Franco-Prussian War created conditions under which the Russian government could achieve the first of its major foreign policy objectives after the Crimean War: denunciation of the neutrality of the Black Sea. On October 31, 1870, Prince Alexander Gorchakov, the Russian Foreign Minister, announced this Russian decision (10).

As Germany supported Russia; as Austria-Hungary was very busy with its internal reorganization through the *Ausgleich* process; and as France was just defeated, the only power that could resist the Russian act was Britain. However, Britain was not ready to intervene in continental affairs in those days because it had neither the will nor the capability.

In fact, the Russian denunciation was a symbolic gesture. Because they had no plans for action in the Near East, and even the war with the Ottomans in 1877 found the Russians still without a Black Sea fleet. They only wanted the other powers to recognize their right to keep warships there, not actually to have them. This Russian denunciation was at best a sop to the Russian pride, freeing them from a humiliation (11).

Although the British government opposed strongly the Russian denunciation their response was also symbolic. The basis of the British objection was not against the essence of the Russian decision but against their way of doing that. William Ewart Gladstone, the British Prime Minister, wished to assert the principle that treaties could be changed only by the approval of the signatory powers (12). While Britain was searching for a continental ally against Russia, it realized that there was no alternative other than Germany and turned to this power which had itself encouraged Russia for such an action. Odo Russel, the British representative in Berlin, told Bismarck that Britain would go to war for the sanctity of the treaties with or without an ally (13). This was not true. The real British aim was to replace Germany as its 'natural ally' in the Near East and to achieve Germany's participation in the Tripartite guarantee to the Ottoman Empire of April 1856. The British government did not realize yet that friendship with Russia was the most essential principle of Bismarckian foreign policy. For this reason, Bismarck could not answer positively to the British offer. However, he also recognized that an Anglo-Russian conflict in the Near East would be dangerous to Prussian interests even if it kept out of it (14).

These conditions created an opportunity for Bismarck to perform the first act of his 'honest broker' play on the European scene. To avoid an Anglo-Russian conflict, he proposed an international conference to revise the settlement of the Black Sea. Such a conference suited

the Russians since they only wanted a theoretical revision rather than a practical right. Furthermore, Russia neither wanted nor was ready for a serious crisis. So, it accepted the German proposal. This offer was also suitable for Britain since it was only going to be recognition of an international principle (15). Despite the fact that the Ottoman Empire was strongly opposed to this offer, as it became clear that the conference would be held and as the empire could not fight Russia alone, it also agreed to the meeting. But it made this acceptance conditional on an understanding that the discussions would be limited to the single question at hand and the other parts of the Treaty of Paris were not to come under discussion (16).

The Conference, which met in London from January to March 1871, denounced the Black Sea clauses of the Paris Treaty. The Black Sea was no longer neutralized but the rest of the treaty remained intact. By this way Russia was satisfied. Britain had also the statement it wished in the London Protocol: the powers 'recognize that it is an essential principle of the international law that none of them can release themselves from the engagements of a treaty, or modify stipulations without the consent of the contracting parties (reached) by means of a friendly agreement' (17). The Ottoman Empire was also satisfied by changing the Straits settlement in a manner which could benefit the Ottoman government: Article II of the Convention enlarged the Sultan's discretionary power to admit through the Straits naval vessels of the friendly states even in peacetime (18). The provisions concerning the Straits of the London Convention of 1871 had great importance because they remained in effect until the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (19).

As far as the British position on the Continental balance was concerned, the Russian denunciation of the neutralization of the Black Sea and the following London Conference was note-worthy since they exposed British incapability to take initiative in Continental affairs

even if the question was directly related to its vital interests. Either because of the isolationist trend of British foreign policy or shifts in the European balance system Britain lost its leading role which would be more clearly seen during the approaching Eastern crisis of 1875-1878. As for the Anglo-Ottoman relations, the London Conference was also significant. Although Britain officially continued to stand by its well-known policy of preserving Ottoman integrity and independence, latest developments revealed that the Crimean War-spirit in England was left in the pages of history. This increased doubts about the reliability of the British guarantee for the Ottoman existence stated both in the Treaty of Paris and of the Tripartite Guarantee of 1856. On the other hand, in the 1870s there was a serious threat to British Imperial interests which was Russia's steady advance in Central Asia and its involvement in Afghan affairs. Since the most effective way that Britain could counter Russian superiority in ground troops was still the threat of a naval attack on the Russian coastline, the independence of the Ottoman Empire should have become more important for the British vital interests (20).

### **2.2.3. The Three Emperors' League**

The new patron of Europe, Bismarck, saw an alliance with Russia, to ensure Germany's security against France, and with Austria-Hungary, to guarantee the future of his '*kleindeutschland*', as *sine qua non* elements of his foreign policy. The only way of achieving this objective was to revive the old Holy Alliance.

The chance for the revival of the Three Northern Courts' League emerged when the Austria-Hungarian emperor, Francis Joseph, and the Russian Tsar, Alexander II, visited Berlin in September 1872. Despite the fact that no written agreement was made, this meeting was accepted as the rebirth of the Holy Alliance (21). The formal establishment of The Three

Emperors' League was in 1873 by the Convention of Schönbrunn between Russia and Austria-Hungary. When, in October 1873, William I, the German Emperor, adhered to this pact the Three Emperors' League was officially created (22).

The meaning of The Three Emperors' League for Britain was very negative. Since France had already been eliminated, it now faced with a Bismarck- imposed isolation, after the self-imposed one, on the Continent. Indeed, the British governments were much blamed in later years for remaining passive and aloof while Bismarck established German power in Europe. As the British policy in Europe postulated a continental ally, if it had no ally it could have no policy (23).

## **2.3. THE DESIRE TO ABANDON ISOLATION**

### **2.3.1. Conservatives' Return to Power**

The year of 1874 was the second turning point in British foreign policy after Palmerston's death in 1865. The return of the Conservative Party, under the leadership of Benjamin Disraeli, ended the long and not very edifying period of isolation and nonintervention during which immense changes had taken place on the Continent, without Britain having been able to exercise any noticable influence in any direction (24). Indeed, the deliberate abstention from the Continent since 1865, had been equally the policy of both Liberals and Conservatives. But, now, the Conservatives wanted to break away from their former traditions and impose an active foreign policy. Although public unrest concerning the uncomfortable isolation of Britain from the Continent was one of the reasons for this change in the Conservatives' attitude, the real source was Disraeli's personality and wish for much more



active foreign policy (25). So, Britain gave up its self-imposed isolation by the Conservatives' advent to power in 1874. But the problem was now to overcome isolation imposed by the new European balance.

### **2.3.2. The Purchase of the Khedive's Shares in the Suez Canal**

After the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, this route was to become the main British commercial artery and Imperial line of communication (26). However, owing to British failure to invest in the Canal company, London could not exercise any control over the company's policy which, according to English shipping firms, often discriminated against their vessels. Therefore, when Disraeli became the Prime Minister, he expressed his desire for a voice in the company's management (27).

The opportunity emerged in the fall of 1875, when London learned of negotiations between the Khedive Ismail Pasha of Egypt and a French syndicate for the sale of his 177,000 shares in the Canal company. The Prime Minister addressed a memorandum to the Queen arguing that 'it is vital to Your Majesty's authority and power at this critical moment that the Canal should belong to England' (28). Such a transaction, purchase of the Khedive's shares, needed Parliamentary authorization, but the Parliament was in recess. However, Disraeli succeeded in overcoming the opposition within his cabinet to obtain a 4 million pounds loan from the House of Rothschild, pending final Parliamentary approval (29). As the first exercise of active and spirited foreign policy, British purchase of the Khedive's shares in the Suez Canal made a profound impression throughout Europe and was interpreted as proof that Britain had definitely abandoned its passivity on the Continent (30).

It is against this background that the Eastern Question again caught fire by a spark of a peasant revolt in Herzegovina in the spring of 1875. An Eastern crisis meant trouble for all the European Great Powers, but especially for Britain. Before discussing the emergence and evolution of the Eastern Question of 1875-1878, it would be useful to make clear British policy towards the Ottoman Empire on the eve of this crisis in order to see its impact on Anglo-Ottoman relations.

### **2.3.3. British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire on the Eve of the Eastern Question**

As explained in the first chapter, preserving Ottoman independence and territorial integrity was made by Palmerston an integral part of the British foreign policy and Britain did not avoid even fighting Russia for the achievement of this objective in 1856.

However, British attitude towards the Porte began to change significantly just after the Crimean War. Although Palmerstonian concern for the security of the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore the desire to preserve the Ottoman Empire continued, London's interest in the Ottoman reforms increased greatly compared with what it had been before the Crimean War (31). In addition to this, British concern over Balkan Christianity also increased, especially under the Gladstone-led government. The British recognized that without a serious Ottoman attempt to satisfy Christian grievances in a period of rising national feeling within the Balkans, there would be almost constant interference in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire by Russia, France or Austria-Hungary (32). In conclusion, British policy towards the Ottomans on the eve of the revolt in Herzegovina in 1875 can be defined as follows:

- 1- to press for Ottoman reforms;
- 2- to keep things as quiet as possible in the East;
- 3- to avoid undue interference by the European powers in domestic Ottoman affairs;
- 4- to stand up verbally for the Treaties of Paris and London of 1856 and 1871 (33).

## **CHAPTER III. THE EASTERN CRISIS OF 1875**

### **3.1. REVOLT IN HERZEGOVINA AND BOSNIA**

In July 1875, a small number of Christian peasants began to stir up a revolt in Herzegovina which would quickly involve the whole of the Slav subjects of the Ottoman Empire and leading to the fourth Russo-Ottoman War of the nineteenth century. The first sign of its urgency was given when it immediately burst out in neighbouring Bosnia in August. Though it quickly turned into a political movement, the very causes of the original uprising in Bosnia and Herzegovina were not so much political, but primarily related with the social and economic structure of the provinces.

#### **3.1.1. Reasons of the Revolt**

Bosnia and Herzegovina were some of the regions that were quickly and completely absorbed into the Ottoman system when they were conquered (1). Of more or less Slavic origin, the population was divided between Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic. The feudal landowners of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the first instance, had embraced Islam and, by this way, power had remained in the hands of a small landed oligarchy. Moreover, the Bosnian Muslims emerged as more Turkish than the Turks. In no quarter, the reform movement of the Porte encountered bitter and more sustained opposition than from the feudal lords of Bosnia (2). For instance, the suppression of the Janissaries and other reforms attempted by the Sultan Mahmud led to an open revolt in the province; and the policy represented by the Tanzimat and Hatt-i Humayun of 1856 was confronted with utmost disfavour (3).

As these conditions are taken into account it is not difficult to understand under which conditions the Christian peasantry had been living. The Ottoman tax farmers' unregulated rapacity; the labour services and burdensome demanded by their native feudal lords could be described as the primary causes of the Christian insurrection of 1875. Moreover, there had been famine in the Asian provinces in 1875 and the Porte demanded extra taxes from the Balkan provinces to compensate for loss of tax income from Anatolia.

On the other hand, besides the terrible social and economic conditions, the impact of the Pan Slavist missionaries, especially after the Crimean War, over the Christian population can not be omitted. Defeat in the Crimean War was a serious blow to the Russian national pride, and this provided a good background for any movement that would emphasize Russian power and leadership. In general, the Pan Slav concept was an assumption of Russian leadership of the Slavic peoples; of their liberation from foreign, that is, Habsburg and Ottoman, control; and of their organization into political units closely allied to Russia (4).

The Moscow Slavic Benevolent Society was established in 1858 with the aim of assisting the South Slavs of the Ottoman Empire in order to achieve their freedom from Muslim control. This organization brought students from the Balkans to Russia who would realize the Pan Slavist ideals when they returned to their homelands (5). Nevertheless, the Pan Slavist propaganda in the Balkan states was not official state policy. Despite the existence of some Pan Slavist figures in the high ranks of state bureaucracy, such as Count Nicholas Ignatiev, the Russian ambassador at Constantinople, Russian foreign policy was hardly formulated by Pan Slavist commitments in the days of the Bosnian insurrection (6). However, the activities of

the Panslavist organizations had assisted the emergence and evolution of a Christian rising in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As a result, Ottoman misrule, the very hard economic conditions created by the tax-farming system, the heavy burden of labour services demanded by the feudal lords together with Panslavist propaganda, created an appropriate environment for an uprising in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 1875.

### **3.1.2. The Attitudes of the Powers**

As soon as it became evident that the insurrection was spreading and that the Ottomans could not immediately suppress it, the European powers began to consider ways and means of dealing with the situation. It was clear that no power welcomed the recurrence of the Eastern Question at that time.

As far as Austro-Hungarian policy towards the Ottoman Empire was concerned, the latter had been declared as Austria-Hungary's 'the strongest and most reliable ally in the Near East' by the Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Julius Andrassy, in May 1872 (7). As a Magyar, Andrassy saw the Slavs and their expansion in the Balkans as the most serious danger to the Dual Monarchy and for this reason, supported Ottoman rule over them. However, as early as November 1873, he told the British ambassador that he had broken with the 'old' policy of simply supporting the Ottoman Empire because this only united the Balkan states in solidarity against the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary (8). So, on the eve of the insurrection in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Austrian policy in the Balkans had a twofold aim: first, to keep the *status quo*, including Ottoman power in the Balkans; and second, to institute Austria-

Hungary as the sole patron power of all the Balkan states, including Serbia and Montenegro. During the Eastern Question of 1875-1878 in which the Ottomans and the Balkan Slavs were the two opposing sides to an armed conflict, this was the basic dilemma of Austria-Hungary's foreign policy that how to combine these two objectives. At the initial stages of the insurrection, Andrassy hoped that the Ottomans, if given the necessary support by the powers, would soon settle the problems raised by the insurrection without causing serious changes in the *status quo* and, in his opinion, the best means for pacific settlement lay in introduction and implementation of necessary reforms (9).

For Russia the time of the uprising was not appropriate either. Since defeat in the Crimean War Russia had been in the process of great domestic reforms and desired to maintain *status quo* in the East. This Russian policy was expressed by the Tsar Alexander, in February 1875, that he wanted to preserve the *status quo* in the Balkans not because he regarded it as an ideal situation, but because he was convinced that a change would lead to unpredictable complications for the whole world. According to the Tsar, the best thing to do was to ensure cooperation of the three empires in preventing the situation in the East from becoming troublesome (10). In essence, with these words he defined essentials of the concept of 'Eastern Question': "the threat of an Ottoman collapse; the powers' fear that the international consequences would be revolutionary; and their corresponding decision to prop up the Empire, not for its own sake, but as a necessary means of preserving international stability" (11).

Although Germany had no direct interest in the Near East, the basic dilemma of Bismarckian foreign policy in those days was how to maintain good relations between Russia and Austria-Hungary provided that both of them were well disposed towards each other and dependent on

Germany. Because failure to satisfy either of them would result in formation of a coalition, which could inevitably include France, which would be directed against Germany (12). For Bismarck, the partition of the Ottoman Empire would be a less traumatic solution than rising of Austro-Russian tension over the Balkans (13). So, German policy towards the Balkan crisis was to prevent an Austro-Russian conflict over the issue and to subscribe to anything that these two powers might determine.

As expected, the British government was not in favour of anything which would be detrimental to Ottoman integrity. When the uprising firstly emerged Britain wished an immediate suppression of it without outside interference. Disraeli, at the very beginning of the crisis, complained that “this dreadful Herzegovina affair, which, had there been common energy, or perhaps pocket-money even among the Turks, might have been settled in a week” (14).

If the Ottomans had only been able to put them down quickly, the insurrection of Bosnia and Herzegovina would almost certainly not have led to any great crisis among the powers. At that time, all the powers were anxious to maintain the *status quo* in the Balkans (15). However, the Ottomans failed to move energetically and an action of the powers became inevitable. At this stage, Andrassy managed to secure for Austria-Hungary the lead. Russia and Germany had already been ready to follow his way and Britain was also obliged to accept the lead of Vienna despite Disraeli’s deepest distrust of The Three Emperors’ League. But Britain was not powerful enough to stand against so imposing a combination (16). In one of his letters, Disraeli explained this situation as follows: “Unless we go out of our way to act with the Three Northern Powers, they can act without us, which is not agreeable for a state like England” (17).



### 3.1.3. The Consular Mission

Now the ball was at Andrassy' court. His first move, by August 1875, was to induce the Ottomans to send a commissioner into the provinces to investigate the situation. At the same time, the governments of the Three Northern Courts instructed their consuls in the revolting provinces to attempt at mediation. France and Italy followed their way, though Britain at first refused, it took part reluctantly at the express request of the Porte itself (18). But nothing came of these first efforts. The consuls interviewed some of the insurgent chiefs. They demanded either autonomy under a Christian prince or occupation by a European power until justice had been done them (19). The consuls were to inform the insurgents that no help would come to them from the great powers, and to advise to end their insurrection and make known their complaints to the Ottoman commissioner. After these negotiations, the consuls considered their mission finished and by September left any further negotiation to the appointed Ottoman delegate (20).

As a response to the Consular Investigation, the Sultan issued, on October 2, an Irade which promised prompt and general reform for all the subjects of the Empire. In spite of all these efforts the insurrection continued during October and November. Furthermore, in October, there came an Ottoman declaration of bankruptcy. The Sultan declared that he could not pay the full interest on his debts (21), which in turn produced the most unfavourable impression in London and shook the confidence of many in the Porte's solidarity (22).

### 3.1.4. The Andrassy Note

While Britain continued with its wait-and-see attitude in the Eastern Crisis, Austria-Hungary and Russia were driven into the action. Andrassy took the initiative for collective action at Constantinople; his purpose was to isolate the Bosnian question, to appease the two provinces, and to set the Austro-Hungarian influence there instead of the Russian one.

On the other hand, the Sultan, when he got wind of the intentions of the powers, decided to act himself. It was a race between Andrassy and the Porte to reform and, on the surface, this was won by the Sultan: a Ferman was announced on December 12, 1875 which consisted of introduction of reforms in the whole of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, this was an old method of dealing with discontent in some provinces and was designed primarily to prevent interference of foreign powers. The Ferman was simply a new edition of an old program including judicial reform, reorganization of taxation, equality of opportunity in government service, improvement of agriculture, industry and commerce (23).

But, the Porte's gesture for reform was not enough to stop Andrassy. If anything, he continued to work out his own reform plan unmoved. The 'Andrassy Note' was communicated to the contracting powers of the Treaty of Paris of 1856 on December 30, 1875. The Note included complete freedom of religion, abolition of tax-farming, restriction of the taxes to the use of the province in which they were raised, various improvements in the lot of the peasantry, and establishment of a European commission to supervise the implementation of these reforms (24).

The powers, except Britain, declared their immediate adherence to the Note. But Britain's approach was completely negative since it had devoted its policy to prevent any foreign intervention to the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. However, upon the request of the Porte again, London also adhered to the Andrassy Note. On January 31, 1876, it was communicated to the Porte who accepted the reform program almost completely. But, the Porte's acceptance was not enough to produce a fertile outcome. The Note became a complete failure because of several reasons: 1- The Porte had no will or capacity to carry out the reforms; 2- It was hardly possible to initiate a scheme of reforms while the provinces were actually in armed rebellion; 3- The insurgents themselves rejected the concessions, on the plea that they were inadequate without a guarantee by the European powers; 4- The British negative attitude caused an erosion of the influence of the Note just at its inception (25).

Although Andrassy and Gorchakov had been very optimistic that a reform program supported by the six great powers would solve the question, Bismarck was from the beginning full of suspicion about the result of the Andrassy Note. He anticipated its probable failure and predicted the eventual clash of Russian and Austrian interests in the Near East. In the event of such a conflict, it was quite clear that the British would sympathize with the Austrians and in that case, Germany would have to make a choice between Russia and Austria-Hungary, Bismarck's nightmare. Since the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the most primary interest of his *kleindeutschland*, in the event of an Austro-Russian conflict, he would turn Russia away and side with Austria-Hungary. Under these conditions, it was almost certain that Russia would appeal to France and Germany would have to fight on two fronts (26).

Realizing Britain's growing interest in European affairs, Bismarck approached Britain for an Anglo-German understanding by January 1876. Britain was now faced with a serious proposal to escape isolation from the Continent. Bismarck was offering the British a voice in Austro-Russian counsels in return for British intercession with France and Italy in a pro-German sense; German support for the maintenance of Ottoman integrity in return for an unspecified British support for Germany; and finally, equal cooperation in the preservation of European peace (27). Despite the positive attitudes of Disraeli and the Queen towards the German proposal a positive response was checked by the Earl of Derby, the Foreign Secretary, who saw Bismarck a wolf in sheep's clothing (28). So, Anglo-German conversations produced no result because of either Bismarck's reputation or Derby's unsurpassable suspicion.

### **3.1.5. The Berlin Memorandum**

Meanwhile, the insurrection continued and even worsened. At the suggestion of Gorchakov, the Foreign Ministers of the Three Northern Courts met in Berlin in May 1876. On May 12, Bismarck, Andrassy and Gorchakov drew up the famous Berlin Memorandum which was merely an elaboration of the Andrassy Note though it went much further in its demands.

The Memorandum began with a call for an armistice of two months during which direct negotiations between the Porte and the insurgents would be held on the following points: 1- The Porte to provide means sufficient to settle the refugees in their homes; 2- The distribution of these means to be made by a mixed commission with a Christian-Herzegovinian president; 3- The Porte to concentrate its troops in few specified places; 4- The Christians as well as the Muslims to keep their arms; 5- The consuls of the powers to watch over application of the reforms and return of the population (29). The Memorandum ended with a veiled note that if,

after the expiration of the armistice hostilities continued, the Three Empires would sanction an accord to arrange more efficacious measures as might be required to reestablish peace (30).

France and Italy quickly accepted the Memorandum, but Britain refused it. Disraeli, who had wished to exploit the crisis in order to break the Three Emperors' League, evaluated it as "putting a knife in Turkey's heart and leading to her dissolution" at the Cabinet meeting of May 16 (31). The British rejection, in fact, was not against the essence of the Memorandum but against the way of its emergence in which England had been excluded from the deliberations of the three powers (32). Disraeli complained about this point to the Russian ambassador at London, Count Peter Shuvalov, that England was being treated like Bosnia and Montenegro (33). As a result, the British Cabinet, on May 16, unanimously agreed to reject the Berlin Memorandum which meant British destruction of the European Concert. On the other hand, this British reaction was interpreted by the Porte as signifying support and consequently, encouraged Ottoman resistance to foreign intervention.

The chaotic situation became more complex by the murder of the German and French consuls at Salonica on May 6. The British Prime Minister, wishing to make use of the crisis to show British power, ordered the fleet to Besika Bay, outside the Dardanelles in order to 'protect the life of the Europeans'. But the Ottoman government, again, interpreted the sending of the British fleet as a symbol of British willingness to prosecute another Crimean War (34).

Britain found further opportunities to end its isolation and to take a leading role on the Continent even after its rejection of the Berlin Memorandum. Early in June, Bismarck reopened discussions with the British. He only wished that Britain should entirely take the lead in the Eastern Question and declared "he was quite ready to follow and back up whatever

England proposed” (35). In addition, there was a Russian overture to Britain through Shuvalov to secure British approval of Gorchakov's three proposals: additional territory for Montenegro as well as for Serbia, and autonomy for Bosnia and Herzegovina. But both of these overtures founded on British suspiciousness and lack of any policy beyond ‘leaving a clear field for the two opposing sides to fight it out’ (36). Both Berlin and St. Petersburg had asked London to name its policy and that they would support it. However, Britain, at that moment, had no clearly defined policy other than ‘doing nothing’.

## **3.2. THE SPREAD OF WAR**

### **3.2.1. Serbia and Montenegro in War**

Among the Balkan states, Serbia and Montenegro had been most deeply concerned with the ultimate fate of the revolt in Bosnia-Herzegovina. There were two main restraining influences on Serbia; one was Austria-Hungary, and the other was Russia. Austria-Hungary lost some of its power in trying to persuade Serbia not to declare war on the Ottoman Empire as Ottoman inefficiency was proven by the progress of the revolt (37). As far as Russia was concerned, the Serbs, since the beginning of the Bosnian insurrection, were given enthusiastic spiritual and material support by the Russian Pan Slav circles although they received no official encouragement from the Russian government itself. However, by May 1876, Gorchakov made no secret of the fact that Russia would no longer induce Montenegro and Serbia to remain neutral. What Austria-Hungary could not do, Russia would not and these two Balkan states came to close to war. National aspirations against the Ottoman Empire, especially in Serbia, was clearly noted by the British Consul at Belgrade, Sir W. White, that he had not met a single Serbian politician who did not believe in the inevitability of a war with the Porte, not for the

purpose of political freedom or independence, but in order to acquire Bosnia and remain under the suzerainty of the Porte as long as European Turkey continued to exist (38). A French-led European attempt, at the end of June, to warn Serbia not to declare war on the Ottoman Empire, was too late and, on June 30, Serbia, and, on the following day, Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire. The immediate response of all of the European powers was to announce their intentions of following a policy of neutrality (39).

### **3.2.2. Insurrection in Bulgaria**

The 1860s had witnessed a steady growth of national feeling even in Bulgaria, one of the most completely absorbed province of the Balkans into the Ottoman system. The establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870 signified a real stimulus to the national cause (40). In the same year, The Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee was established in Bucharest. It had organized a general rising in Bulgaria on September 28, 1875, but it was not successful and was put down by the Ottoman officials (41).

Another uprising was planned in May 1876, but the actual rising began at the end of April. Even the most friendly writers admit that the revolutionaries crushed the helpless and unarmed Muslims in the most ruthless fashion (42). Since the Ottoman authorities lacked a sufficient number of regular troops, in order to deal with the situation they armed the Muslim population and called upon the irregular troops- *Başbozüks* and Circassians. Within a week of the outbreak, Ottoman irregulars suppressed the insurrection which ended with murdering many innocent Bulgarians; burning and destruction of many Christian villages (43). With appearance of news about the Bulgarian atrocities in the European, specifically British, press, the Eastern Crisis entered into a new phase, especially as far as the Anglo-Ottoman relations

were concerned. All this news was leaked to the British press by **Russian** agents in the revolting provinces, for Russia wanted to cut British support of the Ottomans (44).

### **3.3. CHANGES IN BRITISH POLICY**

#### **3.3.1. Bulgarian Agitation**

During the summer of 1876 there occurred one of the deepest, most varied and most prolonged outbursts of public feeling in Britain (45). The very magnitude of the ‘Bulgarian Agitation’ as a popular movement proclaimed a phenomenon; in less than six weeks nearly five hundred demonstrations throughout the whole country addressed to the Foreign Office expressions of abhorrence at the atrocities and repudiation of the pro-Ottoman policy of the government (46).

The first spark of agitation was fired by an article published on June 23 in the *Daily News*. The article, written by E. Pears, included the first account of the atrocities in Bulgaria and resulted in strong public feeling. Questions were asked in both Houses of Parliament as a response to this public reaction. In reply, the government implied that the *Daily News* story was exaggerated. The Prime Minister simply assumed that “their object is to create a cry against the Government” (47).

Evidence of a growing crisis of public conscience began to multiply early in July: Within the first week, two meetings passed resolutions protesting against British intervention on behalf of the Ottomans (48). Dissatisfaction increased because of the government’s policy as if nothing had happened. Newspapers continued to carry stories of the atrocities and people who wished



Britain to side actively with the Christian rebels continued to organize meetings. Although Disraeli evaluated the atrocities only as a party question, Derby was more sensitive to public unrest and warned the Porte several times not to use the *Başbozüks* in the suppression of the revolt and to punish those involved in the atrocities (49).

One of the most significant expression of virtuous indignation was the meeting of July 27 in Willis's Rooms with the involvement of members of the Parliament and trade-union leaders that called for the principle of full autonomy for the Christians in the Ottoman Empire. This means attempting to interfere with the government's policy. Indeed, this was what the agitation was asking: "the fusion of moral passion with the political issues; the recognition of, and protest against, the implication of British Eastern policy with the Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria" (50).

The newspapers sent representatives to Bulgaria to investigate the accuracy of the first accounts of atrocities. One was J. A. McGahan, the Special Commissioner of the *Daily News*, who had arrived in Batak, a town thirty-five miles south-west of Filibe (Plovdiv), wrote that six of eight thousand inhabitants had been massacred after submitting peacefully to the Ottoman commander, Ahmet Aga (51). His report was published on August 7. On the same day, a letter from Walter Baring, who was another journalist carrying out an investigation in the revolting province, was read in the Parliament. The letter, despite journalistic exaggerations, confirmed the general accuracy of the earlier reports in the *Daily News*: about twelve thousand Bulgarians had been killed and sixty villages were, wholly or partly, destroyed (52).

Towards the end of August there occurred the first serious impact of the agitation on the government's attitude in a warning to the Porte by Derby:

“any sympathy previously felt in England towards Turkey has been completely destroyed by the lamentable occurrences in Bulgaria... and to such a pitch has indignation in all classes of English society risen... that in the extreme case of Russia declaring war against Turkey, Her Majesty's Government would find it practically impossible to interfere in defence of the Ottoman Empire” (53).

The agitation movement gained a new impetus with the involvement of Gladstone in September 1876. On September 6, he published his famous pamphlet *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*. In this pamphlet, Gladstone said that the Crimean War had given the Ottoman Empire twenty years of repose, but the insurrection of 1875 “disclosed the total failure of the Porte to fulfill its engagements” (54). He called for the end of the Ottoman administration in the Balkan provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria; and demanded the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire from Europe ‘bag and baggage’ (55).

Gladstone's involvement in the agitation, sooner or later, can be taken as an inevitable outcome of every major element of his politico-religious existence: His Catholic Christianity, his European sense, his Liberalism , and his democratic sympathies, but, above all, his feelings of guilt for supporting the Ottoman Empire during the Crimean War as a member of Lord Aberdeen's Cabinet in 1854 (56).

### 3.3.2. Mediation

While agitation was in process with all of its implications in England, the war continued. Though Montenegro was able to hold its own, Serbia met with military defeat and this brought on attempts by the powers to mediate. On August 24, Serbia requested the good offices of the great powers in order to obtain an armistice. Derby, now under heavy public criticism and faced with the great danger of Russian entry into the war, took the initiative and telegraphed to Henry Elliot, the British ambassador at Constantinople, to propose to the Porte a month's armistice.

The Ottoman government, however, knowing the near possibility of a great victory over Serbia, feared that an armistice would only favour the enemy and therefore, hesitated to suspend military operations until they knew the final terms of peace (57). The Porte, which had already clarified its peace terms, informed London that the Ottoman government would only accept an armistice if Britain would be prepared to support the terms of peace proposed by the Porte. The Ottoman peace terms were: the Prince of Serbia was to come to Constantinople to renew his homage; certain Serbian fortresses were to be reoccupied by the Ottoman troops; the Serbian army was to be limited to ten thousand men; the Serbian militia was to be disbanded entirely; and Serbia was to pay either an increased tribute or war indemnity (58).

The British Prime Minister was most concerned with the popularity of his government and with British prestige abroad. He was more flexible on the nature of a solution than on the necessity for Britain to play a major role in devising it. With such considerations, Disraeli suggested to Derby that Britain should have to take the lead in the partition of the Ottoman

Empire which seemed inevitable unless a quick peace was concluded (59). On the other hand, Derby was prepared to use the atrocities to justify refusal of British military aid or diplomatic support to the Porte if it was attacked by Russia. But if a Serbo-Ottoman peace could be quickly arranged, a Russo-Ottoman war and a possible British treaty obligation to fight for the Ottoman Empire would not arise. So, to ensure an immediate peace between the Porte and Serbia became a vital British interest.

When he learned of the Ottoman peace terms, Derby objected to them and put forward his own, which consisted of administrative autonomy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and some similar arrangement for Bulgaria (60). His peace terms were note-worthy since they showed the shift in British policy dealing with the Eastern Question from the Berlin Memorandum in May up to September. Up until the Memorandum, or more correctly, until the *Daily News* story, Britain had advocated complete Ottoman sovereignty and right of the Porte to deal with internal problems without significant European interference. Now, in September, Britain was no longer willing to advocate unfettered Ottoman control over the provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria, and talked about some kind of autonomy, which had been initially proposed by Gorchakov but refused by Derby. This, almost completely, was the result of the Bulgarian atrocities agitation.

The British Foreign Secretary, with unusual energy, continued to press upon the Porte for an immediate armistice. The Porte's reaction was to order a ten-day suspension of hostilities on September 15. Derby used this time to devise peace terms acceptable to all powers. The Porte encouraged his efforts by prolonging the suspension of hostilities till October 2 and by agreeing, on October 10, to an armistice of five months. But a five-month armistice was not accepted by Russia who preferred an armistice of one month or six weeks (61).

Meanwhile, the Ottoman campaign against Serbia continued and during the last days of October the Ottoman forces inflicted another crushing defeat upon the Serbs. This development forced the Tsar to do something and on October 31, Ignatiev handed to the Porte a forty-eight hour ultimatum, demanding an armistice of six weeks for the Serbs (62). The Porte had no alternative but to accept the Russian ultimatum and this gave Derby the chance to realize his earlier proposal for a European Conference to deal with the Eastern Question.

### **3.3.3. The Constantinople Conference**

Britain invited the other great powers on November 4 to a conference to be held at Constantinople, to which special representatives should be sent. London's intention to send a special representative to the conference reflected two aims: One, the possibility of emasculating the potential of Ignatiev, a Pan Slavist Russian, to make trouble; and second, the undesirability of leaving British negotiations entirely in the hands of Elliot, a Turcophil Englishman (63). Lord Salisbury was appointed as the British delegate to the Constantinople Conference.

The British bases for the Conference were: 1- The independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire; 2- A declaration that the powers were not seeking territorial advantages; 3- The rough status quo for Serbia and Montenegro; 4- Local or administrative autonomy for Bosnia and Herzegovina; and 5- Similar guarantees to guard against maladministration in Bulgaria (64). These were also given to Salisbury as his government's instructions at the conference. These were also the essence of British Eastern policy of the day.

On the one hand, the European powers' acceptance for the conference, on the other hand, two speeches arising from two European capitals were note-worthy since they showed the powers' lack of confidence in the success of the conference: One was delivered by Disraeli at the Guildhall on November 9: "although the policy of England is peace, there is no country so well prepared for war as our own". The Tsar, who had no knowledge of this speech, on the following day, delivered his message to the other powers: "my ardent wish is for a peaceful agreement. Should we not obtain from the Porte such guarantees for carrying out the reforms we have a right to demand, I am firmly determined to act independently" (65). Whereas Disraeli's speech was interpreted as continuity of British support for the Ottomans, it was understood from the Tsar's words that Russia was determined to force acceptance of their demands by 'material coercion', and in such a case the British position would hardly be consistent with the Prime Minister's words.

In such an international conjuncture, the Constantinople Conference began with the preliminary meetings of the six great powers, on December 11, 1876, at the Russian embassy. An odd situation emerged with the exclusion of the Ottomans from the preliminary meetings at their own capital. The other unexpected event was the close association of Salisbury and Ignatiev from the first day of the conference. Through their proposals, the delegates agreed that peace should be concluded with Serbia on the basis of *status quo*, excepting for a rectification of the frontier in favour of Serbia; Montenegro was to receive the conquered districts of Herzegovina and northern Albania; Bulgaria was to be divided into an Eastern and Western province; Bosnia and Herzegovina were to be united as one province and each three provinces were to receive not only a governor-general (a Christian in two Bulgarian provinces) appointed by the Porte with the approval of the powers, but also a provincial

assembly; a police force was to be established in the provinces composed of Muslims and Christians; seventy per cent of the income of the provinces was to be devoted to local expenditure; and a European commission was to supervise the implementation of these reforms (66).

When the first plenary session began on December 23, it was already clear that the Ottomans would not accept these terms. The new Grand Vizier, Midhat Pasha, surprised to great powers by announcing the first Ottoman Constitution on the same day the plenary meetings began. However, the delegates approached the Ottoman Constitution negatively. Since the Constitution guaranteed liberties for the whole empire, it was obvious that the Ottomans would reject their recommendations. This was the case. Midhat Pasha said that they did not intend to threaten or provoke Russia but the Ottomans would not commit suicide by agreeing to the dismemberment of their empire (67).

The Russian proposal for united pressure over the Porte was favoured by the delegates, including Salisbury, but the British government decided that “England will not assent to or assist in, coercive measures, military or naval, against the Porte”; and that “the Porte must be made to understand that it can expect no assistance from England in the event of war” (68). The British attitude at the Conference created great disappointment at Constantinople and the Ottomans made little effort to hide their anger at British abandonment. Midhat Pasha himself said: “Turkey was not unaware of the attitude of the English Government towards her; the British Government had declared in clear terms that it would not interfere in our dispute” (69).

Upon definite Ottoman refusal, the delegates were forced to reduce their ‘irreducible minimum’ and to submit to the Porte a list of modified demands which were still unacceptable

for the Ottomans since they still involved foreign interference in the **domestic affairs** by retaining the demand of European supervision of the reforms and appointment of the provincial governors with the consent of the powers. The Duke of Argyll, who was one of the most persistent believers in the cause of the Balkan Christians, noticed that “it is only fair towards Turkey to admit that the proposals of the powers, even in their ultimate and most modified form, were such as no government could admit if it pretended to real and substantial independence and if any choice were left to it in the matter” (70). At the end, when the Porte indicated its rejection to the reduced terms, the delegates agreed that the Conference was over on January 29, 1877.

As far as the British attitude towards the Ottoman Empire was concerned, the Constantinople Conference was a turning-point: for the first time, Britain had stood against the Ottoman Empire in cooperation with the other powers. This meant that Britain returned to the Concert of Europe which it had destroyed in May 1876. The personality of Lord Salisbury also affected British policy at the Constantinople Conference. He had written to Disraeli his thoughts concerning the Ottomans when he was chosen as the chief British delegate to the conference that the traditional Palmerstonian policy was no longer possible and none of the revolting areas could be returned to the unfettered Ottoman authority (71).

Last, but not least, about the Constantinople Conference was that the British abandonment had very negative and deep repercussions on the new Sultan, Abdulhamid II's psychology. While he expected British support against other powers, he was faced with abandonment. This completely destroyed Abdulhamid's belief in British friendship forever; and, in the later years of his reign, he also abandoned Britain as the 'natural ally' and turned to Germany in order to replace Britain (72).



### 3.4. RUSSIA'S PREPARATIONS

After the entrance of Serbia and Montenegro into the war, the Panslavists redoubled their efforts in Russia. During the summer of 1876, the Russian enthusiasts developed a feverish activity in which the Tsardom assumed a prominent role (73). Under the circumstances the possibility of Russian intervention became steadily greater. In case of a war with the Ottoman Empire there was an urgent necessity for Russia to ensure Austro-Hungarian neutrality in order to prevent another Crimean War coalition. Moreover, it was clear that Austria-Hungary would be a great obstacle to the realization of Slavic aspirations in the Balkans, in the event of a Russian victory over the Ottomans. For these reasons, Gorchakov sought to come to terms with Austria-Hungary.

#### 3.4.1. The Reichstadt Agreement

In the first few days following the Serbian declaration of war, on July 8, 1876, Alexander II and Gorchakov met with Francis Joseph and Andrassy at the Bohemian castle of Reichstadt and concluded the so-called Reichstadt Convention. The public pronouncement of the Convention was that Austria-Hungary and Russia had agreed on the policy of non-intervention dealing with the Ottoman-Serbian War (74). However, a secret verbal agreement had also been arranged on the idea of common action whatever the outcome of the struggle would be: If Serbia and Montenegro were defeated, the two powers would intervene to restore the *status quo* and to obtain administrative reforms, enlisted in the Andrassy Note and the Berlin Memorandum, in the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In other words, the Ottoman Empire would not be allowed to derive any advantage from its victory (75). On the

other hand, if the Porte was defeated, a real partition of the Empire was to be affected, but no large Slavic state was to be created in the Balkans. Bulgaria, Rumelia, and Albania were to be established as autonomous entities. Constantinople was to be a free city. Russia was to acquire southern Bessarabia and some territory in Asia Minor. Austria-Hungary would receive Bosnia and Herzegovina; and Greece would be given Thessaly and Crete (76).

Both parties were well satisfied with such an agreement. For Andrassy, its meaning was to extend his policy of maintaining Ottoman integrity to the point of protecting Austro-Hungarian influence over the Balkan states in view of a probable Ottoman collapse (77).

#### **3.4.2. The Budapest Convention**

The failure of the Constantinople Conference put an end to Russia's pacific inclinations. From the beginning of the crisis, Russia had been bent on bringing about united action by the powers and united pressure upon the Porte. But this was not achieved. By the beginning of the new year, it became clear for Russians that the Ottomans would not yield without a struggle (78).

Despite the Reichstadt Convention, the Russian government remained unsure of its diplomatic position. While the Constantinople Conference continued, the Russian government, anticipating the probable failure of the Conference, negotiated with Andrassy to determine what the attitude of the Dual Monarchy would be if Russia declared war on the Porte. On January 15, 1877, the Budapest Convention was signed by the two powers. In this treaty, Austria-Hungary agreed that should the Constantinople Conference fail, and war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire ensue, it would preserve an attitude of benevolent neutrality

in return for Austrian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (79). This was a military convention and without a political convention it would be invalid. So, a political convention was concluded on March 8 and reaffirmed the provisions of the Reichstadt Agreement. With these two conventions, the Russians became ready for action against the Ottoman Empire. One factor affecting the decision of the Russian government to consider war was the recognized unwillingness of the British government to fight for the Porte as a consequence of the anti-Ottoman explosion of opinion throughout the country (80).

### **3.4.3. The London Protocol**

Russia began the action with a Circular on January 31, which declared the Ottoman rejection of the demands of the powers as an affront to Europe and asked the other European governments directly what they proposed to do under the circumstances (81). While negotiations between Shuvalov and Derby were continuing, a Serbo-Ottoman peace was concluded. But this did not stop Russian efforts to achieve an understanding with Britain. On March 1, 1877, Ignatiev was sent to London with a protocol which merely called upon the Porte to adopt the reforms. Derby told Shuvalov that Britain was ready to agree in principle to the protocol, subject to some modifications and added three necessary stipulations: a formal pledge of Russian demobilization; the Porte should not be asked to sign the protocol; and agreement of the powers to it (82). Upon the Russian acceptance of British conditions, Derby and Shuvalov managed to reach an agreement on the protocol. On March 31, the representatives of all of the great powers signed the London Protocol, which simply reaffirmed the interests of the powers in the amelioration of the conditions of the Christian population, and in the reforms to be introduced in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria. The powers proposed to watch the manner in which the promises of the Porte were carried into

effect. If their hopes should again be disappointed, they declared, such a state of affairs would be incompatible with their interests and those of Europe generally. In that case they reserved to themselves further consideration as to the means best to secure the welfare of the Christian population and the interests of general peace (83).

The London Protocol represented the mildest European program for Ottoman reforms. Despite its signature England was not in complete agreement with Russia even on this mild program. Derby added a declaration that since the British government had signed only in the interests of general peace, the protocol would be *null and void* unless reciprocal disarmament on the part of Russia and the Ottoman Empire were attained. Whereas the Russians made their disarmament conditional on the previous disarmament of the Ottomans and the fulfillment of the other terms of the protocol, the British refused to recognize it unless both sides reciprocally disarmed (84). So, the London Protocol was born as a dead-letter. But it was significant to show the alteration of British policy from the beginning of the insurrection up to beginning of the Russo-Ottoman War: from the Consular Mission of 1875 through the Berlin Memorandum of 1876, the British position was frank opposition to the means which seemed inconsistent with the Porte's authority; now, in March 1877, the British strongly pressed upon the Porte and signed a protocol with Russia for the acceptance of arrangements which were designed to limit, restrict, and partially remove Ottoman control over its European provinces (85). Britain still insisted on the policy of preserving Ottoman independence but no longer its territorial integrity.

#### **3.4.4. The Final Russian Ultimatum**

On April 9, Shuvalov informed Derby that if a war was to be averted, it would be necessary for the Ottoman Empire to send an envoy to St.Petersburg in order to discuss disarmament. On the same day, the Ottoman Council decided to issue a circular dispatch to all the European powers. It contained the Porte's refusal of the protocol as well as its objection to send a representative to Russia (86). By this dispatch, war became a matter of time. Although the London Protocol proposed further negotiation between the powers in the event of the Porte's refusal, no further move was made by the Russian government to reopen discussions rather it ordered full mobilization of the forces.

On April 24, 1877, Russia, by declaring war on the Ottoman Empire, began the fourth Russo-Ottoman War of the nineteenth century in an exceedingly favourable diplomatic situation: Austria-Hungary was bound by the Reichstadt and Budapest Conventions; and Britain bound by the outburst of humanitarian sentiment. The Russian excuse for the war was the Ottoman rejection of the London Protocol though it previously agreed, upon London's demand, that it would not require a formal Ottoman acceptance (87).

## CHAPTER IV: OTTOMAN-RUSSIAN WAR OF 1877-1878

Wars between Imperial Russia and the Ottoman Empire were not extraordinary in European history. From the time of Peter the Great there had been one of these wars every twenty or twenty five years. Although Russia entered the campaign of 1877 under very favourable diplomatic conditions, as far as the military aspects of both sides were concerned, the war of 1877-1878 was also one of the “wars of the one-eyed against the blind” as Frederick the Great once remarked (1). In point of armament the Ottomans had several advantages. They had the finest navy they had possessed since the time of Suleiman the Magnificent. Moreover, Ottoman armies were well-equipped with modern weapons, and even in the matters of leadership, the Ottomans had the advantage. However, there was no unity of command and no real plan of campaign (2). On the other hand, in Russia, the great army reforms were only a few years old and the new system was not yet in running order.

Because of Russian naval inferiority in the Black Sea, the Russians could attack the Ottoman Empire by land alone. So, Romania was the key to the situation (3). Not having a direct interest in the Russo-Ottoman conflict, the Romanian government preferred to stand aloof, but this was not possible. After long negotiations with Russia, from September 1876 to April 1877, a Convention was concluded. on April 16, 1877, which gave Russians the right of transit through Romanian territory (4). On May 21, the Ottoman bombardment of the Romanian town of Kalafat provoked the declaration of war by Romania and proclamation of Romanian independence (5). During May, the main Russian armies moved into Romania and crossed the Danube, on June 28, almost without resistance from the Ottomans.

#### **4.1. BRITISH ‘CONDITIONAL NEUTRALITY’**

The official outbreak of war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire had already been anticipated by the British government. Once Russia had declared war, Britain lost no time to make its policy known. While none of the other powers troubled to reply to the Russian Circular of April 9, in which it was said that the Tsar felt convinced, as he embarked upon war, that he was serving not only Russian interests, but the interests of Europe, the British government protested against the Russian assumption of a European mandate (6).

The British Prime Minister interpreted the war as the beginning of the European partition of the Ottoman Empire and wished Britain to anticipate such partition. Disraeli's thoughts reflected no sentimental feeling for Britain's Crimean War ally, but rather a desire to obtain British supremacy in the world. The Queen agreed with her Prime Minister on this point: "It is not a question of upholding Turkey; it is a question of Russian or British supremacy in the world", she said (7). Under the circumstances Disraeli favoured a temporary British occupation of the Dardanelles as a 'material guarantee' against possible Russian occupation of Constantinople. But his proposal was rejected by the Cabinet (8).

##### **4.1.1. Derby's Note of May 6**

The Cabinet agreed to remain neutral, but only on condition that certain specific 'British Interests' were not imperilled. These 'British Interests' were announced to Russia in a note of warning by Derby on May 6: Russia was warned against attempting to blockade the Suez Canal, and against occupying Egypt. Secondly, the British government could not witness with indifference the fate of Constantinople or passing into other hands than those of its present

possessors; and it also considered the existing arrangements for navigation of the Straits as 'wise and salutary' and not requiring alteration. Thirdly, "the course of events might show that there were still other interests, as for instance on the Persian Gulf, which it would be their duty to protect" (9).

The Note was significant not only because it was described by Disraeli as the 'charter' of British policy, but also since it was the last occasion of cordial cooperation between the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. In addition, from the beginning of the Eastern Crisis in 1875, the British government, for the first time, defined its policy objectives clearly, which can be summarized as keeping open the Suez Canal, no occupation of either Egypt or Constantinople, no changes in the present international regulations of the Straits, and protection of the Persian Gulf.

Shuvalov, the Russian ambassador in London, who devoted himself to the cause of peace between Britain and Russia, persuaded the Russian government of his own view and issued a long Memorandum to Derby on May 30: Shuvalov gave assurances that Russia would not blockade or interrupt navigation in the Suez Canal, nor would bring Egypt in the area of military operations (10). As to Constantinople, he assured Britain against permanent annexation. As to the Straits, the existing regulations ought to be "revised in a spirit of equity" and "by common agreement". As regards British fears of Russian action on the Euphrates and the Persian Gulf or at Erzurum and its effects on the route to India, Shuvalov said " Our position is simple and clear. We have no interest to injure England in this direction but we may be forced to seek measures of defence against her hostility" (11).



The Russian reply failed to make a noticeable impression on the British Cabinet. Despite Russian assurances against permanent occupation of Constantinople, Disraeli was still in favour of occupying the Dardanelles or sending the British fleet to Constantinople in order to protect British interests but several members of the Cabinet objected to this course. The impossibility of challenging Russia without first finding some European ally forced the British government to search for the ways of achieving an understanding with Austria-Hungary.

#### **4.1.2. British Overture to Austria-Hungary**

On May 19, Derby, assuming that the two powers 'have a common interest' in Constantinople and the Straits, drew up a draft containing an invitation to Austria-Hungary to 'discuss a plan of joint action' in the event of a Russian march on the capital (12). The Austrian reply, however, was cool. Andrassy pointed out that Austria-Hungary and Britain could always force the Russians to withdraw from Constantinople and gave a list of seven points which he could not accept: 1) any exclusive protectorate over the Balkan Christians by any one European power; 2) any peace settlement dictated by a single power; 3) Russian acquisition of territory on the right bank of the Danube; 4) Russian cooperation with Romania; 5) the erection of a prince, either Austro-Hungarian or Russian, on a Balkan throne; 6) a Russian occupation of Constantinople; and 7) the erection of a large Slavic state at the expense of non-Slav elements of the Balkans. To prevent these, Austria-Hungary would be ready to risk war against Russia (13).

Though the British government was well satisfied with this program, what it wanted was common action in the existing crisis. But Andrassy refused to go further and the two governments agreed to an exchange of declarations of policy on the basis of Andrassy's seven

points. This was accomplished by a dispatch of Andrassy on July 26, and the reply of Derby on August 14. It was a purely negative agreement and laid down no special course of action in the event of its violation, and, as Disraeli described, it was only a 'moral understanding' (14). Shuvalov made a note-worthy evaluation of the Anglo-Austrian negotiations and said that "the lack of agreement between Austria-Hungary and England had a great influence on the whole course of the crisis. If London and Vienna had been able to agree at the outset and declared that they would not tolerate war, war would have been quite impossible" (15).

Failure in finding a continental ally left only one alternative for action for the British. Upon Disraeli's proposal the British fleet was sent to Besika Bay on June 30, but this British action was perceived negatively by the Ottomans who interpreted the move of the fleet as British participation in the European partition of the Empire.

#### **4.1.3. Russian Advance, British Immobility**

After crossing the Danube, the Russian advance was immediately pushed with great energy. Under General Gurko, a flying column pushed south through the Balkan Mountains and occupied the Shipka Pass on July 19 (16). The siege of Plevna began on the following day with a Russian repulse.

The rapidity of the Russian advance was viewed with the greatest alarm in Britain. Disraeli and the Queen advocated an active alliance with the Ottoman Empire against Russia. But most of the members of the Cabinet were not so panic-stricken. On July 21, however, the Cabinet agreed to warn Russia against occupation of Constantinople: Britain should go to war against Russia if this power occupied Constantinople and did not make arrangements to retire

immediately (17). So, the British government declared that it would tolerate a temporary Russian occupation of the city.

On July 27, Henry Austen Layard, the new British ambassador in Constantinople, reported that the Russians would be at Adrianople soon and said that “if we told Russia clearly and decidedly that we will not consent her taking possession of Constantinople, she might make peace at Adrianople” (18). This news was so serious that on the following day, Layard was asked to induce the Sultan to invite the British fleet to come up to Constantinople (19). However, at that moment, the second victory of Osman Pasha at the second battle of Plevna, on July 30, ended what seemed to have been a serious crisis for the Ottoman Empire as well as for Britain.

At the beginning of August Colonel F. Wellesley, the English military attache with the Russian armies, was returned to London by the Tsar, who had begun to lose his original confidence and enthusiasm, in order to bring the Tsar’s message to the British government. His purpose was to reassure Britain, after their warning of July 21, concerning the occupation of Constantinople, and to make peace on the terms which Shuvalov had brought to London on June 8, namely, an autonomous Bulgarian principality under European guarantee; an increase in territory for Serbia and Montenegro; good administration for the other parts of European Turkey and for Bosnia and Herzegovina; part of the latter going to Austria-Hungary; independence for Romania; and Russian acquisition of Dobrudja, Batum, and part of Bessarabia (20). Wellesley was sent back to Russia with two messages: One was an official, cool, but polite reply from Derby indicating the British government’s desire for peace and their intention not to depart from their position of conditional neutrality; and explaining that British influence at Constantinople was not a favourable one at the present moment for the

purpose of initiating peace negotiations (21). The other message, unofficial and unknown by Derby, from the Queen and Disraeli warned the Tsar against prolonging the conflict or planning a second campaign for the following year; and saying that in such a case “England must take her place as a belligerent” (22). These two messages representing different views within the British Cabinet demonstrated that Britain saw little hope for peace presently; its policy of conditional neutrality would be maintained unless hostilities continued too long, in which case Britain would be forced to go to war.

#### **4.1.4. Cabinet Disunity**

On December 9, Osman Pasha, in danger of starvation, made a last attempt to break through the Russian lines, but was defeated. On the following day, he surrendered the city (23). The fall of Plevna caused great excitement in London. The road to Adrianople was almost undefended and for London a bad dream had become a reality. Meanwhile, the Ottomans had come to realize the danger of their position and on December 12, they asked the powers to mediate. As Austria-Hungary and Germany refused absolutely to take part in such a move, Britain remained the sole power which could take the initiative for Russo-Ottoman negotiations. However, any kind of British action was blocked because of increasing Cabinet dissension.

On the one hand, the Queen strongly opposed Derby’s peace-at-all-price policy and urged her Prime Minister, not for the first time, to be firm. Even the London press called for British action to mediate. On the other hand, as Disraeli described, “in a Cabinet of twelve members, there are seven parties and policies” (24). Disraeli, however, was determined to take a strong stand, this time, at any cost. A note was handed to the Russian ambassador, on December 13,

warning Russia that although the British conditional neutrality was maintained, an occupation of Constantinople or the Dardanelles, even though temporarily or for purely military purposes, might oblige the British government to take measures of precaution.

The Prime Minister, who desired going further than the verbal warning to Russia, asked the Cabinet, on the following day, that the Parliament be summoned before the usual time; a vote of money for a large military increase be requested; and that a mediating position between the two belligerents be undertaken (25). But his proposal was faced with strong opposition from not only Lord Derby but also Lord Salisbury, who insisted that such a policy would end the alliance with the Ottoman Empire. There were several heated Cabinet meetings and the Cabinet was not able to agree on a specific policy or action. In the end, Disraeli won his point by threatening to resign, and his three proposals were accepted by the Cabinet unanimously.

Before communicating to Russia the matter of British mediation, it was decided to invite Austria-Hungary to join in a note to Russia offering mediation before the Balkans were crossed. This, however, was not what Andrassy wished. He preferred the Porte to address itself directly to Russia (26).

London received an appeal from Constantinople for mediation on December 24. This opportunity was seized by Derby; and Russia was informed of the Ottoman desire for peace, and of the British wish for mediation. The Russian reply was simple: "No foreign mediation will be accepted" (27). The Russian government referred the Ottomans to the commander-in-chief, Grand Duke Nicholas, to discuss an armistice. The granting of armistice was to be conditional upon previous acceptance of preliminary peace terms. Though the Porte accepted these vague and elastic peace terms, Russia intended to drag out the negotiations in order to

continue its advance, as the Tsar said: “till our demands have been unconditionally accepted by the Porte” (28).

Relying upon his partners in the Three Emperors' League, Gorchakov believed that Britain, without a continental ally, would be unable to make more rather than a few demonstrations. He was right. While the Russian advance towards Constantinople speedily continued, the British Cabinet could not specify an action or policy except than continuing with neutrality.

#### **4.2. RUSSIAN VICTORY**

Russia took Sofia at the beginning of January 1878. The Ottomans, who were disappointed with British inaction to obtain an armistice, appealed directly to the Russian commander on January 9. Upon the Russian demand, two Ottoman delegates, with full powers to negotiate, were sent to St. Petersburg. They arrived at the Russian headquarters on January 19. But the Russians, realizing that there was little or no Ottoman resistance left, were determined to advance as far as possible before agreeing to the suspension of hostilities. On the morning of January 19, just a few hours before the arrival of the Ottoman delegates, the Tsar informed his brother, with a telegram, to continue military operations; and to delay the communicating with the Ottomans of the bases for peace by asking them for their proposals which would be necessary to refer back to St. Petersburg (29). These were only tactics to gain time for further advance.

Meanwhile, Layard reported with a telegram of January 10, that the Ottomans were unable to defend Adrianople or the lines of the Gallipoli Peninsula; and proposed to bring the fleet nearer to Constantinople. Alarmed by this telegram, Disraeli proposed, at the Cabinet meeting

of January 12, to send the fleet to the Dardanelles (30). But the Cabinet dissensions were again on the scene. Derby strongly objected to an action of the fleet. The Prime Minister again threatened his ministers by resignation. Salisbury averted disruption by proposing that Layard be instructed to obtain the Sultan's permission for the fleet, and Russia be asked for assurances that it would not occupy the Dardanelles. But the Foreign Secretary rejected even this proposal. "He opposed everything, proposed nothing" as the Earl of Cairns, the Lord Chancellor, said (31). A Cabinet crisis was postponed temporarily by two telegrams. The one from Constantinople conveyed an Ottoman request that the contemplated naval action be postponed in view of the possible reaction of such a step upon Russia; the other from St. Petersburg seemed to have made Gallipoli safe (32).

Disraeli's next step was to reopen discussions with Austria-Hungary in order to effect a concerted action against Russia in the form of a defensive alliance. Andrassy, in reply, expressed his disappointment that the British Parliament had not been asked for money; that Gallipoli had not been occupied; and that the fleet had not been sent to Constantinople. He added that "the Austrian Government would not find any support in making a demonstration in going diplomatically hand in hand with England so long as the British Government have not given a visible sign of their determination to protect at least their maritime interests" (33). This Austro-Hungarian policy was clearly specified by Count Ferdinand Beust, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in London, that only after the British fleet had gone to Constantinople, his country would agree to give an order for mobilization. As a result, the negotiations with Austria-Hungary were as unsatisfactory as ever since each of these two powers was willing to follow the lead of the other but neither was prepared to take the initiative.

The British government decided to send the fleet to Constantinople on January 23. This decision, however, resulted in the resignation of Derby, and of the Earl of Carnarvon, the Colonial Minister. As Shuvalov, on January 25, gave to Derby the Russian peace conditions, the Cabinet, already fearful of the effects of Derby's resignation, especially in the Parliament, decided to recall the fleet and Derby was persuaded to recall his resignation (34). This incident, however, threw a rather lurid light on the indecision of the British Cabinet and, consequently, in no way served to strengthen the British position.

#### **4.2.1. Armistice**

On January 31, the Russo-Ottoman armistice was signed at Adrianople on the following terms: 1) Autonomy for Bulgaria, with annual tribute, a national militia, and the frontiers not narrower than those proposed at the Constantinople Conference; 2) Independence for Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania; 3) Autonomy for Bosnia and Herzegovina; 4) Reforms in the other European provinces of the Ottoman Empire; 5) A war indemnity; 6) An agreement regarding the Straits to follow; 7) Ottoman evacuation of Vidin, Rushcuk, Silistra, and Erzurum; and 8) Immediate negotiations for peace preliminaries (35). The Armistice Agreement provided for Russian occupation of the Ottoman territory almost to the lines of Bolayır in the direction of the Gallipoli Peninsula, and almost to the Çatalca lines outside Constantinople, meaning that the Russian advance would continue, even after the cessation of the hostilities.

On the whole, Russian conditions were harsher on the Austro-Hungarians than on the British; and for the moment Vienna, which had previously tried to burden London with the initiative, was obliged to take the lead. Andrassy made no secret of his feelings that Austria-Hungary



had been duped by Russia, and declared his determination not to accept the terms which affected Austro-Hungarian interests unless the other powers gave their assent. He proposed a European Conference; and even went further as to ask the British government for armed aid to combat such a one-sided peace (36).

On the other hand, Britain was alarmed again by the news of continuous Russian advance to Constantinople. Throughout the whole country, the war spirit was rising day by day. However, even Disraeli admitted that Britain lacked the means to prevent Russia from entering Constantinople without a continental ally. The Cabinet, on February 8, again, decided to send up the fleet to the Ottoman capital, and to invite other neutral powers to join in this step. At the same time, the vote for six million pounds was passed in the Parliament. But the Cabinet decision for the removal of the fleet resulted in another fiasco because the Ottomans refused to give permission for the British passage. When Gorchakov learnt of the British intention, he telegraphed Shuvalov that as Britain or other neutral powers as well were sending their fleets to Constantinople in order to protect their subjects, Russia would also send to the city part of its army for the purpose of protecting Christian lives and property (37).

In spite of the Russian threat, on February 12, Admiral Hornby received instructions from his government to go through the Straits with or without the Sultan's permission, and on the following day, the British fleet went through the Straits without Ottoman permission. The Tsar, as a response, sent instructions to Grand Duke Nicholas to arrange for the occupation of Constantinople (38). But, the Grand Duke delayed the Tsar's instructions as he favoured peace. He occupied San Stefano and began peace negotiations with the Ottomans.

#### 4.2.2. The Treaty of San Stefano

The peace treaty, largely the work of Panslavist Ignatiev, was signed on March 3, 1878. This document can be described as first and foremost a Panslavist Treaty for it was drafted exclusively for the benefit of the Slav peoples of the Balkans, and for the aggrandizement of Russia in Europe as well as in Asia (39). Montenegro, with complete independence, was to be enlarged and given the port of Antivari on the Adriatic; Serbia and Romania were to be independent and receive more territory; Bosnia and Herzegovina were to be autonomous; Thessaly, Epirus and other Christian provinces of the Ottoman Empire in Europe were to receive an organization like that of Crete; the Porte was to pay one and a half billion rubles of indemnity; but instead of one billion one hundred thousand rubles, Russia was to take southern Bessarabia, and in Asia Minor, Kars, Ardahan, Batum, and Bayazid; and the Straits were to be open in war time as in peace time to the merchant vessels of the neutral states arriving from or destined to the Russian ports. Last, but not least, a Greater Bulgaria, including Macedonia and enjoying easy access to the Aegean Sea, as an autonomous tributary principality, with a Christian Governor and a national militia was to be established (40).

Such a treaty would be acceptable neither to the British nor to the Austrians (41). Britain could accept neither such a change in the Straits regulations nor the establishment of a new Bulgarian state as a mere outpost of Russia on the Aegean. In addition, the British felt that the Russian advance in Asia Minor would be the first step in Russia's march on the Gulf of Alexandretta. On the other hand, Austria-Hungary was directly menaced by the projected creation of a large Slavic state. There remained only hope for a pacific solution acceptable to these two powers; and Andrassy took the lead, on March 7, by issuing formal invitations to the powers to attend a congress to be held in Berlin (42).

The powers other than Britain accepted this proposal immediately. Britain gave a provisional acceptance based on the submission of the entire Treaty of San Stefano to the congress. The British conditions, whose fulfillment alone would permit it to attend the congress, were communicated to Austria-Hungary on March 9: first, the entire San Stefano Treaty must be open to discussions by the congress; second, no alteration of the previous Treaties of 1841, 1856, 1871 would be valid until it had been approved by the signatory powers of those treaties. The Russian government, however, insisted on consideration of those parts of the Treaty of San Stefano which only affected those treaties (43). While the bases of the congress remained undecided, the British government was groping for a policy, but not very successfully.

#### **4.2.3. Derby's Final Resignation**

Because of the difference between England and Russia regarding the bases of the congress, the prospects of a European meeting appeared very bleak at the end of March. The Russians made a last effort to square Andrassy on the San Stefano Treaty, thereby isolating Britain. On March 24, Ignatiev left St. Petersburg for Vienna to reanimate and fortify the entente of the Three Northern Courts. But the mission failed not because of the Austrian demand for Bosnia and Herzegovina. since the Russians had already resigned themselves to the Austrian occupation of these provinces, but because of establishment of a big Bulgaria (44).

Meanwhile, the British preparations for war increased upon Gorchakov's firm refusal to London's conditions. Disraeli decided upon further pressure on Russia and at the Cabinet meeting of March 27, he laid three concrete proposals before the Cabinet that the reserves

should be called out: troops should be summoned from India; and these troops should occupy some stations in the Eastern Mediterranean (45). The Cabinet agreed to call out the reserves and accepted, in principle, the proposal to bring Indian troops to occupy the needed stations in the Eastern Mediterranean. But, the Foreign Secretary objected vigorously to all this and handed in his resignation which this time was accepted.

Derby's resignation was a turning point in the British foreign policy. He was the architect of the British negative attitude and passivity regarding the Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878. His close friend, Shuvalov, described his impact on British policy as such: "I can affirm that (it) is thanks to the efforts of Lord Derby alone, that peace had been maintained up till now, and we could crush Turkey before England interfered. This last result was the real cause of Derby's fall" (46).

## **CHAPTER V: SALISBURY AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE**

Lord Salisbury succeeded Derby as Foreign Secretary. Because he was in agreement with the Prime Minister, the British Cabinet seemed relatively harmonious after Derby's resignation. Disraeli and Derby were of two opposite characters and mentalities; and could work together only by constant mutual concessions, which resulted, at the end, in the lack of a clear and consistent British foreign policy. While Disraeli vacillated between the idea of preserving the Ottoman Empire and its partition, aiming only at restoring British influence and prestige in Europe, Derby spent all of his energy in resisting measures which required an active British involvement in Continental affairs (1). The latter's disappearance enabled the Cabinet to take a strong and consistent stand in foreign affairs. Added to the unity within the Cabinet, the demise of the Austro-Russian entente gave Britain an opportunity to retrieve influence and prestige after months of hesitation and near disaster. The new Foreign Secretary was able to solve the two problematics of British foreign policy: Lack of a clear formulation of British policy objectives, especially dealing with the Eastern Question, and lack of a continental ally.

### **5.1. SALISBURY'S CIRCULAR**

When Salisbury took up the leadership in foreign affairs, he firstly set up a few principles to guide British policy. He did not believe in the possibility of setting the Ottoman Empire on its legs again, nor he thought it would be safe to stake Britain's security in those seas on Ottoman efficiency. Therefore, he abandoned the Palmerstonian idea of preserving Ottoman territorial integrity, and found other means for protecting British interests. The Foreign Secretary's program of policy was based on the assumption that the Ottoman Empire should be freed from Russia's domination, and rendered 'tolerably independent within its reduced proportion' (2).

This program was issued to the powers, on April 1, in the form of a Circular which defended Britain's diplomatic position on the congress, and set forth objections to the various stipulations of the Treaty of San Stefano. The Circular indicated that this treaty was not compatible with British interests concerning the Straits, Persian Gulf, and Suez Canal. It, then, argued that the cumulative effect of San Stefano would be the suppression of the political independence of the Ottoman Empire, and the substitution of the Russian influence alone in the Balkans and the Near East (3). After advancing these points, Salisbury alluded to some specific clauses of the treaty and proposed four points to revise it: 1) Driving back the Slav state to the Balkans, and creating a Greek province instead of it; 2) Effective securities for the free passage of the Straits; 3) Two naval stations for England -Lemnos and Cyprus- as the Porte, was no longer able to defend the Eastern Mediterranean; and 4) A reduction of indemnity (4). This exceedingly clear formulation of British policy did much to put an end to the general uncertainty in Britain as well as on the European Continent, and found a wide and popular reception.

Salisbury, on April 4, instructed Odo Russel, the British ambassador in Berlin, to enter into confidential conversations with Bismarck for enabling Britain and Russia to exchange ideas. Bismarck as a 'honest broker' accepted to mediate between the two powers, and proposed a simultaneous withdrawal to London and St. Petersburg. The British Foreign Secretary gave Bismarck a frank description of British policy which was divided into two categories: points for which Britain might fight, including opposition to a Slav state on the Aegean or near Constantinople, Russian acquisitions in Asia Minor without a British acquisition of a port to *safeguard its Asiatic interests, either neutralization of the Straits* or recognition of the validity of blockading them in wartime; others for which Britain would be prepared for negotiations,

namely, the extent and nature of indemnity, Russian annexation of Bessarabia, its occupation and influence over Bulgaria. He put it bluntly: “We hope for peace but prepare for war” (5).

The Russians agreed to negotiate a simultaneous withdrawal but, in fact, they had no faith in it, since they believed that London intended either Russian humiliation or war. So, the negotiations for the withdrawal of the forces failed, but afforded a convenient bridge to direct discussions between the English and Russian governments.

## **5.2. THE PRACTICAL END OF ISOLATION**

### **5.2.1. Anglo-Austrian Negotiations**

After removing the first obstacle in the way of British foreign policy by his famous Circular, Salisbury’s chief preoccupation was now to find a continental ally in order to prevent the possibility of being isolated at the congress. For this reason, he made an overture to Austria-Hungary to reach an agreement as to the modification of the San Stefano Treaty. He asked his ambassador in Vienna, Elliot, to “take every opportunity which you decently can to press on Count Andrassy to declare his policy” (6).

After learning the Russian peace terms, Austria-Hungary had abandoned all war combinations, and adopted a policy of compensation. An Austro-Hungarian representative was sent to Constantinople, on March 29, to persuade the Porte to cede Bosnia and Herzegovina to Austria-Hungary. While pressing the Porte, Andrassy communicated to the powers, on April 14, “chief objects to be attained in changing the preliminary Treaty”. He asked that the **frontiers** of Bulgaria should be narrowed; and it should be organized under the

supervision of a European commission; the Russian occupation should cease with the end of the Russo-Ottoman War. Furthermore, he wished to preserve the interests of Greece, and to secure a natural territorial connection between Constantinople, Thessaly, Macedonia, and Albania (7).

On April 20, Salisbury put the question squarely to his Austrian colleague: “would Austria-Hungary be ready to insist on the restriction of the new Bulgaria to the region north of the Balkan Mountains?” Andrassy refused to treat any one question separately and submitted the Austro-Hungarian program, much in the form of demands made upon Ignatiev, and he also added the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to this program (8). Although Salisbury indicated that there would be no British objection to an Austro-Hungarian expansion into Bosnia and Herzegovina, Andrassy was still unwilling to commit himself. He asked once more for a British answer to his Note of April 14 and his call for the congress (9). Because of this unending negative attitude of Andrassy, Salisbury understood that the real exit from the impasse lay through direct negotiations with Russia.

### **5.2.2. The Anglo-Russian Convention**

On April 29, Shuvalov came to the Foreign Office with a proposal for Britain to indicate its objections and requirements and he would take them back to St. Petersburg. Salisbury, in reply, communicated him a memorandum of British conditions, which were essentially the same as those set forth in the Circular of April 1: Britain objected to the Treaty of San Stefano since it admitted a new naval power (Bulgaria) on the Aegean and threatened with extinction the non-Slav (Greeks) elements of the Balkans, placed the Porte so much at Russia’s mercy that it could no longer discharge with independence (10). Removing Bulgaria from the



Aegean, and restriction of it in size, reconsideration of Asiatic annexations of Russia, and maintaining Ottoman independence were laid down as the British demands, with which the Russian ambassador left London on May 8.

Shuvalov found affairs in a chaotic condition in St. Petersburg. Gorchakov was in a very poor health and hardly able to keep up with the developments. The deciding influence was that of Ignatiev. On the other hand, the military and governmental circles were distinctly in favour of some peaceful arrangements. The conditions of the troops were wretched. The Grand Duke Nicholas, the Grand Duke Micheal (Commander-in-chief in the Caucasus), the Minister of War, the Minister of Finance all agreed that it would be impossible to continue the war, let alone to undertake a new war with Britain (11). Before he left St. Petersburg, Shuvalov had been able to overcome Ignatiev's influence and win over the Tsar to a division of Bulgaria and its removal from the Aegean.

On May 16, the Russian army before Constantinople moved forward closer to the city. But Salisbury, impressed by Shuvalov's efforts for peace and not wishing to give the Russian war party any excuse, directed Layard to keep the fleet where it was (12). Shuvalov returned to London, on May 23, with conciliatory proposals: Russia was prepared to have the Bulgarian frontier pushed back from the Aegean and delimited in the west in such a way as to exclude the non-Bulgarians. Moreover, Bulgaria should be divided into two parts with the Balkan Mountains as the boundry. The northern part should enjoy political autonomy whereas the southern part should have administrative autonomy under a native prince chosen with consent of the European powers. Russia desired the withdrawal of the Ottoman troops from the southern part. In Asia, it was ready to restore Beyazit to the Ottoman Empire, but insisted that Kars, Ardahan, Batum as well as Bessarabia would remain in Russia (13).

Both the Queen and Disraeli were distrusting of the Russian proposals and objected to them. The Prime Minister thought permanent Ottoman existence in Europe as the best barrier to Russia. Salisbury, however, felt that continued and unfettered Muslim rule over the Christians was inhumane and unacceptable. Upon the latter's insistence and efforts, an agreement was reached with Russia on May 24 though it was not actually signed until May 30, 1878.

In the convention, the British demand for a division of Bulgaria by the Balkan Mountains was upheld. Britain accepted the Russian view with respect to the acquisitions of Serbia and Montenegro, as well as the Russian annexation of Bessarabia, Kars, Ardahan and Batum. The problems of expelling Ottoman troops from southern Bulgaria, of European participation in the organization of two Bulgarias, and of the Straits regulations were left to the congress (14).

Anglo-Russian Convention was a path to the congress. It was announced in the Parliament, on June 3, that the British Government had accepted Bismarck's invitation to the congress, and Disraeli and Salisbury were to be the British delegates. The Convention was also significant for, the British government had officially accepted the elimination of European Turkey.

### **5.2.3. The Cyprus Convention**

The British government had easily accepted Russian advance in Asia Minor despite the threat involved to the British position in India. The reason for this was simple. During Shuvalov's mission in St. Petersburg, Disraeli and Salisbury decided that it was now time to arrange an Ottoman understanding in order to obtain Cyprus. At the Cabinet meeting of May 11, the proposal was introduced in the form of a defensive alliance with the Ottoman Empire to

protect it from the Russian attacks on its Asiatic possessions, and for this purpose Ottoman consent to British occupation of Cyprus should be given. The Cabinet agreed on the proposal (15). Indeed, throughout April and May, Salisbury prepared Layard for this new policy. He argued at length that the Ottoman “breakwater is now shattered... and the flood is pouring over it”, that the center of its power, in the future, lay in Asia, where it was menaced by Russia and where Britain could alone defend it (16).

The Cabinet sanctioned a telegram to Layard, on May 24, to propose a defensive alliance to the Sultan in case of Russia retaining Kars, Ardahan, and Batum, which the British Government knew already was likely to be the case, and for which he was to cede Cyprus to Britain. The Sultan was given forty-eight hours to take the draft agreement or leave it (17). Layard had no great difficulty in inducing the Sultan to accept this British overture. In view of the British threat to desist from further opposition to Russian advance and from further efforts to postpone the partition of his empire, the Sultan could make no objection. Moreover, a widespread dissatisfaction in both the army and the ruling class resulted in a plot against the Sultan, which arose on May 24. The Sultan was seized with terror although it was quickly suppressed (18). In such a situation, he could not but welcome the British proposal to defend his empire.

An agreement, in principle, was reached already on May 26, but the so-called Cyprus Convention was signed only on June 4:

“if Batum, Ardahan, Kars or any of them shall be retained by Russia, and if any attempts shall be made at any future time by Russia to take possession of any further portion of Asiatic territories, England engages to join the Sultan in

defending them by force of arms. In return, the Sultan promises to England to introduce necessary reforms into the government of Christian and other subjects; and in order to enable England to make necessary provision for executing her engagement the Sultan further consents to assign the island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England” (19).

#### **5.2.4. The Anglo-Austrian Convention**

The series of agreements concluded by Britain was completed by the Anglo-Austrian Convention of June 6, 1878. Despite of all British efforts to effect it, the Convention was achieved as a result of Andrassy’s high performance.

On May, 8 the Russians submitted their reply at Vienna to the Austrian demands made upon Ignatiev. Russia accepted to divide Bugaria into a western and eastern part, with boundries like those laid down in the Constantinople Conference. The European powers were to be allowed to participate in the organization of these two Bulgarias. Austria-Hungary was to be allowed to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, and was to be free to make such economic arrangements with Serbia and western Bulgaria as were necessary to guarantee communication from Salonica to Mitrovitza. But Montenegro was to retain the area assigned to it by the San Stefano Treaty, and the territory lying between Serbia and Montenegro (the Sancak of Yenipazar) was to be divided between them. In return for these Russian concessions, Austria-Hungary was to promise to support Russia at the congress (20). Andrassy regarded these terms negatively. He thought that the junction of Serbia and Montenegro was particularly ominous and appeared like a plan to exclude Austria- Hungary entirely from access to the Balkans.

He learned from Bismarck of British negotiations with Shuvalov and had every reason to fear that his country would be isolated. He disclosed to Salisbury the Russian proposals of May 8, representing them as an attempt to separate Austria-Hungary and Britain. Andrassy warned his English colleague against falling into this Russian trap, and expressed great eagerness to come to an agreement with Britain on the question of Bulgaria, in return, Britain would support Austria-Hungary in respect to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro (21). He also warned Bismarck about the danger of Austria-Hungary remaining isolated in the event of a Russian and British understanding, and asked him to use his influence in London for an Anglo-Austrian agreement (22).

Salisbury, however, found it strange that Andrassy, who had himself conducted secret negotiations with Russia, should talk now of a trap. He doubted whether Andrassy's inclination for a joint action indicated really a more honest policy and decided to wait for Shuvalov's return (23).

On May 16, Andrassy told Elliot of his readiness for an agreement with Britain based on his support for restriction of Bulgaria. He added that he had just refused a Russian attempt to reach an agreement with Austria-Hungary alone, implying that he had done so in order to maintain a good association with England; and that he hoped for London's support on the matter of Sancak of Yenipazar (24).

As soon as the Anglo-Russian Convention was arrived at, Salisbury authorized his ambassador to offer a draft agreement to Andrassy, provided that the two governments should urge at the congress that the autonomous Bulgaria should not extend south of the Balkan

Mountains. The rest of the territory assigned to Bulgaria by the San Stefano Treaty should be subject to provisions securing to the Sultan adequate political and military supremacy to guard against invasions and insurrections. They would also urge that the Russian occupation of the south of the Danube should be limited to six months, passage through Romania to nine months, and the occupying force to be restricted to twenty thousand men. The powers were to take part in the organization of the Sultan's remaining European provinces. Britain would support any Austro-Hungarian proposal with respect to Bosnia at the congress (25). After some discussion of details on this draft, on June 6, a secret agreement was signed in Vienna by Andrassy and Elliot.

Britain's three agreements, though inconsistent between themselves, had removed it from the position of the diplomatic isolation. The purpose of the pact with Russia was to scale down the clauses of San Stefano in order to allow the Sultan an independent existence in Europe. But, Salisbury's support for independent Romania, Serbia and Montenegro; Austrian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Russian annexation of Bessarabia; and Greek expansion into Thessaly and Epirus would have left the Porte in Europe with some of Macedonia, Rumelia, and Albania. So, what Salisbury meant by the Porte's independent existence, being certain that the Porte's days in Europe were numbered, was temporary security for the Ottoman control over Constantinople and the Straits (26). Seeing the Greeks as the eventual inheritors of the Ottomans over Constantinople and the Straits, he also attempted to ensure Greek independent existence through territorial expansion.

While the British Foreign Secretary evaluated the unfettered Ottoman control over Christian subjects as inhumane, he approved, with the Cyprus Convention, that this 'uncivilized' Ottoman rule was appropriate enough for its Muslim subjects in Asia Minor. In short, these

three British agreements put an effective and practical end to British isolation on the Continent. Now, the Berlin Congress, from the British point of view, was only a matter of procedure which would reaffirm British supremacy in Europe.

### **5.3. THE BERLIN CONGRESS**

The Congress convened in Berlin on June 13. It has often been said that the Congress of Berlin was at bottom a farce since all the decisions had been made beforehand, and that the delegates merely signed their names to earlier agreements (27). However, the questions that had been left to the decision of the Congress were numerous and difficult. On the other hand, the agreements made beforehand were all of a vague nature, and all the powers involved were determined to get what they could out of the Congress.

For these reasons, on more than one question, there was danger that the Congress would break up, and Bismarck's, as the president of the Congress, greatest skill was required to bring about a compromise. His procedure for meeting was invariably to submit the questions to the Congress, and after a brief discussion refer them to the interested powers for private negotiations. Bismarck's determination to bring the Congress to a speedy and successful conclusion was facilitated by the fact that his country had no strong interest in the Near East. So, he emphasized his impartiality during the whole course of the negotiations (28).

#### **5.3.1. The Bulgarian Question**

At the opening meeting of June 13, after a brief survey of the events which had preceded the Congress, it was unanimously decided that Bulgaria should be the first subject of the

discussion. But, unanimity ended quickly when Disraeli demanded withdrawal of the Russian troops before Constantinople, on the plea that their presence was a danger to general peace as well as to the success of the Congress (29). Bismarck suggested that the matter should be settled in further direct negotiations between Russia and Britain.

In the interval between the first and second sessions, the solution of the Bulgarian problem made little progress. The decisive factor was the determining attitude of Disraeli, which was finally instrumental in bringing Russia to accept most of the British demands, and in binding Austria-Hungary closely to Britain (30). On the other hand, Bismarck did not lose sight of the advantages of easing the military situation by a Russian retirement, and made an effort to persuade the Ottomans to surrender the fortresses of Şumnu and Varna, or at least the latter, to the Russians. The Ottoman delegates only referred the matter to their government, but the question was not brought before the Congress again (31).

The discussion of the problems of Bulgaria, properly speaking, began at the second session, on June 17, and was not actually settled until the sixth one, on June 26. In the interval, the Congress went through its greatest crisis and came near breaking up. The Russians had accepted the line of the Balkan Mountains as the frontier between the two Bulgarias, and had agreed to the name of 'East Rumelia' for the southern part. But the real difficulties arose from the attempt to define the line of the Balkans, and from the British demand that the Sultan should have political and military control in East Rumelia. Whereas Russia insisted on its military occupation of Eastern Rumelia, Britain urged that the line of the Balkans would leave Varna outside the new Bulgaria, as part of the Eastern Rumelia, and in the west, Sofia should be left to this southern province (32). Disraeli threatened Bismarck that if Russia refused to accept the British proposals, he would wreck the Congress (33).



After a serious crisis, and consequently Bismarck's involvement, the British demand for Varna and Sofia for Eastern Rumelia was dropped; in return, the Russians agreed to the exercise of political and military control by the Sultan in Eastern Rumelia. The question of the presence of the Ottoman troops in this province was finally decided, with French mediation, that the Porte might have garrison troops on the frontier between Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. Public order, in Eastern Rumelia, was to be secured by the national militia. The Russian occupation of Bulgaria was to be limited to nine months. The consuls of the powers were to be associated with the Russian commission in the organization of Bulgaria whereas in Eastern Rumelia the organization was to be carried out by a European rather than a Russian commission (34).

### **5.3.2. The Question of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The next question of major importance to come before the Congress was the disposition of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the Austrians made a great effort to come to a separate agreement with the Porte, this had ended in failure. During the Anglo-Russian conflict over Bulgaria, Britain was strongly supported by Austria-Hungary. In return for which, according to the Convention of June 6, Britain supported Austrian claims dealing with these two provinces (35).

For the British, it was highly desirable that this step should be taken with the approval of the Ottomans, but all last-minute efforts made to secure the assent of the Porte had failed. When Salisbury made the proposal that Austria-Hungary should occupy the two provinces, the other powers, other than the Ottomans, made no objection. It was decided that the Ottomans come

to an agreement with the Austrian delegates on this matter, not until later, and outside the Congress (36).

### **5.3.3. The Questions of Batum and Straits**

Next came the question of Russia's Asiatic possessions. Although this had been settled in the Anglo-Russian Convention, Britain now came to the conclusion that Batum should not be abandoned so easily. When this question came before the Congress, Salisbury threatened Russia with a change in the Straits regulations if it did not give up Batum (37). Disraeli offered the establishment of Batum as a free port. The question was solved by the Tsar's agreement to make Batum 'disarmed' and an 'exclusively commercial' free port (38).

Meanwhile, Salisbury made an announcement during the session of July 11, that since the Treaty of Berlin involved changes in an important part of the Treaty of Paris, and since the stipulations regarding the Straits in the Treaty of London might become subject to difference of opinion,

“the obligations of Her Britannyc Majesty in respect to the closure of the Straits are limited to an engagement to the Sultan to respect in this regard the independent determinations of His Majesty in conformance with the spirit of the existing treaties” (39). If the other powers made similar declarations, the whole regime of the closure of the Straits would be at an end. To prevent such a development, Shuvalov, on the following day, declared to the Congress that “the principle of the closure of the Straits is a European principle”, and that “the stipulations laid down on this matter, in 1841, 1856, and 1871, now confirmed by the Treaty of Berlin...” (40).

The leading affairs of the Congress had been settled when the Batum question was disposed of. The Congress came to a close on July 13, and the delegates returned home, some satisfied, others profoundly disappointed. Disraeli and Salisbury, however, had greater reason for self-congratulation than any of the others. Disraeli was justified in announcing with pride that he had brought his country 'peace with honour' (41).

For the Ottomans, as expected, the Treaty of Berlin was further than being peace with honour. At Berlin, the Ottoman Empire not only lost territory but also was forced to reconcile itself to foreign intervention. The great powers, at this congress, abandoned the principles of the Paris Congress of 1856, which had had a European character, namely the principle of maintaining the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and non-interference in its internal affairs (42). The Ottoman Empire was expelled from the Concert of Europe forever.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

While analyzing British policy towards the Ottoman Empire in the period of 1870-1878 in this study, it has also been explained which dynamics affected the formulation of a great power's foreign policy. Britain, as the 'old friend' of the Ottoman Empire, had been pursuing a policy of preserving Ottoman territorial integrity and independence since 1833. This objective had been so vital for the British that, in 1856, they had entered into war against Russia to achieve this interest, and put the Ottoman existence under the guarantee of international agreements.

From 1865 onwards, however, a radical shift had emerged in the direction of British foreign policy. Either because to keep its overextended global position or to manage its imperial entanglements, Britain had adopted the policy of isolationism and nonintervention on the European Continent. Until 1870, the Ottoman Empire had not been directly affected by the new direction of British foreign policy since the balance of power created by the Treaty of Paris, in 1856, remained intact. But, with the formation of the united Germany at the center of Europe, the old system of the Treaty of Paris was wrecked. Furthermore, Bismarck established his power-bloc in the form of The Three Emperors' League in 1873. Since France had already been eliminated from the ranks of the great powers after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia were bound by the Three Emperors' League, Britain remained alone on the continent. After the Conservatives' return to power in 1874, Britain abandoned its self-imposed isolation, and required a more prominent role in Europe. But, now it was faced with a Bismarck-imposed isolation.

At this international conjuncture, the great Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878 gave its first signs with a peasant revolt, first in Herzegovina and, then, in Bosnia. If the Porte was able to

suppress the revolt quickly, none of the great powers, at that time, wanted to get involved in this crisis. However, the Ottoman incapability inevitably led to the involvement of great powers. Several attempts, Consular Mission, Andrassy Note and Berlin Memorandum, were not successful in ending, or even in localizing, the insurrection. During all these attempts, Britain advocated Ottoman sovereignty totally, and worked for minimization of European intervention in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. When another insurrection began in Bulgaria, in May 1876, the Eastern Crisis entered into a different route, especially for the British and Ottomans.

In the summer of 1876, the news of the Bulgarian atrocities reached the London press, and caused immense public reaction against the Ottoman Empire and pro-Ottoman policy of the British Foreign Office. The Bulgarian atrocities agitation, which continued with all of its impetus during the summer of 1876, was a turning-point in Anglo-Ottoman relations. Outbursts of humanitarian sentiment, the lack of a continental ally, the absence of an army of a size equal to those of the continental powers, all caused British abandonment of the Ottoman Empire despite its reputation in the Crimean War and its commitments in the international agreements announcing an attack on the Porte *casus belli*, and resulted in Britain's return to the European Concert at the expense of the Ottoman Empire.

Then, the question arises: Did Britain abandon its well-known policy of keeping Ottoman territorial integrity and independence?

In spite of the very deep and negative impact of the Bulgarian atrocities agitation on Anglo-Ottoman relations, this famous British policy was not completely abandoned. Britain refused to fight for Ottoman existence in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 mainly because it did

not have the capability. Since any British move on the European Continent was dependent on a continental ally, the lack of the continental ally meant for the British the lack of policy. On the other hand, Britain did not let Russia crush the Ottomans completely by announcing Constantinople and the Straits as the new British sphere of. Salisbury, with his famous Circular of April 1, 1878, put an end to the uncertainty of British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. According to this document, preservation of Ottoman independence, but not territorial integrity, was announced as a cardinal principle of British foreign policy. So, Britain abandoned the policy of preserving Ottoman territorial integrity. All of the international agreements signed at that time, the Anglo-Russian Convention, the Cyprus Convention, the Anglo-Austrian Convention, and the Treaty of Berlin, were the results of this new aspect of British policy.

In conclusion, at the end of the Berlin Congress, British policy towards the Ottoman Empire can be formulated on the following points:

- 1-Elimination of European Turkey;
- 2- Preservation of Ottoman Asia (1).

Indeed, the **British Foreign Office** did not break with the old Palmerstonian policy, and did not replace it with a new and less sympathetic Ottoman policy. This new British policy was simply to provide **Palmerston's** association of British interests and Ottoman independence with a new **geographical focus** (2).

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