

France, England and
the Politics of the
Salonica Campaign
(1915 - 18)

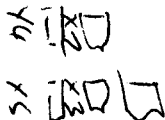
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Abstract

France, England and the Politics of the Salonica Campaign 1915-18 is an attempt to trace and explain the workings of the Anglo-French Entente in wartime. The study has a built-in bias towards the French side of the campaign, since it is the author's belief that the expedition is explicable only in terms of French internal politics and France's wartime aspirations. The policies and actions of England were essentially responses to what happened in Paris. If the study appears somewhat one-sided, therefore, this is because the campaign itself was one-sided. With such uneven cooperation between the allies, it is not surprising that the Salonica Expedition emerges as one of the least fruitful exercises in the allied direction of the war.

The study makes use of extensive collections of hitherto largely unexamined ministerial archives in England and France, together with a number of private collections. The latter, and particularly some previously untapped French sources including the Painlevé, Jules Cambon and Léon Bourgeois papers, have proved profitable and have served to confirm the author's impression that individuals played an enormous part in shaping the development of the campaign. The thesis therefore contains detailed analyses of the motivations and driving forces behind the leading protagonists of the story - Sarrail, Joffre, Briand and Painlevé.

Besides providing a detailed exposé of the campaign itself, the thesis advances our knowledge of several more general aspects of the Great War. In particular the politics of France in the period between the summer of 1915 and the autumn of 1917 are carefully surveyed and analysed. Then new light is thrown upon the nature of French war aims and the way in which these differed from those of England. To this extent the artificiality of the Entente Cordiale is emphasised.

This work owes much to the advice, help and cooperation of others. In particular I would like to thank Professor P. Renouvin, Professor D.C. Watt and Mr P.M.H. Bell for their useful suggestions and encouragement. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Professor D.W.J. Johnson for his support, advice and encouragement. M. Jean Painlevé provided valuable information about his father, as did his niece, Mme A. Rouby. M. Daniel Langlois Berthelot kindly granted me access to his uncle's papers and readily answered my questions. M. Clouet supplied reminiscences of his period as French consul at Salonica, while the late Sir Compton Mackenzie wrote to me in connection with his activities in Greece during the war. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my typists, Miss M. Greenhalph and Mrs N. Fagan for their patience, endurance and expertise, and of course to the staffs of the various libraries and archives in which I have worked.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The war of 1914-18 was not characterised by great imagination on the part of the Allies. As an alternative to the unending carnage on the Western Front the leaders of Britain and France attempted two lesser campaigns in the Near-East,⁽¹⁾ designed to bring the war to a speedier conclusion than seemed possible by hammering away at the German lines in Flanders and Belgium. Neither was a success. Of these, the first - the use of sea mobility to strike with amphibious power at the Dardanelles in 1915 - has long occupied the attention of historians. The Salonica expedition, however, which some saw as a means of striking a mortal blow at the Central Powers by attacking them through the weak underbelly of Austria-Hungary, has received less consideration. Military histories and personal reminiscences are not lacking, but recent attempts to chart the very involved political and diplomatic background of the campaign have been hindered by a lack of archival material.⁽²⁾ This is inevitable in an episode in which a military campaign was so inextricably entwined with the internal politics of Britain and France and in which the motives, actions and aspirations of individuals played such a large part. Percipient observers recognised this at the time: "My own opinion is that until all the documents now held secret in different countries ... are revealed there will be very few men indeed who know the inside story of the Allies' doings in the Balkans, these two years past."⁽³⁾ The opening of ministerial documents together with many private collections justifies, therefore, a new examination and analysis of the Salonica adventure.

After initial expectations of a short, sharp conflict had proved misplaced, the Great War degenerated into a self-perpetuating vicious circle. The continuous absorption of human sacrifices imposed upon governments and generals a sense of awful responsibility to prove that these lives had not been spent in vain. This they could only think of doing by winning the next time, using the same method. Little flair was evident in finding a different approach in the search for victory and men whose reputations rested on justifying the sacrifices already offered assailed bitterly those who suggested trying something new. As 1915 opened, however, some change appeared to be entering this essentially static situation. The three salient features of the war were the deadlock in France, the imperative need to relieve that deadlock before Russia was overwhelmed and the growing belief of a number of politicians in the possibility of relieving it by diversionary politico-strategic operations in the East. But it is against the background of the

(1) as opposed to colonial expeditions.

(2) see A. Palmer: The Gardeners of Salonica (1965) and A. Ducasse: Balkans 14-18 (1964).

(3) G. Ward Price: The Story of the Salonica Army (1917), p.237

bloody slaughter of the war that all plans for finding, by sudden and complex manoeuvres or devices, short cuts to victory, can alone be effectively depicted. An increasing number of politicians, answerable in the last resort to their parliaments, were coming to the conclusion that an alternative must be found. That the would-be alternatives proved quite abortive has not dimmed the enthusiasm of their supporters. Many historians have become almost lyrical about the possibilities of the Dardanelles Campaign. There is something grandiose and splendid about the whole operation, including even the miraculously successful evacuation, which inevitably captures the imagination. "It was the most imaginative conception of the war and its potentialities were almost beyond reckoning. It might even have been regarded, as Rupert Brooke had hoped, as a turning point in history".⁽¹⁾ Similarly Lord Attlee has said that Gallipoli was "an immortal gamble that did not come off ... Sir Winston ... had the one strategic idea in the war. He did not believe in throwing away masses of people to be massacred."⁽²⁾ Few, if any, Englishmen have been equally poetic about the Salonica Campaign. One hears nothing of an "immortal gamble" in the Balkans. This can largely be explained by two factors. The Dardanelles was a relatively short-lived campaign which did not have the opportunity to be beset by political intrigue and it had the merit of being terminated before its futility had become apparent to all. Secondly Salonica was as much a French enterprise as Gallipoli was British, and it is with reluctance that countries see merit in the projects of others. At the Dardanelles, France played the role of a "docile supernumerary",⁽³⁾ but in the Balkans she dictated the course of events. Moreover, not for many decades had a British government embarked on a military undertaking with greater repugnance than it did in October 1915. As Paul Cambon⁽⁴⁾ noted, just as the French had been rushed into the Dardanelles affair without adequate study of the operation, so England was led by France to Salonica without even having time to consider the implications of what she was doing.⁽⁵⁾ In fact France carried a far greater weight than Britain in the first half of the land war and while Britain, after the beginning of 1917, assumed an increasingly larger say in the direction of the war as a whole, Salonica remained to the end the child of France.

(1) A. Moorehead: Gallipoli (1956), p 364.

(2) T. Higgins: Winston Churchill and the Dardanelles (1963), p 185.

(3) E. Delage: The Tragedy of the Dardanelles (1932), p 251.

(4) The prestigious French ambassador in London.

(5) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 6/12/15, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the voices raised in defence of the Salonica expedition have been predominantly French. "Rêve magnifique! Sa réalisation n'était pas impossible: c'était la guerre abrégée de plus d'une année et notre restauration financière combien facilitée - c'était la dislocation complète de l'empire austro-hongrois, qui fut une faute, sans doute évitée - c'était le morcellement du Reich allemand, qui eût un bienfait, rendu possible - c'était l'Europe préservée de l'effondrement total de l'empire russe et de sa bolchevisation, terrible point de gangrène pour notre vieux monde!"⁽¹⁾ The diplomatic historian Pingaud has described Salonica and not the Dardanelles as the great "might have been" of the whole war: "Si ... l'entente avait pu ajouter l'appoint, non plus seulement des divisions primitivement prévues, mais des 200,000 hommes destinés plus tard à être immobilisés dans l'entreprise des Dardanelles, quelle n'aurait pas été la force offensive de la masse ainsi formée pour prendre l'Autriche à revers, en abattre aussitôt la résistance et avancer peut-être de trois années le terme de la guerre!"⁽²⁾ And again, "l'on ne peut s'empêcher de songer à la tournure qu'aurait prise la guerre si les 400,000 Anglais et les 140,000 Français qui payèrent de leur vie la conquête de quelques arpents de terre en Picardie avaient pu être transportés sur le théâtre oriental de la guerre - n'auraient-ils pas formé une masse assez importante pour prendre une heureuse offensive, empêcher l'écrasement de la Roumanie, peut-être même attaquer l'Autriche et entamer l'acte final de la lutte?"⁽³⁾ When the military possibilities of the campaign are being considered, however, it must always be remembered that the terrain of the Balkans was extraordinarily favourable to a defensive action by the Central Powers and not to an offensive action on the part of the Western allies. By going to the Danube, moreover, Britain and France, so far from finding an easier means of approach by which to attack the Central Powers than the Western Front, would have been attacking on a front which was singularly easy for them to defend. A campaign in Southern Macedonia meant fighting Bulgaria and such reinforcements as Germany, Austria and Turkey could manage to send her, with the advantage in communications being against the Western allies.

Indeed, when the campaign finally got underway, it was launched, not with high hopes of invading Austria, but with the strictly limited aim of coming to the rescue of the Serbian army, and, as British military opinion recognised, as

(1) R. David: Le drame ignoré de l'Armée d'Orient (1927), p ix

(2) A. Pingaud: Histoire Diplomatique de la France pendant la Grande Guerre (1938), Vol. 1., p 215

(3) *ibid* Vol. 2., p 142

a military measure to aid Serbia directly, the landing of allied forces at Salonica was absurd. The hostile armies concentrating on the eastern and northern frontiers of Serbia were certain to overwhelm and overrun that country before any effective aid could possibly arrive. As a political move to encourage and determine the action of Greece the despatch of allied troops was perhaps justified. In a sense, though, speculation as to the military potential of the Salonica expedition is of only academic interest. The fact is that if it were ever hoped that the campaign might prove the means of bringing the war to a speedy end, this hope never materialised. Faith in such a possibility was always limited - consequently Salonica provides a familiar story of wanting the ends without supplying the means. Only at the very end of the conflict did the Allied *Armée d'Orient* make significant military progress. For the rest the Salonica forces were locked in the sort of military deadlock which characterised the Western front. When its achievements are considered, therefore, the view which marks the expedition as a waste of time, men and resources appears the most logical. But assessments of this nature are more properly the province of the military historian and the present study will concentrate on the diplomatic and political aspects of the campaign.

At all events "of all the problems which brought soldiers and statesmen into conference during the years 1915-17 the Salonica expedition was at once the most persistent, exasperating and unfruitful."⁽¹⁾ The chief causes of this were the animosities and rivalries with which for centuries the diplomatic affairs of the Balkans had been interwoven, the differences of opinion between the two Entente governments as to the policy to be pursued, the lack of any directing machinery to conduct the allied war effort as a whole, and the political undercurrents in Paris by which the attitude of France was too often determined. The result was possibly the worst example of the breakdown of the coalition in the whole of the war. The history of no other episode in the conflict shows so clearly the divergent views and tactical mistakes which paralysed the allies' actions. Nowhere else can the weaknesses inherent in all coalitions be seen more vividly. For nearly three years the two governments failed to agree on whether it would be better to accord the campaign "une offensive comme objectif ou une retraite comme epilogue".⁽²⁾ And in failing to choose between the two they adopted a middle course which combined the weaknesses of both. They left at Salonica an expeditionary force strong enough to weaken the armies of the main front, but insufficient to make its presence genuinely felt in the Balkans.

(1) Sir W. Robertson: Soldiers and Statesmen (1926), Vol. 2, p 83.

(2) Pingaud: op. cit., Vol 2, p 353.

On 18 June 1915 Winston Churchill⁽¹⁾ circulated to the Cabinet a note on the General Military Situation in the war. In it he argued that a lack of any real coordination in the exertions and plans of the allies had been evident at every stage of the war to that date. This he reckoned to be one of the chief causes of the failure of the military campaigns of 1915. Churchill concluded that unless the campaigns of 1916 were to take the same unsatisfactory course that those of 1915 had so far taken, it appeared vital to assert a far higher degree of common action and for the great belligerents to make plans together, which would offer the prospect of setting a term to the present struggle, the duration of which had already far exceeded the optimistic expectations of the majority of supposedly expert opinion in Britain.⁽²⁾ Similarly, at the end of October 1915, Sir William Robertson, the British Chief of Staff in France, noted that for months past the English and French had been put at a great disadvantage by the lack of coordination in their conduct of the war.⁽³⁾ The opening of a new theatre gave the allies the chance to correct the mistakes of earlier joint endeavours, but it was a chance which they notably failed to seize. If, as the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey asserted, the first object of allied diplomacy in wartime was to preserve solidarity, the Salonica Expedition came nearer than anything else to destroying this primary aim. Grey could scarcely have been thinking of this campaign when he concluded that the goal "was completely and successfully achieved".⁽⁴⁾ With the expedition passing through one of its periodic crises at the beginning of December 1915, Cambon confided to his brother that what worried him most was the prospect of a breach with England. He was appalled at the attitude of the Quai d'Orsay which seemed blind to the implications of this danger: "Berthelot, qui est incapable de concevoir une mentalité étrangère ne redoute pas ce désaccord et croit que nous pouvons imposer nos vues".⁽⁵⁾ The allied conduct of the military campaign and of the related question of policy in Greece continued along this unsatisfactory path for a further two years.

In lieu of a unified body or institution to coordinate the direction of the Entente's political and military strategy, the leaders of Britain and

(1) Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

(2) Note by Churchill: 18/6/15, CAB 37/130/16.

(3) Pingaud: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 131.

(4) Lord Grey: Twenty-Five Years (1925), Vol. 2, p 160.

(5) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 6/12/15, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1. c.f. the rather strange comment by R. D. Challener in G. A. Craig and F. Gilbert (eds) The Diplomats 1919-39 (1953) p 77, "during the war he [Berthelot] had done much to improve relations with Great Britain". At this date Berthelot was 'adjoint au directeur des affaires politiques et commerciales' at the Quai d'Orsay.

France could do no more than substitute a seemingly endless series of allied conferences. But as Arthur Balfour⁽¹⁾ noted when considering the problem of Greece: "What impresses me most painfully is the futility ... of our various international conferences. They have not been few in number, but in many cases the resolutions - long discussed and embodied in formal minutes duly signed by the governments concerned - have been departed from as soon as the Conference separated".⁽²⁾ The lack of machinery to direct policy inevitably meant that what came out as policy lacked consistency and coherence: "En lisant ces pages on sera frappé des multiples variations de la politique suivie par les Alliés, des fréquents changements de front, l'initiative succédant à la réserve et l'action hardie au recueillement".⁽³⁾ Contemporaries were not blind to the need for some sort of control machinery, but seemed unable to effect it, perhaps because they feared that it would involve the subjection of their authority to that of their allies. As early as October 1915 the unofficial but influential observer, Lord Esher, noted the necessity for a small and efficient directing staff of the ablest French and British officers, naval, military and political who could so marshal and coordinate facts and suggestions that the inferences drawn from them would be indisputable and certain to control the executive action of the military commanders of both nations. He considered that the events of the past weeks had been a sad commentary on the lack of political and military directing power. The probable activities of the enemy had been foreseen by some and not by others with a consequent lack of decision and preparation. When these had become necessary the result had been "hurried conferences, obscured counsels, vague and conflicting purposes, followed by decisions and counter-decisions."⁽⁴⁾ Lord Selborne, the Minister of Agriculture, went further and argued that the absence of any striking success for the allies in the war had been due more to the absence of any central control of its conduct than to any other cause. The French government had promised to aid Greece with 150,000 men without consulting England; the British had promised to aid Rumania with 200,000

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- (1) Elder statesman of the Conservative party and an influential figure in view of his long-standing membership of the Committee of Imperial Defence, he succeeded Grey at the Foreign Office in December 1916.
- (2) Minute by Balfour on Memorandum by Nicolson on allied policy in Greece: 27/1/17, F.O. 371/2880/26310.
- (3) Introduction to L'Affaire Grecque 1914-18 - Lieutenant Guiot, Service Historique de l'Etat-Major Général de la Marine.
- (4) Note by Lord Esher 12/10/15, CAB 37/136/4.

without consulting France. "Each one of these decisions may have been justifiable, but it is not possible to wage war successfully by these methods".⁽¹⁾ Not until the end of 1917, however, with the creation of the Supreme War Council, did such a coordination take place. Throughout 1915 and 1916 France attempted so to inflate the prestige of their military chief, General Joffre, as to gain for him a commanding voice not only in the conduct of French strategy, but in that of the allies as a whole.⁽²⁾ And before sanity had been restored to the situation there had been time to create out of the Balkan theatre "un véritable champ de manoeuvre des gaffes de la Coalition".⁽³⁾

Apart from the struggles between allies the fate of the Salonica Expeditionary Force hinged on the outcome of the struggle between the military and political authorities inside France, and to a lesser degree England for control over the conduct of the war. France, when the campaign opened, was working out her solution to the problem which in one way or another beset every belligerent nation; the problem namely of the encroachment of military authority on civil. It took France three agonising years of war to resolve the question of relations between the High Command and the government. The professional soldiers of France were regarded as the historical allies of their fellow authoritarians, the nobles, prelates and Kings. The politicians, on the other hand, were disciples of the revolution - or at least professed to be - and paid lip-service to the bourgeois ideals of liberté, égalité and fraternité. The outbreak of hostilities soon revealed that the state which had once typified the Bonapartist solution to the problem of wartime command had utterly failed to provide a ready-made alternative. In 1914 civilian ministers of war had such measure of influence on military policy as was compatible with the fact that the country had had forty-two war ministers in forty-five years. "Consequently France at war was to grope by trial and error from the military rule of Joffre to the ministerial firmness of Clemenceau".⁽⁴⁾ In fact France emerged from the four year struggle with her civilian government and democratic institutions intact. "Seldom was the nation in less danger of a 'man on horseback' than on 11 November 1918".⁽⁵⁾ Foch, the military hero, was completely overshadowed by Clemenceau, the father of victory. By November 1917 France was ready to acquiesce in a quasi Jacobin dictatorship, and the exhausted nation emerged under the rigorous rule of Clemenceau, who exemplified the will to victory and, more importantly, stood as the champion of civil primacy over the military. In the efforts of the

(1) Memorandum by Lord Selborne 18/10/15, CAB 37/136/20

(2) Pellé to Thomas 25/11/16, Albert Thomas MSS, 94 AP 237.

(3) Note by H. Niche on the direction of the war, 26/12/16, Painlevé MSS 313 AP 55.

(4) J. C. King: Generals and Politicians (1951), p 16

(5) *ibid* p 242

civilian government to capture control of the war effort the Salonica episode plays a crucial role. In all probability Joffre would have been able to deter the government's incursions a little longer, but for the intrusion of General Sarrail, designated commander of the Armée d'Orient, into the political arena.

The politico-military struggle was waged less bitterly but no less surely in England. British military opinion never waived in its conviction that the sole path to victory lay in sending every available man, gun and shell to the French front to kill Germans and break their lines in the West. To one degree or another, however, many politicians and notably Lloyd George⁽¹⁾ focused their attention on the Eastern theatres. In the early part of the conflict the views of Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, were sacrosanct. On 21 May 1915, when Lord Northcliffe published a vehement attack on Kitchener, there was a spontaneous movement of public anger in many parts of the country and the offending newspaper was burned on the Stock Exchange.⁽²⁾ The effect of this situation was that for most of 1915 the Cabinet and its associated committees accepted the War Minister's advice as to what was technically possible without any real knowledge of whether this had any basis in fact. Abusing his position as Secretary for War, Kitchener not only concentrated all power in his own hands but kept all information in his head, releasing only such scraps to his colleagues as he thought fit, thus making criticism of his plans on technical grounds exceedingly difficult. This inevitably foredoomed schemes such as Lloyd George's early efforts to open a Balkan front from Salonica. Almost all the experienced members of the General Staff had gone to France with the Expeditionary Force. Kitchener had apparently little confidence in those who had taken their places at the War Office and preferred to be himself the fount of military advice to the Cabinet. Thus ministers did not have before them any reasoned military proposals for alternative action, including a survey of the difficulties involved and the means of overcoming them, which was one of the normal functions of a General Staff.⁽³⁾ The basic result was a fundamental lack of liaison between military and political authorities in the direction of the British war effort. When service representatives attended cabinet meetings in the early days of the war they appeared to do so only to answer specific questions directed to them. By 1916, however, the military under Sir William

(1) Successively Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister of Munitions and Secretary for War under Asquith, he became Prime Minister himself in December 1916.

(2) W. S. Churchill: The World Crisis, Vol. 2 (1923), p 371

(3) F. Maurice: Lessons of Allied Cooperation (1942), p 36.

Robertson had asserted their primacy, but at the expense of a latent crisis with the politicians which came to the surface with the formation of Lloyd George's government at the end of the year.

Not surprisingly Salonica never became quite the obsession in England that it did in France. Governments of the latter seemed at times to be totally dominated by the campaign. "Salonique et Sarrail, Sarrail et Salonique", wrote Paul Cambon despairingly in October 1916, "c'est là en effet la seule chose importante pour le gouvernement".⁽¹⁾ This reflected the way in which the campaign became increasingly embroiled in the party political struggle in France which, despite claims to the contrary, was never very far beneath the surface of professed unity of purpose. In those darkest moments of the war, therefore, when France looked agonisingly in on herself and the cry of "il faut en finir" reached deafening levels, pent-up nerves, given free range in the secret sittings of the Chamber and Senate, usually found an outlet in criticising the government's conduct of the Salonica campaign. Albert Legrand, an official at the Quai d'Orsay, commenting on the disturbing concentration on internal politics in time of war, declared that "dans les milieux parlementaires, on ne pense et on ne s'intéresse vraiment qu'aux combinaisons ministérielles et au jeu des groupes". For him the only pure area left was "le front des armées".⁽²⁾ He could not, however, have had the Balkan front in mind for this was but an extension of the political intrigues which beset Paris. The growing awareness in England of the relationship between the campaign and French internal politics inevitably coloured the way in which Englishmen looked upon Salonica. For Robertson "French politicians are at the root of the trouble".⁽³⁾ Similarly, the English premier, Asquith, came to the conclusion that "something curious was going on in France".⁽⁴⁾ Indeed as suspicion of French politics became joined by suspicion of French war aims the factor which dominated and even poisoned allied diplomacy in regard to the Salonica Expedition was the growing conviction in England that, as Shakespeare's Marcellus felt of Denmark, "something was rotten in the state of France". It was this above everything else which removed all possibility that the campaign would have a happy and fruitful outcome.

The present study will attempt to analyse the factors and forces which determined the policies of the allies in the Balkan theatre during the Great War. The diversity of these, producing as they did, conflicting aims and interests, ensured that the cooperation of England and France in the Salonica

(1) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 21/10/16, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(2) Legrand to Barrère 29/12/16, Barrère MSS, Vol. 3.

(3) Robertson to Hanbury Williams 16/2/16, Robertson MSS 1/35/57.

(4) War Committee 24/10/16, CAB 42/22/5.

Expedition would be far from smooth. The resulting conflicts carried with them grave implications for the survival of the Entente under the stress of war. Perhaps even more significantly the repercussions of the campaign on the internal development of France played an important part in determining the sort of régime which emerged from the trials of the military conflict.

CHAPTER 2The Origins of the Campaign

On 21 September 1915 General Maurice Sarrail told War Minister Millerand that he had been informed by the Prime Minister, René Viviani, that Salonica (1) could not be envisaged as a base of action for the newly created Armée d'Orient. Yet within two days, in the face of Bulgarian mobilisation and after the urgent pleas for help of Premier Venizelos in Greece, the French Government had agreed, without consulting their English allies, to the despatch of forces to Salonica to help Greece fulfil her treaty obligations to the threatened Serbia. (2) The military campaign in the Balkans, which was to last until the end of the war, was thus set on foot with indecent haste. The actual concept of an expedition based on Salonica had, however, more respectable origins. It derived from that reappraisal of the military situation which followed upon the realisation that original thoughts on the war's nature and duration had been grossly mistaken. By the end of 1914 it was obvious that the struggle, which almost everyone (3) had assumed would be decided early on by a massive pitched battle, was in fact developing into a war of attrition, in which frontal offensives, though still widely seen as the only means of success, would be hideously costly in terms of manpower. Politicians on both sides of the Channel, therefore, began to think in terms of an alternative route into the heartland of the Central Powers via the soft underbelly of the Austrian Empire. Might not such an approach prove easier and less self-destructive than one through the plains of Flanders?

There is considerable doubt as to who was the first public figure in France to come up with the idea of a campaign in the Balkans. It seems safe to assume that several people must have envisaged it at much the same time - so evidently unproductive were proving operations on the western front. In November 1914 Aristide Briand, Viviani's Minister of Justice, produced a plan to send an allied force of 400,000 troops to the Greek port of Salonica so as to protect Serbia, influence the other Balkan states and bring about an offensive against the southern flank of Austria-Hungary. (4) Apart from a strategic motivation Briand seems to have been responding to a section of French public opinion which fervently believed that the wide diffusion of French money, language, thought and influence in the Near-East would indissolubly tie its inhabitants to France. (5) This pressure group which had created a number of

(1) Sarrail to Millerand 21/9/15, 5N 132

(2) Delcassé to Guillemin 23/9/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 283.

(3) One notable exception was the English War Minister, Lord Kitchener, who accurately predicted a long drawn-out conflict.

(4) A. Pingaud: Les Origines de l'Expédition de Salonique, R. H. July-December 1935, p 449.

(5) For French interests in this area see below pp 252-3

organisations interested in the affairs of the Near-East had been joined at the outbreak of war by a section of the press in urging that the government should take prompt action to safeguard French interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. (1)

But Joffre, whose power in the direction of the war in France had been supreme ever since the government's evacuation to Bordeaux had signalled a virtual abandonment of authority, was quick to quash Briand's scheme, arguing that the war could not be won outside France. At very much the same date General Franchet d'Espérey drafted a long memorandum in which he proposed the despatch to Salonica of five army corps, which would then be transported along the Vardar-Morava valleys to Belgrade so as to mount an offensive aimed at Budapest in the spring of 1915. (2) This document was handed over to the President of the Republic, Raymond Poincaré, at the beginning of December 1914. Others have attributed the paternity of the idea as early as October 1914 to General Gallieni, Military Governor of Paris, (3) but the general himself claims no responsibility for the concept. (4) But certainly by February 1915 Gallieni had become an enthusiastic convert to the idea of an expedition to Salonica - to use it, however, not for an advance into the Balkans but as a base for a march upon Constantinople with an army strong enough to encourage the Greeks and Bulgars to join with the Entente. (5) Even Poincaré has attempted to reserve for himself some of the credit for the conception of a Balkan campaign. (6) At all events the question was raised again on the first day of the new year.

(1) G. H. Cassar: The French and the Dardanelles (1971), p 35

(2) P. Azan: Franchet d'Espérey (1949), pp 42-3.

(3) M. A. Leblond: Gallieni parle (1920) Vol. 2, p 57; see also M. Hankey: The Supreme Command (1961) Vol. 1, p 254.

(4) J. Gallieni: Carnets (ed. G. Gallieni), (1932), *passim*.
But see also P. B. Gheusi: Guerre et Théâtre (1919), p 136:
"Le 3 janvier 1915, le capitaine G ... écrivait sur son agenda: le général Gallieni et M. Briand penchés sur les cartes de la Grèce, les yeux fixés sur Salonique et la vallée du Vardar. Ils sont du même avis: une armée qui débarquerait à Salonique et marcherait vers le nord serait sûre d'opérer une diversion puissante et décisive, de nous gagner les Balkans, de libérer le Bosphore et les Dardanelles et de marcher sur Budapest et sur l'énorme grenier à blé de la Hongrie".

(5) B. H. L. Hart: Reputations Ten Years After (1928), p 93

(6) R. Poincaré: Au Service de la France (1926-33), Vol. 7, p 128; c.f. G. Suarez: Briand - Sa vie, son oeuvre, (1938-52) Vol. 3, p 149.

At a reception at the Elysée Palace Briand told his colleagues that he no longer believed in the possibility of a breakthrough on the Western Front and that it was necessary to search a decision elsewhere. He proposed, therefore, the formation of an Anglo-French expeditionary force to be sent through Serbia into Austria-Hungary.⁽¹⁾ The proposition seems to have had the support of Viviani and it was decided that the question should be placed before General Joffre, without whose assent no action would be possible.⁽²⁾ On 7 or 8 January, Joffre was summoned to the Elysée but resolutely refused to countenance any diversion in Southern Europe, arguing that his own plans involved an attack in the spring against the enemy's defensive line in Artois and Champagne for which he would require every available soldier. Joffre was delighted at his success in winning round the government to his point of view and the idea of a Salonica expedition was for the time being allowed to drop.⁽³⁾ Nonetheless, concurrent developments on the other side of the Channel meant that the plan could not be buried as definitively as Joffre would have liked. At the end of December 1914, Colonel Hankey⁽⁴⁾, Lloyd George and Churchill, each acting independently, were coming to similar conclusions about the war situation. All were alarmed by the prospect of an interminable war of attrition in France and were anxious to bring in new allies in the Balkans to increase the pressure on Turkey and Austria-Hungary and relieve that on Russia. Their concern was given added weight with the arrival of an urgent appeal for a diversionary movement from the Grand Duke Nicolas, the Russian Commander-in-Chief, on 2 January 1915. Even Kitchener was sympathetic to the idea of opening up a new theatre of the war in reaction to the policy of slaughter being pressed upon him by Joffre and the British Commander in France, Sir John French, who maintained their faith in the efficacy of frontal assaults in France and Flanders.⁽⁵⁾ As Kitchener told French, the British government were coming round to the view that once the defence of the western front had been provided for, any surplus troops might best be employed in an alternative theatre,⁽⁶⁾ while Lloyd George went so far as to tell Asquith that only the Balkan theatre offered foreseeable prospects of a decision in the war.⁽⁷⁾

(1) G. Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 90.

(2) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 3.

(3) E. Herbillon: Du Général en Chef au Gouvernement (1930), Vol. 1, p 90.

(4) Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence since 1912.

(5) R. R. James: Gallipoli (1965), p 26.

(6) Sir F. Maurice: op. cit., p.37.

(7) A. Pingaud: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 133.

Later in the month the French War Minister had ample opportunity to assess for himself the state of opinion in the English administration in the course of a visit to London. But Millerand faithfully repeated Joffre's objections to the proposed Balkan adventure inducing the War Council to give way and on 26 January reported back to his own Cabinet without apparently indicating the concrete proposals made by the English.⁽¹⁾ Nonetheless two days later several members of the English War Council put forward the idea of the despatch of a purely nominal force to Salonica as an earnest of Britain's intention to send more when available. The Greek Minister in London was reported to have suggested that the appearance of even 5000 allied troops in the Balkans would suffice to influence Bulgarian opinion. Kitchener argued that such a force would be the object of ridicule, but the main difficulty was seen to lie with the French, for Asquith reported that Millerand had not taken very favourably to the idea of assisting Serbia.⁽²⁾ Although, out of a meeting consisting of Kitchener, Balfour, Lloyd George, Churchill, Wolfe Murray and Callwell,⁽³⁾ all except Kitchener were in favour of a force being sent to Salonica as soon as possible, it was pointed out that such action would be difficult without going back on what had apparently been guaranteed to Millerand a few days earlier.⁽⁴⁾ Callwell considered that Joffre and the French War Ministry were too obsessed with the idea that the decisive theatre of the war existed in France and believed himself that more effective openings were possible in the East.⁽⁵⁾ His views were strengthened when the Greek Premier Venizelos made known his country's willingness to enter the war on the allied side provided Roumania did the same, while at a meeting of the French Council of Ministers on 2 February Millerand found himself in opposition to the combined opinions of Poincaré, Briand and Ribot, all of whom urged the wisdom of a Balkan campaign.⁽⁶⁾

Such then was the mood when Lloyd George visited Paris on 4 February, ostensibly to discuss economic problems. In conversation with finance minister Ribot he discovered that Millerand had never mentioned to his colleagues that the suggestion of an expeditionary force to Salonica had been made to him when he was in England. After subsequent conversations with Viviani, Delcassé and Briand, Lloyd George realised that they too had been kept in the dark and he found them astonished and annoyed that Millerand had not fully reported the matter to them. The Chancellor found their attitude to be much more friendly to the idea than that of Millerand, while Briand told him that, with

(1) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, pp 91-2.

(2) Hankey: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 274.

(3) Respectively Chief of the Imperial General Staff and Director of Military Operations.

(4) Callwell to Robertson 30/1/15, Robertson MSS 1/8/1.

(5) *ibid* 4/2/15, Robertson MSS 1/8/2.

(6) Pingaud : op. cit., Vol. 1, p 211.

the possible exception of the Foreign Minister, Delcassé, the rest of the French Cabinet were opposed to Millerand and unanimously in favour of the principle of an expeditionary force of two divisions being sent to Salonica at the earliest practicable moment. Briand also confided his belief that, if Greece and Roumania agreed to enter the war, Joffre would be obliged to provide the necessary forces.⁽¹⁾ The French Government therefore agreed to the sending at once of an army corps to Salonica providing Kitchener sent to France the four divisions he had already promised,⁽²⁾ while Millerand appears reluctantly to have obtained Joffre's consent within the next couple of days.⁽³⁾ So Lloyd George returned from Paris on 6 February together with Delcassé, who bore the promise of his government to send a division to Salonica if the British would do the same. Kitchener agreed with the majority opinion that this was a cheap price to pay if it induced Greece to join the allies.⁽⁴⁾

Callwell was now confident that the French government recognised the importance of securing the Balkans in the interests of the Entente and the possibility of doing so without a military effort sufficient appreciably to alter the strategic situation on the Western Front.⁽⁵⁾ At a meeting of the English War Council on 9 February Asquith argued cogently for the advantages of the proposed expedition and it was decided to send a telegram to Athens explaining the intentions of the allies and requesting the intervention of Greece.⁽⁶⁾ Kitchener stressed the importance of Russian participation in the operation and Delcassé, still in London, pressed the French War Ministry to provide the necessary rifles to induce the Grand Duke Nicholas to cooperate in the proposed allied venture.⁽⁷⁾ But Venizelos absolutely declined to entertain the idea of Greek participation in the war without the collaboration of Roumania, which was becoming increasingly unlikely following the conclusion of a Germano-Bulgarian loan agreement. On 15 February Greece categorically refused to join the Entente and when the English War Council met four days later the attitude of Kitchener had cooled markedly. The idea of operations in the Balkans had, therefore, once more to be abandoned. Individual ministers in England might still maintain that the basic concept was a sound one,⁽⁸⁾ while in France Viviani

(1) Lloyd George to Grey 7/2/15, Lloyd George MSS E2/15/4. Quoted in D. Lloyd George: War Memoirs, Vol. 1 (1933), p 407.

(2) Note by Bertie 4/2/15, Bertie MSS, FO 800/172/Gr/15/4.

(3) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 48.

(4) Sir W. Robertson: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 98.

(5) Callwell to Robertson 8/2/15, Robertson MSS 1/8/3.

(6) CAB 42/1/33

(7) Delcassé to Viviani 9/2/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 219.

(8) Memorandum by Balfour 24/2/15, CAB 24/1/6.

reported in mid-March that the idea of a Balkan diversion was again gaining favour among his colleagues,⁽¹⁾ yet essentially the idea was a non-starter, especially after the resignation of Venizelos on 6 March. Moreover the allies were now embarked upon an alternative side show at the Dardanelles. For as long as anyone retained confidence in the prospects of this operation the possibility of opening up yet another theatre of war was remote.

At the beginning of 1915, therefore, the Salonica campaign had appeared as a fruitful initiative designed to unite the forces of the Balkan states against the Central Powers. When the expedition ultimately materialised in October, however, it would be as a last minute expedient dictated in the final instance by considerations of French internal politics. This fundamental change is crucial to an understanding of the subsequent development of the campaign. The repeated setbacks at the Dardanelles served above all to convince most politicians on both sides of the Channel that a cheap victory in the war was not a feasible proposition. Thus when the Salonica campaign emerged again as a possibility it did so only secondarily as a result of the conflict between "eastern" and "western" concepts of the war. The response of the French government to the increasing discontent in the country at the slaughter on the Western Front was an underlying factor, but it was not this which precipitated the new campaign. Moreover the Salonica expedition was got underway with almost no technical evaluation of its strategic possibilities. It was in no sense a calculated measure designed to bring the war to a speedy conclusion. For, if at the end of 1914 the General Staffs of all the belligerents had essentially run out of ideas for winning the war, by the late summer of 1915, at least among the Entente, the advocates of an Eastern solution to the deadlock on the Western Front had similarly been thwarted in their hopes and expectations. The dramatic change in the French attitude which came in July 1915 with the decision once more to concentrate on an eastern strategy resulted in the main from political intrigue within France. This, above all else, explains the paralysis which beset the Salonica Campaign for the first two years of its history.

French political circles in the summer of 1915 were, if not war-weary, at least becoming anxious at the lack of achievement to show for a year of unprecedented effort, and far more ready to criticise the direction of the war than they had been a year earlier when, with a sublime gesture of patriotic concord, political difficulties and differences had been submerged beneath the veneer of the so-called Sacred Union. In this developing situation the two figures most vulnerable to criticism were inevitably those most readily

(1) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 129.

associated with the war effort - General Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, and Alexandre Millerand, Minister of War in the Viviani government. It was now obvious that the war which almost all had expected to be over before Christmas 1914 was in fact of a completely different nature from that which had been anticipated. Moreover there was a growing feeling in political circles that Joffre, despite his victory of the Marne, was not the general most likely to win the war for France. His slow wits together with his inexperience of higher war study rendered him little more than a modern Delphic oracle, proclaiming the sanctity of the frontal offensive. He was the mere mouthpiece of a military hierarchy which had de Grandmaison as its chief intellectual influence and de Castelnau as acting high priest.⁽¹⁾ Criticism of the French Commander ranged from dissatisfaction over his military policy to a belief that he was trying to establish a dictatorship at Chantilly. But the government could not consider replacing Joffre since his prestige among ordinary Frenchmen remained high.⁽²⁾ His critics were thus limited for the time being to parliamentary circles, especially among the groups of the left. But Joffre had become so pampered through the zeal of War Minister Millerand in shielding him that he had grown to regard the War Ministry as a buffer between himself and the government. Those who wanted a change in the command quickly understood that they would not get it from Millerand. So to reach the general it became necessary to attack the minister. The solidarity between the two men was such that a crisis in the command would almost certainly entail a ministerial upheaval.⁽³⁾ Millerand too readily believed all that the High Command told him, thus allowing Joffre to usurp his authority over the armies and so reducing himself to the mouthpiece of the Grand Quartier Général. As Joffre noted with gratitude, when parliamentary opinion became more anxious and insistent, all the more firmly and consistently did Millerand defend the general's liberty of action.⁽⁴⁾

It was to the misfortune of both Joffre and Millerand that the early months of the war saw the emergence of a new popular hero in the person of General Maurice Sarrail - a man whose views and associates made him an embarrassment, indeed a threat to Joffre. For Sarrail appeared to have imagination and flair when Joffre was dull and lacking in ideas. His political views, moreover, set him immediately at odds with his superior officer and

(1) B. H. L. Hart: op. cit., p 13.

(2) Cassar; op. cit., p 151.

(3) J. C. King: op. cit., p 42; Mermeix: Joffre: La Première Crise du Commandement (1919), pp 26, 31.

(4) J. Joffre: Personal Memoirs (translated by T. Bentley Mott), (1932), Vol. 2, p 391.

made him a focal point for those politicians most ready to criticise the commander-in-chief. Sarrail was one of the few figures in the French High Command whose allegiance to the republican ideal was beyond question. He had emerged therefore as the darling of the Left wing and in particular of the Radical-Socialist party of which he was a member. This was the party which had arisen from the group that had loyally supported Gambetta's Republican Union and had stood foremost on the battle line in defence of the republic.⁽¹⁾ Sarrail had been the only high-ranking officer in the 1890s to speak in defence of Dreyfus and he had subsequently found the way open to rapid advancement under the anti-clerical war minister, General André. His stature had risen dramatically in 1914 as a result of his part in the battle of the Marne in which he had commanded the French Third Army.⁽²⁾ But it was Sarrail's political backing which made him such an important figure, particularly at a time when the semblance of parliamentary government was returning to France after the virtual dictatorship of the early months of the war.⁽³⁾ It was only in 1915, for example, that the parliamentary commissions were able to play an important role. Until then real authority in the direction of the war belonged to the General Staff, in fact to Joffre. The relative stabilisation of military operations on the western front recreated parliament as an efficient organism.⁽⁴⁾

The unofficial but acknowledged leader of the Radical-Socialist group was the former Premier, Joseph Caillaux, a politician whose dubious activities during the war were eventually to bring him before the High Court. At the end of 1915 the English ambassador in Paris, Lord Bertie, reported that Caillaux could rely on the votes of 150 deputies⁽⁵⁾ and this backing represented a force which no French ministry nor the High Command could afford to ignore. However one interprets Caillaux's wartime politics, one would agree with Suarez that he came to be a rallying point for all elements in the French state which were out of sympathy with the government or the army hierarchy: "Partout où l'on conspirait, où l'on se révoltait, où l'on se dérobaît au devoir, son nom apparaissait comme une devise, un signe de ralliement."⁽⁶⁾ Sarrail was therefore an obvious embarrassment to Joffre while he remained among the French military élite and the relationship between the two men was further strained by the fact that whenever the possibility of Joffre's removal was mentioned, the name of Sarrail would not be far distant. As early as February 1915 there had

(1) Cassar: op. cit., p 12.

(2) *ibid* p 152.

(3) B. H. L. Hart: Through the Fog of War (1938), pp 129-32.

(4) G. Monnerville: Clemenceau (1968), p 403.

(5) Bertie to Grey 25/12/15, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/167/Fr/15/90.

(6) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 432.

been circulated by the Headquarters of the French Third Army - whether with Sarrail's connivance it is unclear⁽¹⁾ two memoranda which concluded that if Joffre found himself indisposed for a fortnight and command passed to Sarrail, the enemy would indubitably be chased out of France because of the new conceptions of strategy which Sarrail would bring into the higher direction of the war.⁽²⁾ Joffre, it was said, did not want capable republican generals to have commands which could attract attention to themselves and so demonstrate Joffre's own incapacity.⁽³⁾ The animosity between the two men naturally grew stronger and by the end of March Sarrail was complaining bitterly to Poincaré about Joffre and the barrage of orders and counter-orders which he received from the Grand Quartier Général.⁽⁴⁾ By June the Deputy for the Marne, Margaine, was urging upon the President of the Republic the need to replace Joffre by Sarrail at the head of the French Army.⁽⁵⁾ In these circumstances the Commander-in-chief was inevitably on the look out for the means to ruin his rival.

Millerand's position was no more comfortable than that of Joffre. As early as March he was severely attacked in the Chamber, but managed somehow to extricate himself.⁽⁶⁾ Poincaré found it necessary to criticise Millerand's attitude, his apparent inertia and his obstinate unwillingness to give precise information to the parliamentary commissions.⁽⁷⁾ His uncritical defence of Joffre and his general behaviour increasingly set Millerand at odds with his ministerial colleagues and by early July each meeting of the French Cabinet seemed to produce an "incident Millerand".⁽⁸⁾ The unremitting efforts of the commissioners to inspect material and men at the front and the reluctance of the War Ministry, backed by the High Command, to admit them posed a dilemma which could only be resolved by the removal of Millerand or by a radical reduction in the powers of the parliamentary commissions. The War Minister displayed an uncritical faith in Joffre's rightness and did not care to question his decisions and propositions. He regarded it as a duty to cover and defend him even when the attacks directed against Joffre were only too

(1) In Bonsoir of 23/2/20 Sarrail denied that the documents came from the headquarters of the Third Army.

(2) Mermeix: Sarrail et les Armées d'Orient (1920), p 178; P. M. de la Gorce: The French Army (1963), p 106.

(3) Mermeix: Joffre op. cit., p 52.

(4) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 137.

(5) ibid p 254.

(6) Diary entry 8/3/15, Edouard de Billy MSS, Carton 2.

(7) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 277.

(8) A. Ferry: Les Carnets Secrets (1957), p 89.

justified.⁽¹⁾ Matters came, therefore, to a head when Joffre decided to act against Sarrail - for it was up to Millerand to explain the commander's moves before parliament.

At the beginning of July 1915 Joffre seized upon a military setback suffered by Sarrail to strike out at his rival. A German attack on 30 June inflicted heavy casualties on Sarrail's Third Army and the general's counter-offensive, based on two divisions of reinforcements despatched by Joffre, was delayed too long. In addition it appeared that on some occasions Sarrail had not reported the truth to General Joffre - he had lost trenches and had failed to announce the fact in the hope of winning them back before it had been discovered.⁽²⁾ Joffre immediately wrote to General Dubail, Commander of the Group of Armies of the East, and instructed him to carry out an investigation of the operations in the Argonne and Sarrail's role in them. Joffre showed uncharacteristic subtlety in his choice of Dubail since the latter was a staunch republican and favourite of the political left in very much the same way that Sarrail was. In the event that his report proved unfavourable to Sarrail, it would be difficult, Joffre calculated, for the former's friends to claim that Sarrail had been the victim of a political witch-hunt.⁽³⁾ Joffre later wrote that in order to show that it was for purely military reasons that action was taken in regard to Sarrail he entrusted the enquiry to a commander whose uprightness and independent judgement had never been brought into question.⁽⁴⁾ Another observer, however, considered that the tone of Joffre's letter to Dubail dictated the required response.⁽⁵⁾ Joffre wrote: "I wonder, however, if the answer is not to be found higher up and if the moral atmosphere in the Third Army is such as to permit the free development of that energy, initiative and devotion which are essential in war".⁽⁶⁾ Certainly at the Grand Quartier Général Herbillon noted that what was being held against Sarrail was not so much his military failures as the fact that his command of the army and his relationships with his subordinates were determined by his own political leanings. Sarrail estimated a man's value not on the basis of his military prowess but on the radicalism of his politics.⁽⁷⁾

(1) A. Aulard: Histoire Politique de la Grande Guerre (1924), p 148.

(2) Yarde-Buller to Kitchener 26/7/15, W.O. 159/11/18.

(3) G. H. Cassar: op. cit., pp 154-5.

(4) Joffre: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 376.

(5) A. Ferry; op. cit., p 100.

(6) Joffre to Dubail 16/7/15, Joffre: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 374.

(7) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 166.

Dubail presented his findings to Joffre on 20 July in the form of two long reports. The first on the subject of the military operations was both critical and laudatory of Sarrail's conduct of affairs. The biggest criticism made against the general was that he had failed to constitute any army reserves.⁽¹⁾ The second report on the atmosphere at Sarrail's headquarters and in his army was more damaging. Dubail found in Sarrail's dealings with his junior officers "des procédés qui énervent le commandement subordonné et nuisent à son prestige".⁽²⁾ Sarrail had often not acted the part of an army commander to the full. He had, for example, shown an unwillingness to visit his troops and interest himself in their welfare. The overall tone of Dubail's two reports was therefore not favourable to Sarrail, but neither was it as damaging as has been claimed.⁽³⁾ Sensing perhaps what was afoot Margaine wrote a long letter to Viviani protesting that the 'republican general' was being molested by the Grand Quartier Général.⁽⁴⁾ A day after receiving Dubail's reports, however, Joffre sent his liaison officer, Herbillon, with a letter for Millerand in which Sarrail's replacement at the head of the Third Army was announced. Joffre stated his willingness to give Sarrail command of an army corps unless the government had another mission for him - a phrase which perhaps betrayed Joffre's desire to see his rival removed from French soil.⁽⁵⁾ On 22 July, therefore, the Council of Ministers was presented with the fait accompli of Sarrail's dismissal.

(1) Ferry: op. cit., p 100.

(2) Fonds Joffre, 14N1.

(3) Basing his analysis of this episode on the version of the memoranda given in Joffre's memoirs, G. H. Cassar has argued that the first report "charged Sarrail with gross incompetence" and that Dubail "recommended a change in the leadership of the Third Army and suggested that Sarrail be assigned to take command of the less important Army of Lorraine". [Cassar: op. cit., p 155] But this fails to square with the remark of Marcel Sembat, present at the Council of Ministers when the two reports were read out, that there existed between Dubail's memoranda and the severe conclusions which Joffre drew from them a hiatus. [Ferry: op. cit., p 100] The versions given in Joffre's memoirs bear in fact little resemblance to those in the Fonds Joffre [Ministère de la Guerre, 14N1] which Cassar appears not to have seen and in which Dubail merely concludes that "on pourrait lui [Sarrail] adresser des remontrances sérieuses." The document in the Fonds Joffre which recommends Sarrail's removal appears not to be the work of Dubail, but is perhaps Joffre's own conclusion from the general's report. This seems to have been read out by Poincaré at the Cabinet meeting on 22 July and indeed Poincaré attributes it to Dubail. [Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 335]. But if such were the case it would be difficult to make sense of Sembat's comment.

(4) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 332.

(5) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 170.

At the Cabinet meeting Ribot voiced the feelings of many of his colleagues in suggesting that it was unfair to punish Sarrail for his setback in the Argonne, whereas no one had been disciplined for the recent failure at Arras. But an unwillingness to do anything which might arouse Joffre's anger and even his resignation was a limiting factor on the discussion and the suggestion that Sarrail should be entrusted with the command of the Army of Lorraine was shouted down by Briand, who argued that the continued presence of Sarrail in France would provide an excuse for renewed political agitation. Many ministers had the impression that Joffre would like to see Sarrail sent to the Dardanelles and it was decided to sound out the commander-in-chief on this idea.⁽¹⁾ General Gouraud had recently suffered a serious injury at the Dardanelles and a replacement was required, although when Millerand had discussed the matter with Poincaré earlier in the month there had been no question of Sarrail being offered the post.⁽²⁾ Millerand now voiced opposition to Sarrail's appointment to the Dardanelles command and the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Abel Ferry, sensed in his attitude the seeds of future discord. Ferry felt that at the Cabinet meeting only Poincaré had managed to rise above the level of party political intrigue.⁽³⁾ Kitchener was informed that Briand, for example, had supported Sarrail since he hoped to strengthen his standing with the radical-socialist party in the Chamber in order to fulfil his ambition of replacing Viviani at the head of the government.⁽⁴⁾

Sarrail heard of the blow which had befallen him on 22 July and was instructed to report to the War Ministry on the following day. Before doing so, however, he learnt from the Minister of the Interior, the Radical Socialist, Louis Malvy, that the Council of Ministers had thought in terms of making him Commander of the Dardanelles Expeditionary Force.⁽⁵⁾ Once the news of Sarrail's dismissal became common knowledge a storm of protest arose. Le Radical prepared an article in which it was argued that the general was the victim of a cabal, but the censor stepped in before this could appear.⁽⁶⁾ Herbillon quickly gained an impression of the parliamentary agitation caused by the whole affair: "Sarrail est un drapeau me dit un gros homme; on n'aurait

(1) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, pp 336-7.

(2) *ibid*, p 304.

(3) Ferry: op. cit., p 101.

(4) Yarde-Buller to Kitchener 24/7/15, W.O. 159/11/12.

(5) M. Sarrail: Mon Commandement en Orient (1920), p vii.

(6) Censored article, 5N 364.

jamais dû y toucher. Le priver de son commandement, c'est donner un soufflet au Parlement, en frappant le seul général républicain."⁽¹⁾ Yarde-Buller⁽²⁾ reported to Kitchener that Sarrail was "a dangerous man" and that it was more than probable that he would organise a political campaign against Millerand and Joffre.⁽³⁾ Millerand certainly came in for fierce attacks, there being talk of the radical socialist group deputing a Commissary to watch the army.⁽⁴⁾ The Minister had already been forced to take on three under-secretaries, one for munitions, one for supplies and one for sanitary and hospital questions, thus severely restricting his own authority, but now the Chamber wanted his skin.⁽⁵⁾ Partly because of Joffre's astute choice of Dubail, however, the parliamentary left found it difficult to use the dismissal of Sarrail as the linchpin of their attack on Millerand.⁽⁶⁾

Sarrail had therefore to decide whether or not he would accept the command at the Dardanelles. Appreciating perhaps the motivation which lay behind the offer he declared to Millerand and Viviani on 23 July that, having been relieved of his command in France, he could not accept what was evidently an inferior appointment. His career, he asserted, was at an end and he would go into retirement. Somewhat to Poincaré's irritation Viviani now planned to try to obtain Joffre's consent to giving Sarrail command of the Lorraine army. Perhaps this would lessen parliamentary agitation. In the game of politics one had, Viviani reminded the President of the Republic, to learn to live with the Chamber.⁽⁷⁾ On 24 July the Council of Ministers heard that Joffre, although he had already designated General Gérard for the Army of Lorraine, was apparently not opposed to the idea of giving Sarrail command at the Dardanelles.⁽⁸⁾ But parliamentary intrigues had already succeeded in setting up Joffre and the power of the Chamber against one another - a situation in which Poincaré saw in Sarrail the recreation of Boulangism.⁽⁹⁾ There was also a general outcry against Millerand, and, behind him and Joffre, the government itself was not immune. But Poincaré felt that the parliamentary agitation was not spontaneous and that Sarrail himself was mixed up in it.

(1) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 170.

(2) Head of the British Mission at French Army Headquarters.

(3) Yarde-Buller to Kitchener 26/7/15, W.O. 159/11.

(4) Lord Bertie of Thame: Diary (ed. by Lady A. G. Lennox), (1924), p 204.

(5) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 344.

(6) Bertie to Grey 27/7/15, Grey MSS, F.O. 800/58; *ibid* 1/8/15, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800 167/Fr/15/55.

(7) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 340.

(8) *ibid*, p 341.

(9) A. Ferry: op. cit., p 103.

Several ministers even reported receiving emissaries from Sarrail, so, convinced that this political unrest must be quelled, the government decided to send the Minister of Public Instruction, Albert Sarraut, one of Sarrail's political sympathisers, to try to persuade the general to reconsider his decision concerning the Dardanelles command.⁽¹⁾ Visited also by Briand, Sarrail's opposition to the offer weakened, although he remained adamant that he would only accept if the expeditionary force were strengthened.⁽²⁾ On 25 July therefore, Viviani was able to tell the President of the Republic that Sarrail might after all go back on his earlier refusal,⁽³⁾ while the following day the Radical-Socialist deputy, Franklin-Bouillon, confidently announced to the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission that Sarrail would shortly be leaving at the head of the Dardanelles Expedition.⁽⁴⁾

An examination of the problem of reinforcements was requested from General Gouraud, who declared that three or four new divisions were needed. The Council of Ministers, meeting on 27 July, rallied to the same conclusion, and Viviani and Millerand were entrusted with the task of obtaining Joffre's approval.⁽⁵⁾ But Joffre showed himself reluctant to allow Sarrail to take command of a reinforced expeditionary force. His change of heart appears to have been dictated by little more than his personal antipathy towards Sarrail, for he now expressed the hope that the command should be offered to General Franchet d'Espérey.⁽⁶⁾ "The exercise of power and the ruin of a rival appear to have become more important to Joffre than the immediate task of finding a way to defeat the enemy".⁽⁷⁾ Joffre was summoned to appear before the Cabinet on the last day of July, when his excuse that he was unable to spare four divisions from the Western Front was flatly rejected by the government. Meeting again, later in the day, but this time without Joffre, the ministers decided to nominate Sarrail commander of the Dardanelles Expedition and to get him to prepare a plan of operations straight away.⁽⁸⁾ But Sarrail, sensing his own strength, placed before Millerand on 3 August three conditions which would have to be fulfilled if he were to accept the command. He required that an 'Armée d'Orient' should be constituted, that he should not be placed under the British Commander, Sir Ian Hamilton, and that he would not depart without the agreed

(1) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 342.

(2) M. Sarrail; op. cit., p viii.

(3) Poincaré: op.cit., Vol. 6, p 344.

(4) Parliamentary archives, C 7488.

(5) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 347.

(6) *ibid*, p 348.

(7) G. H. Cassar: op.cit., p 163.

(8) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, pp 350-1.

reinforcements.⁽¹⁾ Millerand was in no position to resist since the Chambers were clamouring for the appointment of travelling commissions which would effectively transfer much of the authority of the government over the army to the Senate Army Commission. Sarrail's close associate, the deputy Paul Doumer, was heavily involved in this intrigue, to which the general himself was probably rather more than a passive observer.⁽²⁾

Lord Bertie was able to keep the English Government sketchily informed of the development of events. He understood that General Bailloud, the acting commander at the Dardanelles, would prefer to return to France rather than serve under Sarrail.⁽³⁾ Franklin-Bouillon informed the British ambassador that the Radical-Socialists hoped Sarrail would receive the command as compensation for his earlier dismissal by Joffre, but Bertie could obtain no confirmation of this from Delcassé. After leaving the Minister of Foreign Affairs, however, Bertie read of Sarrail's appointment in Le Temps. He concluded, therefore, that Delcassé "must be deaf or an awful liar".⁽⁴⁾ Sarrail's political supporters were certainly active on his behalf and on 4 August an article by Gustave Hervé in the Guerre Sociale was seized by the authorities. In it Hervé had predicted the end of the Sacred Union if Sarrail did not receive entire satisfaction.⁽⁵⁾ When the Cabinet met again on 5 August several members voiced their reluctance to do anything which might appear to humiliate a republican general. The ministers therefore readily accepted the conditions laid down by Sarrail,⁽⁶⁾ and later in the day the general was informed that he had been selected to command the Armée d'Orient.⁽⁷⁾ For perhaps the first time in the war the wishes of Joffre in a military matter had not been respected.⁽⁸⁾ The implications of this precedent for the future of any campaign under Sarrail's direction were ominous in the extreme. The political and personal divisions inside the French state had been revealed to lie just beneath the surface - 'l'affaire Sarrail' had proved an unpleasant reminder of the precariousness of the Sacred Union. But General Sarrail's subsequent career would further shake and ultimately destroy this chimera of internal unity.

(1) M. Sarrail: op. cit., p viii.

(2) Yarde-Buller to Kitchener 31/7/15, W.O. 159/11/24.

(3) Bertie to Grey, 3/8/15, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/167/Fr/15/56.

(4) Bertie to Grey 6/8/15, Grey MSS, F.O. 800/58.

(5) Edouard de Billy MSS, Carton 2.

(6) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 11.

(7) Sarrail: op. cit., p ix.

(8) A. Ferry: op. cit., p 100.

When Joffre had been confronted by Millerand on 29 July with the news that the French Government intended to reinforce the Dardanelles Expedition his reaction had been to stress the impossibility of withdrawing any troops from the Western Front until September, when the results of an offensive which he proposed to carry out in Champagne and Artois would be known. He called for a rational plan of operations and suggested that an officer of his General Staff should be sent out to the Dardanelles to collect the necessary information.⁽¹⁾ Asked by Poincaré two days later if it were possible to keep a certain number of divisions ready to be transported to the Dardanelles, Joffre wrote to Millerand on 3 August that the present circumstances were far too uncertain to allow any such movement of troops. Joffre stressed his own responsibility for the defence of France and argued that he must be left free to act in the main theatre offensively or defensively as he saw fit - and with the full complement of his armies.⁽²⁾ Obviously while Joffre maintained this sort of attitude it would prove most difficult for the government to keep its promise to Sarrail of providing him with reinforcements. In the circumstances Sarrail's continued lukewarmness towards his new command was entirely explicable. Moreover haggling with Sarrail made Millerand impatient and provoked him into a slip. "The desire to see me removed from the French front and from France", observed the general at the end of the war, "came out in a phrase which escaped the minister: 'if you imagine that I am going to let you remain in Paris until September 15!'"⁽³⁾ Nonetheless on 11 August Sarrail produced a written appreciation of what a French force might be expected to achieve in the eastern theatre. He suggested a number of schemes based on action from Chanak, the Bay of Adramyti, Smyrna, Alexandretta and Salonica.⁽⁴⁾ Sarrail, himself, appears to have favoured the idea of a Serbian expedition through Salonica.⁽⁵⁾ Joffre quickly dismissed Sarrail's study as too flimsy⁽⁶⁾, and when questioned by Poincaré a few days later became vehement in his opposition to any extension of existing operations at the Dardanelles. What, he asked was intended to be done - simply prepare an expedition to pacify a factious general? The President of the Republic was obliged to remind Joffre that both Generals Gouraud and Bailloud had recommended the extension of the scope of operations

(1) Joffre: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 371.

(2) Joffre to Millerand 3/8/15, 5N 132.

(3) Sarrail: op. cit., p ix.

(4) Note au sujet de la situation militaire en Orient, 5N 132.

(5) P. Coblenz: The Silence of Sarrail (1930), pp 103-4; Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 39.

(6) Ministère de la Guerre: Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre (1924), tome 8, Vol. 1, annex 318.

for purely military reasons. Grudgingly, therefore, Joffre promised two army corps for September. Poincaré thought it evident that, if pressed any further, Joffre might resign.⁽¹⁾

On 17 August it was decided in the Cabinet that Viviani should request Sarrail to study more closely the strategy of an operation to force the Straits, leaving aside all the other expeditions which the general had envisaged.⁽²⁾ Just over a week later Joffre was informed that the government felt it indispensable that reinforcements should quickly be sent to the Dardanelles. But Joffre insisted that he would have to hold on to the four divisions requested until 20 or 22 September when he would know whether or not his Champagne offensive had been effective.⁽³⁾ Joffre argued later that his agreement was based upon the belief that a definite plan of action had been established by Sarrail in the report which he had prepared on the instructions of Viviani.⁽⁴⁾ But Sarrail's report, dated 24 August, was limited to discussing, without final conclusions, the possibilities of a landing on a number of points on the European and Asiatic coasts. There was no detailed analysis of the number of troops required nor of the prospects of success.⁽⁵⁾ Joffre therefore had the question promptly examined by his own secretariat in the Section d'études de la Défense Nationale. The conclusions of this body, which must have delighted Joffre, were emphatically opposed to the resumption of offensive operations at the Dardanelles on the basis of the forces currently being envisaged.⁽⁶⁾ Joffre now requested that, if the plan should still proceed, the divisions which he had previously promised for the end of September should be held back until the first days of October. Sarrail, moreover, should be required to go out to the eastern theatre to assess the situation and its requirements at first hand.⁽⁷⁾

Arguing that the operations carried out so far at the Dardanelles by Sir Ian Hamilton had now failed, Millerand called on 28 August for a new approach to the problem⁽⁸⁾, and three days later the French Cabinet concluded

(1) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 37.

(2) *ibid*, p 42.

(3) *ibid*, p 68.

(4) Fonds Joffre, 14N 10; but the confused version given in Joffre's memoirs (Vol. 2, p 377) in which the Marshal claims to have received Sarrail's report as early as 24 August scarcely supports his case.

(5) Joffre to Millerand 1/9/15, 16N 1678.

(6) Note au sujet des Dardanelles, 16N 1678.

(7) As note (5).

(8) Millerand to Delcassé 28/8/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1065.

that the four divisions already earmarked should be ready to start for the Dardanelles on 20 September.⁽¹⁾ The English authorities were informed of this French decision and were requested to use their own units to replace the two divisions under Bailloud at Cape Helles so that France would have the whole of her forces at her disposition.⁽²⁾ Joffre, appearing before senior ministers, repeated his wish that Sarrail should leave as soon as possible to study the possibilities at the Narrows and again stressed that he could not accept responsibility for the detachment of a single division from the Western front before October. He would sooner resign. And even in October, Joffre maintained, the four divisions would probably be quite insufficient to force the Straits. Viviani, Millerand, Delcassé and Poincaré bowed before Joffre's obstinacy⁽³⁾ and on 3 September the full Cabinet agreed to invite Sarrail to leave to study in conjunction with General Bailloud the possibilities of a reinforced expedition.⁽⁴⁾ But Sarrail appeared unwilling to leave France, while at the same time Joffre's desire to see him depart grew apace. The Commander-in-chief thought that Sarrail was stalling in the hope of acquiring after all a command in France, and felt that the government was too frightened to order him to leave. Colonel Herbillon sensed that Joffre would heave a sigh of relief once his rival was out of the way.⁽⁵⁾ But Joffre's enthusiasm to see Sarrail depart did not make him any more willing to provide him with reinforcements and, in answer to Millerand's request of 7 September that he should have four divisions ready to embark at Marseilles in the first week of October, Joffre now replied that he could not spare the units in question by that date and urged the government to reconsider his earlier objections before deciding on a course of action.⁽⁶⁾

The allied conference held at Calais on 11 September was effectively a triumph for Joffre. The hope was expressed that the troops would be ready to leave on 10 October and that operations could begin around the middle of November. But no definite arrangements were made and if Joffre's offensive in the West proved successful the Dardanelles enterprise would be cancelled to allow the general to use all his troops to push home the victory in France.⁽⁷⁾ In fact the constant postponement of operations at the Straits into the winter months was making their ultimate materialisation increasingly

(1) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 73.

(2) Millerand to Delcassé 31/8/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1065.

(3) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 79.

(4) *ibid*, p 83.

(5) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 183.

(6) Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre, tome 8, Vol. 1, annexes 348 and 351.

(7) Procès-verbal, CAB 28/1.

unlikely.⁽¹⁾ Joffre followed up this tactical success by presenting the government with a further note from the Section d'Etudes de la Défense Nationale. This argued that Joffre's coming offensive in the West was of such critical importance that he must be allowed to employ all available troops on it until its outcome had been decided.⁽²⁾ As this appeared to leave the prospects of serious action at the Dardanelles even more vaguely in the future, Millerand felt obliged to remind Joffre that the Calais agreements were based on the assumption that the general would prepare four divisions to be ready on 10 October.⁽³⁾ Joffre replied that he could not promise that the divisions designated for the Near-East would be ready on time, and voiced further objections to the whole concept of the proposed operation. Responsible for the national defence, Joffre argued that he would be lapsing in his duty if he failed to point out to the government the dangers of an enterprise which he felt might deal a deadly blow to the whole war effort.⁽⁴⁾ Viviani was beginning to despair that the operation would ever get under way. "L'opération des Dardanelles ne se fera pas. Le G.Q.G. ne veut pas qu'elle se fasse, parce que c'est le général Sarrail qui commande."⁽⁵⁾ But if the government's troubles with Joffre were not enough, Sarrail was at the same time stepping up the conditions upon which he would take on the command. A force of 100,000 men was now being mentioned, while Sarrail insisted on command of the allied contingents as well as a guarantee of Italian assistance.⁽⁶⁾ Sarrail, however, did not maintain these pretensions for long and on 23 September submitted a further report to the War Minister which was now limited to the prospects of action on three points - Boulair, Gaba Tépé and the north-west coast of Asia Minor.⁽⁷⁾ Thus the situation was still extremely fluid when the internal wranglings in France were overtaken by the rapid development of diplomatic events. The mobilisation of the Bulgarian army rendered irrelevant further discussion of operations at the Dardanelles and recreated the prospects of a Balkan campaign, such as had been envisaged at the beginning of the year. But the speed with which the French Government would now give up its

(1) G. Cassar: op. cit., p 191.

(2) Note au sujet des Dardanelles, 15/9/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1066.

(3) Millerand to Joffre 14/9/15, Les armées françaises, Tome 8, Vol. 1, Ann. 358.

(4) Joffre to Millerand 20/9/15, 5N 132.

(5) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 111.

(6) Cassar: op. cit., p 193.

(7) Sarrail to Millerand, 21/9/15, 5N 132.

earlier plans and seize upon the idea of an expedition to Salonica is a clear indication that the dominant consideration was not so much strategy as the desire to get Sarraill out of the country: "Il faut éloigner le général Sarraill même au prix d'une armée."⁽¹⁾

Parliamentary agitation for some action in the Eastern theatre was gaining ground. As Caillaux argued on 22 September a great operation was imperative to provide a success somewhere in the Near-East. The right-wing deputy Denys Cochin felt that this should be looked for not at the Dardanelles but elsewhere.⁽²⁾ The opportunity for such an alternative operation was soon provided when Sofia decreed general mobilisation on 23 September. The Serbian government, under the imminent threat of being overrun, appealed immediately to London and Paris for aid, while from Greece Premier Venizelos asked for allied assistance to enable Greece to honour her treaty obligations to Serbia. The French Minister in Athens, Guillemin, had already discussed the possibility of an allied expedition through Salonica with Venizelos, and had learnt that the Greek king would inevitably make a formal protest against the violation of his country's neutrality, but that the Greek government would in fact "allow its hand to be forced."⁽³⁾ When the news of the Bulgarian mobilisation came through Guillemin conveyed Venizelos' urgent request to the Quai d'Orsay that the allies should provide 150,000 men, adding that Venizelos hoped that a reply would be forthcoming within twenty-four hours and that the replies from London and Paris should be made without consultation between the two governments.⁽⁴⁾ Guillemin urged acceptance of Venizelos' proposal, arguing that if the allies did not respond the armed assistance of Greece would be forfeited for the duration of the war.⁽⁵⁾

Sensing that Delcassé would be hostile to any oriental expedition, Poincaré arranged to confer with him about Guillemin's despatches.⁽⁶⁾ By 7 p.m. on 22 September the Foreign Minister had still not replied to Athens. The President of the Republic, who attributed Delcassé's inertia to the fact that his son had been captured by the enemy, finally persuaded him to reply that if the rumours of a Bulgarian invasion proved true Venizelos' request would be examined sympathetically.⁽⁷⁾ The Foreign Minister's personal view,

(1) Undated note by Colonel Bouët on the role of Joffre, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(2) Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission, 22/9/15, C 7488.

(3) Guillemin to Delcassé No. 432, 19/9/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 283.

(4) *ibid*, No. 440-1, 21/9/15, *ibid*.

(5) *ibid*, No. 442, 21/9/15, *ibid*.

(6) Poincaré: *op. cit.*, Vol. 7, p 114.

(7) *ibid*, p 116.

however, was that the threat to Serbia was essentially a bluff.⁽¹⁾ In the meanwhile Venizelos, who evidently viewed the situation more seriously, prepared to mobilise Greece's own forces.⁽²⁾ In the French Cabinet on the same day, however, the weight of opinion was behind Poincaré and not Delcassé, and it was decided to send a firmer message of support to the Greek premier. Viviani, Briand, Ribot, Millerand and Navy Minister Augagneur considered that, even if Venizelos were forced to resign by the attitude of his monarch, France should still go to the aid of the Serbs.⁽³⁾ So Venizelos was now informed that France for her part was ready to supply the troops which the Greek leader had requested.⁽⁴⁾ The motivation behind the decision of the French Government was probably never fully worked out. Above all the situation appeared to offer the prospect of breaking the deadlock created between Sarrail's acceptance of the Dardanelles command and Joffre's effective refusal to satisfy his rival's demands. There was no doubt also an unwillingness to see Serbia crushed and to allow the Central Powers to register a further prestigious victory, facilitating the Drang nach Osten with all its inherent threats to French Levantine aspirations, while a fear of the parliamentary consequences of inaction must also have been near the surface. But in all probability none of these motives ever completely surfaced from a welter of confusion and panic reactions. In fact the French ministers, and in particular Millerand⁽⁵⁾, whose parliamentary position had never fully recovered from the battering it had received from 'L'affaire Sarrail', appear to have acted with inordinate haste. At all events it is important to notice that the decision belonged to the politicians. Joffre merely acquiesced and thus the campaign would be undertaken with a total lack of strategic planning and forethought.

Not surprisingly, however, Venizelos was delighted with the French response and his enthusiasm was shared by Guillemin.⁽⁶⁾ The French Military Attaché in Athens, General Braquet, also warmly applauded his government's decision. He considered the early despatch of forces to be vital and felt that the Dardanelles operation should be wound up as soon as possible, since French

(1) Delcassé to Guillemin, No. 436, 22/9/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 283.

(2) Guillemin to Delcassé, No. 451, 23/9/15, *ibid.*

(3) Poincaré: *op. cit.*, Vol. 7, p 116.

(4) Delcassé to Guillemin, No. 443, 23/9/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 283.

(5) Paul Cambon to Jules Cambon 6/12/15, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(6) Guillemin to Delcassé, No. 458, 24/9/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 283.

resources were not adequate to maintain two expeditions in the Near-East.⁽¹⁾ But General Bailloud, concentrating his attention on the lack of military foresight, sounded a cautionary note, arguing that with Bulgaria hostile the operation faced grave problems, especially in view of the difficult terrain of the Balkan peninsula.⁽²⁾ Paul Cambon, on the other hand, felt that the French decision was somewhat premature in view of the fact that no prior agreement had been reached with Lord Kitchener, the English War Minister.⁽³⁾ France's decisions had indeed been arrived at, as Venizelos had requested, without reference to England and it was only when the French commitment had been made that the ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, was told to express the hope that the British government would send instructions to their ambassador in Athens, Sir Francis Elliot, to give the same promise to Venizelos on behalf of the English administration.⁽⁴⁾

From Athens Elliot had reported that a decree for Bulgarian mobilisation had been signed but not published on 21 September. He noted that Venizelos took the situation very seriously and warned that the Prime Minister would resign if the Greek king did not accept his policy. He added, however, that the Greek statesman was confident of carrying his monarch with him if the answer of the allies to his request for troops were favourable.⁽⁵⁾ On that same day Maurice Hankey had concluded that "the idea of committing the Allies to yet another campaign in this part of the world ... is most objectionable from a military point of view." He anticipated, moreover, that Britain would encounter strong opposition from France to any such proposal.⁽⁶⁾ Initial British reactions to Venizelos' appeal were handicapped by Kitchener's absence from London on military business. But Grey's personal impression was that it was not possible for the country to send a military force to Greece immediately, although this might not be ruled out later on.⁽⁷⁾ Meanwhile Sir Arthur Nicolson⁽⁸⁾ informed the Greek ambassador that although Britain was fully aware of the gravity of the situation and also of the difficult and delicate position in which Venizelos was placed, no firm commitment could

(1) Braquet to Millerand 25/9/15, 7N 1337.

(2) Bailloud to Millerand 24/9/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1030.

(3) Military attaché, London to Millerand 24/9/15, *ibid.*

(4) Delcassé to Cambon, No. 3015, 23/9/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 283.

(5) Elliot to Grey No. 854, 21/9/15, F.O. 371/2266/135856.

(6) Note on the position in the Balkans, drawn up at the direction of Asquith CAB 24/1/23.

(7) Grey to Elliot, No. 769, 22/9/15, F.O. 371/2266/135856.

(8) Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office.

yet be made.⁽¹⁾ This hesitation was encouraged by the fact that Lord Bertie had reported that no answer had yet been given to Athens by the French Government.⁽²⁾ Pressure inside the Foreign Office to make a definite decision had, however, begun to mount by the time that the Dardanelles Committee met on 23 September. Lord Robert Cecil⁽³⁾ urged the very great importance of the immediate despatch of a small force to Salonica, and argued that even 1000 men would be better than nothing.⁽⁴⁾ By the time that Grey met his governmental colleagues, therefore, he had come to the conclusion that the allies must make an immediate landing at Salonica. News from Sofia had suggested that within fifteen days the Serbians would be crushed by the enemy forces. Lloyd George, reviving his old enthusiasm for a Balkan campaign produced wildly optimistic calculations to suggest that an intervention by 150,000 men would result in the adhesion of 500 or 600,000 Roumanians and possibly also 200,000 men from Serbia and 150,000 from Greece. These figures totalled up to not far short of a million men, whom the Austro-Germans would have to attack and in winter this would be a very difficult operation. Surely, he concluded, it was worth sending 150,000 men to gain so rich a reward. Lloyd George's oratory was, however, not sufficient to convince all his colleagues with the result that the Dardanelles Committee merely decided that Lord Kitchener should ascertain whether the French Government had contemplated or worked out any details for sending troops to Salonica on behalf of Greece and Serbia.⁽⁵⁾

Kitchener argued that an Anglo-French force of up to a maximum of 300,000 men might be required and wished to know if the calculations of the French military authorities agreed with his own.⁽⁶⁾ A telegram was also sent to the British minister in Athens asking what number of troops would be required at Salonica to induce Greece to honour her treaty obligations and give her full support to Serbia if Bulgaria attacked the latter.⁽⁷⁾ This telegram was important as being the first definite mention of any proposal on the British side to land troops at Salonica. But by the time Venizelos received this enquiry he was also in possession of the definite commitment of the Quai d'Orsay. Taken in conjunction with the French offer, Venizelos took Grey's message as an earnest that the whole force he had asked for would

(1) Nicolson to Grey 23/9/15, CAB 37/134/30.

(2) Bertie to Grey 22/9/15, No. 681, F.O. 371/2266/136600.

(3) Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office.

(4) Minute for Sir E. Grey 23/9/15, Cecil MSS, F.O. 800/195.

(5) Dardanelles Committee, 23/9/15, CAB 42/3/28.

(6) Military Attaché, London to Millerand No. 113-4, 23/9/15. A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 980.

(7) Grey to Elliot No. 776, 23/9/15, F.O. 371/2266/136596.

be sent, although he warned that at any moment his deteriorating relationship with King Constantine might prompt his own resignation.⁽¹⁾ The stately course of British diplomacy had thus been overtaken by the precipitate decision made in Paris and in the face of this fait accompli, together with definite news that Bulgaria had issued orders for a general mobilisation to take effect from 25 September, the 32nd meeting of the Dardanelles Committee unanimously agreed to inform the Greek Government that Britain was prepared to associate herself with the reply of the French guaranteeing the forces asked for to enable Greece to fulfil her pledges to Serbia. In the course of this meeting Kitchener read out an appreciation by the General Staff, the wording of which merits attention, for it delineates the bounds within which the British military authorities were prepared to contemplate a second Eastern front - bounds which, if adhered to, would unquestionably have prevented the relatively futile confinement of large numbers of British troops in this unproductive theatre of operations for the remainder of the war. It read: "It must be clearly understood that the role of the 150,000 allied troops for which Greece has asked and which will, if necessary, be sent to Salonica will ... be restricted to enabling and assisting the Greek army to protect the Serbian flank and the line of communication with Salonica."⁽²⁾

Elliot was now instructed to make an identical declaration to Premier Venizelos to that already made by Guillemin, promising to enable Greece to fulfil her obligations to Serbia.⁽³⁾ Grey stressed, however, that the despatch of troops to Salonica must remain dependent on the consent of Greece which had not yet been received.⁽⁴⁾ And when no such invitation was forthcoming Grey suspended the diversion of transport to Salonica.⁽⁵⁾ But the Foreign Office was warned that if no British or French troops landed in Greece in the following few days the unfortunate impression would soon gain ground that the Allies were unable to carry out their announced purpose.⁽⁶⁾ Cecil considered that the key to the situation was the presence of allied troops in Macedonia as soon as possible. That and that alone gave a real chance of a favourable issue and no question of an official welcome should be allowed to delay it.⁽⁷⁾ Grey thus felt that he had no choice but to send some ships

(1) Elliot to Grey, No. 868, 24/9/15, F.O. 371/2267/138053.

(2) C.I.D. précis of documents prepared by M. Hankey, CAB 42/4/21.

(3) Grey to Elliot, No. 780, 24/9/15, F.O. 371/2267/13871.

(4) Grey to C. des Graz, No. 465, 24/9/15, F.O. 371/2267/138172.

(5) Grey to Elliot, No. 792, 27/9/15, F.O. 371/2267/138769.

(6) O'Beirne to Grey, No. 633, 28/9/15, F.O. 371/2267/140452.

(7) Minute by Lord Robert Cecil, 30/9/15, F.O. 371/2267/141051.

without delay, on the understanding that they would be welcome to Greece.⁽¹⁾ But at the heart of the British Government's motivation was the fact that the French, by their unilateral decision, had left Britain with little alternative. As Asquith explained to the King "the French at once agreed to comply and ... it was impossible for us in the circumstances to hold back".⁽²⁾

In Paris one central personality - General Sarrail - had been kept curiously ill-informed of the development of events. On 25 September he heard from the Sorbonne historian, Alfonse Aulard, that the Council of Ministers had decided to send one of the Dardanelles divisions to Salonica, while three days later he learnt that the destination of the newly designated Armée d'Orient would be Salonica and not the coast of Asia Minor. Léon Blum, chef de cabinet at the Ministry of Public Works, suggested the possibility of an exchange of posts with Franchet d'Espérey, who had shown an interest in the Near-East command, while the deputy Paul Benazet warned the general against getting involved in an Oriental hornets' nest. Even Georges Clemenceau advised Sarrail against acceptance of the new command.⁽³⁾ Millerand, having let Sarrail know of the new destination of his army asked him to draw up a note on the subject of French intervention in the Balkans. Sarrail complied and concluded that "si l'effectif des troupes françaises dirigées sur les Balkans ne comportait que les trois brigades actuellement désignées ... cet envoi ne pourrait pas avoir de véritable portée militaire". As the expedition stood at the time it could not be considered as other than "un geste".⁽⁴⁾ Nonetheless the response of the French government was to issue official orders designating Sarrail as Commander-in-Chief of the French army operating in Serbia. His mission was in the first instance to cover the communications between Salonica and Serbia against all threats from the Bulgarian troops and eventually to cooperate with the Serbian army in active operations against the enemy forces.⁽⁵⁾ In an attempt to illuminate these somewhat vague instructions Sarrail called on Delcassé on 5 October. The choice of Delcassé in Sarrail's attempt to obtain elucidation was perhaps not a good one. Viviani had already complained of a paralysis of will on the part of the Foreign Minister⁽⁶⁾ and at all events Sarrail received no satisfaction from

(1) Grey to Elliot, No. 817, 30/9/15, F.O. 371/2267/140452.

(2) Asquith to George V, 2/10/15, CAB 37/135/1.

(3) Sarrail: op. cit., pp xiv-xv.

(4) Sarrail to Millerand 2/10/15, 16N 3275.

(5) Order by Millerand 3/10/15, 7N 1338.

(6) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 130.

him nor from Poincaré⁽¹⁾. The general seems nevertheless to have concluded that he could achieve little further by waiting any longer in Paris and on 7 October he departed for Salonica. Perhaps this new campaign would yet create the opportunity to establish once and for all his military reputation. The prospects probably appeared more inviting to him than enforced inactivity in France. But before Sarrail had had time to reach his destination dramatic developments in Greece had undermined the already shaky premises upon which the expedition was based. Just before the first allied landings Venizelos, finding his position in relation to his King untenable, resigned. So the Anglo-French force which had gone to Greece to enable her to fulfil her obligations to Serbia, found itself confronted by a Greek army, in the process of mobilisation, which would at best be neutral and which might even prove to be hostile, for King Constantine was suspected of sympathies with Germany. Paul Cambon reflected on the gravity of the situation: "Toujours est-il que nous débarquons maintenant à Salonique pour porter secours aux Serbes qui risquent d'être coincés entre les Austro-Allemands et les Bulgares. Nous voici donc avec un nouveau front de bataille." He remained, however, unconvinced of the soundness of the allies' strategy: "C'est donc en Champagne et en Artois que les choses prendront tournure et que la répercussion des événements déterminera le sort des Balkaniques".⁽²⁾ Events were to show that Cambon's fears were not without foundation.

(1) Sarrail: op. cit., p xv.

(2) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 3/10/15, Paul Cambon - Correspondance 1870 - 1924, (ed. H. Cambon), Vol. 3 (1946), p 83.

CHAPTER 3The Beginnings of the Campaign

From the outset Kitchener was apprehensive that it might prove impossible to confine the new expedition to its original limits, fearing that the figure of 150,000 allied troops would soon have to be exceeded. He called therefore for a conference with the French to determine what instructions the first troops should receive on landing, together with the ultimate role of the army once it had been constituted at Salonica.⁽¹⁾ Robert Cecil felt that, although Britain was bound to offer assistance to Serbia and Greece, if this assistance was rejected it was by no means clear that she could not use the troops destined for Salonica to better effect elsewhere.⁽²⁾ By 4 October the British Government was ready to give the problem more detailed attention than it had yet received and Kitchener announced to the Dardanelles Committee that there would be a conference at Calais the following day to settle the forces that should be sent and the rôle they were to carry out. He thought that the matter was rather confused and believed that it was possible that neither Joffre nor the French General Staff knew about the promise which had been made to send 150,000 men to Salonica by the Allied governments. Asquith hoped that the French would put their cards on the table at this meeting, but a cautionary note was again sounded on behalf of the General Staff by Sir Edward Carson.⁽³⁾ He read out the following extract from a paper dated 2 October: "The balance of advantage is against the employment of any Allied troops in the Balkan theatre which could possibly be thrown into the scale in France, unless it can be shown that the defeat of the Serbians would more than counterbalance success by the allies in the main theatre and that such defeat cannot be delayed without the employment of Allied forces in the Balkans."

This Carson rightly considered to be "a very important expression of opinion" and one which should be "borne in mind in coming to a decision upon the subject."⁽⁴⁾ It might profitably be argued, however, that this sort of consideration should have been carefully examined before British troops were actually committed to the Balkan theatre.

(1) Attaché Militaire, London to Millerand, No. 129, 1/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1030.

(2) Minute for Lord Crewe 2/10/15, F.O. 371/2270/142529.

(3) The Attorney General in the Asquith Government, he resigned when he considered that the British delay in sending forces would lead to the destruction of Serbia.

(4) Dardanelles Committee 4/10/15, CAB 42/4/2.

At the Calais Conference it became evident for the first time that a serious divergence existed between the two governments in relation to their new enterprise. As the First Lord of the Admiralty, Arthur Balfour, pointed out to the Dardanelles Committee the following day, the French approached the Balkan problem from the Serbian point of view and had actually ordered troops to proceed up to Nisch. The British, on the other hand, had made it clear that their troops were intended to assist the Greeks to fulfil their obligations to Serbia. Kitchener, in a criticism which could equally well have been applied to himself and his colleagues, argued that the French attitude was rather unsatisfactory as they had not thought out the consequences of the steps they had taken. Thus at Calais it had emerged that the French had already given orders to General Bailloud to proceed with his divisions into Serbia, while Kitchener had been obliged to point out that it was not the British intention to send troops from the neighbourhood of Salonica for Serbia until it was definitely ascertained that the Greeks were taking an active part in operations and that the line of communications would be secured.⁽¹⁾

Fleeing from its own indecision the Dardanelles Committee dropped the entire question in the lap of the War Office and Admiralty Staffs on 6 October. Reporting three days later the combined staffs concluded that the risks involved in detaching 150,000 men to Serbia were too great to justify action being taken on the slender hope of being able thereby to prevent munitions and other reinforcements from reaching the Turks. They reported, moreover, that of all the various possible operations a renewed offensive at Gallipoli was that which seemed most likely to prove advantageous in the Mediterranean theatre of war.⁽²⁾ The resignation of Venizelos, news of which reached London on 6 October, proved a further complication for the British Government. Elliot was instructed to explain to King Constantine that British troops had been sent to Salonica on the understanding that Greece intended to support Serbia against Bulgaria and that the cooperation of British and French troops would be welcome to and was desired by Greece to enable her to support Serbia. As it appeared possible that Venizelos might be succeeded by a government that would adopt a policy of neutrality, Grey felt it impossible to send more troops to Salonica until the situation had been cleared up.⁽³⁾

(1) Dardanelles Committee 6/10/15, CAB 42/4/3.

(2) General Staff Paper 9/10/15, W.O. 32/5593.

(3) Grey to Elliot No. 852, 6/10/15; Grey to Bertie No. 2257, 6/10/15, F.O. 371/2270/145⁵26.

Prime Minister Viviani viewed the situation rather differently and, having lost faith in the capacity of his ailing Foreign Minister, arrived in England to conduct negotiations with Asquith and the English Government in person.⁽¹⁾ Viviani forcefully argued that the unopposed entry of the Bulgarian and German armies into Serbia would have dire consequences for allied prestige in the Near-East and the entire Islamic World. He staunchly denied that the offer of military assistance had been made solely in relation to Greece's treaty commitments to Serbia. Contrary to British calculations the resignation of Venizelos entailed not the abandonment of the operation but the necessity to recognise that the force of 150,000 originally envisaged would no longer be sufficient. But Viviani made it plain that the imperative necessity for France of defending her own soil meant that she could make only a small contribution to any additional reinforcements which the allies might judge necessary.⁽²⁾ As was to become usual in the conduct of the campaign, however, France's political and military leadership were not in accord and on the following day at Chantilly, Joffre maintained, although Kitchener remained unconvinced, that much could still be done with the basic force of 150,000 men. This would substantially assist the hard pressed Serbian army.⁽³⁾ Matters came to a head when on 11 October Sir Arthur Nicolson received a telegram from M. Zaimis, the new Greek Prime Minister, to the effect that in the latter's opinion the casus foederis in relation to the Graeco-Serbian treaty had not arisen in the present situation. Moreover the attitude of the Greek government in the current European conflict would be no more than one of benevolent neutrality towards the Allied powers.⁽⁴⁾ Thus the whole justification for British intervention in the Balkans - to assist the Greeks to fulfil a specific treaty obligation - had been undermined at a stroke, and the logic of the situation was that Britain must now either withdraw completely or conform to such more extended plans of operations as seemed to be envisaged by the French. A statement of these French plans had been sent by Joffre to Kitchener two days earlier, in which it was argued that the mission of the troops should be to cover and hold the railway line between Salonica and Uskub in order to secure communications with the Serbian army and the supplies of that army, and to cover the right of the Serbian Army, preventing any attempt of the enemy on Central Serbia. Joffre stressed that if

(1) Note by Guillaume, archives of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Correspondence, French Legation, July - December 1915.

(2) Viviani to Delcassé No. 2309-10, 7/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1030.

(3) Procès-verbal, W.O. 159/7/29B

(4) Nicolson to Grey, 11/10/15, CAB 37/135/20.

in the future, a new distribution of Greek and Roumanian forces led the allies to increase the amount of their effort in the Balkans, France, having a limited number of men at her disposal, could not take part in such an effort, the responsibility for which would fall entirely on the British Government.⁽¹⁾

The divergence which was beginning to emerge between the conceptions of the two governments was further revealed when Viviani attempted to gain British approval for a statement of explanation which he intended to make to the Chamber of Deputies on 12 October. The British did not like any mention of "assistance to Serbia" which left out the original Greek invitation, since they believed that without Greek cooperation Serbia would need the help of a really large allied force which would be most unlikely to arrive in time. Thus the declaration, as Viviani proposed to make it, seemed like an open-ended commitment by England and France rather than the clearly defined involvement which the British government was prepared to accept.⁽²⁾ From a military and diplomatic point of view Grey had been "delighted" at the decision to open a Balkan front. But he reflected that the sending of a large force into the Balkans had been examined several months before and expert opinion had been no more in favour of it as a military operation than it was now. Moreover, Grey did not feel "comfortable" when expert military opinion was disregarded.⁽³⁾ In an attempt to clarify the situation Paul Cambon visited Grey on the morning of 14 October and expressed great anxiety that the British were not going to fulfil the engagements which he said had been entered into to send troops to Salonica in accordance with the understanding arrived at when Viviani was in London. Cambon asked whether it was true that Britain was not sending any more troops than those already at Salonica, whereas the promise had been made to send with France a total of 150,000 men. Grey pointed out that the promise to Venizelos had been conditional on Greece carrying out her treaty engagements. If Greece would not do so then Grey held that the allies were under no obligation to send this particular force. At the meeting with Viviani, he recalled, he had made it clear that it was not safe to send a force into the Balkans without being assured of a base at Salonica, of which the allies could only be certain if Greece cooperated. Grey stressed that preparations were going ahead for sending the troops that had been agreed upon, but these would not be available immediately, and the place of disembarkation and the use to be made of them must be decided according to circumstances.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Summary of Joffre's note of 9/10/15, CAB 42/4/6.

(2) Viviani to Cambon No. 3307, 11/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1030; Note by Sir E. Grey, CAB 37/136/3.

(3) Memorandum by Sir E. Grey, 13/10/15, CAB 37/136/6.

(4) E. Grey: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 222; Grey to Bertie No. 815, 14/10/15, F.O. 371/2270/151538; Cambon to Viviani 14/10/15, No. 2377, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1030.

Grey pushed home his point when he reminded Lord Bertie, for communication to the French Government, that the British plans could not be carried out unless General Joffre was prepared to facilitate the release of the troops from France, since England had no other source of supply. ⁽¹⁾ But Joffre was most unhappy about what he saw as an entirely new point of view, when asked by Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in France, to relieve two English divisions which were to be transferred to the East. Joffre argued that Sir John's reserves were far better placed than his own to sustain such displacements and at the same time warned Millerand that the British government should be urged to expedite its despatch of forces to Salonica unless France wished to find herself alone in supporting the whole weight of the expedition. ⁽²⁾

The English Cabinet remained deeply divided with one section, including Lloyd George, wishing to send troops to Salonica, while another, including Kitchener, wanted to make another big effort at the Dardanelles. ⁽³⁾ With the aim of forcing the British Government to come to a decision Millerand arrived in England on 15 October. ⁽⁴⁾ He and his colleagues were concerned that, according to the reports arriving from General Sarrail, the British troops were showing every intention of remaining at Salonica during the winter rather than pressing north in support of the Serbs. ⁽⁵⁾ The military situation was deteriorating daily as the plight of Serbia became ever more desperate. As the Serbian Legation in London warned, the force of the Serbian army was not sufficient to bear any longer without help the enormous pressure exerted by the combined German, Austrian and Bulgarian armies. ⁽⁶⁾ Millerand now bluntly asserted that if the English did not send troops to Salonica the French Government would resign and the Entente would be endangered. General Callwell felt that the French must be in abject terror of Sarrail and of public opinion, which fondly imagined that saving the Serbs was a perfectly simple operation. In fact Callwell thought the task of the expedition was an impossible one. The French plans did not appear to have been properly thought out by the General Staff and he could not understand how they proposed to

(1) Grey to Bertie, No. 2349, 15/10/15, F.O. 371/2270/152047.

(2) Joffre to Millerand, No. 8324, 15/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1031.

(3) Robert Blake: The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, (1952), p 108.

(4) Paul Cambon: Correspondence, Vol. 3, p 86.

(5) Viviani to Cambon, No. 3403, 17/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1031.

(6) Note from the Serbian Legation 16/10/15, CAB 37/136/17.

manage for transport.⁽¹⁾ Callwell told General Robertson, who was anxiously viewing the situation from France, that the British General Staff was totally opposed to operations in Macedonia which were "objectionable from every point of view."⁽²⁾ Robertson took heart from this statement and urged that Britain should beware of having her hands forced by Millerand or any other French politician. He considered that strained relations with the French would be far preferable to losing two or three divisions in the Balkans and perhaps even losing the war.⁽³⁾

In conversation with Millerand, Sir Edward Grey reasserted that the despatch of English contingents to Salonica was dependent on Greece's participation in the war. Millerand protested at this statement and learnt that he could count on the support of Lloyd George whose opinions were the same as those of the French government.⁽⁴⁾ Viviani willingly prolonged Millerand's stay in London in the hope that agreement might be reached,⁽⁵⁾ and the War Minister's persistence was indeed rewarded when a joint declaration was approved to the effect that the two governments were agreed to continue to send the 150,000 men, while reserving the right to re-examine the situation if circumstances were to demand it.⁽⁶⁾ Nonetheless the French Government continued to receive information that the English forces upon arrival refused to move on from the town.⁽⁷⁾ Viviani warned that the consequences of a disagreement between the two countries would have serious internal repercussions, which could be exploited by the enemy. He stressed therefore the military and diplomatic advantages of the campaign and concluded that "la partie est engagée ... Nous sommes sur le terrain où nous sommes et nous ne pouvons l'abandonner".⁽⁸⁾ From reports in his possession the French premier feared that the attitude of the English risked paralysing the action of the French forces now advancing to the aid of the Serbians,⁽⁹⁾ but as Paul Cambon tried to explain the difficulty was to convince honest but timorous spirits in the English government, fearful of a disaster in the mountain warfare imposed by the Balkan landscape,

- (1) Callwell to Robertson 20/10/15, Robertson MSS, 1/8/26.
 (2) *ibid* 22/10/15, *ibid* 1/8/28.
 (3) Robertson to Callwell 23/10/15, *ibid* 1/8/29.
 (4) Cambon to Viviani 18/10/15, No. 2421, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1031.
 (5) Viviani to Cambon 19/10/15, No. 3428-9, *ibid*.
 (6) Cambon to Viviani 19/10/15, No. 2430-1, *ibid*.
 (7) Viviani to Cambon No. 3447, 20/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1031.
 (8) *ibid* No. 3462, 21/10/15, *ibid*.
 (9) *ibid* No. 3468-9, 22/10/15, *ibid*.

that everything should be sacrificed in the cause of prompt action.⁽¹⁾ Grey felt that Sarraill was acting very rashly in advancing northwards with so small a force and considered that he should retreat.⁽²⁾ But from Paris Lord Bertie warned that French public opinion might easily be exasperated if the English showed any signs of backing out of the Salonica expedition. Joffre had expressed the view that it was necessary both from military and political points of view to continue operations based on Salonica and indeed to send additional troops,⁽³⁾ while within the Foreign Office itself Sir Arthur Nicolson warned that "our relations with France will be seriously impaired if we do not meet their wishes by sending immediately the division to Salonica."⁽⁴⁾

The effect which all this pressure was having on the British government was revealed when the Dardanelles Committee met on 25 October to consider the Balkan situation, at a meeting which was crucial in exposing the essential impotence of the British position. The nature of the decisions reached here and, more particularly, that of the arguments used to support them go a long way towards explaining that supine inertia in Britain's Balkan policy and her fatal willingness to acquiesce in the whims of French diplomacy in this theatre, which was to characterise the whole of 1916. At the meeting Kitchener said that the French Military Attaché had brought him a strongly worded note, making a request that British troops should not be sent to Alexandria, as Kitchener wished, but straight to Salonica, since any delay would permit of the destruction of the Serbian army. In Kitchener's opinion the terms in which the Note was couched suggested that there was a political motive behind it and that it was not based entirely on the requirements of strategy. The question which arose in his mind, therefore, was whether a refusal on the British part to comply with the French demands would place the French Government in any political difficulty. Edward Grey doubted whether Joffre thought the expedition strategically sound, or was obliged to back it for other reasons, possibly for fear that otherwise Millerand would fall and the cordon sanitaire protecting Joffre from criticism would be removed.⁽⁵⁾ To this Kitchener added that, if Millerand resigned, General Joffre would not be able to maintain his position and that would entail a considerable change in the policy of France. His advice was, therefore, that Britain should tell

(1) Cambon to Viviani No. 2464, 23/10/15, *ibid.*

(2) Grey to Bertie No. 2374, 22/10/15, F.O. 371/2270/156221.

(3) Bertie to Grey No. 792 + 794, 23/10/15, F.O. 371/2270/156928-9.

(4) Nicolson to Grey 24/10/15, F.O. 371/2270/157600.

(5) See above p 20.

the French that she intended to take the correct course, but that if this involved any danger of upsetting the French government, she would send the troops asked for to Salonica. Sir John French, hastily summoned from his Headquarters in France, then expounded upon the internal French political situation in a way which revealed that the British authorities were fully acquainted with the intricacies of 'l'affaire Sarrail'.⁽¹⁾ The picture drawn was of a very delicate structure, which any false move by France's ally might serve to upset. This exposé provoked the most pertinent of questions from Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary for India. If the Salonica expedition was a futile military operation, he asked, was it worthwhile conducting it in order to save M. Millerand, General Joffre and the French Government? Kitchener, who should presumably have presented the military point of view, answered with ponderous authority that more than this was at stake - it was to save the alliance itself; if England were to break with France the war would be over and Britain defeated.⁽²⁾

The implications of this meeting were enormous, for although it could not have been appreciated at the time, the British Government was effectively abdicating its right to have any more than the most nominal of voices in the direction of allied strategy in the Balkans. The principle had been established that the maintenance of the existing French régime should have priority over all other military and diplomatic considerations in this theatre of the war. It meant that France could justify all future changes and modifications in her policy in this area, and secure the adherence of the British to them, on the grounds of the stability of her own domestic political situation. In adopting this principle Britain was likely to envelop her freedom of manoeuvre in the Balkans for the foreseeable future in a paralysing cocoon of submission to the will of her ally - and this is precisely what happened at least until the fall of the Briand government in the spring of 1917. All attempts to reassert a degree of independence and sovereign authority in British policy towards the Salonica enterprise were doomed to be quashed for fear of the disrupting effect they might have on the other side of the Channel.⁽³⁾

(1) Compare Sir Frederick Maurice's view - *op. cit.*, p 51 - that the British government was unaware of the political motivation behind French diplomacy.

(2) Dardanelles Committee, 25/10/15, CAB 42/4/17.

(3) See below, chapters 5 and 7.

The Dardanelles Committee decided in the end not to make any firm decisions until General Murray, Chief of the Imperial General Staff and General Callwell had visited Chantilly to put the English point of view to Joffre.⁽¹⁾ But Joffre immediately let Millerand know that he felt that these two officers would lack the necessary authority to conclude a definitive agreement. Joffre considered that the English hesitations in the present situation represented "un abandon en pleine bataille".⁽²⁾ With the French commander in this frame of mind it was no surprise when the military conference held on 27 October failed to resolve the impasse. At the suggestion of the President of the Republic,⁽³⁾ therefore, Joffre decided to come to London in person to exercise his powers of persuasion. Grey expressed his delight at the news of Joffre's visit. Though he was aware that there was a political side to the question, he said that he regarded it as one to be settled on military grounds alone. He was therefore encouraged to hear from Paul Cambon that Joffre would be discussing the question from a purely military point of view.⁽⁴⁾ The Foreign Secretary's expectations would, however, be rudely disappointed. The views which Joffre expressed at 10 Downing Street came as a surprise to British ministers who had suspected that his enthusiasm for the Salonica expedition was at the most lukewarm. He insisted on the importance of doing everything possible to save the Serbian army and believed that, if the enemy were checked, Greece could still be brought in on the side of the Allies. More importantly, however, from certain remarks let fall by Joffre after the meeting it appeared that his own retention of the post of Commander-in-Chief of the French army and even the permanence of the alliance itself might depend on the reply of the British government.⁽⁵⁾ Kitchener's account of the episode was that Joffre pointed a pistol at the Cabinet and said, "If you back out of Salonica it is the end of the Entente", and he thumped the table and the Cabinet gave way.⁽⁶⁾ Joffre was aware that Sarrail's political friends were urging on the campaign in Salonica with vehemence and gaining fresh supporters and he evidently felt that his position would be compromised unless he gave the campaign his support and secured British participation in it.⁽⁷⁾

(1) Cambon to Viviani No. 2491, 26/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1032.

(2) Joffre to Millerand No. 4234, 27/10/15, 16N 1679.

(3) Millerand to Viviani 28/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1032.

(4) Grey to Lord Granville 28/10/15, No. 850, F.O. 371/2270/160863.

(5) Note by M. Hankey, CAB 42/4/20, Appendix C; F. Maurice: op. cit., p 54.

(6) Bertie: Diary (entry for 9/11/15), Vol. 1, p 262.

(7) On Joffre's changing attitude to the campaign see F. S. Oliver to A. Chamberlain 14/12/15, Chamberlain MSS A.C. 14/6/61.

Given the considerations which were now shaping British policy it was not surprising that a memorandum by Joffre on the role of the Allied armies at Salonica was soon accepted by the Asquith Government. The assertion by Sir Archibald Murray at the Dardanelles Committee on 30 October that the opinion of the General Staff and of the principal officers of the British Expeditionary Force in France was unanimously opposed to the Serbian enterprise as a military operation was unceremoniously ignored.⁽¹⁾ Joffre's document conceded that the original mission of the Salonica force could no longer be achieved, but it argued that the possibility existed of re-establishing communications with the Serbian army.⁽²⁾ Cambon reported that the English ministers had been deeply impressed by the precision and clarity of Joffre's explanations and by the measured authority of his words,⁽³⁾ but all the available evidence would suggest that the French commander merely blackmailed his allies into agreement. Few if any ministers were prepared to risk a quarrel with the French government which had clearly deeply committed itself in the matter. Acting perhaps on the principle that war is too serious a matter to be left to soldiers, the Dardanelles Committee decided to recommend support for the French army in its task of ensuring communications with the Serbs.⁽⁴⁾ It is true that Kitchener's reply to Joffre did appear to have a sting in its tail: "In view of the French Staff statement dated 29 October 1915, including definite calculations of the capacity of the port of Salonica and of the carrying power of the railways into Serbia ... and in view of the strictly limited role that the French General Staff and General Joffre desire British troops to fulfil, viz, to ensure the position of Salonica to Krivolak inclusive, in order to support the French army ... and with the full understanding that if communication with the Serbian army cannot be opened and maintained, the whole Allied forces will be withdrawn to be used as circumstances may require, the British Government are prepared to cooperate energetically in the manner proposed by the French government."⁽⁵⁾ But in the light of the compromised position in which British diplomacy had been placed by its too willing subservience to the intricacies of French politics, the venom of British resistance in any particular crisis was not likely to be

(1) CAB 42/4/20.

(2) Memorandum by Joffre 29/10/15, CAB 37/137/39.

(3) Cambon to Viviani No. 2524, 30/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1032.

(4) M. Hankey; op. cit., Vol. 1, p 434.

(5) Kitchener to Joffre 30/10/15, CAB 37/137/39.

as strong as these words might suggest. The decision to withdraw from Salonica would inevitably have to be a French one. General Robertson, soon to become Chief of the Imperial General Staff and who had been present when Joffre issued his scarcely veiled threats to the British government, sounded a cautionary note. He warned that the situation in the Balkans might soon be quite different from what it was then and that more troops would almost certainly be needed besides those already agreed upon. Every possible development should therefore be worked out by the joint staffs in consultation, otherwise there would be a "repetition of the jumble, cross purposes and friction of the past month".⁽¹⁾ But despite the prophetic nature of Robertson's comments, his warnings were ignored. British diplomacy was in fact in disarray and Bertie heard that the confusion at the Foreign Office was "indescribable". Grey, in particular, was very tired and disgusted at the failure of his Balkan policy.⁽²⁾

Beneath the scurry of diplomatic activity the Salonica campaign had at least got underway. Despite uncertainties about the landing, the French agents on the spot secured that this passed off without incident and with no opposition from the Greek authorities.⁽³⁾ Receiving at the beginning of October Kitchener's estimate that it might be necessary to commit up to 400,000 men to the Balkan peninsula, the Grand Quartier Général drew up a secret report which rejected this supposition as most unlikely. Indeed any supplementary effort over and above France's initial commitment of around 60,000 men would have to be provided by the English. Chantilly concluded that France and Poland remained the only theatres of operations where the allies could expect to bring the war to a successful conclusion.⁽⁴⁾ Joffre seized upon this statement of opinion to remind Millerand that any removal of troops from the Western Front to Salonica must be kept to a strict minimum. Neither the fact that the enemy was installed on French territory only eighty kilometres from Paris nor the state of French resources in men and munitions permitted France to constitute a large expeditionary force for Salonica.⁽⁵⁾ French officials out in Greece inevitably viewed the problem in a different light and Guillemin urged that the rapid despatch of 150,000 men would have an excellent effect on Greek

(1) W. Robertson: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 194.

(2) Record of conversation with Lansdowne, Curzon and Lloyd George, 28/10/15, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/15/15.

(3) Braquet to Millerand 3/10/15, 7N 1341.

(4) Note by the 3rd Bureau on Kitchener's telegram No. 129, 3/10/15, 5N 132.

(5) Joffre to Millerand 3/10/15, 16N 1678.

public opinion. Only this could bring Greece into the war and avoid a disaster for Serbia.⁽¹⁾ General Braquet, on a mission to Salonica from his base at Athens, felt that at least a division should be left at the Greek port with the idea of making it into a military base for the future.⁽²⁾ But on 12 October Generals Bailloud and Sarrail were authorised to cross the Serbian frontier although they were to be careful to maintain communications with Salonica.⁽³⁾ Subsequent instructions left Sarrail with considerable liberty of action.⁽⁴⁾

On 11 October Bulgarian troops finally clashed with Serbian units and two days later each side declared war on the other. On 13 October the Bulgarians also met with French forces and by the 17th both Paris and London had declared war on Bulgaria. Greece and Roumania, however, steadfastly refused to exchange their position of neutrality for the dangers involved in active participation. The British General Staff, however, asked by the Dardanelles Committee on 11 October to examine the question, concluded that only the entry of Greece and Roumania "would justify consideration of the employment of an allied force in the Balkans".⁽⁵⁾ Yet within a matter of days the War Office heard that the Greek General Staff were of the opinion that for Greece to send help to Serbia would be to invite disaster and destruction. The Greek staff also considered that whatever number of allied troops were sent in they would not arrive soon enough to save Serbia and that therefore they could be more usefully employed in Asia Minor or France.⁽⁶⁾ Not surprisingly, therefore, it was with considerable reluctance that the British Government finally authorised its forces to cross the frontier into Serbia.⁽⁷⁾ Braquet surmised that the attitude of the English troops was probably determined by their wish to avoid serving under the orders of a French general. They desired, he thought, to operate quite independently of the French Army.⁽⁸⁾

From Bucharest the French Military Attaché, Commandant Pichon, urged the necessity of his country's involvement in the Balkans if the allies hoped to

(1) Guillemin to Delcassé No. 551, 10/10/15, 7N 1338.

(2) Braquet to Millerand No. 59, 9/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1030.

(3) Millerand to French Consulate, Salonica 13/10/15, *ibid.*

(4) M. Sarrail: *op. cit.*, p 42.

(5) Statement of the views of the General Staff in regard to a possible development in the Balkan situation 13/10/15, W.O. 159/4.

(6) Commander, Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to Kitchener 21/10/15, W.O. 106/1336.

(7) F. Doygas: L'Armée d'Orient dans la Guerre Mondiale (1932), p 69.

(8) Braquet to Millerand and Guillemin 15/10/15, 7N 1341.

deprive Germany of access to the vast resources of the Eastern world.⁽¹⁾ The radical deputy for the Pas de Calais, Abrami, who was attached to Sarrail's Headquarters staff in the Armée d'Orient, wrote to Poincaré and several members of the government to urge that an immediate and vigorous effort should be made against the Bulgarians. If such action were not taken Germany would be left dominant in the Balkans. Only the despatch of a large army could save the situation which was becoming critical.⁽²⁾ Joffre himself thought that evacuation would be the proof of impotence and that the decision to suspend landings at Salonica might expose French troops already there to the threat of a disaster in the event that Greece went over to the enemy camp.⁽³⁾ But with one eye always firmly fixed on the western front and in the knowledge also that the new campaign was being directed by his avowed enemy, Sarrail, Joffre was not likely to view the extension of France's existing commitment in the Balkans with any great enthusiasm. His liaison officer with the Ministry of War felt that Sarrail's forces were as dust compared with the armies which opposed him, especially as he could no longer count on the assistance of the Greek troops, on the basis of which the expedition had originally been undertaken.⁽⁴⁾ But Joffre himself informed Millerand that it was impossible for him to send a further infantry division to Salonica over and above the two which he had already taken from his own forces in France.⁽⁵⁾ His attitude could not, however, be as extreme as that of the British General Staff which, impatient at the lack of resolution shown by the country's political leaders, baldly concluded that they were "entirely opposed to the undertaking of a campaign based on Salonica" and that the diversion of troops from the western theatre of war to this region was unjustified from the strategical point of view and endangered the allied prospects of victory in the war as a whole.⁽⁶⁾ Added force was given to this argument when the British commander at Salonica, General Sir Brian Mahon, reported at the very end of October that no action which the allies could now take would be sufficiently timely to save Serbia.⁽⁷⁾ On 22 October the Bulgarians had advanced across the railway south of Uskub, severing the communications of the Serbian Army with Salonica.

(1) Pichon to Millerand, No. 45, 18/10/15, 5N 116.

(2) Report by Commandant Revol and Lieutenant Sarraut 27/10/15, Archives of Marshal Galliéni, 6N 47.

(3) Avis du Général Joffre sur les communications téléphoniques du Ministre de la Guerre, 22/10/15, 16N 1679.

(4) Herbillon, op. cit., Vol. 1, p 191.

(5) Joffre to Graziani No. 9553, 17/10/15, 16N 3266.

(6) The Military Position of the Allies in the Near-East, undated, W.O. 106/1335.

(7) Mahon - Appreciation of the Military Situation 31/10/15, W.O. 32/5122.

As has been observed, however, even at this early date the development of the Balkans expedition was being determined by political rather than military considerations.

Edward Grey was therefore being somewhat less than frank when he informed the French chargé d'affaires that the visit to London of General Joffre at the end of October had resulted in complete agreement between the two governments.⁽¹⁾ The Foreign Secretary merely expressed the opinion that there should be closer consultation in future between the French and British military authorities and that neither power should be committed to operations involving the forces of the other without previous consultation between the respective military chiefs. In fact the difficulties of meaningful allied cooperation were well illustrated when Kitchener, on his way to the Near East to survey the scene and to report upon the best policy, stopped off in Paris for consultations with the new French Government.⁽²⁾ The French chargé d'affaires in London warned his government that Kitchener might well be hoping to find the new war minister, General Galliéni, less favourable to the Macedonian expedition than his predecessor.⁽³⁾ But after interviews with Briand and Galliéni, Kitchener reported back to Asquith in London, reflecting the frustration he so obviously felt: "As regards Salonica it is very difficult to get in a word; they were both full of the necessity of pushing in troops and would not think of coming out. They simply sweep all military difficulties and dangers aside and go on political lines, such as saving a remnant of Serbs, bringing Greece in and inducing Roumania to join. I could get no idea from them as to when the troops would come out, they only said they must watch events."⁽⁴⁾ Galliéni admitted that the relief force would arrive too late to save Serbia. Nonetheless, like his Cabinet colleagues, he was unwilling to face the consequences of disengagement from Balkan affairs. His attitude provoked Kitchener to suggest that the French government seemed to have no plans, only aspirations.⁽⁵⁾ Indeed this unsubstantiated optimism was apparently shared by many French officers out at Salonica. From English headquarters the ardent Bulgarophile, General Howell, sent Lloyd George a list

(1) Grey to Bertie No. 866, 4/11/15, F.O. 371/2272/166809.

(2) See below pp 139-40 for details of the new French government.

(3) Fleuriau to Briand No. 2560, 4/11/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1032.

(4) Kitchener to Asquith 5/11/15, CAB 42/5/5, Appendix A; Kitchener to Balfour 5/11/15, Balfour MSS (British Museum) Vol. 49726.

(5) Leblond: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 109; P. Lyautey: Galliéni (1959), p 272.

of the difficulties to which the French appeared to be blind. Howell, on the other hand, appreciated the central paradox of the expedition. Only a great victory over the Bulgarians would be likely definitely to bring in the Greeks. Yet, without Greece definitely in, the possibility of a great victory was remote. Therefore the adherence of Greece was also remote.⁽¹⁾ But the French Council of Ministers, taking advantage of Kitchener's presence in Paris, decided on 6th November to seek a firm assurance that England would supply 90,000 men out of the total 150,000 without further delays,⁽²⁾ and on the same day Kitchener met Joffre at Chantilly and gave such an undertaking, without, however, telling the French Chief that he would soon be going to Salonica himself.⁽³⁾ Only the previous day Sir William Robertson had written a paper on the conduct of the war in which he argued that the operations in the Balkans should be assessed by the contribution which they made to the defeat of the Central Powers and be measured therefore in comparison with the main effort on the Western Front. Yet because of the line of policy being followed by the British government, in which expert military advice was continually ignored, this sort of argument was quite simply irrelevant.⁽⁴⁾

While the British government continued to pursue a policy which in the last resort would be determined by fear of French reactions, the new Briand cabinet in France was bombarded with advice on the conduct of the Salonica expedition. From the French Military Mission in Greece Colonel Bordeaux urged that it was indispensable that command of the Anglo-French forces should be vested in a French general. The lack of success at the Dardanelles was generally attributed to the English and it was important that this experience should not be repeated.⁽⁵⁾ General Braquet felt that 150,000 men was the absolute minimum which could be consigned to the Balkan theatre. But the government must decide exactly what it wanted to achieve in the Near-East. He feared, however, that, whatever was decided upon, the allies would be too late to act effectively. The problems of the area had never been given sufficient attention and France would now have to reap the fruits of this

(1) Notes on the Salonica expedition 7/11/15, Howell MSS IV/C/2/187.

(2) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 225.

(3) G. Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 191.

(4) Memorandum by Robertson 5/11/15, CAB 42/5/6.

(5) Bordeaux to Guillemin 2/11/15, 7N 1337.

negligence. (1) Guillemin on the other hand confidently asserted that the allies would require at least 300,000 men to face the enemy in the Balkans and to hold the Greeks in awe. (2) The French government, however, showed an unwillingness to commit itself and, within the broad scope of the instructions that he had already received, Sarrail was left a large personal initiative. (3) His mission was simply to save and reconstitute what he could of the Serbian army in such a way that, joined with the allied contingents, it would once again form a realistic fighting force. (4) But in view of the retreat of the Serbian army towards Montenegro and the progress of events in Macedonia it became probable that the Anglo-French forces would have to retire to Salonica. Cambon informed Grey that in such an eventuality the French government felt that the allies should hold Salonica, taking full control of the port and suspending Greek management of it temporarily. (5) Within the French administration Galliéni considered that retirement upon Salonica was necessary, but Joffre remained optimistic that the Serbian army could yet be saved. (6) Joffre appreciated the dangers of the current situation, which left the allied contingents exposed, but felt that the best way to counteract them was to speed up the rate at which the English forces arrived at Salonica. He also wanted pressure to be put on Italy to join in the allied expedition. (7) After lengthy discussions on 13 November the French cabinet merely decided that Sarrail should be left the liberty to decide whether or not to retreat to Salonica, dependent on his assessment of the military situation. (8)

On the previous day the English War Committee had once again voiced its concern at the uncertainties of the situation. Asquith understood that the French government favoured a retirement to Salonica and defensive operations, while Sarrail wanted an advance and was actually approaching Veles. It was therefore decided that Grey should inform the French ambassador that the government considered it essential that the military advisers of the two countries should come to an understanding as to the proper military policy to be adopted in regard to the operations of the allied forces in the Balkans. (9)

(1) Braquet to Galliéni 3/11/15, 7N 1337.

(2) Guillemin to Briand No. 743, 15/11/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 284.

(3) Galliéni to Sarrail 6/11/15, No. 6840, 16N 3136.

(4) Galliéni to Sarrail 11/11/15, No. 6991, 16N 3142.

(5) Grey to Bertie 10/11/15, No. 879, P.O. 371/2270/169452.

(6) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 240.

(7) Joffre to Galliéni 11/11/15, No. 6407, 5N 150.

(8) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 248.

(9) War Committee 12/11/15, CAB 42/5/8.

Within the Foreign Office Sir Arthur Nicolson reflected on the fluidity of the situation in the Near-East but considered that nearly everyone now felt that it was not possible to carry on simultaneously both the Macedonian and Gallipoli operations. He realised that the French were very anxious that Britain should continue with "the Salonica business", but rejected the idea that his government had been forced into it in the first place by her allies. (1) The fault, he believed, lay rather in Venizelos' request that the two allies should consider his request for aid separately. (2) Grey therefore pressed that discussions should take place with the French government - no decision could be made without prior consultation (3) - but the War Office felt it prudent to remind the British commander at Salonica of the strictly limited understanding which existed with the French government. The role of the troops under General Mahon's command was restricted to ensuring the position from Salonica to Krivolak in order to support the French army which alone assumed the duty of protecting the railway between Krivolak and Veles and of ensuring communication with the Serbian army. (4)

Meanwhile Kitchener had arrived in the Near East on his fact finding tour of inspection and had begun to confide his apprehensions concerning the Salonica expedition to General Girondon, Gouraud's former Chief of Staff at the Dardanelles. He felt that, if the enterprise was going to be pursued, 400,000 men would be needed. He made obvious his resentment of the fact that the French Government had gone into the campaign without consulting their allies, who had been obliged to follow suit largely to preserve the Entente. (5) In addition Kitchener had gained the impression that, with the possible exception of Cape Helles, Gallipoli should be abandoned. To cushion the impact of retirement upon Moslem opinion and to thwart a Turkish advance on the Suez Canal, he proposed that the troops released thereby should be used to effect a fresh landing in Ayes Bay, near Alexandretta. (6) Cambon confidently predicted that this proposal would be rejected by Kitchener's own ministry which feared the dissipation of British resources. (7) Moreover the Military Attaché at the London embassy believed that the English General Staff would be loath to quit Salonica since this would leave the port open to use by the Germans and Austrians as a submarine base. (8) As regards the prospect of a

(1) Nicolson to Hardinge 11/11/15, Nicolson MSS, F. O. 800/380.

(2) See above p.33

(3) Grey to Bertie 15/11/15, No. 899, CAB 37/137/24.

(4) Murray to Mahon 15/11/15, No. 9951, W.O. 106/1337.

(5) Girondon to Gallieni 11/11/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1033.

(6) P. Magnus: Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist (1958); p 364; R. R. James: op.cit., pp. 329-31.

(7) Cambon to Briand No. 2645, 13/11/15, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1033.

(8) Panouse to Gallieni No. 1555, 12/11/15, 16N 2967.

third oriental operation from Alexandretta, Paris disliked the thought of having British troops so close to Syria, which was already regarded as a French sphere of interest. Accordingly on 13 November the French Military Attaché was instructed to deliver a note to the British government which advised that before British troops disembarked in the region of Alexandretta it would be necessary to "take into consideration not only the economic interests but also the moral and political situation held by France in these countries".⁽¹⁾ In fact the combined weight of opinion of the French government and the English General Staff was sufficient to secure that Kitchener's proposal was rejected by the War Committee on 15 November.

Revealing the gravity with which he viewed the situation, Kitchener wrote to Asquith that the decision to be made on the future of the Salonica Campaign would have such a momentous effect that it could prove to be the turning point leading to the loss of the war by the allies. He regarded the chances of saving Serbia as non-existent but feared that with attention shifted to the Eastern theatre the offensive arranged for early 1916 in the west would be very greatly weakened. Then if the war were to drag on through the winter of 1916-17 Kitchener warned that some of the allies, if not England herself, would be unable to stand the strain.⁽²⁾ Moreover Kitchener cited the opinions of senior British officers newly arrived at Salonica to show that the alarm he felt at the situation was not confined to himself.⁽³⁾ The following day Kitchener was even able to quote General Sarrail's opinion to support his own contentions. The French general was of the belief that it would require 300,000 men to hold Salonica and generally confirmed the War Minister's estimate of the gravity of the military position.⁽⁴⁾ In view of the confusion concerning the Salonica situation and with that at the Dardanelles remaining uncertain the French government requested a conference to review and co-ordinate policy in the Near-East. When the delegates assembled in Paris on 17 November Briand found in Lloyd George a still ardent supporter of the Salonica expedition. The Minister of Munitions' attitude served to counteract the hesitations of his colleagues and the British government once

(1) Panouse to Galliéni No. 1556, 13/11/15, 16N 2967.

(2) Kitchener to Asquith 16/11/15, No. 47, W.O. 106/1337.

(3) *ibid* 16/11/15, No. 54, *ibid*.

(4) *ibid* 17/11/15, F.O. 371/2278/173938; Sir G. Arthur: Life of Lord Kitchener (1920), Vol. 3, p. 119.

again ended up by promising that their full commitment of 90,000 men would be sent out as soon as possible, but this time with the addition of two extra divisions.⁽¹⁾ The biggest concession that the English representatives could extract from Briand was the promise that if junction with the Serbs became manifestly impossible, while to the rear the forces of Greece posed a threat to the allied troops, then the French government would be prepared to examine the question of total evacuation.⁽²⁾ This was, however, a promise which Briand made in a void divorced from the factors which really governed his diplomacy. Internal French considerations meant that evacuation would never be politically expedient for the French premier whatever the military and diplomatic situation might dictate.⁽³⁾

Sarrail now considered that a retirement to Salonica was essential but that it would be difficult to carry out if not begun immediately.⁽⁴⁾ Accordingly the English War Committee decided on 19 November that the War Office should inform the French Military Attaché that Britain was sending fresh forces to Salonica, as had been agreed two days earlier, but only for the purpose of giving support to the retiring forces.⁽⁵⁾ But a copy of Sarrail's telegram to Paris, which talked of receiving four French corps and which seemed still to be contemplating continuing operations in the Vardar Valley forced the War Office to reiterate its conviction that immediate retirement was imperative.⁽⁶⁾ From Paris Yarde Buller was able to quieten this concern somewhat by pointing out that Joffre was strongly opposed to any further French troops leaving the Western Front and that there was no likelihood that the four French corps referred to would be sent.⁽⁷⁾ But Yarde Buller did hear that Joffre would be present at a meeting in Paris on 25 November to decide whether as a matter of principle operations on an extensive scale should be undertaken in Macedonia.⁽⁸⁾ In fact Galliéni had already criticised Sarrail for the continual reference in his despatches to the figure of four army corps as necessary for his operations. As the French War Minister reminded Sarrail, "jamais le gouvernement n'a consenti, ni même mis en discussion la constitution de votre armée sur cette base."⁽⁹⁾ But General Braquet felt that France had the choice of either

(1) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 197; CAB 37/137/34.

(2) Procès-verbal of Paris Conference, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 981.

(3) See below, chapter 6.

(4) Cambon to Briand 18/11/15, No. 2690, 5N 150.

(5) War Committee 19/11/15, F.O. 371/2279/174967.

(6) War Office to Yarde Buller 22/11/15, W.O. 106/1337.

(7) Yarde Buller to War Office 22/11/15, W.O. 106/1337.

(8) *ibid* 24/11/15, *ibid*.

(9) Galliéni to Sarrail No. 7278, 18/11/15, 16N 3142.

reinforcing the army or of abandoning the Balkans altogether. The latter course of action would, he believed, destroy at a stroke the efforts of four centuries to build up French influence in the Near East. It was therefore an unthinkable solution. So, like Sarrail, he maintained that in the changed circumstances resulting from the defeat of the Serbs an army of at least 300,000 would be required.⁽¹⁾ Where exactly these reinforcements might arrive from remained, however, a mystery since, in addition to the opposition of Joffre and Galliéni, the English War Office made it known that General Sarrail could not expect to receive any further troops from England.⁽²⁾

Although the initiative still lay with Sarrail himself, opinion was by now definitely hardening in favour of a retirement to Salonica and on 22 November Denys Cochin, Minister without Portfolio in the Briand government, who had been sent to Greece to view the situation at close quarters, reported that Sarrail believed Serbia to be doomed and that he should retreat to Salonica, where nothing would be possible without a force of 300,000 men.⁽³⁾ From the British camp Mahon reported on the growing sense of futility which surrounded the expedition. It had not prevented the Bulgarians from fighting, nor had it encouraged Greece to attack Bulgaria, and it was no longer possible to think in terms of saving Serbia. In fact the whole enterprise had degenerated into a "useless errand".⁽⁴⁾ Mahon understood that Sarrail was beginning to withdraw his two advanced divisions, but gathered that he was still without instruction from his government and that he was taking this step on his own initiative.⁽⁵⁾ The existing uncertainty as to whether the intention was to go forward, to remain still or to retire affected adversely all arrangements and made it difficult to give decisions on even minor details. Sarrail and his Chief of Staff had twice been approached with a view to formulating definite proposals about the conduct of a possible, if not probable, retirement and to consider the various problems involved. But their attitude had been to dismiss the subject with the "enunciation of a few broad tactical principles and a wave of the hand."⁽⁶⁾ Sarrail did at least clarify the situation with his decision, notified to the French government on 27 November, to bring back to Salonica all the divisions which had advanced into Serbia. The problem now, as Sarrail fully

(1) Braquet to Galliéni No. 163 23/11/15, 7N 1337.

(2) War Office to Military Attaché, Paris 22/11/15, No. 10192, W.O. 158/758.

(3) Guillemin to Briand 22/11/15, No. 812, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 247.

(4) Mahon to War Office 20/11/15, F.O. 371/2272/175665.

(5) *ibid* 23/11/15, F.O. 371/2272/177992.

(6) *ibid* 24/11/15, W.O. 158/755.

recognised, was to determine what role could be given to the allied forces which had evidently failed in their original mission. The general himself concluded that unless a diplomatic or political motive existed for retaining Salonica itself, it would be preferable to re-embark the troops as soon as they returned there.⁽¹⁾

The retreat to Salonica inevitably raised the hopes of all those who wished to see an end to the campaign. These ranged from the King of Greece to the British General Staff. Constantine had already given Denys Cochin a rather arrogant assurance that if the allies wished to retire to Salonica with a view to leaving Greek soil he would guarantee the security of their retreat.⁽²⁾ Within the English military hierarchy Henry Wilson, a former Director of Military Operations, pressed for complete evacuation. But, as Bonar Law⁽³⁾ warned him, the French would not permit this. Their government would feel that if the troops were all withdrawn from Salonica after what would be a complete defeat, the position of the administration in France would be untenable.⁽⁴⁾ Nonetheless in a paper drawn up by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, even before Sarrail's definite decision to retreat, the conclusion was reached that the weight of military arguments against holding Salonica was overwhelming. It was accordingly recommended that all further transport of troops to Salonica should be instantly stopped and that the evacuation of Salonica should proceed as fast as possible.⁽⁵⁾ Reluctant perhaps to adopt the conclusions of the military in toto, Grey informed Bertie that the prospective danger to the whole Anglo-French forces being considered to be very serious, the French government should take the matter into immediate consideration.⁽⁶⁾ At the same time the Director of Military Operations, General Callwell, was despatched to Paris to try to elicit some positive statement of intention from the French. Grey considered it most urgent that a decision should be arrived at. Callwell conveyed to Gallieni the information that complete evacuation was "virtually" British policy, though it awaited the final decision of the government. But he warned the English War Office that his mission would become useless unless a definite decision could be communicated to the French on the following day, 26 November.⁽⁷⁾ In fact there was no question of the French government agreeing to evacuation, for,

(1) Sarrail to Gallieni No. 290/3, 27/11/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1034.

(2) Guillemin to Briand No. 842, 26/11/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 247.

(3) Leader of the Conservative Party and Colonial Secretary in Asquith's coalition government.

(4) Bonar Law to Wilson 22/11/15, Bonar Law MSS 53/6/50.

(5) Paper by Murray 23/11/15, Austin Chamberlain MSS 19/8/11.

(6) Grey to Bertie 25/11/15, F.O. 371/2278/179370.

(7) Callwell to Murray 25/11/15, W.O. 106/1337.

as Briand told Guillemin on 28 November, the intention was to make Salonica a fortified base for future offensive or defensive operations.⁽¹⁾ Not surprisingly, therefore, Callwell's mission proved a failure. As Sir Archibald Murray told the War Committee on 29 November, Callwell had found it impossible to get a definite expression of opinion on the strategy to be adopted in Greece and Serbia from the French General Staff, while Asquith dejectedly concluded that the War Committee was absolutely in the dark as to the French plans. Grey was therefore authorised to represent to the French government that Britain was much concerned at getting no definite opinion from the French General Staff as to the future of the Anglo-French troops in Serbia, as to whether they were to retire on Salonica and whether it was safe that they should remain at Salonica or not, He was also to press that a conference of Anglo-French ministers and military authorities should take place in London or elsewhere without delay.⁽²⁾

For the last time for some months to come the British government was bracing itself for a showdown with the French. As the Foreign Office official, George Clerk, commented, "the first thing necessary is a decision by France and ourselves as to remaining at or evacuating Salonica."⁽³⁾ In fact the inter-allied conference was to be precipitated at very short notice by a startling development within the English government itself. On the evening of 29 November Lord Kitchener left for London from Paris where he had spent the day on his way home from his mission to Gallipoli and Greece.

(1) Briand to Guillemin 28/11/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 247.

(2) CAB 42/5/24.

(3) Minute (29/11/15) on Elliot to Grey, F.O. 371/2278/180246.

CHAPTER 4The First Crisis

On 29 November Kitchener had had an interview with Briand and had given his views in regard to Salonica and the defence of Egypt. Two days later he told the War Committee that he believed that Gallieni had given orders to Sarrail to do as he thought right about retirement and, so far as he knew, Sarrail was gradually withdrawing his force. He did not think that such a course was fair on the general and considered that in a matter of such grave importance the French government should give him a definite order. He knew that General Sarrail was personally anxious to retire, but thought that if the onus of taking the decision to retire without having suffered a defeat in the field were left to him, he might hesitate ⁽¹⁾. On the same day the Defence Council in Paris was considering a telegram from Sarrail which requested instructions. Both Joffre and Gallieni showed themselves favourable to the retention of Salonica ⁽²⁾, but Joffre had already warned his War Minister that French occupation of Salonica could not be persisted in in the face of the formal opposition of the English ⁽³⁾. So although Joffre had prepared a list of objections to put before the English General Staff when they arrived at Chantilly on 5 December, if they demanded evacuation ⁽⁴⁾, it was not likely that he would maintain this attitude if the British remained adamant. The diplomatic situation remained, however, uncertain and Cambon telegraphed on 30 November that although Grey favoured total evacuation, he was not sure whether the English government as a whole shared this view. He feared that there was a total lack of consensus between the allied governments and the general

(1) War Committee 31/11/15, CAB 42/6/1.

(2) Suarez - op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 204.

(3) Joffre to Gallieni No. 16651, 30/11/15, 16N3014.

(4) Note d'Introduction à la Conférence du 5 décembre, 30/11/15, 16N3056.

staffs and within these national bodies themselves (1). From Salonica General Mahon voiced concern that the military situation was becoming increasingly unsatisfactory with news of the concentration of Bulgarian forces, and urged that a decision as to evacuation should be arrived at immediately. Further procrastination might be ruinous to both possible policies - that of remaining and that of leaving (2).

After a fresh examination of the problem the French Cabinet confirmed its intention of remaining at Salonica and decided to ask for fresh English contingents to bring the total strength of the expeditionary force to 300,000 men. Salonica was to be held as a base for future operations in the Balkans with a view to keeping Greece neutral and persuading Roumania to enter the war (3). Cambon was instructed to let Grey know of this new resolve (4), but Briand's despatch had scarcely left the Quai d'Orsay when a telegram arrived from the London embassy reporting that, having heard Kitchener's reports, the English War Committee had decided, subject to French agreement, in favour of evacuation (5). Bertie was told to represent to the French government that, Sarrail's attempts to open communications with the Serbian army having failed, the agreement that the whole of the allied forces should be withdrawn to Salonica, for use as the circumstances might require, had come into effect. If the French government dissented there should be a conference as soon as possible to settle the matter (6). Bertie reported that his statement caused great consternation to Briand and his Secretary General, Jules Cambon. He added that he considered that the situation between the British

(1) Note by William Martin 1/12/15, 16N3162.

(2) Mahon to Kitchener 1/12/15, F.O. 371/2280/183443.

(3) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol. 7, p. 295.

(4) Briand to Cambon 1/12/15, No. 4093-5, A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 285

(5) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol 7, p. 309; Cambon to Briand 1/12/15, No. 2809, A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1034.

(6) Grey to Bertie 1/12/15, F.O. 371/2278/182529.

and French governments would become very difficult if Britain insisted on withdrawal, which the French regarded as a desire expressed by King Constantine and his government on behalf of the German government. The French view was that if Salonica were abandoned it would be occupied by an enemy force either in collusion with the Greeks or in spite of them and that the withdrawal would have far-reaching and disastrous results throughout the Balkans and everywhere in the East ⁽¹⁾. Briand trusted that no steps would be taken committing the British government to withdrawal before Cambon had made representations on behalf of the French. He warned that if the attitude of the English government became known to French public opinion the consequences would be most serious ⁽²⁾. Berthelot therefore set about preparing a long and cogent list of the diplomatic, military and political disadvantages which would result from the evacuation of Salonica. He objected to the fact that Britain was proposing to retire even before she had fulfilled her often repeated obligation to send 90,000 troops ⁽³⁾. But in the meantime Cambon had reported that the English War Committee had again asserted the need for evacuation and that instructions had been sent to General Mahon to co-operate with Sarrail in preparations to this end ⁽⁴⁾, while from the English War Ministry the French liaison officer, Captain Doumayrou, told Gallieni that for the first time for a long while the British government was completely united in its determination and that the vote in the War Committee had been unanimous ⁽⁵⁾. Kitchener wanted Gallieni to know that he had never seen such agreement in the English Cabinet. If

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- (1) Bertie: Diary Vol. 1, p. 271; Bertie to Grey 1/12/15, F.O. 371/2278/182517; Memorandum by Bertie 4/12/15, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/15/26.
- (2) Briand to Cambon No. 4109, 2/12/15, A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1034.
- (3) Briand to Cambon No. 4101-7, 2/12/15, *ibid.*
- (4) Cambon to Briand No. 2818, 2/12/15, *ibid.*
- (5) Doumayrou to Gallieni No. 3575, 2/12/15, *ibid.*

the French ministers came over to England they should not expect to change any opinions ⁽¹⁾.

Nevertheless, the French Cabinet, meeting at the Elysée, agreed to back Briand in his resistance to the English determination to quit Salonica. The French Premier was to leave as soon as possible for London to try to win round the British government to the French point of view ⁽²⁾. Joffre confidently informed Sarrail that the intention of the French government was to remain at Salonica and that negotiations were in progress in London to secure agreement on this point and on the future line of conduct in the Balkans. Sarrail was even instructed to begin immediately defence works at Salonica ⁽³⁾. But Grey, while admitting that there were objections to evacuation from a political point of view, was emphatic that the question was one to be settled by military opinion - and in Britain this was unanimous. Evacuation, he stressed, was preferable to the loss of the whole force, which the British military authorities believed must ensue if Germano-Bulgarian forces advanced on Salonica. Kitchener and his military advisers believed that, unless the decision to re-embark all the troops was made without delay, the whole Anglo-French force would probably be lost ⁽⁴⁾. As long as there was a prospect of a military disaster, Grey told Cambon, it was not worthwhile discussing anything but military considerations ⁽⁵⁾. In the face of such pronouncements the French Military Attaché in London wrote privately to Gallieni to warn him of the serious situation which might arise out of the disagreement between the two countries,

(1) Doumayrou to 'mon colonel', 2/12/15, 5N 151.

(2) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol. 7, p. 303; Briand to Cambon No. 4115-7, 2/12/15, A.E. 'Guerre' Vo. 285.

(3) Joffre to Sarrail 3/12/15, No. 7843, 16N 3136.

(4) Grey to Bertie No. 2830-1, 2/12/15, F.O. 371/2278/183275.

(5) Ibid. 3/12/15, F.O. 371/2280/184537.

so determined was the British government to pursue its own policy to a conclusion ⁽¹⁾. Indeed, if Grey's statements had been a faithful reflection of the ultimate policy of the British government - that is, that the Salonica expedition was to be judged solely on the criterion of its military values - then the situation would not have been as hopeless from the British point of view as it had appeared a couple of weeks earlier. But in fact Grey's assertion was only true up to a point - in the last resort factors other than military ones would play the dominating role in determining the actions of the British government.

This then was the situation when the full English Cabinet assembled on 3 December and was faced with a bombshell from the English War Lord. Kitchener bluntly informed his colleagues that he took so grave a view of the position and prospects in the Eastern theatre that he could take no further responsibility for the conduct of the war unless British troops were at once withdrawn from Salonica and the earliest and most certain of the catastrophes which he envisaged in the East thereby arrested ⁽²⁾. As he told Douglas Haig ⁽³⁾ later in the day, when explaining his behaviour, the British had only gone to Salonica to satisfy the French and to give employment to General Sarrail ⁽⁴⁾. Kitchener's standing among his ministerial colleagues was no longer high. His attitude to politicians, his refusal to confide information to them and his unwillingness to make full use of the General Staff because of the confidence he retained in his own opinions and abilities ⁽⁵⁾ all meant that many figures in the Asquith government would have

(1) Panouse to Gallieni 2/12/15, 5N 151.

(2) Asquith to George V 3/12/15, CAB 37/139/7.

(3) Commander-in-chief of the British army in France.

(4) R. Blake - op. cit., p. 115

(5) P. Magnus - op. cit., p. 288.

preferred to see him relieved of his ministerial responsibilities. Kitchener devolved on to subordinates as little authority as he could. He sought to manage the Great War with the same style of personal control that he had so effectively exercised in the command of the tiny Nile Expedition ⁽¹⁾. But Kitchener had a value which no figure in the country could seek to rival let alone replace. The accusing finger of the famous recruiting poster has become a legend in itself and has tended to obscure the real historical significance of this relic of the mythology of the Great War. The fact is that Kitchener's enormous prestige, deriving largely from his campaigns in Africa, meant that his presence in the government, however odious to the professional politicians, was vital to the continued inflow of men into the ranks and thus to the government's continued prosecution of the war. As a result, although his cabinet colleagues looked upon him as an intellectual lightweight ⁽²⁾, the Minister of War's opinions on all matters to do with the conduct of the war carried a disproportionate authority. This was not so great as when Churchill had described it: "When Kitchener gave a decision it was invariably accepted as final. He was never, to my belief, overruled by the War Council or the Cabinet in any military matter, great or small. No single unit was ever sent or withheld contrary, not merely to his agreement, but to his advice"⁽³⁾. Indeed movements were already afoot to remove Kitchener from the day to day conduct of the war by increasing, to an unprecedented level, the authority of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. But Kitchener's prestige in the country remained undimmed and it was still unthinkable that he could be dispensed with altogether. Moreover the importance of Kitchener's recruiting powers cannot

(1) W. S. Churchill - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 175.

(2) P. Magnus - op. cit., p. 374.

(3) W. S. Churchill - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 172.

be over-estimated when it is remembered that the principle of conscription was one of the last concessions to total war to be wrung from a British government which represented the death-throes of nineteenth century laissez-faire liberalism. It is in the light of these considerations that Kitchener's threat to resign should be viewed. Its impact upon the government may easily be imagined.

The Cabinet unanimously concurred in the War Minister's views and it was decided that Lord Bertie should at once inform the French Government of the crisis which had arisen from Kitchener's statement and point out that the gravity of the matter was such as to make desirable a conference the following day between the two governments either in London or Calais ⁽¹⁾. On leaving the meeting Grey told Cambon that Kitchener's resignation would bring about a general crisis and that it was imperative that agreement should be reached by the two governments before the military conference arranged for 5 December ⁽²⁾. Meanwhile in Paris Gallieni was still considering the last communication of the British government. He expressed his surprise that Kitchener appeared to have changed his views from those he had recently expressed in Paris, when, Gallieni claimed, he had been in favour of holding Salonica to prevent it from becoming an Austro-German base ⁽³⁾. But soon after 5 p.m. Bertie received Grey's latest despatch informing him of the Cabinet crisis which had developed earlier in the day. He went at once to the Quai d'Orsay, but neither Briand nor Jules Cambon was present and he was unable to see the French premier before 6.30 p.m. The

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- (1) Grey to Bertie 3/12/15, F.O. 371/2278/184182.
c.f. the rather strange statement of Lloyd George - War Memoirs, Vol. 1, p. 526: "As yet the British Cabinet had not reached a definite decision upon the issue".
- (2) Cambon to Briand No. 2829, 3/12/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1034.
- (3) Bertie to Grey 3/12/15, F.O. 371/2278/184113.

latter was very much perturbed at Grey's telegram and said that he, Gallieni and Admiral Lacaze, the highly regarded Navy Minister, would go to Calais the next morning so as to meet the British ministers as quickly as possible ⁽¹⁾.

Prior to the conference Berthelot prepared for his master a note in which he forcefully argued that Britain's insistence on evacuation should be met with intransigent opposition from the French. The effects of giving way would, he said, be catastrophic. The confidence of French public opinion in the outcome of the war would be shaken, the Briand ministry would fall, General Joffre's position would be weakened and even Poincaré, the President of the Republic, might not escape from the holocaust. A long series of military and diplomatic arguments must, therefore, be placed before the English to convince them of the lack of wisdom in their decision. And, as a trump card, Berthelot suggested that Briand might dangle before the English the offer of putting the campaign under the command of a general acceptable to both the allied powers - General Lyautey ⁽²⁾. For reasons which have already been examined ⁽³⁾, however, the supersession of the existing French commander at Salonica, General Sarrail, was the greatest political impossibility which could have been asked of Briand, and in fact the matter was never raised at Calais ⁽⁴⁾.

At the conference a clash of wills was inevitable and both sides followed familiar set pieces. Briand put forward the views of the French government as to why evacuation was undesirable, and then Kitchener spoke with

(1) Bertie Memorandum 4/12/15, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/15/26.

(2) The Royalist Resident-General of Morocco.

(3) See above pp 20-1.

(4) Petite note pour le président du conseil 4/12/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 981.

emotion saying that if it were decided to remain at Salonica he must resign for he could not accept the responsibility for a decision which in his opinion would produce a military disaster ⁽¹⁾. After a brief adjournment Asquith read out a statement to the delegates declaring that to keep 150,000 men at Salonica was likely to lead to a military disaster and insisting in the name of his government that preparations should be made without delay for evacuation. This declaration was accepted by Briand for the French government, which in consequence abandoned its own wish to remain at Salonica, although it was insisted that the responsibility for the decision lay with the British government ⁽²⁾. Briand said that if the British government announced that they could do nothing at Salonica then the question was settled. If Britain refused to stay there "la France n'a que s'incliner". He considered that it would be a catastrophe to leave Salonica, but the responsibility for that would establish itself later ⁽³⁾. Delegates returning to London and Paris on the evening of 4 December, therefore, could well have been forgiven for assuming that the Salonica Expedition had effectively been wound up. Thus when, on the same day, Sir Francis Elliot pressed to know whether the final decision was to remain at Salonica or not, only one possible answer could be given him ⁽⁴⁾. Philippe Berthelot certainly believed that the campaign had been abandoned, for, just before midnight ⁽⁵⁾ on 4 December, he submitted an impassioned note to Briand "sous l'impression que l'on avait accepté l'évacuation de Salonique". This note underlined the folly of capitulating before the imaginary danger posed by the King of Greece and the German Emperor, and the perils

(1) Note by Bertie 6/12/15, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/15/29.

(2) Note on the conference, CAB 37/139/15.

(3) Procès-verbal, CAB 28/I.C.4.

(4) Elliot to Grey No. 1363, 4/12/15, F.O. 371/2280/184890.

(5) The original note bears the time 11.30 p.m., not 1 a.m. on 5 December as G. H. Cassar - op. cit., p. 231 - suggests.

involved in giving up control of the Mediterranean and leaving the Germans liberty of action in the Near-East. As the Calais decision would materially affect the course of the war, France should make public that no agreement existed between the allies and that she was merely following the English line for the sake of the Entente. British policy since the beginnings of the campaign had been disloyal and had been tantamount to a go-slow strike. The English conception of the war, limited as it was to the north of France and Egypt, was infantile and selfish. They were heading for defeat and were dragging France along with them. Wildly Berthelot suggested that France should look after her own interests and seize Crete and Corfou immediately.⁽¹⁾

At all events the impression given by Briand's biographer that the Calais Conference had come to no definite conclusion is far from the truth⁽²⁾. As Asquith recalled a decade later: "I soon came to the conclusion that if we stuck to our guns we should not only hold our own, but the French would on the whole feel relieved. So I turned

- (1) Note by Berthelot 4/12/15, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1034; A. Bréal - "Philippe Berthelot"(1937) p. 144; G. Cassar - op. cit., pp. 231-2. The significance of the document is not that it called for the Calais decision to be reversed, as Cassar maintains, but that it shows that the French had agreed to evacuation. Berthelot merely wanted the French government to relieve itself of all responsibility for the decision. Cassar appears to base his argument on the attempt of Berthelot's biographer to exaggerate the role played by his subject in reversing the Calais agreement. (Bréal - op. cit., p. 145).
- (2) G. Suarez - op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 213: "Au fond le désaccord restait entier. Briand avait obtenu l'ajournement de l'évacuation. Joffre avait suggéré l'installation du camp retranché, mais chaque parti restait sur ses positions". For the truthful assessment of one of the French delegates see A. Ribot: Letters to a Friend (1926) p. 300.

on Kitchener again, who played his part of the sullen, morose, rather suspicious, but wholly determined man with good effect ...[The French] acquiesced with some show of reluctance and regret and we parted ostensibly, and I think really, on excellent terms"⁽¹⁾. Back in Paris, however, Briand was confronted by a cabinet crisis of the first order. Ironically enough Denys Cochin, newly returned from Greece, had just told his colleagues that he had become convinced that no useful purpose could be served by remaining at Salonica⁽²⁾. But Briand was faced with uncompromising opposition to the idea of evacuation from the socialists in his government, led by Marcel Sembat and Albert Thomas. The veteran de Freycinet, on the other hand, did not feel it was possible to remain at Salonica without the English and he was supported by Gallieni. In the face of this impasse Briand, knowing that the Sacred Union could not be preserved if the Socialists left his Cabinet, willingly clutched at the compromise offered by Léon Bourgeois that nothing should be done until Russia and Italy had been consulted⁽³⁾. As Paul Cambon appreciated this manoeuvre had no other motive than to gain time⁽⁴⁾. He was convinced that Briand had agreed to evacuation at Calais but that in the face of the objections of important members of his cabinet he had gratefully accepted Bourgeois's suggestion. Cambon found lamentable this constant series of discussions and the inability to reach a firm decision⁽⁵⁾. He had seen the Admiralty Chief of Staff, Admiral Oliver, who had been present at Calais and who had informed him that the allies were in agreement to evacuate⁽⁶⁾, but he now received a despatch from Briand to the effect that the Calais Conference had been between representatives of the two governments, while a final decision could only be made after consultation between

(1) H. H. Asquith - Memories and Reflections (1928) Vol. 2, p. 111.

(2) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol. 7, p. 309.

(3) *ibid*, pp. 311-2; Cassar - op. cit., pp. 232-3; Paul Cambon to Henri Cambon 7/12/15, Cambon - Correspondance, Vol. 3, p. 91. For Gallieni's vivid description of the chaos of this meeting of the Conseil des Ministres, see M. A. Lebland - op. cit., p. 195.

(4) Paul Cambon to Jules Cambon 6/12/15, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(5) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 7/12/15, Correspondance, Vol. 3, p. 91.

(6) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 7/12/15, *ibid*, p. 92.

the two governments themselves⁽¹⁾. Henry Wilson warned on 6 December that he had already spoken to the man⁽²⁾ who was to go over to England to see Lloyd George and endeavour to get the Calais decision cancelled. He stressed that a quarrel must be avoided at all costs even if this meant handing over the British troops in Greece to Sarrail to do with as he pleased⁽³⁾.

After consultation with Briand and Jules Cambon, Bertie considered that there was disagreement as to what had passed at Calais. He felt that the fault might lie with Kitchener whose memory sometimes let him down⁽⁴⁾. Paul Cambon told Grey that the French Cabinet was strongly of the opinion that the allied forces should be kept at Salonica. He had been instructed therefore to ask that the British government should reconsider the matter⁽⁵⁾. But Grey regarded the position of the allied forces with the greatest anxiety. He could not believe that the French would wish these forces to be lost and could only suppose that they did not share the belief that the troops were in danger. He hoped they were right, but feared the contrary⁽⁶⁾. But the familiar process was now about to begin, whereby England's resolution to pursue her own policy in relation to the Salonica campaign would be undermined by her fundamental adherence to the dictates of French domestic politics. A recent study has maintained that the crumbling of

(1) Briand to Cambon No. 4176, 5/12/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1034.

(2) presumably Albert Thomas.

(3) Henry Wilson to Bonar Law 6/12/15, Bonar Law MSS 52/1/15. The choice of Lloyd George shows that the French government was fully aware of his partiality for the Salonica venture. Lloyd George assumes almost the role of a fifth columnist in the English ministry at this point. c.f. Private note by Austen Chamberlain 29/6/16, Chamberlain MSS AC 12/35: "I was afraid that the P.M. would find himself landed in considerable difficulties owing to the intrigues of Lloyd George with French politicians in opposition to our own military advisers".

(4) Bertie - Diary. Vol. 1, p. 274.

(5) Grey to Bertie, 6/12/15, F.O. 371/2280/187477.

(6) Note by Grey 6/12/15, Lloyd George MSS D/23/5/10.

British resolve resulted from panic in the Foreign Office over a possible threat to the maintenance of the Entente⁽¹⁾. The charge, however, would seem to be misdirected. When on 7 December Bertie telegraphed to the effect that Briand was now arguing that to withdraw from Salonica would be a fatal mistake, George Clerk, a senior official at the Foreign Office, unhesitatingly commented: "I made careful notes of M. Briand's language at Calais and it certainly justifies an assumption that the French Ministers present accepted our decision, reluctantly certainly, but without reserve and on behalf of the French Government so far as regards the main point - withdrawal from Salonica"⁽²⁾. The real lack of resolution appears to have been shown at the highest cabinet level, when the old argument of the dire consequences of a threat to political harmony in France again reared its head.

By the time that the War Committee met on 6 December it was evident that all was not running smoothly and Asquith anxiously asked Kitchener if he had any information as to the French government having gone back on the agreement reached at Calais⁽³⁾. Kitchener replied that the Military Attaché, Colonel Panouse, had informed him verbally that he gathered that the French government had decided they could not abide by the Calais decision until the Italians and Russians had been consulted and also agreed. Asquith noted that there had evidently been trouble in the French Cabinet after the conference, while Admiral Oliver remarked that he had received similar information about the French government's change of view from the Naval Attaché and he gathered that Briand would have to resign if the forward Salonica policy were upset. Lloyd George reported his meeting with Albert Thomas, who had stated that the unanimous feeling in the French Council of War on the receipt of the Calais decision had been one of consternation. The effect of the French

(1) A. Palmer - op. cit., p. 50.

(2) Minute on Bertie to Grey No. 968, 7/12/15, F.O. 371/2278/185902.

(3) CAB 42/6/3.

agreeing to the proposal to evacuate would mean the ultimate overthrow of the Briand government. In fact the French Cabinet had decided to send over Thomas, ostensibly to talk about munitions, but in fact to work on Lloyd George who, according to Thomas, remained favourable to the campaign. The two men having ties as radicals and Ministers of Munitions, the French government hoped it might be possible to use Lloyd George to win over his cabinet colleagues⁽¹⁾.

Because of the possible collapse of his own administration Briand had been obliged to take drastic measures. The French Cabinet, examining the record of the Calais meeting, came to the conclusion on 6 December that the document did indeed represent a reluctant acceptance on France's part of the decision to evacuate⁽²⁾. Such a step remained however a political impossibility, while the conflict of wills between England and France had created, in Cambon's opinion, the gravest crisis since the outbreak of the war⁽³⁾. So Briand, in his own hand, carefully changed the wording of the procès-verbal of the conference, drawn up by his Directeur Politique, de Margerie, so as completely to alter the sense of what had been decided upon at Calais. It was now made to appear that the French representatives had merely taken note of the British pronouncements ad referendum to their own government⁽⁴⁾. As Cambon wrote with no small measure of disgust at the way in which the government of his country was being run, "The whole question is dominated in the minds of Briand, of Viviani (now Minister of Justice) and of the President of the Republic by the fear of a ministerial crisis."⁽⁵⁾ Commenting on Briand's evident lack of good faith, Cambon argued that Clemenceau, for all

(1) Paul Cambon to Jules Cambon 6/12/15, J. Cambon MSS Vol. 1.

(2) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol. 7, p. 312.

(3) as note (1).

(4) A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1034 contains two versions of the procès-verbal with Briand's handwritten alterations, or as de Margerie puts it, "corrigé par M. Briand".

(5) as note (1)

his failings, would be a more acceptable figure at the head of the government than "ce lézard qu'il est impossible de saisir et dont au fond la seule ambition est de miroiter au soleil"⁽¹⁾. But a Clemenceau ministry, because of long-standing personal animosities, would make it extremely difficult for Poincaré to remain as President. The prospects of ministerial instability, as well as a radically different approach to the conduct of the war, therefore clearly existed and it was in the vistas of political chaos in France that British resolve to enforce the Calais decision began to weaken. As Lloyd George was now asking, could Britain afford to see the end of the Sacred Union in France with the Socialists resuming their factious criticism in the Chamber? Would England allow her ally to be overcome by internal strife, the consequences of which would deal the Allied military effort a crippling blow?⁽²⁾

Bertie soon heard that the British government's resolve was slackening. He gathered that Lloyd George had said that if Britain deserted the French over the Salonica question he would resign. Asquith might therefore be faced with having to choose between Lloyd George and Kitchener. Bertie suspected, however, that Kitchener, when he saw the way the votes were going, would "after trumpeting, fold up his trunk and accommodate to circumstances"⁽³⁾. But Kitchener at the same time, sensing the changing mood, was already contemplating giving up the position of Secretary of State⁽⁴⁾. Bertie himself did nothing to encourage the Cabinet to take a strong line when he reported that a withdrawal from Salonica might cause the fall of Briand's government. Britain would be held by French public opinion

(1) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 7/12/15, Cambon - Correspondance Vol. 3, p. 92.

(2) Lloyd George - op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 453.

(3) Bertie: Diary, Vol. 1, 7/12/15, p. 274.

(4) Kitchener to Robertson 7/12/15, Robertson MSS, 1/13/31.

to have left France in the lurch⁽¹⁾. Briand was now arguing that if the British objections to holding Salonica were based on military grounds he was anxious that the matter should be settled by the discussions currently taking place at Chantilly, between the allied Chiefs of Staff, where the English representative would have the opportunity of hearing Joffre's point of view⁽²⁾.

The will of the British government to hold its ground was thus already weakening when General Murray reported to the meeting of the War Committee on 8 December that two days earlier the question of Salonica had been considered at the Military Conference at Chantilly and that he had found himself in opposition to the views of the Serbian, French, Italian and Russian representatives, whom he could not bring to consider the actual military situation⁽³⁾. The French had argued that, despite the temporary setback which the allied forces had encountered, the diversity of interests at stake in the Balkans could at any moment swing the pendulum in favour of the allies, who should be there to take advantage of it⁽⁴⁾. The Conference had therefore concluded that although the decision of the war could only be sought in the main theatres of operations, the delegates, with the exception of the British representatives, were unanimous in requesting the maintenance of the occupation of Salonica⁽⁵⁾. The receipt of this information had a profound effect on British ministers, many of whom had hoped that Joffre would have revealed his lack of enthusiasm for the campaign. In fact there had been considerable confusion in the Grand Quartier Général over the question of continued

(1) Bertie to Grey 7/12/15, F.O. 371/2278/185903.

(2) Briand to Cambon 6/12/15, No. 4208-9, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1035.

(3) CAB 42/6/6.

(4) Plan of action proposed by the French to the Coalition, W.O. 159/4.

(5) Procès-verbal of the Chantilly Conference, Robertson MSS, 1/10/10.

occupation and, following the Calais Conference, a draft despatch had been drawn up to inform Sarrail that the allies had agreed upon evacuation⁽¹⁾. Following the lead of the politicians, however, Chantilly reversed its stance and Joffre informed Sarrail that the French government had no intention of evacuating and asked him if he had really told Kitchener that he, himself, saw no further purpose in remaining at Salonica⁽²⁾. In reply Sarrail confirmed his belief that with the forces currently at his disposal, no meaningful result was possible and, diplomatic and political considerations aside, evacuation seemed a logical conclusion⁽³⁾. The British Cabinet, however, knew nothing of this hesitation and Lloyd George, in an astonishing commentary on his scale of priorities, now announced that he thought it was better that Britain should lose all her forces than that any serious misunderstanding should arise with the French⁽⁴⁾. He received support from Balfour who argued that it was absolutely impossible to desert France and that, since the British were at Salonica at their instigation, they should throw the responsibility for conducting the matter further on the French and ask them to take over both the military and diplomatic command. This proposal to the War Committee was perhaps too far-reaching a submission and it was decided instead that Kitchener and Grey should go to Paris with carte blanche to settle the matter as they should think best⁽⁵⁾.

Grey informed Bertie that he and Kitchener were coming not to press either the retention or evacuation of Salonica, but because the military situation had become so serious

(1) Draft of Joffre to Sarrail, n.d. 16N3056.

(2) Joffre to Sarrail No. 2967, 6/12/15, 16N3136.

(3) Sarrail to Joffre No. 6193, 7/12/15, *ibid.*

(4) c.f. Robertson's contradictory statement, above p. 45.

(5) War Committee 8/12/15, CAB 42/6/6.

that the British government considered it necessary to be in the closest touch and consultation with their French opposite numbers⁽¹⁾. But the visit to Paris was in effect a tactical victory for France, for as the British position had already been made perfectly clear, it could only be modified by Kitchener and Grey in favour of the French point of view. Kitchener seems to have been rather unhappy about the mission which had been entrusted to him. Rather plaintively he told General Callwell that the cabinet no longer paid attention to his views and always asked instead for the opinions of the General Staff. Callwell feared that the War Minister's journey to Paris could only make matters worse⁽²⁾. In fact in discussions with Briand and Gallieni the question as to whether the allies could hold Salonica with a force of 150,000 was only briefly touched upon, and all discussions seemed to be based on the tacitly understood premise that the continuation of the campaign was a sine qua non of the conference⁽³⁾. As Grey communicated to the Foreign Office, he and Kitchener had told the French authorities that the sole object of the visit was to arrange with the French government how British troops could support the French forces and secure the safety of the whole allied force. The subsequent question of remaining at Salonica was left to be decided by the course of events. "Strained feeling," Grey comfortingly concluded, "on the part of the French government is, we think, very much diminished by our visit"⁽⁴⁾. The possibility naively envisaged by Grey in this despatch that the expedition might yet be abandoned was in fact illusory, since as has been seen "the course of events", to use Grey's phrase,

(1) Grey to Bertie 8/12/15, Grey MSS, F.O. 800/58.

(2) Callwell to Robertson 9/12/15, Robertson MSS, 1/8/28.

(3) Procès-verbal, CAB 37/139/24.

(4) Bertie to F.O. 9/12/15, F.O. 371/2278/188147.

which exerted ultimate influence over British policy was the course of political events in France, and this was never likely to make feasible the abandonment of the Salonica expedition.

Lord Selborne⁽¹⁾, viewing the developments from London, voiced concern that Kitchener had abandoned the position, which at one stage the whole British cabinet had supported, that he would resign rather than stay at Salonica. Selborne thought it a pure self-deception to pretend that the question of evacuation was really open. The French were going to have their way again, the Greeks would be turned into hostile neutrals or enemies and the exact situation, which the British General Staff had always said would be fatal, would be produced⁽²⁾. The reality of the situation was revealed by Asquith to the King following the cabinet meeting of 14 December. In effect, Asquith argued, the French had asked and Britain agreed that the allies should stay on for a time, under arrangements which, from a military point of view were equally necessary, whatever might be the final decision, leaving "as far as the French are concerned that final decision in suspense, but our own views as to what it ought to be remaining unchanged."⁽³⁾ What the Prime Minister did not state, however, was the impossibility of translating British views into allied actions. When Grey returned from Paris he was able to tell the War Committee that his visit had changed the whole aspect of affairs in the French Chamber. Conveniently forgetting that he had had to go back on a unanimous decision of the British cabinet, Grey almost congratulated himself for having given priority to French political considerations rather than the expert military opinion which

(1) President of the Board of Agriculture.

(2) Selborne to Chamberlain 10/12/15, Austen Chamberlain MSS 13/3/94.

(3) Asquith to George V, 14/12/15, CAB 37/139/27.

a couple of weeks earlier he had held to be sacrosanct. His assessment of his mission was that it had taken place at the right psychological moment and that it was "essential that it should have been made."⁽¹⁾ Briand's position had been eased, but perhaps not to the extent which Grey imagined, for Bertie heard that the subsequent debate in the French Chamber had been much more stormy than the newspaper accounts had suggested, and that at one time 150 Radical-Socialist deputies thought of abstaining⁽²⁾.

The *démarche* begun by Kitchener's resignation threat thus came to an end. It was perhaps typical of British diplomacy at its most arrogant that this humiliating and ultimately costly collapse of policy could be represented in this way as a tactical triumph. In fact Britain's Balkan policy had been effectively emasculated and her freedom of action curtailed. As a result, carefully considered evaluations of the military situation, such as the General Staff continued to produce, could in the last resort remain no more than pious statements of intent, susceptible to the modifying influences of French political pressure⁽³⁾.

(1) War Committee 13/12/15, CAB 42/6/7.

(2) Bertie - Diary, Vol. 1, p. 276.

(3) Some accounts have grossly misrepresented this complicated episode in inter-allied diplomacy. Joffre suggested that it was the news of King Constantine's declaration that he would not attack the allies and would consent to the defensive organisation of Salonica, which made the English ministers more amenable when they arrived in Paris (Memoirs, Vol. 2, p. 425). Herbillon argued that, having returned from Calais, the British ministers were struck by Briand's arguments and agreed to review the question. The episode was therefore 'un beau et brillant succès pour notre "Premier"'. (Herbillon - op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 216). This tendency to convert an exercise in rather base political expediency on Briand's part into a triumph of statesmanship is repeated by Robert David for whom the incident was "the decisive moment when he (Briand) best understood and served the interests of France". (R. David - op. cit., p. 123).

CHAPTER V

France, England and the
Development of the Campaign, 1916

"Allies are a tiresome lot", commented Sir William Robertson in October 1916 after a year of attempting to co-operate with France in the direction of the Salonica Expedition.⁽¹⁾ Once the decision to remain at Salonica had been taken, relations between England and France revolved around two major issues. The first was the question of what role the Salonica army should now play in the general conduct of the war and the second centred on the policy to be adopted by the allies towards the government and king of Greece.⁽²⁾ As far as the military campaign was concerned the prospects, at least from a British point of view, were far from promising. "We were committed to the defence of Salonica for an indefinite time... We had engaged ourselves, probably for the duration, in a venture which at the moment had scarcely a friend among our statesmen, our soldiers or our sailors".⁽³⁾ The British commander, General Mahon, had been powerless in the face of his country's volte-face concerning evacuation. On 5 December he had received orders to discontinue altogether further disembarkation of troops, but five days later disembarkation was ordered to re-commence and instructions were received to occupy and prepare forthwith a position for defence around Salonica.⁽⁴⁾ But while the Times might rejoice that a "complete

(1) Robertson to Haig 25/10/16, Robertson MSS 1/22/84

(2) Restrictions of space prevent a detailed survey of the relations of England and France with Greece during the Salonica Campaign in the present study. The question can be examined in the English Foreign Office archives (Series FO 371 vols 2266-2280; 2603-2633; 2865-2895; 3142-3159) and at the Quai d'Orsay (Series Guerre vols 246-321). For an interesting recent study of the earlier part of this period see also C. Theodoulou - Greece and the Entente, August 1914 - September 1916 (1971).

(3) C. B. Falls - Military Operations: Macedonia (1933) vol 1, p 50.

(4) Mahon to Monro 1/1/16, Howell MSS III/C1/5.

and definitive agreement" had been reached by the French and English governments,⁽¹⁾ a basic lack of accord persisted between the two allies. Kitchener noted that the military situation had improved and asserted that the allied armies, having taken up defensive positions, would be able to hold the port,⁽²⁾ but Robertson, who was now taking over from Kitchener the day-to-day direction of the war, had not given up the hope that Salonica might yet be evacuated. In response to a General Staff paper which concluded that "to employ our surplus divisions in the Balkans next spring and summer would not only not promise any adequate results as against the Central Powers but might possibly ruin our chance of ultimate victory" and that "it would be most advantageous to be relieved of our present commitments in the Balkan theatre",⁽³⁾ Robertson urged upon the War Committee acceptance of the principle that "we are to persuade the French to withdraw with us from Salonica".⁽⁴⁾ But the British ministers, conscious always of the political considerations which had kept them at Salonica in the first instance, rejected this conclusion at their meeting on 28 December.⁽⁵⁾ Balfour ventured to suggest that, although the original reasons for the enterprise were bad ones, it might be foolish to abandon an adventure which it had been foolish to undertake. Germany could not ignore the allied presence in the Balkans and in any case no offensive on the western front would be feasible for several months.⁽⁶⁾ Within the Foreign Office Sir Arthur Nicolson even thought that it would be well to make Salonica a base from which to form, equip and organise a large force to operate in the Balkans when the proper season arrived.⁽⁷⁾ The majority of opinion in the

(1) The Times 15/12/15

(2) Kitchener to Hanbury-Williams 14/12/15, No 448, W.O. 106/1338

(3) Examination by the General Staff into the factors affecting the choice of a plan of campaign 16/12/15, CAB 42/6/14

(4) Note for War Committee 23/12/15, Robertson MSS 1/6/73

(5) War Committee 28/12/15, CAB 42/6/14

(6) Note by Balfour on conclusion of War Committee of 28/12/15, CAB 42/7/5

(7) Nicolson to Hardinge 16/12/15, Nicolson MSS FO 800/380

British political and military hierarchy was still, however, convinced that evacuation remained a desirable ultimate objective, although, after talking to Joffre, Major Clive warned that there was little chance of getting any divisions away from Salonica before the beginning of February.⁽¹⁾ But across the Channel declarations by the French government showed how shallow was the agreement which existed between the two countries. When questioned by the Senate Foreign Affairs Commission Briand asserted that any additions to the Salonica force would have to be met by England.⁽²⁾ The English War Committee, on the other hand, was shortly to declare that "any reinforcements sent must be French troops and sent on French transports".⁽³⁾

Whether or not reinforcements might ultimately be sent to Salonica or the whole expedition be abandoned, more immediate problems confronted the British and French governments. Chief among these was the question of a unified command for the allied armies. Joffre advised Kitchener of the possibility that the Salonica force might soon be attacked. In such a situation it was indispensable that all eight divisions should be under the command of a single authority.⁽⁴⁾ Kitchener accepted the concept of a French commander-in-chief because of the preponderant French influence in the decision to undertake the campaign, but he expressed the hope that a high-ranking French officer would be placed above both General Mahon and General Sarrail.⁽⁵⁾ Briand greeted Kitchener's partial acquiescence with gratitude, but pointed out that the only generals senior enough to be placed over Sarrail could not be removed from the Western Front. French public opinion, moreover, would find it difficult to understand why Sarrail, having

(1) Clive to Mahon 22/12/15, W.O. 158/758

(2) Senate Foreign Affairs Commission 13/12/15, Archives du Sénat

(3) War Committee 15/12/15, FO 371/2278/192041

(4) Joffre to Panouse No 66, 23/12/15, 5N 147

(5) Doumayrou to Joffre No 13, 28/12/15, 16N 3136. Joffre was apparently not unfavourable to Kitchener's proposition and would have liked to send out Lyautey or Franchet d'Espérey to Salonica. But this idea was vigorously opposed in the French cabinet, especially by Painlevé and Bourgeois (Poincaré op. cit., vol 7, p 362)

successfully organised the retreat from Serbia, should now be inflicted with this apparent disgrace.⁽¹⁾ Briand's appeal was, however, unnecessary for the French embassy had already explained to Kitchener that his precondition "pouvait être gênante pour le gouvernement français". As a result Kitchener had disclaimed any wish to involve himself in French internal politics and had willingly conceded that General Mahon should be placed under the command of Sarrail.⁽²⁾ "Thus was instituted, at a moment when the British government had not finally decided whether their troops were to remain at Salonica, the unified command in French hands which was to endure until the end of the war".⁽³⁾ Mahon was therefore informed that he should comply with the instructions of General Sarrail regarding military operations for the defence of the town and harbour of Salonica, although he would continue to be under the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force as regards administration.⁽⁴⁾ This was, however, a more restricted formula than that conveyed by Joffre to Sarrail, who was informed unreservedly that he was to exercise the command of the combined allied forces at Salonica.⁽⁵⁾ At all events the decision of the British government to waive its numerical superiority in the Salonica expedition, which included an inherent right to overall command, carried with it the seeds of many future difficulties.

Over and above the question of unified command, however, Sarrail's chief difficulty at this stage was to obtain from Chantilly the forces which he considered necessary to the continuance of the campaign. Mahon reported that Sarrail considered the allied line to be inadequately held and that he (Mahon) was being urged to ask for at least another division from England.⁽⁶⁾ Robertson replied that as Sarrail was in

(1) Briand to Cambon No 4594, 30/12/15, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1035

(2) Doumayrou to Joffre No 17, 30/12/15, 16N 3136

(3) C.B.Falls - op. cit., vol 1, p 97

(4) Kitchener to Grey 10/1/16, F.O. 371/2605/6757

(5) Joffre to Sarrail No 4784, 9/1/16, A.E. 'Guerre' vol 1036

(6) Mahon to Robertson 13/1/16, F.O. 371/2605/8805

command of the whole allied force he should apply to his own government for a further division, if he thought this was required to secure Salonica.⁽¹⁾ But when this was reported to him, Sarrail merely used it as an occasion to ask the French government to press upon the British the need for a fresh division. This, he stressed, was independent of the two divisions which he was asking from Chantilly, which were vital if the Salonica operations were not to degenerate into a similar state to those of the Dardanelles.⁽²⁾ With rumours circulating in Greece of possible reinforcements, Guillemin asked for clarification from the Quai d'Orsay. He reminded Briand that he had already expressed the view that the allies should have 300,000 men at Salonica to hold the Greeks in awe and to be able to defeat whatever enemy forces might be encountered.⁽³⁾ Briand replied, however, that the figure of 300,000 had never been envisaged and that Guillemin should regard a total force of 200,000 as the maximum that was possible.⁽⁴⁾ In fact Briand had just emerged from a difficult session of the Senate Foreign Affairs Commission where he had been obliged to explain why the French government had gone back on its earlier assurance that no further French troops would be consigned to the Balkan theatre beyond the 60,000 originally designated.⁽⁵⁾ To the concern of opponents of the campaign such as Clemenceau, Briand had also asserted that Salonica could in the future become the base for more extensive operations than those so far engaged.⁽⁶⁾

Within the French government General Gallieni showed himself in favour of large scale operations in the Balkans and thus at once set himself in opposition to Joffre. On 15 January the War Minister presented to his colleagues a study of possible future military operations, which concluded that there

(1) Robertson to Mahon 14/1/16, F.O. 371/2605/9264

(2) Sarrail to Joffre No 911/2, 16/1/16, 16N 3136

(3) Guillemin to Briand No 145, 20/1/16, 16N 3162

(4) Briand to Guillemin No 116, 22/1/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1036

(5) Meeting of Senate Commission 17/1/16, Pichon MSS, vol 4398

(6) *ibid.* Archives du Sénat

was little hope of breaking the German line in France and that it would be preferable to seek the final decision of the war in the Balkans with a force of twenty divisions.⁽¹⁾ Joffre, of course, found an ally in Robertson, who was pleased to note that he and the French commander were in agreement as to "the limitations which the difficulties of the country, the lack of roads and communications and the shipping situation impose upon the Army of the East".⁽²⁾ In conference at Downing Street, moreover, the allies agreed that for the moment there was no question of other than defensive operations,⁽³⁾ and that the immediate needs of the situation were to reconstitute and make use of the depleted Serbian army and to ask the Italian government to participate in the expedition.⁽⁴⁾ Dissenting voices, however, could still be heard on both sides of the Channel. Bertie noted that there was still a hankering after giving up the Salonica expedition on the part of Kitchener's friends,⁽⁵⁾ while Clemenceau continued his polemics in "L'Homme Enchaîné", arguing that "even should Sarrail succeed in holding his ground in Salonica the strategic result of the affair would still amount to exactly nothing".⁽⁶⁾ Nevertheless Joffre defined Sarrail's mission in the terms of the Downing Street agreements. For the time being the possibility of an offensive was ruled out and Sarrail's task was to hold on to the positions which he already held. The general conditions of the war precluded, Joffre stressed, any further re-allocation of forces as between the French and Salonica theatres, and Sarrail must make do with those already at his disposal.⁽⁷⁾ What Sarrail could envisage for the future was a limited offensive designed to have a powerful impact on public opinion, which it might be possible to launch

(1) Poincaré - op. cit., vol 8, p 28

(2) Robertson to Joffre 18/1/16, W.O. 106/1355

(3) Proces-verbal, 19/1/16, A.E. 'Guerre' vol 981

(4) Conference Conclusions, CAB 37/141/12

(5) Bertie - Diary, vol 1, p 291

(6) 'L'Homme Enchaîné' 15/1/16, cited Coblentz - op. cit., p 114

(7) Joffre to Sarrail No 930-2, 22/1/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1036

if one or more of the Balkan states came over to the allied side.⁽¹⁾

The character of General Sarrail naturally exercised a profound influence on the development of Anglo-French relations in regard to the Salonica campaign. In the words of the official British historian, "in the case of this theatre of war it is necessary, as in few others, to discuss the personality of an allied commander, because that of the French commander-in-chief had here an influence so important not only on operations but also on the relations between the French Headquarters and the British".⁽²⁾ With the campaign still in its infancy, from the headquarters of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force Bell asserted that in his opinion Sarrail was "a rotter" and that but for him Britain would "never have been landed with Salonica at all".⁽³⁾ At Salonica itself Howell noted that Sarrail was out to create for himself a very good press and that he invariably spent a whole hour each evening meeting newspaper correspondants and lecturing to them on the situation.⁽⁴⁾ Mahon's successor, General Milne, found Sarrail conceited, excitable, ambitious, impetuous and unscrupulous. He was resentful of opposition and control and this led him to be impatient with those who did not agree with him. He was not open to argument once he had come to any conclusion, but was inclined to show dislike of those whom he considered to have stood in his way. He was prone to drive rather than to lead and did not understand or make allowances for the different mentalities of the nations with which he had to deal. Not surprisingly Sarrail did not inspire Milne with great confidence but the latter admitted that he might be biased as Sarrail seemed to regard him as Robertson's emissary sent to thwart all plans for an offensive.⁽⁵⁾ Acting as a

(1) Joffre to de Gondrecourt No 60-1, 23/1/16, 16N 3014

(2) C.B. Falls - op. cit., vol 1, p 97

(3) Bell to Howell 21/12/15, Howell MSS IV/C2/193

(4) Howell to Robertson 16/1/16, Howell MSS IV/C2/197

(5) Milne to Robertson 20/7/16, Robertson MSS 1/14/27a. Sarrail's resentment of Milne may have had some justification for, in private conversation with Painlevé in November 1916, Lloyd George revealed that Mahon had been replaced because he had acquiesced too willingly in Sarrail's wishes - Note by Painlevé on voyage to London, November 1916, Painleve MSS 313 AP 110

liaison officer for the War Office, Lieutenant-Colonel Maynard reported that Sarrail seldom went far from Salonica and that the knowledge he had gained from personal reconnaissance at the front must be very limited. Most of his time appeared to be devoted to political matters and to ceremonial functions which brought him before the public eye. Subordinate commanders had the impression, therefore, that operations were undertaken in too haphazard a manner, often without sufficient forethought or preparation and that political motives were apt to induce Sarrail to interfere unduly with their prosecution, however unversed he might have been in the local situation.⁽¹⁾

The difficulties of the English command in working in conjunction with Sarrail were demonstrated at an early date. Mahon's intelligence service had been weaving a net in which he hoped to take all enemy spies and agents in one sweep. The plan had been submitted to Sarrail who had given no verdict upon it. But at 2.40 pm on 30 December 1915 Sarrail sent Mahon a verbal message to the effect that he intended to seize all enemy consuls at 3 pm and adding that, if Mahon had any suggestions to make, he should make them before then. Sarrail also invited the nominal co-operation of a small party of British troops. To give an air of unity to the proceedings Mahon sent these and the consuls were duly seized and taken to French headquarters. Mahon noted that as a result of Sarrail's unexpected and independent action the capture of the enemy agents which was to be attempted later in the day was not likely to succeed.⁽²⁾

Elliot commented that the incident was the result of a sudden brain storm on the part of Sarrail, while the senior British naval officer at Salonica pointed out that, as Mahon had feared, the lack of co-operation resulted in many important enemy agents escaping capture, as the British plan for arresting these spies was spoilt by the premature action of the French.⁽³⁾ In a similar incident in the early evening of 27 January Mahon learned that the fort of Kara Burun was to be occupied twelve hours later by a French battalion and two batteries under the

(1) Notes by Maynard after two trips to Salonica, September and October 1916, W.O. 106/1347

(2) Mahon to Robertson 30/12/15, F.O. 371/2282/201846

(3) Elliot to Grey 1/1/16, F.O. 371/2605/19740 and comment by Admiral Stuart Nicholson on same

guns of French warships. The garrison was to receive no warning and, if it resisted, the fort would be taken by assault. The British were called upon to station two battalions east of Salonica to resist any attempt by Greek troops to march towards the fort. In exasperation Mahon telegraphed to London: "I greatly regret this step and particularly the methods about to be employed ... but I have not been consulted and the measures are now too far advanced to attempt to modify them."⁽¹⁾

The possibility of offensive operations from Salonica first began to be mooted in February 1916. Lloyd George, supported by Bonar Law and Robertson, visited Briand to attempt to dissuade the French premier from the idea of any real offensive and to induce him to concentrate all efforts on the French front. Bertie noted, however, that the British leaders did not have any success, "for Briand remained oracular."⁽²⁾ But there were serious misgivings at Chantilly about the proposal for an offensive which was being placed before the English government. General Pellé, Joffre's Chief of Staff, argued that to launch a major military effort in the early spring the allies would have to be in possession of incomparably greater means of transport than were at their disposal. Without the aid of a reconstituted Serbian army Pellé felt it was impossible to think in terms of an offensive before July or August.⁽³⁾ Panouse, after an interview with Kitchener, reported that it was most unlikely that the English warlord would agree to send a further division to General Mahon. The opinion of the English General Staff appeared to be that an offensive from Salonica would require long months of preparation and the sending of substantial forces from the Western front which could only compromise the effective strength of the latter.⁽⁴⁾

In the face of this resistance from England the divisions between the political and military chiefs in France became more

(1) Falls - op. cit., vol 1, p 100; Grey to Bertie, No 312, 28/1/16, F.O. 371/2615/17688

(2) Bertie - Diary (7/2/16) vol 1, p 299

(3) Pellé to 'M. le Ministre' 6/2/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 982

(4) Panouse to Joffre No 1858, 7/2/16, 16N 2967

acute. Within the Quai d'Orsay Jules Cambon argued that it was necessary to undertake operations as quickly as possible to restore allied prestige and to win the support of the neutral Balkan states. The longer action was delayed the more difficult the situation would become.⁽¹⁾ But in conversation with Robertson on 14 February Joffre expressed the opinion that a great offensive from Salonica was out of the question, although he proposed to increase the force for the purpose of making a demonstration on a large scale.⁽²⁾ For a real offensive Joffre considered that six or seven hundred thousand men would be required. But he was prepared to bow to his government's judgment that a mock offensive might be sufficient to bring in Romania on the side of the allies.⁽³⁾ Robertson came to the conclusion that "the French politicians are at the root of the trouble ... From every point of view to attempt anything big in the Balkans would be the height of folly".⁽⁴⁾ Joffre had "sprung rather a bomb" upon him in suggesting a demonstration northwards with 400,000 men to keep the Bulgarians and the Germans from attacking Romania. The politicians in France seemed to think that if anything went wrong with Romania their ministry would be turned out. But Robertson was prepared to oppose the project "to the utmost of my power" and was working hard to make the English government take a hard line. He felt that Britain was not taking nearly sufficient lead in the conduct of the war considering the great amount she was contributing towards it.⁽⁵⁾ Taking a firm stand Robertson advised Mahon that no change had taken place in British policy with regard to the employment of their troops at Salonica nor at that time was the question of undertaking offensive operations being considered by the British government.⁽⁶⁾ Robertson realised that "Sarrail

(1) Herbillon - op. cit., vol 1, p 242

(2) Note by Robertson 22/3/16, CAB 42/11/9

(3) Note of conversation with Robertson 14/2/16, Fonds Joffre, 14N 10

(4) Robertson to Hanbury Williams 16/2/16, Robertson MSS 1/35/57

(5) Robertson to Haig 17/2/16, ibid 1/22/22

(6) Robertson to Mahon 21/2/16, F.O. 371/2605/34165

must be a great trouble" to Mahon, but assured the British commander that he would never be party to any offensive operations in the Balkans. These would "be both futile and foolish". Possibly Mahon might be equipped to some small extent with pack transport so as to make a part of his force a little more mobile, but whatever was done in this respect would be on a small scale unless and until Mahon was definitely told differently.⁽¹⁾ At the same time the Chief of the Imperial General Staff confided to Haig that it was his intention at the forthcoming inter-allied conference to "knock the Salonica thing clean out". It was, he flatly stated, utter nonsense.⁽²⁾

On 22 February the War Committee expressed its basic concurrence in Robertson's views and determined that the adoption of the offensive in the Balkans on a scale sufficient to ensure the co-operation of Romania and Greece was at present ruled out by the lack of mercantile shipping and the strain it would impose on British resources, while the adoption of a partial offensive did not offer sufficient military advantage. Robertson urged upon his colleagues that from what he had seen of the French generals and the French staff he thought that the sooner Britain got the general control of operations the better it would be.⁽³⁾ On 24 February, however, evidently as a result of the great German offensive at Verdun launched three days before, Robertson telegraphed to Mahon, that, although no large-scale operations were contemplated, a portion of the British forces would be given transport suitable for offensive action.⁽⁴⁾ His long-term objective remained, nonetheless, to use some of Mahon's troops "elsewhere, more usefully than at present". The attack about Verdun might have the effect of proving the futility of keeping large forces idle when the main decision was being fought out on the Western Front.⁽⁵⁾ But Joffre, maintaining as ever a precarious balance between support for and opposition to the Salonica adventure, warned Robertson that he could not consent to the removal of a single division from Macedonia. This could only be seen by public opinion as a sign of weakness and of

(1) Robertson to Mahon 21/2/16, Robertson MSS 1/35/72

(2) Robertson to Haig 21/2/16, Robertson MSS 1/22/27

(3) CAB 42/9/3

(4) Robertson to Mahon 24/2/16, W.O. 106/1339; Falls-op.cit., Vol 1, p 109

(5) Falls - op. cit., vol 1, p 109

anxiety about the position on the Western Front.⁽¹⁾

At the beginning of March Mahon reported to London that Sarrail had received orders to assume the offensive. His alarm was apparent as he pointed out that with present forces and under present conditions he did not consider that any advance could be made into Serbia or Bulgaria with reasonable prospects of success.⁽²⁾ After further discussion with Sarrail he telegraphed next day that it now appeared as if no more than bluff were contemplated and on that he was not inclined to look favourably.⁽³⁾ Robertson declared himself unable to understand the receipt by Sarrail of any such orders, which could not justifiably be despatched without the concurrence of the two governments. He had seen Joffre only days before and the latter had made no mention of any such intention.⁽⁴⁾ In fact Joffre subsequently indicated to Robertson that he had merely called for an appreciation from Sarrail of the possibilities.⁽⁵⁾ Yarde-Buller reported that Sarrail had misunderstood Joffre's instructions and that the generalissimo had renewed his assurance to Robertson that he would take no decision modifying the line of policy agreed upon without Robertson's assent.⁽⁶⁾ But the whole episode illustrates the lack of entente between the two allies in relation to the campaign. Robertson was disappointed that Joffre still declined to consider a withdrawal from Salonica. He found that the French had become "even more tiresome than before", and determined that he would not run down the British forces in Egypt for the benefit of the French front, while both allies had five divisions "sitting in Salonica doing nothing".⁽⁷⁾ Robertson therefore warned Mahon that in conversation with Sarrail he should be careful to avoid giving the impression that the British government had any intention of departing from its existing policy, which was restricted to the defence of the base at Salonica.⁽⁸⁾ At the same time Joffre told Sarrail that

(1) Joffre to Yarde-Buller 26/2/16, 5N 148

(2) Mahon to Robertson 5/3/16, W.O. 106/1339

(3) Falls - op. cit., vol 1, p 109

(4) Robertson to Mahon No 14108, 6/3/16, W.O. 106/1339

(5) Falls - op. cit., vol 1, p 110

(6) Yarde-Buller to Robertson 8/3/16, W.O. 106/1339

(7) Robertson to Murray 6/3/16, Robertson MSS 1/32/9

(8) Robertson to Mahon 4/3/16, No 14144, W.O. 106/1339

it was not possible to envisage any further reinforcements being sent by England to Salonica and that on the basis of the existing forces, supplemented by a reconstituted Serbian army, the aim of France's Balkan policy was to win Greece and Romania to the allied cause and, if possible, to detach Turkey and Bulgaria from the enemy bloc.⁽¹⁾

At a conference of the chiefs of staff held at Chantilly on 12 March the question of operations in the Balkans was fully discussed. It was agreed that for the time being it was not feasible either to withdraw troops from the Armée d'Orient nor to reinforce it. Robertson asserted that the whole issue of Salonica would have to be re-examined at a later date and pointed out that it was difficult for England to make her force there more mobile while France, Italy and Russia were making growing calls on her shipping in other theatres of the war. The conference determined that the allies should undertake a general offensive in the summer of 1916 and that until then the Armée d'Orient should as far as possible be organised for mountain warfare.⁽²⁾ Robertson, however, remained unhappy about the whole operation and in a paper prepared for the War Committee argued that in view of German activity in the west it was more than ever important that the allies should use there all men who could possibly be sent and not keep them "useless and idle in secondary theatres". A force of more than 200,000 had now, he argued, been locked up for several months without exerting any appreciable influence on the course of the war. It was time that "an end was put to this ridiculous situation". He urged the government to inform their French counterparts that they intended to remove one division from Salonica to France as soon as transports could be made available and to follow this with the removal of further divisions as the reconstituted Serbian army arrived.⁽³⁾ Meeting to discuss Robertson's proposals the War Committee readily accepted his assurance that the forces at Salonica were considerably in excess of the number necessary to secure the position there and soon adopted his conclusions in toto to be put before the French at a forthcoming conference in Paris.⁽⁴⁾ Doumayrou warned the French government

(1) Joffre to Sarraill 10/3/16, 16N 3136

(2) Falls - op. cit., vol 1, p 110

(3) Note on the situation at Salonica 22/3/16, CAB 42/11/9

(4) War Committee 23/3/16, CAB 42/11/9

of Robertson's resolution and indicated that Kitchener would support him. The French delegates, however, would probably find the determination of Asquith and the other British ministers less fixed.⁽¹⁾

At the Conference the British delegation tried to use Kitchener's prestige to win their case and the War Minister "expatiated in a hectoring manner on the inutility of the Salonica Expedition". He announced the intention of withdrawing a British division and then Robertson disclosed that this would be preliminary to the withdrawal as soon as possible of a second and a third division. Perhaps responding to Doumayrou's analysis of the situation, Joffre and Briand gave the usual series of diplomatic arguments against a withdrawal from Salonica. Romania would give up all hope of a combination with Greece, Bulgaria would be emboldened to take up an aggressive attitude towards Romania and there would no longer be any prospect of Greece joining the Entente Powers. Briand therefore appealed to Asquith and Grey to reflect on the diplomatic and political consequences of a withdrawal in present circumstances. The effect materially and morally would be disastrous. Asquith, "seeing that Kitchener and Robertson had not made out a logical case", said that he would not persist in the proposal put forward by the British military authorities.⁽²⁾ The general impression conveyed by the French representatives was that they were now more firmly opposed than ever to withdrawing any troops from Salonica.⁽³⁾ This was even true of Joffre, and General Gouraud noted the novelty of hearing from the mouth of the generalissimo vigorous arguments in support of secondary theatres of operations.⁽⁴⁾ Robertson regretted that his "heated discussion with Joffre in front of Asquith and Briand" had again failed to bring any divisions away from Salonica. He remained convinced, however, that Sarrail would "get us into a mess there before he has done", and expressed the hope that Mahon would be careful and not lose any more British lives than possible in foolhardy enterprises.⁽⁵⁾ On reflection, after the

(1) Doumayrou to Jugal No 79, 21/3/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 982

(2) Bertie - Diary, vol 1, p 327

(3) Procès-verbal, CAB 28.1.C. 7b

(4) Gouraud to Berthelot 30/3/16, Berthelot MSS

(5) Robertson to Murray 5/4/16, Robertson MSS 1/32/19

war was over, Robertson noted that British ministerial opinion at the allied conferences was seldom determined or unanimous. French ministers, on the other hand, invariably presented a united front and came to the conference well prepared not only to meet British arguments against continuing the expedition but also to produce new ones for enlarging it. When, as was often the case, these arguments were of a political character, it would be claimed that they were so important as to necessitate military considerations being overridden.⁽¹⁾ Nonetheless Robertson had no alternative but to inform Mahon that there was no prospect of any troops being withdrawn from Salonica. It was therefore possible that circumstances might justify Britain later on in changing her purely defensive policy for limited offensive measures. As a result Mahon was instructed to furnish the War Office with information on additional transport requirements to meet such an eventuality.⁽²⁾

A plan for limited offensive operations submitted by Sarrail had in fact received Joffre's approval on 20 March. Writing at the beginning of April, however, Sarrail warned that with the forces currently at his disposal he was capable of no more than bluff. The general argued that a unique opportunity existed since, in his opinion, a mobile war was possible in the Balkan theatre alone - only there could the allies break out of the stalemate of the trenches. The only requirement, therefore, was for substantial reinforcements to be sent.⁽³⁾ Joffre was also becoming impatient with the situation and had urged Briand to force Romania to declare herself for the allies, under threat of the removal of part of the Armée d'Orient and of possible negotiations with Bulgaria.⁽⁴⁾ Although Sarrail's new plan of operations was criticised in detail by Joffre,⁽⁵⁾ the generalissimo argued before the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale on 20 April that, if Romanian collaboration were forthcoming, the Armée d'Orient would be called upon to play an important role in the winning of the war.⁽⁶⁾ The council itself

(1) Robertson - op. cit., vol 2, p 105

(2) Robertson to Mahon 31/3/16, No 14979, W.O. 106/1339

(3) Sarrail to Joffre No 849/3, 7/4/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1036

(4) Note sur la question roumaine 15/4/16, 16N 3057

(5) See below p 151.

(6) Note sur la situation balkanique 15/4/16, 16N 3015

decided that Sarrail's forces should be ready to launch a real offensive as soon as they had been reinforced by the Serbian army,⁽¹⁾ and Joffre informed Robertson of the consequent need to maintain all forces currently engaged in the Balkan theatre. He argued that when the reconstituted Serbian army had arrived at Salonica there would be a total of 300,000 fighting troops and that no other mission could be assigned to the expeditionary force than to attack the enemy on the Greek frontier with all available forces. Even if it were not possible to obtain any important success, the offensive would nevertheless have the effect of immobilising important Bulgarian forces as well as the German or Austrian divisions which the enemy would have retained on the spot or even brought back into the peninsula on account of demands made by the attacked Bulgarians. The offensives on the main fronts would in consequence be proportionately relieved. Joffre therefore renewed his previous requests that the British troops should as soon as possible be prepared for a campaign in mountainous country.⁽²⁾ This was the first time that the French Commander-in-Chief had "definitely expressed himself in favour of an offensive in Macedonia".⁽³⁾ Robertson thought it best in the circumstances to remind Mahon of the limits of British policy in the Balkans. The British commander could hold the enemy under the threat of an offensive by moving his troops up to, but not over, the Greek frontier. But he should carefully avoid taking any action which he considered might commit his troops to offensive operations beyond the frontier, more especially as he was not properly organised for mountain warfare.⁽⁴⁾

When the War Committee discussed the situation on 28 April no final decision was arrived at. Robertson merely undertook to furnish a memorandum examining future operations in the Balkans and the possibilities of an offensive in that theatre. The enquiring Lord Crewe,⁽⁵⁾ who wished to know just what was

(1) Joffre to Briand No 1232, 2/6/16, 16N 3015.

(2) Joffre to Robertson 25/4/16, CAB 42/13/2; W.O. 106/1348

(3) Falls - op. cit., vol 1, p 116

(4) Robertson to Mahon No 15781, 26/4/16, W.O. 106/1340

(5) The Lord President of the Council and one of Asquith's close colleagues

the military purpose of the campaign, received little satisfaction. Asquith said that there did not seem to be any immediate strategic objective; the real justification was to influence the Greek and Romanian governments.⁽¹⁾ To find out how advanced French plans were, Robertson asked Mahon whether Sarrail had consulted him adequately in regard to his plan for offensive operations.⁽²⁾ Mahon was in fact not even aware that any definite plan had actually been prepared. He had not been asked to express his views on the subject in a general way, nor were the staffs in consultation with regard to details.⁽³⁾

Robertson's memorandum was duly prepared and discussed at the War Committee on 3 May. The general pointed out that Joffre had been expecting the intervention of Romania for more than a year now and that there were no good reasons for supposing that she was any nearer taking the field on the allied side than she ever had been. The intervention of Greece was a more genuine possibility, but the Greek army was deficient in munitions and equipment, which could only come from the allies and which would entail a further strain on their shipping resources - a strain which would have been increased much beyond present limits by their own action in taking the offensive in the Balkans. Robertson thought, moreover, that there was no justification for expecting any great success in the Balkans - he believed that the operations would soon resolve themselves into a state of deadlock similar to that on the main European fronts. As regards the advantage of holding enemy forces in the Balkans, Robertson believed these would be restricted to the Bulgarian army and a small German force, and he was unable to see that this would have any material effect upon the decision of the war. He warned, however, that if the British now insisted on the 350,000 troops of the Armée d'Orient remaining inactive this would place her in an impossible position vis-à-vis the French and might seriously strain inter-allied relations. The only course, therefore, was not to reject Joffre's proposals but to do the utmost to ensure that the plan of operations was strictly limited and suited to the size of the force

(1) CAB 42/12/12

(2) Robertson to Mahon 30/4/16, Robertson MSS 1/14/10

(3) Mahon to Robertson 1/5/16, *ibid* 1/14/11

available and the conditions of its organisation and equipment. In order to ensure that this was done it was necessary that Mahon should, on the assumption of the offensive, revert to his original status of an independent commander.⁽¹⁾ The War Committee hesitated, however, to adopt Robertson's suggestions and Lloyd George argued that Joffre should be told that to attempt an offensive with the forces available was impossible. In the end it was merely decided that Robertson should discuss with Joffre the scope and plan of the proposed offensive in order that an estimate might be made of the liabilities involved in respect of men, munitions and ships before a final decision was reached.⁽²⁾ Robertson confided his fears to General Murray that the War Committee would eventually accept Joffre's proposals in toto and that offensive operations would be undertaken in June. In such an eventuality, however, he would insist on Mahon regaining his independence. He thought it likely that there would "be a row with the French in this connection", but argued that it was "preposterous" to suppose that Britain should place her forces in any sense under the orders of Sarrail.⁽³⁾

In view of the increasing gravity of the situation Mahon was replaced by the more senior and experienced General Milne.⁽⁴⁾ Robertson inquired of the new commander his opinion of the proposed operations, having regard to "men, munitions, communications, transport, mountain artillery and much additional shipping which we might find it impossible to provide". Robertson admitted that Britain would have to co-operate with her ally

(1) "Offensive Operations in the Balkans", 29/4/16, CAB 42/13/2

(2) War Committee 3/5/16, CAB 42/13/2

(3) Robertson to Murray 3/5/16, Robertson MSS 1/32/24

(4) Fairholme pointed out to Robertson that Mahon had from the first entirely subordinated himself to "the masterful personality of General Sarrail", so that latterly he was hardly informed, much less consulted regarding what was done. This would, Fairholme argued, make it very difficult for Mahon's successor to take up a stronger line without incurring resentment. The British army having been placed under Sarrail, Fairholme supposed "that we have abandoned all claim to a policy, at least locally". (Fairholme to Robertson 12/5/16, CAB 42/14/12)

to the fullest extent possible, but this would not justify her undertaking "futile and costly operations".⁽¹⁾ He wanted Milne to know that Britain was at present in no sense committed to offensive operations.⁽²⁾ In reply Milne expressed the opinion that Sarrail's scheme was "ambitious and risky" and that the chances of carrying it to a successful conclusion were small. Sarrail had informed him that he had received definite instructions to attack when ordered and that the allies were agreed upon this point, but Milne had made it clear that he was bound by no such instructions. He considered a clear definition of future policy to be essential if Britain were not to be drawn into unforeseen operations based on the term "limited offensive".⁽³⁾ Robertson regarded Sarrail's tactical plan as much more than risky and ambitious, since it proposed an offensive front of nearly 100 miles. He wanted to know if Milne had in any way agreed to this plan in the event of the main principle being sanctioned.⁽⁴⁾ Milne was in fact unaware of the extent of the proposed operations. He had not agreed to Sarrail's plan nor could he until the intention of the British General Staff and the position of the British army under Sarrail were quite clear.⁽⁵⁾

On 10 May the War Committee heard that Robertson had been unable as yet to see Joffre, but he understood that the Italians would take no part in the proposed operations and that, on the contrary, General Cadorna was about to remove certain brigades from Valona.⁽⁶⁾ Developments in Paris, however, now began to speed up the course of events. On 11 May the French Cabinet decided unanimously⁽⁷⁾ to ask Britain to send two of her divisions in Egypt to Salonica.⁽⁸⁾ Briand told Cambon that for the second time the question of Salonica had arisen between

(1) Robertson to Milne 8/5/16, Robertson MSS 1/14/16

(2) *ibid* 12/5/16, *ibid* 1/14/17.

(3) Milne to Robertson 12/5/16, *ibid* 1/14/18

(4) Robertson to Milne (undated), *ibid* 1/14/23

(5) Milne to Robertson (no date), Robertson MSS 1/14/24a

(6) CAB 42/13/6

(7) with the exception of Denys Cochin who remarked that Joffre and de Castelnau wanted the troops to be sent to France

(8) Poincaré - *op. cit.*, vol 8, p 214

the two allied governments. The Armée d'Orient had already achieved diplomatic results sufficient to justify its continued presence in the Balkans but with its fighting strength about to reach 350,000 men there could be no question of its remaining idle at a moment when the allies were about to attempt concerted action on all other fronts. The French government therefore requested that the British forces should be supplied with all necessary material. Moreover a reserve of 50,000 men offered the prospect of much greater success than was likely with existing forces and would, in all probability, pull Rumania and Greece into the conflict. Cambon should therefore urge upon Grey the necessity to divert two divisions from Egypt, originally destined for the western front.⁽¹⁾ The Quai d'Orsay, waiting for a response from London, heard that the English government was totally opposed to an offensive against Bulgaria and that General Maurice, the Director of Military Operations, who was coming to Chantilly, would put this point of view forcibly to the Grand Quartier Général. This, Paris suggested, would be diametrically opposed to the "ententes intervenues relativement à l'offensive du corps expéditionnaire franco-anglais à Salonique".⁽²⁾ Cambon reported that this information was not accurate. The English government and General Staff were not absolutely opposed to the idea of an offensive and Maurice had no such instructions. As to the suggested agreement regarding offensive operations, Cambon expressed total ignorance.⁽³⁾

Having obtained more precise details from Joffre as to the scope of the proposed offensive, Robertson prepared a further paper for the War Committee. Supporting himself with the observations of General Milne, Robertson gave as his opinion that the campaign should not be undertaken. He did not think that even Joffre himself believed the allied forces were strong enough to achieve success. Robertson added "with full respect to the Committee" that he could take no responsibility in regard to the plan and that he considered it "entirely unsound from every military point of view".⁽⁴⁾ In the War Committee

(1) Briand to Cambon No 1585-8, 12/5/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1036

(2) Briand to Cambon 15/5/16, No 1619, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1037

(3) Cambon to Briand 15/5/16, No 585, ibid

(4) 'Offensive Operations in the Balkans', 16/5/16, CAB 42/14/1

on 17 May Robertson asserted that any man who was trying to get 350,000 men to attack 300,000 in a restricted and highly entrenched country "was a madman". He was therefore most anxious that Milne should be put on the same footing as Haig on the Western Front. Robertson's arguments were readily accepted and it was decided that Milne should be informed that he was to continue to comply with Sarrail's orders for the defence of the town and harbour of Salonica, but that as far as offensive operations were concerned the British general was in every respect an independent commander and not bound by any instructions except those received from Robertson. At the same time a memorandum was drawn up for presentation to the French government based on Robertson's paper.⁽¹⁾ Paul Cambon, in full knowledge of the attitude of Chantilly,⁽²⁾ had expressed the hope to Sir Arthur Nicolson that the reply of the British government would be precise and that, if it were a refusal, it would be supported by clearly expressed military reasons.⁽³⁾ He was not to be disappointed. In the British despatch it was pointed out that Joffre had himself previously laid great stress on the inevitable effect upon French reserves of the prolonged fighting at Verdun and the consequent need for strengthening the Western Front and that the British government felt that the security of the Franco-British forces in the autumn might demand the services in France of every available man. The British authorities were convinced that it was not feasible to undertake such a stupendous task as that involved by a campaign in the Balkans at a time when the Entente forces were so vitally committed to fighting on the main fronts. The general policy in the Balkans must therefore be defensive and the allied troops then at Salonica be reduced to the number required for the defence of that place.⁽⁴⁾ In transmitting the memorandum to Cambon, Sir Edward Grey emphasised the overwhelming difficulty of the shipping situation and said that it was most important that, pending further discussion, no forward movement should be made by the troops at Salonica. He did not wish to discuss the memorandum since he did not feel competent to comment on

(1) CAB 42/14/1

(2) see below pp 151-2.

(3) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 18/5/16, Jules Cambon MSS vol 1

(4) War Committee 17/5/16, CAB 42/14/1; Falls - op. cit., vol 1,
p 117

military matters, upon which the British reply had been exclusively based.⁽¹⁾ Cambon reported to Paris that, although the request for two divisions had been rejected, the English military hierarchy was less opposed than in the past to the idea of offensive operations and that useful discussions were more likely to ensue between the allied general staffs than between the two governments.⁽²⁾

Robertson found it "very difficult to deal with people like the French". He expected that there would be "rather serious trouble about this matter", but felt that "we really must stick to our ground on this occasion". If Britain embarked on a Balkan campaign the result might be very serious indeed in regard to the war as a whole.⁽³⁾ Before Briand had even received the communication of the British government he urged upon Cambon the need to obtain the assent of London to the French proposals. French opinion would be most unhappy if the sizeable forces gathered at Salonica were left unemployed and the government would be in a difficult situation in relation to the press and to the Chamber if the British reply proved negative. If the British government was still not convinced by Cambon's entreaties, Briand was ready to meet Asquith, Grey and Kitchener at Boulogne or Calais at a time which suited their convenience.⁽⁴⁾ Cambon duly followed the instructions of the Quai d'Orsay, but was not prepared to allude to the possibilities of a hostile reaction in the French press since the power of government censorship was such that this would be tantamount to saying that the administration itself had fostered the newspaper campaign. Cambon believed that the sine qua non of British adherence to the French plans was that the Western Front should not in any way be weakened. Yet the two divisions which France claimed for Salonica had been urgently requested by Joffre for France. Had the general-in-chief changed his mind? Moreover were these two extra divisions really indispensable to the launching of an offensive? Questions such as these were bound to be raised by the English representatives at the conference which Briand had proposed and the French government

(1) Grey to Bertie 19/5/16, Grey MSS, F.O. 800/59

(2) Cambon to Briand 19/5/16, No 504, A.E. 'Guerre' vol 1037

(3) Robertson to Haig 18/5/16, Robertson MSS 1/12/36

(4) Briand to Cambon No 1682-4, 21/5/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1037

must be prepared to answer them. It was not general observations but precise reasoning which would induce the British to change their mind.⁽¹⁾

On receipt of the British response, however, the Conseil des Ministres authorised Briand to provoke a meeting of the two governments as soon as possible.⁽²⁾ Briand informed Cambon that the French cabinet remained unanimous in its opinion and that the attitude of the English authorities was likely to cause a parliamentary crisis in France. He stressed to Cambon that General Joffre shared completely the views of the government on the necessity for a vigorous offensive and that he (Briand) was still ready to defend the French project at a conference of the two allies.⁽³⁾ The English War Committee heard from Grey of the "great emotion" which had been caused in the French Cabinet by the English attitude. Lloyd George believed that General de Castelnau and others now approved of the question being left to the military to decide. If that were the case it was to Britain's advantage.⁽⁴⁾ So Cambon now forwarded a memorandum from Grey which emphasised the British government's conviction that the question of operations at Salonica was one in which military considerations must be decisive and that if political factors were allowed to encroach all hope of success in the war might be lost. But in deference to Briand's request the idea of a conference was accepted.⁽⁵⁾ The French ambassador was instructed to reply that the French government had never weighed political considerations above military ones, even though, only days earlier, he had been warned of the political repercussions within France of a British refusal. Briand, as an earnest of his intention to give priority to military factors, suggested that the matter should be discussed between the military authorities of the two powers. He maintained, moreover, that the resolution to undertake offensive operations from Salonica had been taken by the combined chiefs of staff of both Britain and France and that the present French proposal

(1) Cambon to Briand No 624 and 624 bis, 22/5/16, A.E. 'Guerre' vol 1037

(2) Poincaré, op. cit., vol 8, p 233

(3) Briand to Cambon No 1724, 23/5/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1037

(4) War Committee 26/5/16, CAB 42/14/11

(5) Cambon to Briand No 649, 26/5/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1037

was based on the formal opinions of General Joffre and the Grand Quartier Général.⁽¹⁾ Cambon again took the opportunity to correct Briand's interpretation of the facts. It was possible to take up the question again, but it was not possible to cite the resolutions arrived at during the Chantilly Conference of the preceding March as engaging the British government to reinforce the Armée d'Orient nor to undertake an offensive. He suggested that "avant d'entamer une discussion sérieuse avec les autorités militaires anglaises, il importe de se reporter à ces textes".⁽²⁾

Robertson now appreciated that the issue was no longer one for military opinion, since the two allies apparently disagreed. The solution to the problem rested with the governments. The British War Committee therefore replied to the latest French appeal that it had never acquiesced in any decision of principle in favour of an offensive from Salonica and that in the opinion of the War Committee no useful purpose would be served by a further military conference. On the contrary it would be necessary for the leaders of the two governments to meet once again.⁽³⁾ Robertson hoped that Milne now understood that the British government had not agreed to any offensive operations in the Balkans. Sarrail, if he thought such an agreement existed, had been misinformed and Milne should "put this right at an early opportunity". The British commander would be informed immediately if his government's policy were changed.⁽⁴⁾

Taking advantage of the freedom of expression which his seniority in the diplomatic corps permitted him, Cambon sent Briand a secret despatch containing his own views on the whole affair.⁽⁵⁾ It had been carried out, he argued, without method. It had been well known that the British military chiefs were opposed to any offensive and that the British shipping situation was extremely grave. Yet instead of trying carefully to remedy

(1) Briand to Cambon No 1758, 27/5/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1037

(2) Cambon to Briand No 653, 28/5/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1037

(3) War Committee 30/5/16, CAB 42/14/12

(4) Robertson to Milne 28/5/16, W.O. 106/1340

(5) For Cambon's reluctance to play the role of the puppet of the Quai d'Orsay see W.K. Eubank - Paul Cambon, Master Diplomatist (1960), pp 202-3

these factors, France had gone straight in and asked for two divisions from Egypt which had already been promised to Joffre in France. In addition France had cited agreements which had never been made and had communicated Sarrail's plan of operations which needed half a million men to be carried out. In such circumstances a refusal from Britain was only to be expected. Coming as near as he possibly could to telling Briand what he knew of Joffre's true attitude,⁽¹⁾ Cambon said that whatever the premier was told he should know that at heart the Grand Quartier Général wanted the extra divisions to be sent to France and that this was appreciated in England. The best hope, therefore, was that English approval might be secured for a plan to undertake offensive operations without the two divisions, and it was along these lines that Briand should direct his attention with a view to the forthcoming conference.⁽²⁾

Pressure was however building up on the French government to force their British counterparts to agree to the offensive. On 2 June Joffre reminded Briand that the longer a decision was delayed the more difficult the ensuing operations would become because of the opportunities afforded to Bulgaria to re-inforce her defensive positions.⁽³⁾ On the same day Briand himself had given an undertaking to the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission that he would insist upon the English sending their two divisions from Egypt to Salonica.⁽⁴⁾ The English attitude, however, showed no immediate signs of growing weaker. General Haig had requested that, in view of the proposed offensive in France, every available division should be brought there from Salonica with a view to supporting his operations which were likely to be of a prolonged duration.⁽⁵⁾ The War Committee was in no position to consent to this but it did remind the French government that Milne had been informed that, apart from the defence of Salonica, he was to confine himself to co-operation with Sarrail in accordance with his own judgement based on the instructions he received from London. Reports received

(1) see below p 152.

(2) Cambon to Briand 30/5/16, No 666, A.E. 'Guerre', vol 1037

(3) Joffre to Briand 2/6/16, No 1232, *ibid*; Suarez - *op. cit.*, vol 3, p 285

(4) Parliamentary archives, C 7490

(5) Haig to Robertson 1/6/16, CEB 42/15/6

From Milne had suggested that Sarrail was making such dispositions of the Allied forces on and near the Greek frontier as might involve them in offensive operations, but the British forces would take no part in any such operations.⁽¹⁾ Sarrail's present dispositions were "not at all satisfactory," and there seemed a considerable risk that Britain might be drawn into an offensive against her will. The British government was therefore anxious that Milne should make his position in relation to Sarrail perfectly clear to the latter.⁽²⁾ But when Milne confronted the French general he heard again that Sarrail had definite orders to attack which had been confirmed as recently as 5 June and that he declined to withdraw any of his advanced positions, which "will sooner or later draw us into offensive operations".⁽³⁾ Grey informed Cambon that the members of the War Committee had heard with great surprise and concern that such orders had been sent when the whole question of an offensive was under discussion. Their fear was that a disaster would be precipitated.⁽⁴⁾ When reporting back to Paris, Cambon commented on the lack of agreement between the two governments which reproached one another with sending contradictory instructions to their respective generals - a situation which would only cease when the question of an offensive had been settled.⁽⁵⁾ Bertie now informed Grey that Briand denied sending orders for an offensive to Sarrail. The French premier had, however, said that if Britain failed to cooperate in the measures proposed, which were of very limited extent, the French forces would have to operate alone, since it would be absurd to take no action when there were 350,000 allied troops at Salonica.⁽⁶⁾ Bertie had urged Briand not to press for an offensive when he came to London, but the latter contended that the French proposals were quite feasible and safe and that he would endeavour so to convince the British government.⁽⁷⁾

But while the British government continued to preserve an impressive face of resistance to the blandishments of France, the actual discussions of the War Committee had revealed the return of that overriding concern with the stability of the French body politic which had so paralysed British diplomacy

(1) F.O. Memorandum, F.O. 371/2619/106998.

(2) Robertson to Milne 3/6/16, F.O. 371/2619/106998.

(3) Milne to Robertson 6/6/16, No. G. C. 149, W.O. 106/1340; Falls: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 125.

(4) Grey to Bertie 7/6/16, No. 1238, F.O. 371/2619/110200.

(5) Cambon to Briand No. 708, 7/6/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1057.

(6) Bertie to Grey 8/6/16, F.O. 371/2619/110911.

(7) *ibid* 8/6/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/168/Fr/16/39.

at the end of 1915.⁽¹⁾ Asquith pointed out that Briand would be arriving at the inter-allied conference in the knowledge that his ministry would fall if he failed in his mission. Politically the Salonica offensive was a matter of life and death for the French. Balfour voiced the opinion that Joffre and Briand - indeed the whole French people - must be mad. Rather more realistically Grey commented that for their own political purposes the French were prepared to force a disaster. As Lloyd George explained, the men who were criticising Briand were the friends of General Sarrail, and, as the Prime Minister observed, "if Briand went then General Joffre would go too and then General Sarrail would have the command in France."⁽²⁾ Such a prospect was sufficient to send a chill down the spine of any British politician and Grey anxiously asked Bertie for his opinion of the consequences of a British refusal to cooperate in the French offensive. If the alliance itself were endangered the situation would be "most critical".⁽³⁾ Bertie replied that it was quite possible that Briand might fall as a result of the Secret Session of the French Chamber in the following week, but the real reason would be the unpreparedness of the Verdun defences. He might claim that Britain's refusal to join in a Salonica offensive had greatly hampered his policy, but Bertie did not consider that his resignation on such a plea would in any way endanger the entente. If English troops were withdrawn from Salonica the effect on French public opinion would be very bad, but Bertie did not think that the French public would accuse Britain of desertion if she made it clear that she would continue to cooperate in the defence of Salonica and only abstained from an offensive in order to use her military power for the common interests of the two allies in the defence of French territory.⁽⁴⁾ Reassuringly Bertie added that there was no danger of Caillaux being a member of any cabinet which replaced the existing one.⁽⁵⁾ Moreover if Clemenceau came to power he would work strongly with England and there would be no question of an offensive from Salonica. Both Clemenceau and his close associate Pichon regarded Joffre as "run out and not up to his work" and Sarrail as a "rue de Valois

(1) Lloyd George even insisted that the minutes of the War Committee should be changed so as not to give the impression that the British government was opposed as a matter of principle to the idea of an offensive, but only in present circumstances. Lloyd George to Hankey 8/6/16, Lloyd George MSS, D/17/3/37.

(2) War Committee 7/6/16, CAB 42/15/6.

(3) Grey to Bertie 7/6/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/168/Fr/16/35.

(4) Bertie to Grey 7/6/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/168/Fr/16/38.

(5) *ibid* 8/6/16, *ibid* F.O. 800/168/Fr/16/40.

political general."⁽¹⁾

On 8 June Milne had a further difficult interview with Sarrail. The French general "was much excited and only kept his temper with difficulty". He adhered to his earlier statement that he would attack without the aid of the British army and that he had received these instructions from his government, who had informed him that both governments were agreed on this point. He declined to make any suggestions for cooperation as he said that he was no longer "allowed to command the allied forces". Milne found it very difficult to cooperate with a commander who adopted such an attitude. He thought it absolutely necessary to "free this army from his ill-concealed intentions to force an offensive". Sarrail wanted to bring about a situation which would force the British army to give active support to the French, for which it was not prepared or bring upon it the stigma of leaving the French unsupported. Milne felt that he would have to choose the first of these alternatives.⁽²⁾ Meanwhile Sarrail complained to Paris that he had heard from a reliable source that Milne's instructions were to oppose the idea of offensive action in the Balkans with a "force of inertia".⁽³⁾ The French commander confided to the Naval Attaché, de Roquefeuil, what he had not been able to say in his official despatch. He had heard that the order to Milne resulted from an accord between the British government and a section of the French High Command. He hoped that de Roquefeuil would pass this information on to Guillemin so that eventually it would reach the Quai d'Orsay.⁽⁴⁾

The prospects for agreement when Briand, War Minister Roques and Joffre came to Downing Street on 9 June were obviously not good. Joffre argued that it was inadmissible that at Salonica alone, of all the theatres of war, the

(1) Bertie to Grey 9/6/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/168/Fr/16/41; Lloyd George MSS, D19/7/16.

(2) Milne to Robertson No. G.C. 159, 8/6/16, W.O. 106/1340.

(3) Sarrail to Jogal No. 1034/3, 8/6/16, 16N 3143.

(4) Sarrail to de Roquefeuil No. 303, 9/6/16, Marine archives xf. 2. When this suggested understanding between the British government and a section of the French High Command was revealed to a Secret Sitting of the French Chamber on 1 December 1916 by the deputy, Charles Chaumet, it caused a sensation. "Est-ce qu'il est tolérable qu'il y ait une partie de l'état-major pour donner son avis au gouvernement ou à l'état-major anglais indépendamment du commandement en chef, du gouvernement français?". [Parliamentary archives C7649] No genuine understanding, probably existed, although England was aware of the misgivings felt at Chantilly concerning the Salonica Expedition.

allied forces should remain idle. He did not want to increase the numbers of troops there, but he thought that those who were there should be used. Briand pointed out that it was the British government which had asked France to press for Italian troops to be sent to Salonica. Evidently some use was contemplated being made of them. Briand begged the British government to join in action at Salonica and to furnish their troops with the necessary supplies. But Asquith counted that unsuccessful or indecisive action would have a bad effect and the British military authorities were convinced that failure was more probable than success. The French military chief argued that a local success was possible with only a minimum risk, but Balfour believed it was criminal to dissipate energy at Salonica in the present circumstances when every other theatre of war was crying out for reinforcements in men and material. For Robertson the question was not one of merely local importance but of general policy. He thought the operations were not likely to succeed and questioned the possibility of a 'limited' offensive. Asquith conceded that there was no question for the present of any withdrawal from Salonica nor of any reduction of troops as had been suggested at Paris in March. Briand, with his oratorical powers, had pointed out the absurdity of keeping 350,000 men idle, but this was not a true description of the situation since they were immobilising the whole of the Bulgarian army, 100,000 Turks and some Germans and Austrians. Briand retorted that this was not a question of oratory. The opinion he had expressed was the deliberate, reflected and fixed opinion of the French government based not only on political but on military reasons. He urged the British government to think again. The French had prepared an offensive, Sarrail had taken his measures. Briand could not conceal the extremely delicate position in which the British attitude was placing him.⁽¹⁾

A situation of complete impasse thus existed when the conference broke up. Haig was "surprised and sorry" that after all the talking the Salonica question had still not been settled. But he urged Robertson to "stick to it" and assured him that he would win in the end.⁽²⁾ On the Friday evening after the conference, however, Cambon came to visit Grey and explained to him that Briand was in a very difficult position in view of a debate to be

(1) Procès-verbal - CAB 37/149/19; CAB 28 I.C. - 8.; A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 989; *ibid* Vol. 1037.

(2) Haig to Robertson 16/6/16, Robertson MSS, 1/22/48.

held on 16 June in a Secret Session of the French Chamber. The French premier had been very much moved by the definite refusal with which he had been met by the British and the impression in France would be bad. The French ambassador therefore urged that the door should be left open. Grey replied that the British had a long history of conforming to the will of France. He reminded Cambon that in March 1916 Asquith, Kitchener and himself had been instructed by the Cabinet to demand the withdrawal of two British divisions from Salonica, but had given way to the objections of Briand and Joffre despite the very great reluctance of the rest of the British cabinet. With a measure of irony he pointed out that, when Asquith had said at the Downing Street Conference that up to this moment there had been no difficulties between the two governments, he had spoken the truth, since whenever there had been a difficulty the British had given way. But, Grey bravely asserted, it was not fair that this should always be expected nor was it possible.⁽¹⁾ At the same time, however, after obtaining the authority of Asquith to do so, Grey accepted French amendments to a British memorandum on the Downing Street Conference which substantially modified the stance taken by his government. The original document had asserted the opposition of the British military authorities to an offensive from Salonica at the present time, which "must be prejudicial to the offensive in France and may even be fatal to the allied chances of success in the whole war". Cambon, however, secured the insertion of paragraphs to the effect that the British government would not refuse at a future date to examine the question of an offensive from Salonica as soon as circumstances and the condition of the troops allowed and that it would hasten the equipment of its army with a view to such operations.⁽²⁾ This addition obviously gave the French advocates of an offensive encouragement, since it appeared that the British government now condemned it not on general principles but for temporary technical reasons. Robertson considered that it "knocked the bottom" out of the War Committee's memorandum of 17 May, which had given the impression of opposing the offensive on general grounds and because it was fundamentally unsound.⁽³⁾ He was therefore not surprised when the French "at once weighed in" with a memorandum which suggested that they would be ready for

(1) Note by Grey 10/6/16, CAB 37/149/28.

(2) Summary of British Views, 9/6/16, L. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1037; note by Grey 10/6/16, CAB 37/149/27; Falls - op. cit., Vol. 1, p 136.

(3) Robertson - op. cit., Vol. 2, p 116.

an offensive in July and that they proposed to send orders to Sarrail to the effect that he should not take the offensive until he received further orders, but that he should move his troops up to the frontier in order to be ready for it. This, Robertson complained, was not at all the sense of what had passed at the conference.⁽¹⁾ Cambon himself recognized that the French memorandum stretched the British concessions beyond justifiable limits and did his best to adapt Briand's despatch to the terms of the additions which he had secured in the original British document.⁽²⁾

Understandably enough Robertson felt it was time to strengthen the will of the British government to resist and in a paper drawn up for the War Committee pointed out that the British memorandum of 17 May had argued that allied troops at Salonica should be reduced to the number required for the defence of that place. The latest British communication, however, had given Joffre the impression that Britain had more or less accepted the French policy and that the proposed offensive was merely deferred for the time being. Robertson thought it desirable that there should be no further misunderstandings. France was unlikely to agree to any reduction in forces unless it was made clear to her that there was no prospect of Britain being ready for an offensive for several months to come. It would be little less than a crime to maintain more troops at Salonica than were needed for defence at a time when Douglas Haig was crying out for all available assistance. Robertson therefore asked the War Committee for an assurance that preparations for an offensive in the Balkans were not to be undertaken until the result of the offensive in France had been seen and the general situation again reconsidered.⁽³⁾ The War Committee agreed that Grey, in concert with Robertson, should draft a further communication to Cambon laying stress on the fact that the British government had never yet accepted the principle of taking the offensive in the Balkans and that in any case the British forces could not be fully equipped for offensive operations for some months.⁽⁴⁾ When completed the document made it quite clear that no activity from Salonica could be entertained if it had the effect of depriving the British army in France of any part of its resources

(1) Robertson to Haig 22/6/16, Robertson MSS 1/22/49.

(2) Cambon to Briand No. 621, 14/6/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1037.

(3) 'Policy regarding operations in the Balkans', 14/6/16, CAB 42/15/3.

(4) War Committee 16/6/16, CAB 42/15/8.

in men, munitions or material, which were then or might later be required there and that it was improbable in any case that the equipment of the British Salonica force for mountain warfare could be completed before September, nor was it at all certain that the difficulties in regard to shipping would by then have lessened.⁽¹⁾ What the effect of this communication would be Robertson could not guess, but "the whole of the fat [was] in the fire once more".⁽²⁾

Joffre, in a letter to Briand, handled the whole correspondence in a manner very damaging to the logic of the British case. He argued that the new memorandum contained inadmissible modifications of that of 9 June and said that he could not accept the proposition that the Salonica offensive should only be undertaken after that on the Western front. It was during the combined plan of offensives that the situation would be ripe to attack the Bulgarian forces. He considered the early entry of Roumania into the war to be a distinct possibility and stressed that in such an eventuality the allied armies should be ready immediately to begin operations. If the British government did not give up its case Joffre wanted France to renounce her agreement not to start offensive operations without the consent of both governments and he intended to ask Sarrail whether he could attack the Bulgarian forces with the French and Serbian armies alone.⁽³⁾ In the meantime the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission had urged the French government to secure as soon as possible unity of command on the Salonica front with a view to preparing for action,⁽⁴⁾ while Albert Thomas was in communication with leading figures of the English press, who were trying to arouse a campaign among both Liberals and Conservatives in favour of a Salonica offensive.⁽⁵⁾

The French government was nothing if not persistent and on 28 June Cambon suggested to Lord Hardinge⁽⁶⁾ that, the diplomatic and military situation having changed, the moment had come to examine again the question of an offensive from Salonica. But the French ambassador warned

(1) War Committee 21/6/16, CAB 42/15/10.

(2) Robertson to Haig 22/6/16, Robertson MSS 1/22/49.

(3) Joffre to Briand No. 18699, 25/6/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1037; Joffre to Sarrail No. 3215, 25/6/16, 16W 3136; Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 300.

(4) Leygues to Briand 24/6/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1037.

(5) Letter from P. Millet 19/6/16, Thomas MSS 94 AP 146.

(6) Hardinge succeeded Sir Arthur Nicolson as Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office on 20 June.

Briand that to ask the British government to take part in an immediate offensive was to invite a refusal. It would also be a mistake to suggest that France intended to go it alone in any such venture. What was needed was to work on Robertson, whose influence persuaded the British government, to convince him of the reasonableness of the French case.⁽¹⁾ In a formal communication on the 30 June, therefore, the French government contented themselves with pointing out that the situation had been altered by a Russian victory and an Italian counter-offensive, and that it was during the attack on the Somme that allied action in the Balkans would be most efficacious.⁽²⁾ Grey gave Cambon the impression of appreciating the French arguments but again insisted upon the overriding difficulty imposed by the shipping situation.⁽³⁾ At the same time Joffre informed Sarrail that the latter might receive new instructions either in the event of England modifying her policy under the pressure of developments or if France decided that the interests of the Coalition demanded unilateral action on her part.⁽⁴⁾

Robertson, however, was already acting to cut the ground from under this latest French initiative. Commenting on Cambon's memorandum, he argued that nothing had happened to change the view he had always held that an offensive from the Balkans, before the conditions essential for success had been realised, would be "a useless and unjustifiable sacrifice of British lives and wasteful expenditure of war material". He noted that French tactics had changed in recent weeks and that they were now trying to argue on military grounds and were suggesting that his opposition alone stood in the way of offensive operations. Robertson hoped that the government would make clear that the views they conveyed to Paris were not only those of the General Staff but of the entire War Committee.⁽⁵⁾ This body while agreeing with Robertson that recent developments on the main fronts had not created such a new situation as would justify reversing its previous decision, concluded that the actual entry of Roumania into the war would create such a situation. Grey and Robertson were therefore

(1) Cambon to Briand No. 811, 29/6/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1037.

(2) Falls : op. cit., Vol. 1, p136.

(3) Cambon to Briand No. 690, 1/7/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.

(4) Joffre to Sarrail 1/7/16, 16N 3015.

(5) Note for the War Committee 5/7/16, CAB 42/16/1.

instructed to draft a reply to the French government to the effect that, on the definite assurance that Roumania would enter the war, Britain was prepared to expedite the equipment of her forces at Salonica for an offensive, the object of which would be to hold as large a proportion as possible of the Bulgarian army on the Greek frontier.⁽¹⁾ The *Quai d'Orsay* moreover, heard that Robertson was coming round to accept the inevitability of an offensive, although he persisted in his view that it would be a risky enterprise.⁽²⁾ Joffre now confidently called upon Sarrail to prepare a plan of operations which aimed to tie the Bulgarian forces to the Greek frontier, making it impossible for them to launch a serious campaign against Roumania, and which included in its calculations the whole of the allied *Armée d'Orient*, including the English divisions.⁽³⁾ Two days later the actual dates of Sarrail's attacks were imposed upon him, without, as the general later remarked, any concern for the possibilities of the situation.⁽⁴⁾

On 18 July, however, the War Committee determined that there must be a change in the agreement regarding the relationship between Sarrail and Milne. So Hardinge handed to the French *chargé d'affaires* a note which stressed that the British government were unable to deprive themselves entirely of control over their troops when engaged in offensive operations, but, in the event of such operations being undertaken from Salonica, Milne would be placed on the same footing with regard to Sarrail as that of Haig in regard to Joffre. In other words Milne would be instructed to support and cooperate with the French commander against the enemy in the execution of such plan of operations as might be agreed upon by the allied High Commands.⁽⁵⁾ Two days later Robertson was authorised to discuss and conclude a military convention in France regarding the operations of the allied forces at Salonica, with the significant modification of earlier statements that the British government would be prepared, as soon as they were satisfied that Roumania had definitely entered the war, to authorise British

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- (1) War Committee 6/7/16, CAB 42/16/1; Cambon to Briand No. 735, 11/7/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038; Palmer: op. cit., p 72.
- (2) P. Millet to de Margerie 11/7/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038. A further pressure on the British government to consent to an offensive was the knowledge that the Italian government would send a brigade to Salonica only if it were to take part in a real offensive rather than a demonstration [Grey to Rodd 12/7/16, F.O. 371/2606/139052]
- (3) Joffre to Sarrail No. 4978-80, 15/7/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.
- (4) Sarrail: op. cit., p 137.
- (5) Falls: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 137.

forces to cooperate with their allies in such action as might be necessary to contain the Bulgarian forces on the Greek frontier.⁽¹⁾ But Briand was far from happy with the formula for unified command produced by the War Committee. It was not, he suggested to Cambon, adequate to ensure the success of the forthcoming offensive and was certain to create discord between the two generals. Cambon was urged to press upon Grey the need to allow Robertson some lee-way in his discussions with Joffre and not to be tied to the wording worked out by the British government. In addition there appeared to be a possible difficulty in that while the British authorities were subordinating their participation in a Salonica offensive to Roumanian intervention, the Roumanians demanded as a sine qua non of intervention an attack by Sarrail's army on 1 August.⁽²⁾

Cambon, on leave in Paris, noted a pervading nervousness at the Quai d'Orsay but was pleased to hear that Robertson had been given some room to manoeuvre and discuss the command formula. The French ambassador gave President Poincaré "une véritable leçon" on the way in which foreigners, and particularly the English, should be spoken to and on the dangers of expecting too much.⁽³⁾ But he was annoyed at the way in which the discussions between Robertson and Joffre ignored the inherent difficulties at Salonica such as the climate.⁽⁴⁾ The agreement on the command which eventually emerged was that instructions relating to the initial offensive would be settled by agreement between the British and French High Commands. In the execution of these instructions Milne would give Sarrail support and cooperation "proportionate to the numbers and equipment of the troops under his orders". In addition he would be responsible to the British government for the employment of his forces. Sarrail would consult Milne as to the employment he proposed to make of the British forces with the reservation that he would have the latitude to decide upon the missions, the objectives to be gained, the zones of action and the dates on which each operation was to commence.⁽⁵⁾

(1) War Committee 20/7/16, CAB 42/16/10.

(2) Briand to Cambon 20/7/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.

(3) Cambon to de Fleuriau 21/7/16, P. Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 117.

(4) *ibid* 25/7/16, *ibid*, p 118.

(5) Joffre to Sarrail (undated), W.O. 106/1352.

Joffre was not overpleased with this compromise. He wanted Sarrail to be the real commander at Salonica, not least because if the operations were not a success it would be he who would be held responsible.⁽¹⁾ At the same time Robertson emphasised to Milne that until Roumania had definitely entered the war the British government would not authorise offensive action, and that British cooperation had been agreed upon only "on a scale commensurate with the strength and equipment of our force". Joffre, Robertson warned, had no intention of reinforcing Sarrail, while Milne could not expect any further fighting troops from England. Furthermore Roumanian participation remained only a possibility.⁽²⁾ The War Committee reinforced Robertson's words when on 28 July it agreed to inform Paris that, unless and until Roumania was at war with Bulgaria, the basis of the draft convention arrived at by Robertson and Joffre disappeared and the military action of the Salonica forces would not exceed that of observing and containing the Bulgarian forces on the Greek frontier.⁽³⁾

On 11 August the new Secretary of State for War, David Lloyd George, agreed at the French Foreign Ministry to a revised protocol regarding Roumanian intervention and the launching of an offensive,⁽⁴⁾ although Poincaré felt that this still did no more than mask the lack of agreement which persisted between Briand and the British cabinet.⁽⁵⁾ Roumania would declare war ten days after the opening of an allied offensive, but Robertson wanted it made known that all he would consent to Milne's army attempting was to do its best to hold the Bulgarian forces where they then were.⁽⁶⁾ Milne heard that Sarrail's intention was to make an attack on Bulgaria even if Roumania only declared war against Austria-Hungary,⁽⁷⁾ but Robertson stressed that the British government had never approved of their troops being committed to offensive action until they were satisfied that Roumania had joined the Entente.⁽⁸⁾ Britain's hesitation despite the agreement signed by Lloyd George caused much discontent in Paris and his observer, Le Roy Lewis, heard from conversations in French political

(1) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 321.

(2) Robertson to Milne 25/7/16, No. 19962, W.O. 106/1353.

(3) CAB 42/16/11; Falls: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 138.

(4) Note for de Margerie 11/8/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.

(5) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, p 312.

(6) Robertson to Hardinge 15/8/16, F.O. 371/2607/160536.

(7) Milne to Robertson 14/8/16, *ibid.*

(8) Robertson to Milne 15/8/16, *ibid.*

circles that the effect would be very bad if Britain failed to act vigorously once a military convention with Roumania had finally been concluded on 17 August.⁽¹⁾ Under pressure Robertson now conceded that Milne's mission was to support and cooperate with Sarrail in containing the Bulgarian forces so as to facilitate the action of the Roumanian army against Austria-Hungary "without prejudice to any further objectives which [might] present themselves for consideration later, having regard to available resources including transport".⁽²⁾ But at heart Robertson remained as dubious as ever about the whole operation. He insisted to Maurice Hankey that Britain had no more troops available for the Balkans. To take a division from Egypt would be to take the only one available to go to India, while to take one from England would be to leave the Home Defence Forces unduly weak. This was irrespective of the cardinal need to send every possible man to the French front. The whole expedition, Robertson reflected, was a French enterprise from start to finish and the French ought to see it through. In addition Britain ought not to put more troops under Sarrail even if she had them to spare.⁽³⁾ Robertson found that he did not dare turn his back on the politicians for in a moment they would be sending out another expeditionary force - if they could find one. It was "a queer business" for him to conduct, but he was glad to say that he had "no difficulty in getting [his] own way", even though the situation demanded eternal vigilance.⁽⁴⁾

Even with Roumania in the war Sarrail seemed unwilling to attack the Bulgarian army despite Joffre's persistent entreaties to do so.⁽⁵⁾ The general retorted that he would attack as soon as he had secured adequate forces on his left flank. The important thing was to avoid the defeat and failure which would be caused by inadequate preparation.⁽⁶⁾ But Cambon confided to his son that all the orders in the world would not put heart into a general who had none. In England confidence was totally lacking in the French commander.⁽⁷⁾ With the Russian forces fully extended Cambon felt

(1) Le Roy Lewis to Lloyd George 18/8/16, Lloyd George MSS B 3/14/4.

(2) Robertson to Milne 19/8/16, F.O. 371/2607/165092.

(3) Robertson to Hankey 23/8/16, CAB 42/18/16.

(4) Robertson to Haig 25/8/16, Robertson MSS 1/22/70.

(5) Joffre to Sarrail No. 8903, 30/8/16, 16N 3136; see below p 163.

(6) Sarrail to Joffre No. 143, 3/9/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.

(7) Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 123;

that it was up to Sarrail to create a diversion to relieve the Roumanians. But the ambassador was sure that he would either not do so or else that he would arrive too late.⁽¹⁾ In the prevailing uncertainty which surrounded Sarrail's intentions the English War Committee produced a statement of policy to the effect that the Armée d'Orient should exert its full powers to prevent a Bulgarian attack on Roumania,⁽²⁾ while Briand urged that Italy should be requested to make a contribution to the campaign comparable to those of England, France and Serbia.⁽³⁾ By 20 September Bertie heard that Sarrail was now definitely 'on the move forward',⁽⁴⁾ but the effort to help Roumania was to prove as vain as that to assist Serbia at the end of 1915.⁽⁵⁾

At the beginning of October Joffre redefined Sarrail's mission as, in the most favourable circumstances, the elimination of Bulgaria from the conflict and, at the very best, the immobilisation of her forces in the Dobrudja and Macedonia.⁽⁶⁾ The manpower situation remained, however, acute, and in the War Committee on 9 October Lloyd George expressed the hope that additional forces could be sent to save the Roumanians from the fate which had already befallen Belgium and Serbia. He reported that Milne believed that he would be able to break through the Bulgarian front if he received an extra eight divisions. Robertson countered that these could only arrive too late and that he could not in all conscience advise the government to send more troops to the Balkans.⁽⁷⁾ Robertson now accused Lloyd George of showing "want of confidence" in his advice by raising the question of reinforcements before the War Committee, and hinted at resignation. The War Minister replied by suggesting that one of Robertson's closest associates had revealed the differences between them on the Salonica question to the press and he claimed the right to criticise Robertson in the War Cabinet. He concluded by warning "You must not ask me to play the part of a mere dummy. I am not in the least suited for the part".⁽⁸⁾ The C.I.C.S.

(1) Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 124.

(2) War Committee 12/9/16, CAB 42/19/6.

(3) Cambon to Grey 5/10/16, F.O. 371/2623/199586.

(4) Bertie: Diary, Vol. 2, p 32.

(5) P. J. Deygas: L'Armée d'Orient dans la Guerre Mondiale, (1932), p 121.

(6) Joffre to Sarrail No. 3484-6, 6/10/16, 16N 3136.

(7) CAB 42/21/3.

(8) Robertson to Lloyd George and Lloyd George to Robertson, both 11/10/16, Robertson MSS 1/19/6.

inquired of Joffre whether he considered that the present situation in Roumania demanded taking the offensive on such a scale as would open the road to Sofia. If so he wanted to know whether the necessary effort could be produced before the winter and how many additional divisions would be required.⁽¹⁾ Clive stated Joffre's belief that recent events had greatly increased the importance of the Balkan theatre. He considered it necessary to send four more divisions - two English and two Italian - and that, if they were sent immediately, the operations in progress had a great chance of success, the more so as there were numerous indications of demoralisation in the Bulgarian forces.⁽²⁾ The War Committee discussed Joffre's views on 12 October and noted that it had never been consulted on the extension of the role of the Armée d'Orient, now apparently envisaged by Joffre, involving cooperation with Russia in the decisive defeat of the Bulgarian forces. Robertson's opinion was that the reinforcements of four divisions contemplated by Joffre would not be sufficient to enable the allied armies to register a genuine victory, but that the risk existed that, if not reinforced at all, they might prove unable to fulfil their original role and thus permit Bulgarian troops to be withdrawn for operations against Roumania.⁽³⁾ Consequently Robertson replied to Joffre that although he was fully alive to the importance of giving Roumania every possible assistance it was not possible to send two divisions from Egypt without prejudicing the defence of that country and the situation in the East generally. The War Committee would, however, sanction the despatch of reinforcements equivalent to about 21,000 men, so as to enable Milne to sustain and intensify the offensive action he was then taking, but this was the utmost that could be done. The hope was expressed that Joffre would do at least as much to strengthen the French force and that Italy should also contribute two divisions.⁽⁴⁾

Cambon was annoyed at the tone of the despatches he received from Briand, urging him to support Joffre's request for two British divisions. These "démonstrations oratoires" were illusions which bore no relation to reality. Cambon proposed to make no comment, but simply to present the

(1) Robertson to Joffre 9/10/16, F.O. 371/2624/202380.

(2) Clive to Robertson 10/10/16, Robertson MSS 1/14/46.

(3) CAB 42/11/6.

(4) Robertson to Joffre 12/10/16, F.O. 371/2624/204324; Cambon to Briand No. 1380, 14/10/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1039.

communications to the British government in the full knowledge that they would be swept aside. Briand stated that the sending of two divisions from Egypt would be only a temporary expedient, yet at the same time spoke of the ravages made by disease in the strength of the Armée d'Orient, thus implying that the reinforcements would be simply filling gaps. The French request, therefore, "ne tient pas debout".⁽¹⁾ Not surprisingly Cambon considered the British offer of an additional 21,000 men as the most that could be asked of them.⁽²⁾ Robertson on the other hand found the new situation of having to resist the pressure not only of the French, but of his own War Minister, a taxing one. It had been only "with the greatest difficulty" that he had managed to get his own way and, he revealed to Murray, he had been obliged to write Lloyd George "a straight letter" indicating that he could no longer carry on in his post unless his advice were accepted. His tactics had been successful but he recognised that "the same thing [would] occur again later"⁽³⁾. The stage was thus set for the régime of complete mistrust which was to characterise the relations of the two men until Robertson's fall in February 1918. But in the War Committee on 17 October Lloyd George declared that he and Robertson were in agreement; either a very large force should be sent to the Balkans or nothing at all. Britain had done what she could in the circumstances and he felt that it was France which might do more.⁽⁴⁾

A further allied conference was held at Boulogne on 20 October. Cambon predicted that the British would be well prepared with arguments and statistics as to why they would be unable to comply with the French requests, and that they would be opposed in Joffre and Briand by men "sans notions précises sur rien".⁽⁵⁾ In the event Asquith pointed out the British government's objections to an extension of the mission of the Armée d'Orient to which they had never agreed. To the best of his information an additional ten good divisions and adequate artillery would be required to give the allied forces a reasonable possibility of driving back the enemy, while with the addition of fifteen divisions the odds would

(1) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 14/10/16, Jules Cambon MSS Vol. 1.

(2) *ibid* 15/10/16, *ibid*.

(3) Robertson to Murray 16/10/16, Robertson MSS 1/32/48; Robertson to Haig 16/10/16, *ibid* 1/22/83.

(4) CAB 42/22/1.

(5) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 20/10/16, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 130.

be in the allied favour, providing the Bulgarians were not reinforced by Germans or Turks. Briand countered that the British premier's assessment of the situation was out of date. Since the last examination of the position at Salonica the Balkan theatre had become of greatly increased importance. He himself was opposed to the concept of a main theatre of war and thought that the allies' disposition of forces should be dictated by what the enemy did.⁽¹⁾ Lloyd George rather embarrassed his colleagues by making a strong plea in favour of sending large reinforcements to Salonica⁽²⁾, but the conference broke up without any firm agreement being reached.

When the War Committee considered the situation on 24 October Lloyd George confessed that the whole Salonica enterprise had broken down because it had been treated as a political question - by the French as political on account of Sarrail and by Britain as political on account of the French. It had never been treated as real. He now argued that the only answer which could be given to the French proposals was that it was too late. Robertson said that on purely military grounds the sending of one division would have no effect. But, on the other hand, if the Committee considered that it would have a good effect on Roumania he could send a division from France and replace it later by one from England. He insisted, however, that he should be able to withdraw this division in the spring. Grey reported that there would be a row in the French Chamber if Roumania collapsed and that all the blame would be put on England. He was anxious for an immediate decision since Albert Thomas awaited a reply. With these political considerations once again to the fore, the Committee decided that the French proposal to increase the British contingent at Salonica to seven divisions and the French to six should be accepted.⁽³⁾ The subsequent communication to Paris showed the extent to which military arguments were being pushed into the background⁽⁴⁾ for it was stated that the English

(1) Procès-verbal, CAB 28. 1.C. 11; A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 989.

(2) Hankey: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 536.

(3) CAB 42/22/5.

(4) Albert Thomas reported that, whatever decision was arrived at, the British government had at least abandoned its stance that in military matters the opinions of the military experts must be accepted without question. [Thomas to Briand 24/10/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1039.]

government "as a proof of their desire to meet the wishes of the allies in every way possible ... [had] decided to waive further discussion as to whether this [would] produce useful military effects and to accept the French proposal".⁽¹⁾

Milne was accordingly informed of the British decision, reached, it was said, because of the very strong representations made to the British government and the personal intervention of the Tsar and President Poincaré, and was reminded that this did not modify the British view that the decision of the war must be sought on the Western front.⁽²⁾ Robertson still had "no intention of adopting the Balkans as a main theatre". He felt that the allies were undoubtedly winning on the French front and that it would be folly to weaken their effort there in the futile hope of gaining decisive results in the Balkans.⁽³⁾ The War Committee had been "very good about the matter and quite realised the uselessness of sending the divisions", but had been obliged to weigh "the military disadvantages against the political and moral conditions". Robertson considered the proviso about withdrawing the division in the spring to have little value, but was anxious to get Joffre on his side to prevent any talk of the Balkans becoming a major theatre.⁽⁴⁾ Haig also felt strongly the folly of detaching troops from the decisive front to one of secondary importance, but having on several occasions spoken very strongly against this policy he could do nothing further and had to obey orders.⁽⁵⁾

In Haig's opinion, however, as in that of many other observers, it was not 'men' who were wanted at Salonica but 'a man'. "From all accounts Sarrail ... is quite useless".⁽⁶⁾ At the end of 1916 France's allies made conscious efforts to get rid of the French commander in the Balkans in whom they had progressively lost all confidence. In the middle of October the Russian

(1) Grey to Granville 24/10/16, No. 2383, F.O. 371/2624/213307. The original War Office draft read: "The War Committee do not consider that the proposed addition would be capable of producing any useful military effect, but as a proof ...".

(2) Falls: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 202.

(3) Robertson to Milne 25/10/16, Robertson MSS 1/14/47.

(4) Robertson to Haig 25/10/16, *ibid* 1/22/84.

(5) Blake: op. cit., p 173.

(6) *ibid*.

foreign minister consulted with the English ambassador in St. Petersburg on the conduct of Sarrail. While the general was not as active as he should be in military matters, he displayed great activity in political affairs, as, for example, when he had officially welcomed Venizelos on the latter's arrival at Salonica. The Russian government hoped that Britain would use her influence with France to prevent the recurrence of such incidents in the future, since Sarrail had no business to take any action of a political character except in close accord with the representatives of the allied governments.⁽¹⁾ Joffre was warned that a joint representation might be made by the British and Russian governments to secure that the Armée d'Orient was placed in the hands of a man who was exclusively a military leader.⁽²⁾ In fact an official complaint was delivered by the Russian ambassador in Paris, Iswolsky, which argued that it was unacceptable that political and military questions should be confused and that military leaders should be transformed into political agents.⁽³⁾ Criticism of Sarrail was also forthcoming from Rome where complaints were made concerning the disproportionate burden of responsibility which the general placed on the Italian 35th division. Sarrail's behaviour, it was pointed out, was scarcely designed to prompt a favourable reply to the request for an increased Italian contribution to the campaign. The Italian General Staff might indeed find itself obliged to recommend the total withdrawal of Italian troops from Salonica if no change was effected in the High Command.⁽⁴⁾ The British ambassador in Rome had for some time noted in the Italian foreign minister a strong feeling against Sarrail, whom he regarded as being preoccupied with politics in Greece rather than with military operations,⁽⁵⁾ and a protest at Sarrail's attitude towards the Italian contingent under his orders was delivered to the Quai d'Orsay in the middle of November.⁽⁶⁾

Even King George showed concern at Sarrail's behaviour but learnt that the War Committee had come to the conclusion that it would be better not to interfere for the moment because of the unsettled political and military situation in France. Robertson had, however, been authorised to obtain from

(1) Buchanan to Grey 13/10/16, No. 1583, F.O. 371/2628/207054.

(2) Janin to Joffre No. 171, 18/10/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1039.

(3) Note from Iswolsky 18/10/16, *ibid.*

(4) Condrecourt to Joffre No. 676, 28/9/16, 16N 3137.

(5) Rodd to Grey 2/10/16, F.O. 371/2627/196241.

(6) Note from Italian ambassador 19/11/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040.

Joffre a statement of Sarrail's views and intentions and in asking for these he had said as much as he properly could to Joffre by way of showing that Sarrail was an unsatisfactory general. Lloyd George had also told Albert Thomas that Sarrail ought to be moved and Robertson had no doubt that this would get back to the French Government. He believed that the latter would like to get rid of Sarrail but were afraid to do so.⁽¹⁾ On 28 October the C.I.G.S. called upon Milne to give his opinion of Sarrail's past and future plans of operations. Milne replied that the details of Sarrail's earlier scheme of the spring were not properly considered and that neither the tactical nor the administrative difficulties had been gone into before it was enunciated. Audacity was certainly not lacking in Sarrail, but prior consideration of difficulties, concentration of effort and activity of execution were. Sarrail's army attacked "on the principles they learnt before the war". The essential condition of success in the Balkans, Milne concluded, was the coordination of effort by the Higher Command and the allotment by it of zones of action to each nationality engaged. The mingling of the allied forces under no considered plan would lead to friction as it had done in the past and would seriously detract from the results obtained.⁽²⁾ The whole problem was discussed in the War Committee on 31 October when it was decided that Grey should authorise Bertie to make informal representations to the French government on the unsatisfactory conduct of operations by Sarrail and the lack of confidence which the allied forces had in him. If these proved of no avail Bertie should concert with his Italian and Russian colleagues to produce a formal complaint.⁽³⁾ Bertie tackled Briand about the subject on 3 November and subsequently sent a memorandum setting out the grievances of the Italian, Russian and British governments.⁽⁴⁾ On receipt of this document Poincaré "sniffed a good deal", but Briand reminded him that, in so far as the English had a large number of troops under Sarrail, they were fully entitled to make friendly observations to the French government respecting him. Briand promised to read the memorandum to the Conseil des Ministres, but said that the French government could take no action against Sarrail without precise facts and charges being laid before them.

(1) Robertson to Stamfordham 27/10/16, Robertson MSS 1/33/65.

(2) Milne to Robertson 30/10/16, CAB 42/23/11.

(3) C.B. 42/22/13.

(4) Bertie to Grey No. 1151, 3/11/16, F.O. 371/2624/221152.

General Roques, moreover, was making a detailed, first-hand examination of the problem.⁽¹⁾ When Bertie saw him again, however, Briand made no mention of the subject. The English ambassador understood that the reports coming in from General Roques at Salonica were not unfavourable to Sarrail as far as the latter's military dispositions were concerned.⁽²⁾ If Sarrail could parry the thrusts of his enemies inside France, he could certainly cope with those coming from abroad. In fact on 6 November Lloyd George confessed to Painlevé that he had never received precise complaints about Sarrail. He was convinced that Robertson had simply been persuaded by his French friends that Sarrail was a bad general.⁽³⁾

Shortly after the decision to increase the British contingent at Salonica had been made, Robertson drew up a careful review of the whole war situation. As far as the Balkans were concerned an addition of fifteen divisions would be necessary decisively to defeat the Bulgarian forces. Such a reinforcement was out of the question until the War Committee decided that the Balkans and not France was the main front. There was therefore no satisfactory military alternative between continuing on approximately the present scale and making the Balkans the main theatre of war. Bad strategy, Robertson argued, had never yet proved to be good policy and he regretted the sending of another division to Salonica, although he recognised the reasons which had prompted the decision. He regretted it not only because of the dissemination of forces but because it brought England a step nearer embarking on extensive operations in the Balkans, where, Robertson believed, decisive results were impossible.⁽⁴⁾ The reinforcements had, in fact, been obtained without any clear view of the uses to which they would be put, for at the end of October Joffre called upon Sarrail to tell him what his plans were and what he envisaged the possibilities and objectives of the Armée d'Orient to be.⁽⁵⁾ Joffre nonetheless pressed Briand to ensure that England kept the promise she had made at Boulogne and brought her contingent up to seven divisions.⁽⁶⁾ At the same time he tried to

(1) Bertie to Grey No. 1155, 4/11/16, F.O. 371/2624/222017; Note by Briand 3/11/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040.

(2) Bertie to Grey 7/11/16, Bertie MSS F.O. 800/162/Bal/16/8.

(3) Note by Painlevé November 1916, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(4) 'General Review of the Situation', October 1916, CAB 24/2/85.

(5) Joffre to Sarrail No. 6307-9, 31/10/16, 16N 3136.

(6) Joffre to Briand No. 228, 1/11/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040.

convince Robertson that the entry of Roumania into the war had given the Balkans an entirely new significance which they would ignore at their peril. The actions of the Armée d'Orient would only be fully effective if the scope of its mission were enlarged and Joffre urged Robertson to fulfil the obligations entered into at Boulogne.⁽¹⁾ Robertson considered that Joffre was unduly optimistic in his assessment of the capabilities of the Armée d'Orient without massive reinforcements and he urged Milne to leave no doubt in the mind of General Roques as to the true situation.⁽²⁾ Nothing, Robertson told the War Committee, could be worse than adding a few divisions to those already at Salonica and, while Joffre might talk in terms of an advance towards Sofia, there was no realistic alternative for the Armée d'Orient to its present limited role.⁽³⁾ Joffre learnt that the Italian High Command had also set its face against further reinforcements unless the allies should decide to make the Balkans the decisive arena of their war effort.⁽⁴⁾ Nonetheless on 8 November Milne suggested that it would be undesirable to give the British forces a purely defensive role in 1917 as they would deteriorate in these circumstances. Either they should come back - which meant a loss of prestige - or else go forward - which meant a larger operation. In brief while Milne agreed with the General Staff that no decisive action could be taken without large reinforcements, he gave weight to the French case by envisaging far greater prospects, even with the troops already in Macedonia, than Robertson had been prepared to concede.⁽⁵⁾

Inter-allied relations regarding the Salonica Campaign were thus at their customary low ebb when the politicians of both countries assembled in Paris on 15 November. Prior to the conference Lloyd George prepared a paper for Asquith in which he argued that the Salonica Expedition illustrated the two fatal defects which had pursued the Entente - tardiness and lack of cooperation. The equipment of the army in guns and transport was ludicrously inadequate, even for the modest role which it was supposed to play. The whole state of the forces gave the impression that the generals in command had "as a matter of policy been deprived of every temptation to make too effective a use of the armies under their control".⁽⁶⁾ At the

(1) Joffre to Robertson No. 1656, 3/11/16, *ibid.*

(2) Robertson to Milne 4/11/16, Robertson MSS 1/14/50.

(3) War Committee 7/11/16, CAB 42/23/9.

(4) Gruss to Joffre No. 795, 13/11/16, 16N 3161.

(5) Falls: *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p 206.

(6) Note by Lloyd George, CAB 28 I.C. 12.

conference itself, however, Asquith meekly accepted Briand's resolution that for the coming winter the Balkan theatre should be recognised as the principal front of the allied war effort.⁽¹⁾ This in fact was a startling departure from the policy which Britain had attempted to pursue since the very beginning of the campaign. At the same time the military chiefs were meeting at Chantilly. Here Robertson vainly attempted to resist the pressure of the French, but in the end agreed that the size of the Armée d'Orient should be increased as soon as possible to twenty-three divisions including seven British, with the aim of seeking the decisive defeat of the Bulgarian army.⁽²⁾

Despite this climbdown Robertson, by the beginning of December, was arguing that it would be incurring undue risk for the Salonica forces to attempt to hold the front they then occupied against such an attack as might be brought against it. He therefore advised Lloyd George that a defensive front should be selected adequate for the size of the available forces. If this were done, and if the allied forces were effectively commanded, Robertson considered that the Armée d'Orient should be able to hold its own.⁽³⁾ At the same time he wrote to Joffre urging that the collapse of Roumania altered the whole situation and inviting him to consider the possibility of an attack by Bulgaria, Germany, Turkey and Austria, combined with hostile action on the part of Greece.⁽⁴⁾ France, however, was thinking in altogether different terms and on 5 December the Council of Ministers decided that in view of the worsening situation in Greece, where allied soldiers had been ambushed, the total contingents of the allied army should be raised to nine English divisions, eight French and five Italian.⁽⁵⁾ Once again the task of securing reinforcements from London was left to the unwilling Cambon,⁽⁶⁾ while Joffre telegraphed that if there was a probability of the enemy diverting more troops to the Balkans it was all the more necessary to bring the allied force up to twenty-three divisions and to continue the offensive.⁽⁷⁾ The French request arrived, however, with the English political situation in

(1) Procès-verbal A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 990; CAB 28 I.C. 12b; Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 4, p 6.

(2) Decisions taken at Chantilly 15-16 November, CAB 28 I.C. 12e; Fonds Clemenceau 6N 68.

(3) Robertson to Lloyd George 3/12/16, W.O. 106/1355.

(4) Falls: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 252.

(5) Roques to Joffre No. 226, 5/12/16, 5N 145.

(6) Briand to Cambon No. 4094, 5/12/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040; Cambon to Grey 6/12/16, F.O. 371/2622/247100.

(7) Joffre to Robertson 7/12/16, W.O. 106/1355; Joffre to Dertier No. 53-7, 7/12/16, 16N 3161.

a state of crisis. As the Asquith government tottered towards oblivion, Hardinge warned that it would be impossible to obtain an immediate decision on the proposed reinforcements⁽¹⁾, but, when the new War Cabinet did assemble on 9 December, Robertson was as emphatic as ever. He had already asked Milne urgently to send any observations regarding the utility, practicability and maintenance of the proposed reinforcements.⁽²⁾ Milne was "rather doubtful of the use it [might] be intended to make of these reinforcements",⁽³⁾ and when the War Cabinet met Robertson was ready to deal with this "difficult business".⁽⁴⁾

Owing to the defeat of the Roumanians and the attitude of Greece, he argued, the situation in the Balkans had undergone a complete change and the plan agreed upon at the Chantilly Conference, to knock out Bulgaria by simultaneous operations from the Danube and Salonica was now out of the question. In a tour de force, which epitomised the attitude he had unfailingly held throughout 1916, Robertson summed up his advice by saying that "none of the objects for which we went to and remain in the Balkans can now be attained. It is impossible to maintain and employ there a sufficient force to exert a decisive effect on the war in our favour. We ought therefore to withdraw altogether from the country, but as this proposal is probably not practicable for the moment for political reasons, we should at the most definitely adopt the policy of holding Salonica defensively".⁽⁵⁾ He added that the whole question was difficult and complicated because a foreign general over whom England had no control was in command. He had no confidence in Sarraïl's ability as a commander, but considerable misgivings because of his

(1) Cambon to Briand No. 1624, 7/12/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040.

(2) Robertson to Milne 8/12/16, W.O. 106/1351.

(3) Milne to Robertson 8/12/16, *ibid.*

(4) Robertson to Haig 7/12/16, Robertson MSS 1/22/94.

(5) War Cabinet 9/12/16, CAB 23/1/1. This is quoted in Lowe and Dockrill: The Mirage of Power (1971) Vol. 2, p 204, but is juxtaposed with a statement by Robertson which really belongs to a meeting of the War Cabinet on 26 December. Moreover the quotation is terminated abruptly to give the impression that Robertson was advocating evacuation, when the full transcript of his speech reveals that he too, the arch proponent of the priority of military factors, had been influenced by "political reasons".

ignorance of Sarrail's real intentions and those of the French government.⁽¹⁾ The actual reply to Paris was rather more discreet than Robertson's outburst. Cambon merely reported that difficulties of transport and supply were such as to rule out acceptance of the French proposal. Britain envisaged rather, in the event of a strong offensive in the north, the need to retire to a more defensible position, where extra divisions would be superfluous.⁽²⁾ Robertson told Joffre that the War Cabinet considered that the whole situation in the Near-East had greatly changed and that the defence of Salonica had now become the primary objective of the force. It was desirable that the French and British naval and military authorities should review the whole case before taking any action regarding the despatch of further troops and the War Cabinet hoped that Joffre would obtain Sarrail's views before such a conference assembled.⁽³⁾ Milne entirely agreed with Robertson's opinions, but pointed out that Sarrail declined even to discuss the question of a retirement.⁽⁴⁾

Once again, therefore, Robertson had been successful in withstanding the pressure of France to carry out plans which he regarded as militarily nonsensical. A recent study has suggested that Robertson exercised "a virtual dictatorship" over the direction of British strategy in 1916.⁽⁵⁾ The Salonica campaign seems to illustrate quite clearly that this is an exaggeration. It is certainly true that Robertson was appointed to succeed Murray as Chief of the Imperial General Staff with unprecedented powers so that he might act as a counterweight to Kitchener. It was strong pressure from a Lloyd George - Bonar Law - Carson alliance which finally nerved Asquith to take advantage of Kitchener's temporary absence at the Dardanelles to create an alternative source of military authority. But, when the last word in British strategy so often lay on the other side of the Channel, it is absurd to suggest that anyone in this country exercised a dictatorship. If Robertson's will had been final, the Salonica campaign would never have been allowed to drag on as long as it did, involving ever larger numbers of British troops, with no obvious advantage to the ultimate determination of

(1) War Cabinet 9/12/16, CAB 23/1/1.

(2) Cambon to Briand No. 1136, 9/12/16, Paul Cambon MSS, Dossier 6.

(3) Robertson to Joffre 10/12/16, W.O. 106/1355.

(4) Milne to Robertson No. 207, 11/12/16, W.O. 106/1351.

(5) V. H. Rothwell: War Aims, Peace Moves and Strategy in British Policy, 1916-18 (Leeds University Ph.D. thesis, 1969), p. 151.

the conflict. What is perhaps true is that Robertson's power appears unnaturally magnified by an effective abdication of authority within the Foreign Office during 1916. In this process the person of the Foreign Secretary, himself, is of crucial importance. It was Sir Edward Grey's firm conviction that the rôle of diplomacy in the war could, by definition, be only very limited. ⁽¹⁾ Diplomacy had failed or else the war would never have broken out, so Grey believed that primary responsibility must now devolve upon the military leaders. In the particular situation in which the conduct of the war was in fact being determined as much if not more by politics than by military considerations, Grey's grossly inaccurate assessment augured badly for British diplomacy.

The situation was further exacerbated by the collapse of Grey's health. In the course of the year his eye-sight began to fail with obvious consequences for his capacity to read official papers. But his pathetic attempts to resign were met by Asquith's insistence that the two men, who had been in office when the war broke out, should see it to its conclusion. Warned that only complete rest would save him from total blindness, Grey arrived at the unsatisfactory solution of vacating the Foreign Office for up to ten days in each month or six weeks, during which time, while he was isolated in the Highlands of Scotland, his office would be filled by the Lord President of the Council, Lord Crewe. ⁽²⁾ It was clearly unsatisfactory that a great office of state in time of war should be held by a man suffering in such a way. Until the middle of 1916, moreover, there was a distinct lack of cohesion inside the Foreign Office since Arthur Nicolson never ranked among Grey's intimates. ⁽³⁾ Then the unusual step was taken, presumably with Grey's approval, of bringing Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, back to serve once more as Permanent Under-Secretary. Cambon found that the new head of the Foreign Office had a far greater influence over Grey. It was rare that the French Ambassador found Hardinge in his own office, since he was so often in consultation with the Foreign Secretary, whereas Nicolson had often gone more than twenty-four hours without seeing Grey ⁽⁴⁾. Similarly Paul Painlevé, French Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, was told that Hardinge was "le Berthelot du Ministère Anglais". ⁽⁵⁾

(1) Grey: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 154; K. Robbins: Sir Edward Grey (1971), p 301.

(2) Robbins: op. cit., pp 323-4. Hardinge, the permanent head of the Foreign Office, found Crewe "very weak", [Hardinge to Bertie 2/9/16, Bertie MSS F.O. 800/172/Gr/16/14.]

(3) Z.S. Steiner - The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898-1914 (1969), p 122.

(4) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 1/7/16, Cambon: Correspondence Vol. 3, p. 116.

(5) Note of conversation with de Fleuriau 7/11/16, Painlevé MSS 313 AP 110.

Such a situation was clearly not conducive to the development of a strong policy within the Foreign Office, and it is not surprising that little initiative emerged from this quarter until Grey, Crewe and Asquith himself were swept away by the formation of the Lloyd George government at the end of 1916.

Robertson took advantage of Lloyd George's accession to power to draw up for the new premier a lengthy exposé of the war situation. Salonica was causing him a great deal of anxiety "because of the very unsatisfactory way in which the situation [was] dealt with by the French". Without entering into the wisdom of the Balkan operations, he could assert that the French had never had any real plan and therefore no good could possibly accrue. Briand went there for political reasons and did not want to come away for the same reasons. It was now necessary to take some really definite measures to put the Salonica matter on a proper footing and thus remove a "hideous nightmare". Britain had never had any Eastern policy, but had simply "danced attendance on the French". It was perhaps the most glaring example of the ineptitude of British diplomacy during the war. Throughout the conflict Robertson had sensed a "sad lack of courage and masterfulness" in the Foreign Office and yet it was there that the basis of Britain's position in the eyes of the world rested.⁽¹⁾ At all events, in the face of Robertson's intransigence Joffre was obliged to inform Sarrail that for the time being the mission of the Armée d'Orient in inflicting a decisive defeat on Bulgaria was suspended.⁽²⁾ But Robertson was still not happy with these instructions since they envisaged the possible resumption of offensive action at a later date and required Sarrail not to abandon, except under military necessity, the territories which he held.⁽³⁾ Joffre stressed that the offensive against Bulgaria provided for at the Chantilly Conference should continue to be part of the plans of the Coalition. France would therefore go ahead in sending Sarrail two extra divisions and with the arguments for doing so having been presented to the British ad nauseam, Joffre could see little purpose in a further allied conference.⁽⁴⁾ The decision to send two additional divisions was indeed maintained by the Comité de Guerre meeting

(1) Draft memorandum 8/12/16, Robertson MSS 1/19/9; final version is in Robertson: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 288.

(2) Joffre to Sarrail No. 576, 11/12/16, 16N 3136; Falls: op. cit., p 253.

(3) War Cabinet 15/12/16, CAB 37/16/30.

(4) Joffre to Robertson 16/12/16, W.O. 106/1353.

on 16 December, even though Joffre was now removed from all effective authority.⁽¹⁾ In the Chamber Army Commission Abel Ferry expressed concern that the defeat of Roumania might have left the Armée d'Orient without a role,⁽²⁾ but on the same day Briand was enthusiastically received by a secret session of the Senate when he asserted that although current plans had failed he was not prepared to admit that the struggle in the Near-East had been settled in favour of the enemy.⁽³⁾

With Lloyd George, always the most sympathetic of British politicians towards the Salonica campaign, at the head of the government and with the French, now supported by Russia, once again "bombarding" Britain to send more troops to Salonica, Robertson was uncertain as to what would result. On 23 December the War Cabinet discussed the problem at a meeting at which Robertson was requested not to be present. He sensed a "very dangerous tendency" for the War Cabinet to direct military operations.⁽⁴⁾ Given an opportunity to state his case three days later, Robertson produced another bombastic oration designed to leave the politicians in no doubt as to where he stood. Hankey found him in a very disgruntled state and threatening to resign. He felt that the new War Cabinet had no faith in Robertson's western front policy, but that they would never find a soldier to carry out "their Salonica policy".⁽⁵⁾ Hankey was inclined to think the Cabinet would "come a cropper before long".⁽⁶⁾ With his future career in the balance Robertson stated that Salonica was one long story of the British government acting against its better judgement in the interest of the other allies and being impelled thereby to reject the advice of the British General Staff. Reviewing the history of the campaign and the successive submissions of the British government to the will of France, Robertson concluded that on every occasion the advice given by Joffre had proved to be wrong and that given by the British General Staff had proved to be right. Every division sent to Salonica meant a reduction in the chances of obtaining a favourable decision on the western front in 1917. Britain could no longer afford to continue sinking men into Salonica and Robertson thought the time had come when the Cabinet "really must act according to its own judgement".⁽⁷⁾ Not

(1) Comité de Guerre 16/12/16, 16N 3058.

(2) Parliamentary archives C 7497.

(3) Secret Session 22/12/16, Archives du Sénat.

(4) Robertson to Haig 24/12/16, Robertson MBS 1/22/97.

(5) The distinction was perhaps less clear-cut than Hankey painted.

(6) Hankey: op. cit., Vol. 2, pp 595-6.

(7) War Cabinet 26/12/16, CAB 37/162/17.

content with this tirade Robertson wrote privately to Lloyd George to express his hope that the cabinet would decide that they could not send two more divisions. The French attitude was exactly the same as it always had been when the question of sending reinforcements was under consideration. They painted everything in the most lurid colours and sought to persuade the British against their better judgement by veiled threats as to what would happen if they did not agree.⁽¹⁾ The Salonica affair, Robertson confided to the French officer, Colonel Billotte, would remain for him a vexation and an annoyance until the day he died.⁽²⁾

Pressure on Robertson was, in fact, immense, for on 26 December French delegates arrived in London for yet another inter-allied discussion. These few days were the worst time for him in a "very bad year". The French recognised the strategic factors which argued against their proposals, but "in order to save their own political positions [they were] prepared to go to any desperate lengths no matter how futile they [might] be".⁽³⁾ At the conference Lloyd George and the War Cabinet were not averse in principle to sending two more divisions to the Salonica front with a view to an offensive there or at least to securing the line then held.⁽⁴⁾ It was made clear to Haig that no British divisions would be released from Salonica for the French front⁽⁵⁾ and Lloyd George gave Ribot a categorical assurance that there was no question of abandoning the expedition.⁽⁶⁾ In between sessions of the conference the War Cabinet met again and heard Robertson reaffirm his conviction that the Salonica forces should now have a primarily defensive role. The shipping difficulty and the insecurity of the lines of communication would in all probability become much greater in the future and by sending more divisions Britain would greatly increase the chance of eventual disaster.⁽⁷⁾ No final decision was in fact arrived at regarding the proposed reinforcements and the matter was deferred to a further conference to be held in Rome. It was provisionally agreed that the allies should continue to hold the line then occupied, as long as this could be done without exposing the force to defeat. But a shorter line

(1) Robertson to Lloyd George 27/12/16, Lloyd George MSS F/44/3/5.

(2) Record of conversation 26/12/16, 16N 3138.

(3) Robertson to Haig 28/12/16, Robertson MSS 1/22/100.

(4) Hanksy: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 604.

(5) Maurice: op. cit., p 77; Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 4, pp 100-1.

(6) Procès-verbal, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 990.

(7) War Cabinet 27/2/16, CAB 37/162/19.

would be prepared for occupation, if the need arose, which would enable the army to hold its own against any attack which might be made. Merely passing the buck, the delegates also decided that pressure should be put on the Italian government to send some additional divisions to Salonica.⁽¹⁾

With "great difficulty" Robertson had yet again "contrived to prevent [the British] government acceding to the French request." There could never be any object in sending more troops to the Balkans unless it was to take the offensive against Bulgaria or Turkey, and this was not a practicable proposition.⁽²⁾ But his triumph had been at the expense of an increasingly apparent rift between the British civil and military authorities.⁽³⁾

Throughout 1916 the lack of transport had been constantly cited as the major reason for British opposition to the Salonica venture. Unquestionably this was a major consideration, but underlying it was Robertson's personal hostility to the whole campaign. The expedition was the creation of the 'frocks' and the French, Robertson's two main enemies. Early in 1915 he gave a succinct statement of his policy for victory: "There is only one way of ending this war satisfactorily and that is by putting our troops where they can kill the most Germans and by trusting to ourselves and not to other people".⁽⁴⁾ This formula ruled out the then unborn Salonica expedition on two grounds: the enemy involved was primarily non-German and the directing voice was that of Paris and not London. Appointed to his office on terms which effectively usurped the functions of the Secretary for War and which made him the only source of professional military advice to the government, Robertson rejected the notion that he should simply advise and then leave it to ministers to accept or reject his advice. He considered rather that the politicians should accept his views since he occupied in practice a senior position in the War Committee, although never formally accorded such status. But Lloyd George was not prepared to allow Robertson a free hand. Under Asquith the structure of control in Britain's foreign relations was relatively simple. Policy was directed by Grey, working on friendly, if slightly distant, terms with the Premier. Grey, moreover, took a very narrow view of the rôle of diplomacy in wartime, thus leaving wide

(1) Conclusions of Conference, CAB 28 I.C. 13.

(2) Robertson to Delmé-Radcliffe 28/12/16, Robertson MSS 1/35/25.

(3) Hankey: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 605.

(4) Robertson to Callwell 22/2/15, Robertson MSS 1/8/9.

scope for the military leadership. But the formation of the Lloyd George cabinet ushered in a more complex régime.⁽¹⁾ The decline in the importance of the Foreign Secretary in the inner councils of government had begun even before Lloyd George took office. Although he continued to attend meetings of the War Committee, Grey's was no longer the predominating voice in foreign affairs. Known as one of Asquith's loyal colleagues, he inevitably shared in his leader's declining prestige.⁽²⁾ The new Foreign Secretary, Balfour, on the other hand had come to believe in the need for a greater unity of political decision and that Lloyd George was the proper person to have control of it.⁽³⁾ Moreover Lloyd George's desire to control the diplomacy of the war spilt over into the field of strategic diplomacy, which Robertson had come to regard as his preserve. His concept of the best means to win the war differed starkly from that of Robertson. As Haig put it "the one blackspot in the whole picture of the war is our Prime Minister's desire to gain ground in secondary theatres, as if he did not believe in our ability to beat the Germans themselves and wishes to gain something with which to bargain at a peace conference."⁽⁴⁾ With such divergent views bitter conflicts within the higher direction of the British war effort were inevitable in 1917.

(1) Rothwell: op. cit., pp 4-6.

(2) D. Collins: Aspects of British Politics 1904-19, (1965), p 142.

(3) Collins: op. cit., p 191.

(4) Haig to Robertson 22/8/17, Robertson MSS 1/23/46/2.

CHAPTER 6

The Political Background in France (1916) - Joffre versus Sarrail

From the early nineteenth century there developed under Leopold von Ranke a school of historians who preached the primacy of foreign over domestic policy - a philosophy of history which suggested that the latter could best be explained in terms of the former and not vice versa. It is unnecessary to remark that such an approach is no longer fashionable, nor would it be contributing much to the development of historical thought to argue that the present research reveals Ranke's ideas to be faulty. This has been shown many times already. Nonetheless, if proof were still needed that Ranke's analysis of history was the inverse of that which is most helpful to its understanding, an examination of the Salonica Campaign might provide it. No other diplomatic episode of the Great War was so startlingly a reflection, indeed a calculated function, of French internal politics than this 'parent pauvre' of military operations in the main theatre of the war. Nothing else revealed so clearly the internal political stresses of wartime France, which continued unabated the internecine struggles of the Third Republic, submerged only to the extent of providing a chimera of unity in the face of the enemy.

When the complicated manoeuvrings of René Viviani to enlarge the basis of his government in October 1915 failed to produce the required results and he was obliged to hand over the task of constructing a cabinet to his Minister of Justice, Aristide Briand⁽¹⁾, power passed into the hands of the staunchest upholder of the Salonica Expedition in the outgoing government. Earlier in 1915 Briand had unsuccessfully pressed upon his ministerial colleagues the desirability of launching a diversionary movement in the Balkans⁽²⁾, and his enthusiasm for pursuing an eastern strategy had been one of the factors responsible for carrying the French Government into the Salonica venture in the wake of Bulgarian mobilisation at the end of September. The expedition, by prompting the resignation of foreign minister Delcassé, had already brought down Viviani's government and Briand's position on assuming the premiership was far from secure. The maintenance of the Salonica expedition was to become a question of faith upon which Briand's

(1) An ubiquitous figure in the political history of France in the first three decades of the twentieth century, Briand, a socialist whose views had become increasingly reactionary, now set about constructing his fifth ministry.

(2) See above, p 14 ff.

ministerial survival depended. Surrender to the opponents of the campaign would mean his own political demise.

Briand's enthusiasm for the Salonica expedition had been confronted at the end of September 1915 by the passive opposition of Delcassé. The latter, having already grossly mistaken the intentions of Ferdinand of Bulgaria, now hoped to abandon the proposed eastern expedition and to concentrate all resources on the Western Front.⁽¹⁾ At the height of the crisis the French minister in Athens had found himself without information from the Quai d'Orsay, which had not replied to any of his telegrams since 26 September. Delcassé's apparent paralysis prompted the Political Director, de Margerie, to send instructions on his own initiative.⁽²⁾ The Finance Minister, Ribot, concluded that Delcassé was frightened to associate himself with the responsibilities which the government was assuming,⁽³⁾ and indeed the latter offered his resignation to Viviani on around 10 October.⁽⁴⁾ Ribot and Millerand were designated to make representations to him with a view to persuading him to withdraw his resignation. This, after all, was no time for the Viviani government to be confronted with internal convulsions. Delcassé yielded to their entreaties, but two days later sent the Prime Minister a categorical letter of resignation. This drew from Viviani a reply couched in hard and trenchant terms.⁽⁵⁾ The Foreign Minister, who had previously sought to retire on the grounds of ill-health, now argued that he could not agree with the policy of his colleagues.⁽⁶⁾ He could not associate himself with the Salonica expedition now that it seemed doubtful whether the help and collaboration of either England or Greece would be forthcoming.⁽⁷⁾ Poincaré could not but express his astonishment that Delcassé should now speak of disagreements of which he had shown no inkling in the meetings of the Conseil des Ministres.⁽⁸⁾

The resignation of as distinguished a politician as Théophile Delcassé inevitably shook the Viviani government to its foundations and caused widespread misgivings throughout France. As one sympathetic observer enquired,

(1) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 146; Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 158.

(2) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 148.

(3) *ibid*, p 168.

(4) Note by the Belgian ambassador, Guillaume, 10/10/15, Correspondance Politique, Légation de France, Archives of Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(5) Ribot: Letters to a Friend, p 122.

(6) Diary entry, 1/11/15, Edouard de Billy MSS, Carton 2.

(7) Note by Guillaume 14/10/15, Belgian archives; Ferry: op. cit., p 117.

(8) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 176.

"où allons-nous pour que vous abandonniez la barque?"⁽¹⁾ It was perhaps a prophetic comment on this ill-fated venture in Anglo-French cooperation that the first victim of the Salonica Campaign should be the man who had done more than any other over a decade earlier to construct the Entente Cordiale itself. Viviani, who himself took over the Foreign Affairs portfolio, explained the situation to anxious senators in the Foreign Affairs Commission on 15 October,⁽²⁾ but six days later Clemenceau, Pichon and d'Estournelles were still pressing for additional information on the resignation and for clarification of the current position at the Quai d'Orsay.⁽³⁾ On 19 October, Viviani, while still refusing to give details of Delcassé's letter of resignation, admitted that the Foreign Minister had not been an active supporter of the Salonica Expedition, but assured the Chamber Commission that Delcassé had told Ribot, Millerand and himself that there was no rift in the cabinet and that he had resigned because of his health. Indeed Delcassé, on his own initiative, had pressed upon one of France's allies the need to send troops to support the Balkan campaign. Viviani went so far as to confirm Caillaux's analysis of the situation to the effect that if Delcassé's resignation letter spoke of disagreement in the government it distorted the truth in doing so.⁽⁴⁾ All this though provided only temporary relief to Viviani's ministerial misfortunes and by the end of the month he had been forced to abandon the attempt to reconstruct his government. In the ensuing political manoeuvres the much maligned Millerand was considered deadweight and an obvious liability to any ministry. To inspire public confidence, General Galliéni, officially designated as Joffre's successor, was called to be Minister of War, although professing that he had neither the political finesse nor the health to stand the strain.⁽⁵⁾

The parliamentary situation at the end of October was extremely grave. It was evident that the malcontents in the Chambers had not been satisfied and Briand was soon subjected to the same sort of persecution as had just driven his predecessor out of office. One of his most ardent and dangerous critics, Georges Clemenceau, was using his newspaper L'Homme Enchaîné to hold up admiring pictures of an England which had set her face against further Balkan entanglements. Moreover the French foreign ministry, which Briand now

(1) M. Braibant to Delcassé, 14/10/15, Delcassé MSS, Vol. 9.

(2) Pichon MSS, 4398; Procès-verbal, archives du sénat.

(3) Pichon MSS, 4398.

(4) Parliamentary archives, C7488.

(5) B. H. L. Hart: op. cit., p 94; Gallieni: Carnets, p 210.

determined to keep within his own hands, already possessed evidence from its London embassy of attempts by French and English opponents of Salonica to join forces in a combination which would have as one of its objectives the destruction of the French government. The comte d'Aunay, a close associate of Clemenceau, was conducting secret negotiations in London, where he had expressed the desire to meet Lloyd George and Balfour. The English ministers, however, had been warned that their statements might be exploited against the French cabinet.⁽¹⁾ Briand's response to this latent crisis was to enlarge his government by the introduction as Ministers without Portfolio of several prestigious elder statesmen, whose inclusion would, he hoped, serve to buttress his régime against the attacks of disaffected sections of the Chamber and Senate. Thus, for example, the former Prime Minister, Freycinet, despite being almost ninety years of age, was recalled for a further period of ministerial service, while Clemenceau was left to surmise that, in his mid-seventies, he was as yet too young for office.⁽²⁾ Not everyone was satisfied with Briand's expedient. The influential deputy Tardieu wrote contemptuously of the old men and chatterers to whom governmental decisions would now have to be subjected.⁽³⁾

Briand's government, then, inherited from its predecessor a military campaign on the other side of Europe, which had already aroused great passions in political circles. Viviani also bequeathed to his successor the concept of the Sacred Union, by which the political parties of France had agreed to submerge their own differences for the duration of hostilities to the higher cause of winning the war. No other single factor so strained the fragility of this patriotic concord than did the military expedition to Salonica. Briand found himself faced with the dilemma that his own survival together with that of the Sacred Union itself were dependent upon the prosecution of a military venture, his own faith in the value of which rapidly diminished. Yet he knew that military failure was synonymous with

- (1) Fleuriau to W. Martin 16/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1031; Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 7, p 190.
- (2) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 26/11/15, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 89.
- (3) Tardieu to Berthelot 31/10/15, Berthelot MSS. Berthelot did not destroy his private papers as systematically as R. D. Challener implies in G. A. Craig and F. Gilbert (eds.): The Diplomats (1953), p 65. A substantial, if fragmentary, collection remains in the possession of his nephew M. Daniel Langlois Berthelot, while a collection of semi-official documents dealing with Berthelot's work in the field of propaganda is held at the Quai d'Orsay.

his own destruction since in a very real sense Salonica was "his personal affair", while his political enemies lay in wait for him in the event of his military brainchild proving abortive.⁽¹⁾ The fact that Briand could neither live with nor without the Salonica campaign proved ultimately to be a paradox which he was unable to resolve.

Criticism of Briand's conduct of the Salonica venture or outright opposition to it was likely to come from three basic sources, the French Parliament, France's English allies who, as has been seen,⁽²⁾ had been dragged with a total lack of conviction into supporting the campaign, and the Grand Quartier Général under the hitherto all-powerful Joffre. At the risk of oversimplification it might be said that the most vociferous voices in the Chamber were in favour of the expedition, while those in the Senate were against it. Briand had to pursue an awkward course between this essential polarisation. In the Upper House Clemenceau took advantage of Freycinet's recall to the government to secure for himself the presidency of the two influential Senate Commissions on foreign affairs and the army. These he used as a power base to attack the government's policies without mercy. On 21 October the Senate Foreign Affairs Commission had expressed concern at not being kept informed of the developments in the Salonica campaign and voiced grave anxiety at the prospect of any weakening of the allied forces on the Western Front to supply the new enterprise in the East,⁽³⁾ while four days later Viviani had been presented with a series of probing questions by the Chamber Commissions of the Army and Navy, which felt themselves equally in the dark as to what was going on in the new theatre of war.⁽⁴⁾ Clemenceau did not lose the opportunity of maintaining parliamentary pressure on the government and on 19 November presented Briand with a hostile conclusion adopted by the Senate Army Commission which criticised the government for the lack of planning, preparation and inter-allied co-ordination with which the campaign had been engaged.⁽⁵⁾ A fortnight later the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission was calling for the securing of the French position at Salonica, the retention of which was stated to be essential, by the immediate provision of French and allied reinforcements.⁽⁶⁾

(1) P. Cambon to J. Cambon, 21/10/16, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(2) See above, pp 37-38.

(3) Ordre du jour, 21/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1031.

(4) Painlevé to Viviani, 25/10/15, *ibid*, Vol. 1032.

(5) Clemenceau to Briand, 19/11/15, *ibid*, Vol. 1033.

(6) Leygues to Briand 1/12/15, *ibid*, Vol. 1034.

The following day Briand's confidant and chef de cabinet, Philippe Berthelot, urged upon the ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, the undesirability of the parliamentary consequences in France which might ensue from any decision to evacuate Salonica. But Briand removed this remark from the final draft of the telegram to Cambon, since the importance of a military operation could not justly be impressed upon the English government on considerations of internal French politics.⁽¹⁾

Parliamentary difficulties obviously weighed heavily upon Briand, since he was in the last resort dependent upon a favourable vote in the Chamber for his own maintenance in office. But France was not fighting the war in isolation and a potentially more serious threat to both Briand and the Salonica Campaign arose at the beginning of December 1915 with the decision of the British government, under the threat of Kitchener's resignation, to stage in the course of a conference at Calais a showdown with the French over the question of evacuation.⁽²⁾ Briand only extricated himself from the crisis which arose by resorting to the type of dubious political expediency which was to characterise the whole of his wartime ministry.⁽³⁾ The pattern had already been set, therefore, whereby the diplomacy of the Salonica campaign would be decided on considerations of French domestic politics. The military rights and wrongs of the expedition had already been lost sight of. As Sir William Robertson, soon to become C.I.G.S., put it, bluntly and without the niceties of diplomatic verbiage: "The fact is it is all political. If the French came away from Salonica Briand and Co. will fall and Clemenceau may succeed him and then Poincaré might have to go."⁽⁴⁾ As Robertson recognised, the recent political history of the Third Republic made it most unlikely that Clemenceau and Poincaré would be able to work in harmony. With a presidential crisis in wartime the spectre of complete chaos loomed large.

But perhaps the most serious threat of all to Briand's support of the Salonica campaign came from the fact that the French military hierarchy, with General Joffre at its head, was almost unanimously opposed to the venture. In 1910, when a new supreme commander for wartime had had to be named to replace General Féau, the claims of General Pau had appeared the

(1) Briand to Cambon No. 4101-7, 2/12/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1034.

(2) See above, p 66 ff.

(3) See above, p 75.

(4) Robertson to Callwell 11/12/15, Robertson MSS 1/8/39.

strongest on the basis of his existing functions. But the Council of Ministers would have none of him "because he went to Mass".⁽¹⁾ Joffre moreover had walked into a position of growing stature. Between 1907 and 1914 there were nine ministers of Foreign Affairs, eight of finance, seven of the navy, nine war ministers and twelve Presidents of the Council. But during the same period there were only two chiefs of the Army's General Staff. This stability and concentration of supreme responsibility in the hands of two men served in itself to restore prestige to an institution which had so greatly suffered during the fury of the Dreyfus Affair. The question of the high command in wartime, however, had been raised almost by accident in 1911. The enquiry of a right-wing senator, M. Provost de Launay, was answered by General Goirand, Minister of War: "In time of war the Supreme Commander is the Minister; the personage who bears this title is, in peacetime, only the Inspector General of the Army and in wartime Commander of the armies of north and east."⁽²⁾ But Joffre's combination of functions in the years before 1914 when he was both vice-president of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale and Chief of the Army General Staff gave him extensive, almost absolute, powers⁽³⁾, and when war broke out Viviani soon stated that the government had no intention of interfering in the command of the troops nor in the direct conduct of operations.⁽⁴⁾ The underlying basis for Joffre's almost total control of French war plans and policy lay in the fact that during peacetime the war had never been conceived of as anything other than a short, sharp clash of arms culminating in a quick victory. There was a deep-seated belief in French military circles that victory was reserved for any army which seized the initiative and opened with a vigorous offensive, without due concern for strategic or tactical principles. There existed an emphasis on Napoleonic audacity and little appreciation of the defensive strength of entrenched riflemen. A veritable mystique of the frontal offensive had replaced sound military strategy.

Thus, with the outbreak of hostilities the French government virtually abdicated its directing authority and left Joffre unfettered to achieve a quick victory. The one restriction on the commander-in-chief was that his eventual successor had been officially designated. Apart from this, the government fondly imagined that its task was merely to sit back and watch

(1) La Gorce: *op. cit.*, pp 86-7.

(2) *Ibid*, p 108.

(3) J. M. Bourget: Gouvernement et Commandement (1930), p 239.

(4) P. Renouvin: The Forms of War Government in France (1927), p 81.

what would be no more than a duel between armies. Governments prior to 1914, moreover, had made no provision for creating a body similar to the later War Council in England, that could serve as a link between civilian and military leadership. Consequently France at war was to grope by trial and error from the military rule of Joffre to the ministerial firmness of Clemenceau. Joffre conceded in 1915 that "the commander-in-chief is responsible only to the government, who can replace him if they do not approve of his action", but he realised that, after his victory of the Marne, his position was inviolable.⁽¹⁾ For most of 1916, even, Joffre remained strong enough to resist all opposition. War Minister, Gallieni, took a vigorous stand against him and on 7 March read to his colleagues a long indictment of the Grand Quartier Général, its encroachments into civil affairs, its repugnance of control or even inspection, and its neglect of proper preparations at Verdun. But on 17 March it was Gallieni and not Joffre who resigned.⁽²⁾ Joffre's power in the early days of the war was considerably increased by his decision to remove the government to Bordeaux. Whatever the motive for this action it could only play into the hands of those who already scorned the politicians. The important point to note, however, is that this question which should have been argued out in the Council of Ministers was decided in effect by Joffre.⁽³⁾ From now on the government watched the vicissitudes of the battle like a distant spectator.

Joffre's objections to the Salonica adventure were on both personal and military grounds. He resented any diversionary expedition which drew a single soldier away from the western front, for which he himself was directly responsible and he felt a strong personal antipathy towards the newly designated Commander-in-chief of the Armée d'Orient, General Sarrail.⁽⁴⁾ Indeed Sarrail's appointment has been noted as the first occasion in the war on which a military matter was decided against the wishes of the French commander.⁽⁵⁾ Similarly the despatch of troops to Salonica to save the forces of Serbia from destruction had been hastily decided by the government with only cursory reference to General Joffre.⁽⁶⁾ Indeed Joffre was careful to impress upon

(1) Cassar: op. cit., p 39.

(2) F. P. Chambers: The War Behind the War, 1914-18 (1939), p 247; Bertie to Grey 18/3/16, Lloyd George MSS D 19/7/11.

(3) Bourget: op. cit., p 246.

(4) See above, pp 21-2.

(5) *ibid* p 28.

(6) *ibid* p 34.

Millerand's successor, Gallieni, that the oriental theatre was only a secondary field of warfare, and that a decisive result in the European war could only be obtained in France and Russia.⁽¹⁾ Thus when Paul Cambon had noticed an apparent warming in Joffre's attitude to the Salonica campaign, this was dictated by considerations of personal survival, since he considered that a governmental crisis involving the fall of Millerand could also endanger his own position, and not by any conversion to the military possibilities of the expedition.⁽²⁾ Joffre could therefore threaten the English with the breakdown of the Entente if the occupation of Salonica were not maintained, while at the same time doing everything he could within France to obstruct attempts to render the expedition successful.

In view of this background Briand's decision on 2 December, immediately before the Calais Conference, to extend Joffre's jurisdiction to include the Armée d'Orient would seem at the least somewhat surprising. But Briand was in fact making a calculated gamble. Joffre had been chagrined by the fact that Sarrail had been taking his orders directly from the War Ministry rather than from the Grand Quartier Général. By enlarging Joffre's authority to include the Salonica force, Briand could be sure that Joffre's own supporters would be pleased that their hero had become generalissimo. Furthermore by making Joffre responsible for the Armée d'Orient the general would be given a personal commitment in the army's success and therefore he could be expected to take an interest in it which was notably lacking so long as this army's prestige was tied primarily to the reputation of Sarrail. It could further be surmised that the Sarrail faction, despite initial irritation at their favourite's subjection to Joffre, could be won over eventually when they realised that Joffre would be sending substantial reinforcements and material to the puny Armée d'Orient.⁽³⁾ Indeed Briand went so far as to instruct Joffre not to use his new authority to obstruct or thwart Sarrail's operations.⁽⁴⁾ In fact there is evidence that Briand's underlying intention was, by making Joffre overall commander, to relieve him of the day to day control of operations on all fronts. But Briand's calculations backfired, since Joffre

(1) Joffre to Gallieni 30/11/15, 16 N 3014.

(2) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 18/10/15, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 86.

(3) King: op. cit., p 85.

(4) Bonet to Painlevé 21/12/15, Painlevé MSS 313 AP 109.

kept direct command on the western front, while using his authority over Sarrail to interfere in the course of operations in the Balkans and to deny to Sarrail the forces he needed to carry out any militarily meaningful campaign from Salonica.⁽¹⁾ In retaining direct control over the western front, Joffre could only supply Sarrail's army to his own detriment, and while his conception of the war remained fixed upon the idea of the main theatre of operations, this was something he was hardly likely to do. The great cry of the supporters of the Salonica expedition became, therefore, throughout 1916 that it should recover its autonomy by being removed from the hostile tutelage of Joffre's headquarters at Chantilly.⁽²⁾ Joffre consistently begrudged each single French soldier sent to Salonica - the one man whom he was pleased to see removed to this distant theatre of the war being Sarrail himself.

Sarrail, then, was very much the bête noire of his military chief and this relationship inevitably coloured from the outset the light in which Chantilly judged the Commander of the Armée d'Orient. As early as December 1915 the G.Q.G. was criticising Sarrail's conduct of operations⁽³⁾ and at the beginning of the new year the opinion was expressed that the situation in the Balkans demanded the appointment of General Lyautey to supreme command in that theatre.⁽⁴⁾ Pellé, Joffre's chief of staff, immediately gave his weight to the idea of sending out Lyautey on a special mission.⁽⁵⁾ It was in this atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion that relations between Chantilly and Salonica developed throughout the next twelve months and that Joffre embarked on a systematic campaign of impeding and emasculating the authority of his rival and ultimately of trying to replace him.

Joffre's first significant infringement of Sarrail's liberty of action was to send out in December 1915 his newly appointed deputy, General de Castelnaud, on a tour of inspection, ostensibly with a view to reporting on the defensive arrangements of the military camp at Salonica. He secured

(1) Note by Painlevé, November 1916, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(2) See, for example undated Note by Captain Giannotti, *ibid*, 313 AP 109.

(3) G.Q.G. note on Sarrail's compte-rendu of 10/12/15, 16N 3056. War Minister Gallieni was also critical of Sarrail's military conduct and concluded as early as 22 November that Sarrail was "indécis et en dessous de sa tâche. Il ne songe qu'à couvrir ses responsabilités. Un Marchand ou un Gouraud aurait déjà attaqué vigoureusement les Bulgares". [Gallieni: Carnets, p 221].

(4) Organisation du Haut Commandement en Orient 4/1/16, 16N 3056.

(5) Undated, unsigned note, *ibid*.

approval from War Minister Gallieni for a mission to confirm his impression that the entrenched camp could be held with a force of 150,000 fully supplied men.⁽¹⁾ The mission immediately aroused an outcry among Sarrail's supporters in France and Sarrail could not have viewed de Castelnau's arrival with any great enthusiasm. As far as Sarrail was concerned, de Castelnau was a clerical sympathiser of quasi-royalist tendencies and thus an inspector from whom a republican general and militant free-thinker could expect to receive little sympathy.⁽²⁾ When de Castelnau returned to Paris the report which he presented to the government was in some respects diametrically opposed to the tenor of Sarrail's despatches to the Grand Quartier Général. He concluded that Sarrail's forces were sufficient, that the commander could not have had the opportunity to assess the utility of the reinforcements which he was demanding, and that Sarrail's general staff was second rate and should be replaced.⁽³⁾ Damagingly for Sarrail, de Castelnau also noted that political affairs seemed to occupy the former's attention more than did military matters.⁽⁴⁾ Sarrail clearly resented what he regarded as de Castelnau's and Joffre's interference and he wrote privately to Gallieni complaining that under the orders which he received from his inspector he was deprived of all initiative, while remaining responsible in the event of failure.⁽⁵⁾ On the same day he wrote to his political confrère, Paul Painlevé, then Minister of Fine Arts and Public Instruction in the Briand government, asking him to restore order to a situation in which others were attempting to create disorder.⁽⁶⁾ De Castelnau's mission was the occasion for fears to be expressed to the French Foreign Ministry that Sarrail was about to become the object of a political witchhunt, in which his outspoken left-wing views would serve to outweigh any consideration of his value as a military leader and to bring about his destruction: "La suite des événements a montré qu'on ne pardonne pas au Général Sarrail et qu'on veut évidemment sa peau."⁽⁷⁾

(1) Joffre to Gallieni 13/12/15, 5N 147.

(2) Mermeix: Joffre, p 195.

(3) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 225.

(4) de Castelnau's report 31/12/15, 16N 3142.

(5) Sarrail to Gallieni 26/12/15, Sarrail: op. cit., p 72.

(6) Sarrail to Painlevé 26/12/15, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(7) Unsigned letter to the Direction Politique 26/12/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1035.

It was not long before the day to day effects of the decree of December 2, extending Joffre's authority to the Salonica front began to be felt by General Sarrail. On communications addressed to him by the Grand Quartier Général he found that the words 'en chef' had been systematically scratched from his title to remind him of his subordination to Chantilly. This deprived Sarrail of a status accorded to him by a governmental decree of 5 August, which had not been cancelled by that of 2 December. A few days later Sarrail was forbidden to correspond in future with the government, except through the intermediary of Joffre. Then in January 1916 the Grand Quartier Général deprived him of the right to bestow the Légion d'honneur and croix de guerre upon his soldiers. A decoration for Sarrail's subordinate, General Leblois, was held up for four months together with all decorations for the two divisions which Leblois commanded. In this respect Sarrail was reduced to the status of an army commander on the western front.⁽¹⁾ Then in July 1916, in the middle of the hot season, Joffre refused the sun-hats which Sarrail had had the temerity to request for his soldiers, who were being decimated by sun-stroke. Joffre felt obliged to remind his subordinate that the conquest of North Africa had been accomplished without the aid of such luxuries.⁽²⁾

In fact General Leblois became the scapegoat through whom Chantilly persecuted Sarrail himself.⁽³⁾ When both Gallieni and Briand pressed Joffre to go ahead with Leblois' decoration, the generalissimo resisted on the somewhat improbable grounds that Leblois' brother subsidised Clemenceau's Homme Enchaîné and that Leblois himself supplied that newspaper with confidential information.⁽⁴⁾ Paul Painlevé steadfastly resisted the efforts of Sarrail's enemies in the Council of Ministers to recall Leblois and

(1) Note by Painlevé on the application of the decree of 2/12/15, November 1916, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(2) Coblents: op. cit., p 171. When Abrami revealed this episode to a secret session of the Chamber of Deputies there was, understandably, considerable uproar and repeated cries of "who answered thus?", 29/11/16, C 7648.

(3) It is worth noting that Leblois had been relieved of his command on the Western Front in the spring of 1915 on the request of General de Langle de Cary on the grounds of the lack of energy shown in his attacks and the gloomy nature of his forecasts. (Undated note on the Armée d'Orient, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040.)

(4) Louis Leblois to Clemenceau 5/2/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 53.

extracted a promise from Briand that Leblois would be promoted.⁽¹⁾ "M. Painlevé prouva par des témoignages décisifs que ce général n'avait pas cessé de montrer la plus grande activité et que son endurance était notoire".⁽²⁾ But although Leblois' decoration was reluctantly conceded by Joffre, the general continued to be the victim of a hostile campaign on the part of the High Command. Even after Sarrail's successful offensive of 1916, Joffre telegraphed to Sarrail that young and active leaders were needed to follow up this victory and that Leblois, inert and exhausted, was no longer up to the command with which he was entrusted.⁽³⁾ On the basis of a report by General Cordonnier, the Grand Quartier Général castigated Leblois with inertia, incompetence and softness.⁽⁴⁾ Sarrail, however, continued to stand up for his subordinate and congratulated the troops under his command "des succès remportés sous l'énergique impulsion du Général Leblois".⁽⁵⁾ Joffre, though, was not to be thwarted and, despite Painlevé's unceasing efforts, Leblois was removed from the provisional command of the French contingent at Salonica, which he had exercised since the disgrace of General Cordonnier.⁽⁶⁾ It was rumoured that de Castelnau would have resigned if Leblois had not been removed.⁽⁷⁾ But with Joffre himself excluded from power and consoled only with the regalia of a marshal, Sarrail returned to the defence of his favourite and secured the approval of the Council of Ministers for a plan whereby Leblois was to be placed with vaguely defined powers directly under himself.⁽⁸⁾ Moreover when Painlevé arrived at the rue St. Dominique Leblois was given the task of reporting on the Armée d'Orient and its requirements in terms of men and munitions. His report, completed in May 1917, implied that the French government had in no way facilitated Sarrail's mission, which the general had been obliged to carry out to the best of his ability.⁽⁹⁾ As a reward for his loyalty, more marked perhaps than his military prowess, Leblois was then named by Painlevé as Président du Conseil Supérieur des Colonies.⁽¹⁰⁾

(1) Painlevé to Sarrail 8/1/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(2) Undated confidential note on the services of General Leblois during the war, *ibid*, 313 AP 109.

(3) Joffre to Sarrail No. 4036-7, 11/10/16, 16N 3016.

(4) Conclusion à tirer du rapport du Général Cordonnier 10/11/16, 16N 3058.

(5) Derougemont to Joffre No. 78, 22/11/16, 16N 3144.

(6) Painlevé to Sarrail 2/12/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(7) Louis Leblois to M. Prévost 3/12/16, *ibid*, 313 AP 109.

(8) Decrais to Sarrail No. 115, 18/3/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(9) Report by Leblois 10/5/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 209.

(10) Decrais to Sarrail No. 291, 27/6/17, *ibid*, 6N 200.

Joffre's regulations were obvious affronts to Sarrail's dignity and prestige, yet they were self evidently in the nature of pin-pricks which, though irritating, did not materially affect his authority and the strength of his command. It was not long, however, before Sarrail realised that the control of Chantilly would impinge upon more important matters - and in particular upon his capacity to wage a military campaign in the Balkans. In the middle of January 1916 Sarrail appealed for two further French divisions to be sent immediately to Salonica as reinforcements, pointing out that if earlier requests had received satisfaction he might have been successful in the original aim of the expedition and saved the Serbian army from destruction. (1) On the same day, however, Joffre telegraphed to Salonica to say that he regarded existing forces there as sufficient and requesting Sarrail to look upon this declaration as definitive. (2) Joffre's liaison officer at the Ministry of War noted that Sarrail's request was cogently argued, but he feared from the reactions he had heard at the Grand Quartier Général that Chantilly's response would be something less than benevolent. (3) From Sarrail's headquarters Abrami stressed that the general would only demand such forces as were strictly necessary for his needs, (4) but Joffre was as yet too powerful to brook any ministerial interference and, in response to governmental suggestions that certain reinforcements should be accorded to Sarrail, he haughtily reminded Gallieni that the apportioning of the French armed forces between the various theatres of war was uniquely the prerogative of the commander-in-chief. (5)

As was usual when Joffre resisted the French government's attempts to take men from the Western Front, Paris looked to London to supply the necessary forces. But Joffre, still the pre-eminent 'westerner', approached Robertson with such an evident lack of enthusiasm for the project, now put forward by the French government of increasing the Salonica force by 100,000 men, that the British military chief concluded that Joffre himself had no faith in it. He found that Joffre "is really rather tiresome in this matter because he knows that the operations would be foolish and useless, yet apparently will not so tell his government openly". (6) By the time the question came

(1) Sarrail to Joffre No. 927/2, 17/1/16, 16 N 3137; 5N 147.

(2) Joffre to Sarrail No. 606, 17/1/16, 16N 3137; Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, p 34.

(3) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 231.

(4) Note by Abrami 4/1/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(5) Joffre to Gallieni No. 12623, 22/1/16, 5N 147; A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1036.

(6) Robertson to Haig 17/2/16, Robertson MSS, 1/22/22.

before the British War Committee Robertson was able to tell his colleagues that Joffre was relieved at Robertson's opposition to an extension of operations in the Balkans, since he himself did not approve of the project but was afraid to say so.⁽¹⁾ By the beginning of March Robertson was convinced that Joffre really wanted Salonica to be evacuated but could not admit to this since he was in the hands of the politicians. "The whole thing," Robertson dejectedly concluded, "is a French political rant".⁽²⁾

Nonetheless in April 1916 Sarrail, impatient at his own enforced inactivity affirmed that he considered an offensive, if properly prepared and supplied, to be both possible and desirable.⁽³⁾ But his plan of operations, as presented to Joffre, was criticised by the latter since it was constructed upon the premise of the provision of reinforcements which Joffre was not prepared to countenance.⁽⁴⁾ Sarrail's assertion that a war of movement was possible only on the Balkan front caused quite a stir at Chantilly, which replied to the general's plans in no uncertain terms. Herbillon could not fully understand this reaction since Sarrail's proposals, granted reinforcements, seemed feasible.⁽⁵⁾ Not surprisingly Joffre and de Castelnau vigorously resisted the attempts of Ribot and Bourgeois to secure additional forces for Sarrail, arguing that it was impossible to denude the French front any further.⁽⁶⁾ Yet Joffre allowed his nominal support to be given to a request by the French government that, with a view to offensive operations, two English divisions in Egypt earmarked for the French front should be sent instead to Salonica.⁽⁷⁾ Paul Cambon reflected on Joffre's lack of resolve and weakness of character in allowing it to be said that the government and High Command were in agreement on this issue. To make matters worse Sarrail was an incompetent general who did not want to take any risks, but preferred to play "the eternal game of the politicians", complaining about everyone else and shifting responsibility on to others. Cambon then discovered, however, that at the same time as the official request was being made in London, General Pellé had sent over an officer from Chantilly to the English G.H.Q. to inform

(1) War Committee 22/2/16, CAB 42/9/3.

(2) Robertson to Murray 6/3/16, Robertson MSS, 1/32/9.

(3) Sarrail to Joffre 7/4/16, 16N 3136.

(4) Joffre to Sarrail No. 9476-7, 6/5/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1036.

(5) Herbillon; op. cit., Vol. 1, p 269.

(6) Poincaré; op. cit., Vol. 8, p 208.

(7) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 15/5/16, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1; Briand to P. Cambon 12/5/16, No. 1585-8, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1036.

the British authorities that in fact the request emanated solely from the French government and had not got the support of the military.⁽¹⁾ As Cambon correctly anticipated this was enough to cut short any possibility that the English might accede to the French demand: "Je te répète qu'à Chantilly on est opposé à l'envoi des deux divisions anglaises du Caire à Salonique et qu'ici on le sait - alors rien à faire".⁽²⁾ He had, nevertheless, to go through the charade of presenting and repeating Briand's requests to the English government, without feeling able to tell the French premier what he knew of Joffre's real attitude, nor that this attitude was known to the English.⁽³⁾ Briand appears to have been the only person unaware of the futility of the exercise for in the English War Committee on 17 May the Director of Military Operations stated his belief that Joffre was not at all keen about the proposal, but appeared as if he had got to make the best of it.⁽⁴⁾ Lord Crewe found the whole thing something of a bore, since military opinion on both sides of the Channel was against the plan, and concluded that it derived "from General Sarrail plus French politics".⁽⁵⁾ Nonetheless the French government insisted that Joffre should conform his attitude with that of the ministry. The generalissimo agreed reluctantly to do so, but still protested that he would prefer to see Sarrail made governor of Indo-China!⁽⁶⁾ At the Downing Street Conference in June, therefore, Joffre warned Douglas Haig in private conversation that the continued resistance of the British government to the idea of an offensive would cause the fall of Briand's government and gave Haig the impression of giving his support to it so as to avoid this political crisis.⁽⁷⁾

(1) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 17/5/16, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1; c.f. Note by Painlevé on Decree of 2/12/15 (November 1916) - "Tandis que le gouvernement français fait des efforts désespérés pour obtenir des alliés des renforts en Macédoine, le G.Q.G. fait connaître son avis technique qui est opposé à celui qu'il donne comme organe gouvernemental". Painlevé MSS 313 AP 110.

(2) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 18/5/16, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(3) Cambon to Briand No. 585, 15/5/16, and No. 504 (letter), 19/5/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1037.

(4) War Committee 17/5/16, CAB 42/14/1.

(5) Crewe to Bertie 3/6/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/168/Pr/16/30.

(6) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, p 224.

(7) Blake: op. cit., p 148. c.f. the observation of Lloyd George: War Memoirs, Vol. 2, pp 535-6: "But although on this occasion he [Joffre] spoke with all the outward visible manifestations of earnestness and sincerity ... it was difficult to believe that he was convinced by his own eloquence ... It was one of the most cynical performances I have ever listened to".

Joffre thus pursued a double game of supporting the Salonica Campaign in so far as this was necessary for governmental stability, while continuing to be chesssparing in the supplies which he was actually prepared to send to Sarrail's army. It would be mistaken to search too deeply for Joffre's motivation. His guiding principle was always one of personal survival. In this context the words of Liddell Hart are perhaps instructive: "Reluctant to believe that a man in so great a position could be as simple as he appeared, that his superhuman calm could come from insensibility, his silence from ignorance, even the allied leaders who met him at close quarters felt there must be unplumbed depths in the apparent shallows."⁽¹⁾ Sarrail's friends attributed to the generalissimo the legend which was circulating in Paris by the early summer that Sarrail was being unnecessarily inactive since he had an army of half a million fighting men, when the true figure of actual combattants was in fact much lower. From Salonica headquarters Captain Mathieu thought he could discern a carefully laid plot against Sarrail, firstly to place him in a situation where, deprived of material, he would inevitably suffer a military disaster, and secondly to present him as being in revolt against the policies of the government.⁽²⁾ Of the interests of the country, he concluded, the Grand Quartier Général could not give a damn - the only important thing was to destroy Sarrail.⁽³⁾ Not surprisingly, therefore, Sarrail's request for extra munitions in July met with a blank refusal from Chantilly.⁽⁴⁾ The Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission heard that the Armée d'Orient was in no position to make a serious military effort - it had neither the troops nor the equipment to play a useful role and the country must be so informed.⁽⁵⁾ The uncompromising attitude of Chantilly had to be modified as the prospect of a major offensive to be synchronised with the intervention of Roumania became accepted policy, but from Paris Lord Escher remarked on the malicious interest with which Sarrail was being watched and suggested that a series of slight checks would lead to his immediate supersession. "I am not sure", he concluded, "that a brilliant victory at his hands would be at all welcome in high quarters. He is not only disliked but feared".⁽⁶⁾ Similarly the historian Anlard confided to Poincaré his fear that Chantilly was not falling over itself to ease Sarrail's task in case it thereby gave him the opportunity to secure a victory.⁽⁷⁾ This impression was confirmed by

(1) B. H. L. Hart: op. cit., p 39.

(2) Mathieu to Paix-Séailles 10/5/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 56.

(3) ibid 5/4/16, ibid, 313 AP 109.

(4) Sarrail to Joffre No. 5119, 19/7/16; Joffre to Sarrail No. 5543, 22/7/16, ibid, 313 AP 110.

(5) Meeting, 26/7/16, C 7490.

(6) Escher to Robertson 21/8/16, Robertson MSS 1/21/40.

(7) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, p 223.

Bourret writing to Tardieu when he remarked upon the desolation felt at the Grand Quartier Général when the news of Sarrail's substantial victory at Monastir became known. The patriotic desire to see Sarrail flung into the sea would have to be postponed sine die.⁽¹⁾

Sarrail's independence of action was continually restricted throughout 1916 by a series of liaison officers sent out from France by Joffre. The first of these, Colonel Alexandre, was appointed as early as December 1915,⁽²⁾ but instead of merely executing a diplomatic brief they tended to become "des contrôleurs du général en chef, lequel ignore les rapports qui sont faits sur son commandement au Grand Quartier Général".⁽³⁾ As a means of lessening Sarrail's authority still further Joffre hit upon the idea of appointing a separate commander of the French contingent in the Armée d'Orient, while leaving Sarrail in nominal overall command of the allied forces. Joffre first mooted this suggestion on the return of the de Castelnau mission, but it was not until July 1916, with the imminent prospect of offensive operations, that he managed to secure the approval of the new War Minister, General Roques, for his proposal.⁽⁴⁾ A list of three names was presented to Sarrail for a post which would effectively deprive him of the day to day command of the French forces under his authority,⁽⁵⁾ and although Briand let it be known that Sarrail need not feel himself restricted to Joffre's shortlist⁽⁶⁾ the latter's will prevailed and General Cordonnier left to take up his new post. During the ensuing offensive Cordonnier found Sarrail's strategy unacceptable and repeatedly disobeyed orders. Joffre was irritated by the way in which Sarrail attempted to deprive Cordonnier of all effective command⁽⁷⁾, but Sarrail reported his version of the situation to Joffre and by October was threatening to send Cordonnier back on the first boat to France if he continued to ignore his directives.⁽⁸⁾ On 17 October the French Council of Ministers decided to recall Cordonnier⁽⁹⁾, and Joffre, notifying the decision to Sarrail, urged as Cordonnier's successor General Guillaumat rather than Leblois, who, as one of Sarrail's henchmen, was being favoured by the latter.⁽¹⁰⁾

(1) Bourret to Tardieu 20/11/16, Tardieu MSS, 324 AP 5.

(2) Joffre to Sarrail No. 5363, 10/12/15, 16N 3014.

(3) Report by Meunier-Surceuf 25/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(4) Joffre to Roques No. 19540, 27/7/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.

(5) Joffre to Sarrail No. 6179, 30/7/16, *ibid*.

(6) Boust to Sarrail 31/7/16, *ibid*; Sarrail: *op. cit.*, p 140.

(7) Poincaré: *op. cit.*, Vol. 8, p 321.

(8) Sarrail to Joffre No. 440, 8/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(9) Decrais to Sarrail 17/10/16, *ibid*; Roques to Joffre 17/10/16, 5 N 110.

(10) Joffre to Sarrail No. 4915, 18/10/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1039.

Meanwhile one of Joffre's train of liaison officers had reported that in the Sarrail-Cordonnier dispute the latter was not wholly in the wrong and that the situation called for a full-scale enquiry which would probably lead to a substantial reorganisation of the command at Salonica. (1) Sarrail's method of command in the offensive had been gravely at fault and he was found wanting in the qualities of leadership. Similar conclusions were reached at Chantilly following an examination of Cordonnier's own version of the wrangle with Sarrail. (2) As will emerge later, however, Joffre was no longer strong enough to enforce his will and, when Sarrail flatly refused the appointment of Guillaumat as Cordonnier's successor, Joffre could not but accept the situation. Sarrail's liaison officer at Chantilly encouraged him to think that he had considerable latitude in the choice of a replacement with the result that the command was left for the time being in the hands of Sarrail's crony, Leblois, whom the Grand Quartier Général had repeatedly condemned as inept. (3)

Joffre's contempt for Sarrail's military prowess and suspicion of his penchant for political intrigue came in the course of 1916 to be shared at the Quai d'Orsay. Here Briand had taken on as his chief collaborator and chef de cabinet Philippe Berthelot so as to circumvent the authority of Jules Cambon, whom public opinion and the insistence of the President of the Republic had imposed upon him in the extraordinary position of Secretary General. (4) Briand's confidence in Berthelot was complete and he so unswervingly followed his advice that by May 1916 Cambon was confiding to the English ambassador that he was disgusted with his own position, since Briand never consulted him. (5) In April Briand reprimanded Sarrail for writing privately to the Prince Regent of Serbia and expressing personal views on the use of the Serbian army and also criticised opinions which he claimed were being bandied about in Sarrail's entourage of sympathy towards the Bulgarian cause. (6) Sarrail denied that there was any foundation in these

(1) Requin to Joffre No. 42, 15/10/16, 16N 3137; 16N 3058.

(2) Conclusions à tirer du rapport du Général Cordonnier 10/11/16, 16N 3058; 16N 3144.

(3) Decrais to Sarrail, 19/10/16, 21/10/16, and 22/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(4) A. Ferry: op. cit., p 128.

(5) Bertie to Grey 12/5/16, Lloyd George MSS, D 19/7/13. For an interesting assessment of the extent of Berthelot's power and influence at a rather later date see the essay by R. D. Challener: "The French Foreign Office: The Era of Philippe Berthelot" in G. A. Craig and F. Gilbert (eds.): The Diplomats (1953).

(6) Briand to Guillemin No. 460, 7/4/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1036; Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 275; Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, p 128.

accusations. (1) Then in May the radical deputy Abrami became convinced that Briand was creating difficulties for Sarrail over the question of Zionist sympathies among the general's subordinate officers. (2) Returning from the funeral of General Gallieni Berthelot allowed a rare outburst to break his usually passive exterior when he complained bitterly that Sarrail ignored the orders which he received and that he was evidently in revolt against the French government. (3) At the War Ministry Herbillon sensed that Briand, annoyed at Sarrail's continual whims and complaints, was beginning to lose his patience. (4) For political reasons, however, it was not expedient for Briand to be as openly hostile to Sarrail as was Joffre. If he were to dispose of the Salonica commander it would have to be because the latter had manifestly shown himself not to be up to the task before him and not because he had been systematically starved by the government of the forces necessary to prove his military worth. Paul Cambon therefore noticed a marked difference of tactics between Joffre and Briand in their approach to the Salonica question, although they were, he considered, in basic agreement by the autumn of 1916 about Sarrail's worth and pursuing essentially the same aim. Joffre believed that Sarrail, being militarily incompetent, would not be any more successful if reinforced with half a million men, but Briand confided to Cambon's military attaché that he wanted to give Sarrail everything he asked for so that the general would be without an excuse if his operations floundered, and then Briand would be able to get rid of him. The French premier, therefore, continued to press the English government for men and more men for Salonica to compensate for the forces which Joffre so systematically declined to send. (5) More subtle Briand's approach may have been, but the fact remains that by the autumn of 1916 Sarrail had forfeited the confidence of both the military and political directors of French policy. He was now to become increasingly dependent for his maintenance in his command on the support of men whose influence in the construction of governmental policy was at best secondary. Consequently Joffre found himself starved of information by Sarrail as to the progress of operations carried out by the Armée d'Orient. (6)

(1) Sarrail to Painlevé 2/4/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(2) Note by Abrami 11/5/16, *ibid*, 313 AP 109.

(3) Undated private note, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(4) Herbillon: *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p 276.

(5) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 21/10/16, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(6) Joffre to Sarrail No. 8341, 24/8/16, 16N 3136.

Joffre's continued vendetta against Sarrail was in the long term subjected to a primary desire to replace him. Failing some obviously grave misdemeanour this could only be done if an inspector of high rank were to report that Sarrail was unfit to exercise his command. With this end in view, therefore, Joffre telephoned on the evening of 24 August to the President of the Republic to inform him that he proposed to raise the following day the question of sending out General de Castelnau on a second mission to Salonica with written authority from the government to relieve Sarrail of his command if he considered this necessary.⁽¹⁾ De Castelnau's instructions, it may be surmised, would have left little scope for any other conclusions being reached as a result of his mission. Joffre argued that it was no longer possible to know what was going on at Salonica. Sarrail's comptes-rendu gave no indication of the progress of military events and what was known of his activities was not such as to inspire any great confidence. Joffre was perhaps ill-advised to forewarn Poincaré of his proposal since the President of the Republic seems to have been strongly under the influence of Sarrail's political associates. Bertie noted that Poincaré had been elected by a combination of the moderate parties with the object of preventing the election of M. Pams, a rich cigarette paper maker, who was supposed to have extreme political views. The result had been very disappointing to Poincaré's supporters of that time for, from fear of disclosures by the rue de Valois faction about the past associations of his wife, he had leant much on and favoured the Radical-Socialists.⁽²⁾ Joffre also ensured that Briand would know in advance of his planned démarche.⁽³⁾ The Council of Ministers decided, however, that de Castelnau's mission should be delayed and that he should not have the right to change the command in the Balkans without first referring back to Paris. All that happened was that Roques gave his backing to Joffre's request for more detailed information from Sarrail.⁽⁴⁾

Several days later at a meeting of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale, Joffre returned to the attack and read out a list of Sarrail's alleged deficiencies - an inadequate garrison at Florina, recently captured

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- (1) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, p 324.
- (2) Bertie to Grey 21/2/17, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/169/Pr/17/8; ibid 9/11/16, ibid, F.O. 800/168/Pr/16/83. Bertie's analysis ignored some of the subtleties surrounding Poincaré's election to the Presidency.
- (3) Pellé to Berthelot 24/8/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 259.
- (4) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, pp 324-5; Joffre to Sarrail, No. 8619, 27/8/16, 16N 3136; Roques to Joffre, No. 5689, 26/8/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.

by the Bulgarians, disobedience in the face of Joffre's command to take the offensive on 20 August, haggling over orders, misunderstandings with France's allies, constant complaints about the insufficiency of troops and supplies.⁽¹⁾ Once again Joffre demanded that de Castelnau should be sent out on an inspection trip, but the Council being only a consultative body could not take a decision on this point. Joffre though was not to be thwarted and, having discussed the matter on a train journey with Poincaré,⁽²⁾ sent Colonel Herbillon on the night of 16 October with a letter for Briand complaining that Sarrail did not act in accordance with his directives, that his actions were ineffective and that it was absolutely imperative to send out an inspector with full powers. This renewed sally by Joffre occurred at the height of Sarrail's quarrel with Cordonnier. Herbillon reflected privately upon the justice of Joffre's accusations and wondered whether Sarrail had ever been given the equipment necessary to act effectively.⁽³⁾ A similar communication was made to War Minister Roques in which Joffre argued that he would be failing in his duty before the government if he continued to leave the Armée d'Orient under the untrammelled command of General Sarrail.⁽⁴⁾ Subsequent to the meeting of the Council of Ministers on the following day, however, Roques curtly informed Joffre that not only would Cordonnier rather than Sarrail be relieved, but that a mission of inspection could only be regarded as an infringement of General Sarrail's authority and as such could not be countenanced by the government.⁽⁵⁾ Within a few days, however, the government had appointed Roques himself to carry out an inspection of the Armée d'Orient and its command, but the origins of this decision were such that the chances of this prompting a conclusion such as Joffre desired in terms of the removal of Sarrail were negligible. Joffre had in fact already lost his long struggle with Sarrail. From now on it would be the generalissimo himself, reeling under a series of setbacks on the western front, whose position was threatened. General Sarrail, for the time being at least, was secure.

It must be evident that if Sarrail had enemies he must also have had friends. Sarrail's parliamentary backing in the group contemptuously referred to as the rue de Valois gang has already been examined,⁽⁶⁾ but he would in all

(1) King: *op. cit.*, pp 133-4; G.Q.G. Note 8/9/16, 16N 3057.

(2) Poincaré: *op. cit.*, Vol. 9, p 11.

(3) Herbillon: *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p 349.

(4) Joffre to Roques No. 13605, 16/10/16, 5N 110; A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1039.

(5) Roques to Joffre 17/10/16, *ibid.*

(6) See above, pp 21-2.

probability not have been able to surmount the combined assaults of Joffre and Briand, but for the assistance of certain powerful individuals. Sarrail seems to have corresponded directly with many parliamentary sympathisers, including Caillaux⁽¹⁾ and Franklin Bouillon⁽²⁾, while inside the French Cabinet he could count on the support of Malvy, Léon Bourgeois and Painlevé⁽³⁾. Malvy, the Minister of the Interior, is usually regarded as the missing link between Caillaux's parliamentary following and the influence exercised by the Radical-Socialist party in the direction of the government. Léon Bourgeois was one of the elder statesmen introduced by Briand to bolster up his ministry and held no departmental office. But the most important of the three was unquestionably Paul Painlevé. This normally retiring, extremely distinguished mathematician could be roused to outbursts of great emotion in his defence of General Sarrail.⁽⁴⁾ To understand his near fanaticism in this matter one must make a conscious effort to place oneself in the milieu of France during the Great War. Comparatively near to the present day this may be, but it was nearer still to the very foundation of the Third Republic and there was still missing in France a basic consensus as to the correct form of the body politic such as perhaps exists today. There existed, therefore, in left-wing circles in wartime France a constant fear that a military victory might prove the occasion of a right-wing, possible clerical, coup d'état by the victorious generals, which would effectively sound the death-knell of the Republican institution.⁽⁵⁾ It was as easy to associate the army with the persecution of Dreyfus and the threat of Boulanger as it was with the defence of the patrie. Relatively early on in the war Joffre became acquainted with the fears held by General Sarrail. "Yes", Sarrail told a deputy, "we are headed straight for a dictatorship. When the Germans give in General Joffre will be promoted Marshal and will hand over the reins to General Foch. That means the return of imperialism and the end of the

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- (1) Circumstantial evidence in the Sarrail-Decrais correspondence, 6N 200; the majority of Caillaux's papers were destroyed on the orders of his secretary in 1954 and what is left remains closed. (Information provided by the Service des Archives Privées, Archives Nationales).
- (2) Howell to Robertson 16/1/16, Howell MSS IV/c/2/197.
- (3) Bertie: Diary, Vol. 2, p 55; Bertie to Grey 12/11/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/168/Pr/16/86. Callieni who was not himself among the ministers closely aligned to Sarrail [M-A. Leblond: op. cit., p 62] named Painlevé, Doumergue and Clémentel as prepared to defend the general "quoi qu'il fasse". [ibid, p 199]. But the inclusion of Doumergue in this group would not appear to be justified [see below p 163].
- (4) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 20/3/17, Paul Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 153.
- (5) c.f. L. Villari: The Macedonian Campaign (1922), p 174.

Republic. You are going to Paris for the opening of parliament. You must remain there, do not come back. It is essential for the Chamber to remain in session and to see that no coup d'état takes place..."⁽¹⁾ The suspicion of the political loyalty of the top military leaders was shared by no one outside a small group of parliamentarians, a few dozen senators and deputies at the most. Public opinion was indeed far from sharing their fears. The victor of the Marne was naturally one of the most popular men in France.⁽²⁾ But for a man like Painlevé Sarrail had a crucial importance as a general whose adherence to the principle of republicanism was as ardent as his own.⁽³⁾ As Lloyd George was later to be reminded, "Sarrail stands here... for the Republican idea."⁽⁴⁾ In his own work 'Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain' Painlevé takes great credit for the appointment during his tenure of the war ministry in 1917 of two generals who were to prove among the leading architects of the military victory of 1918,⁽⁵⁾ and J. C. King in his study of politico-military relations in wartime France writes of the 'love feast' between Painlevé and Pétain.⁽⁶⁾ In more intimate circles, however, Painlevé confided that he had nominated Pétain because he was the least treacherous of the generals - "le moins traître des généraux".⁽⁷⁾ Painlevé's suspicion of the military was in fact extreme and one longs sometimes for an unwritten sequel to his own work, entitled perhaps 'Comment j'ai soutenu Sarrail.'⁽⁸⁾

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- (1) Jeffre: Memoirs, Vol. 2, p 373 (Foch to Jeffre 3/12/14).
- (2) La Gorce: op. cit., p 107.
- (3) Before entering parliament Painlevé had fought tirelessly for a revision of the judgement on Captain Dreyfus (Morreix: Nivelle et Painlevé, (1919) p 43).
- (4) H. Norman to Lloyd George 7/6/17, Lloyd George MSS F 41/6/2.
- (5) P. Painlevé: Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain, (1923), pp 126-7.
- (6) King; op. cit., p 191.
- (7) Conversation with M. Jean Painlevé 8/5/73.
- (8) Reverse suspicions of the intentions of the left-wing military were also not lacking: "Leur [the radical socialists'] seule préoccupation à l'heure actuelle est d'être au pouvoir pour le jour des élections et de s'imposer au pays par fas et nefas. Ils seraient capables, comme les Conventionnels à leur déclin de se réserver dans la prochaine chambre les deux tiers des sièges. Je les crois capables de tout, même d'un 18 Fructidor dont Sarrail serait l'exécuteur". [P. Cambon to X. Charmes 28/3/17, P. Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 158]. See also P. Cambon to J. Cambon 21/10/16, Jules Cambon MSS Vol. 1: "Ce Sarrail est l'homme du parti radical socialiste qui veut quoiqu'il arrive conserver le pouvoir et qui rêve d'un 18 Fructidor".

To be effective in his support of the Republican general Painlevé needed adequate channels of communication with him. A direct correspondence existed between the two men, but because of the military censor matters of extreme delicacy could only be included in this if the letters could be entrusted to an intermediary travelling between Paris and Salonica. Sarrail had, after all, been forbidden to correspond with the government except through Joffre.⁽¹⁾ To circumvent the censor, therefore, Painlevé, in need of a safer method of correspondence, secured the appointment to Sarrail's headquarters staff of Paul Fleuret, a municipal councillor in the fifth arrondissement of Paris, which Painlevé represented in the Chamber.⁽²⁾ Fleuret then proceeded, acting as Sarrail's mouthpiece, to correspond in code, but through the normal postal service, with Painlevé's trusted private secretary, Jean Bourguignon. Painlevé and Sarrail were thus able, at one remove, to maintain a regular interflow of information and ideas. "Grâce au code secret que nous avons établi, Bourguignon et moi, il est très facile de dérouter la censure postale et de dire beaucoup de choses".⁽³⁾ Painlevé was also kept up to date on events on the Balkan front through frequent visits from Louis Leblois, brother of Sarrail's subordinate general and right-hand man. The arrival of Leblois at the Painlevé household immediately created gloom for Painlevé's young son, who realized that because his father would be long engaged in intimate conversation dinner would be much delayed that evening.⁽⁴⁾

Sarrail greeted Painlevé's appointment to Briand's ministry in October 1915 with great enthusiasm - for France, for the Republic and for the Armée d'Orient, and pointed out that his great need was for reinforcements which he trusted Painlevé would help to secure.⁽⁵⁾ But it was not long before Sarrail was complaining to Painlevé that Joffre seemed to have set his face against sending any more men to the Balkan front.⁽⁶⁾ Painlevé advised Sarrail to do his best to ignore the irritations and pinpricks with which Joffre constantly complicated his life and Sarrail said that he would follow this advice.⁽⁷⁾ Painlevé's first major success for Sarrail was in securing for

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- (1) Joffre to Sarrail, No. 606, 17/1/16, 16N 3136.
 - (2) Painlevé to Sarrail 18/2/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.
 - (3) Fleuret to Painlevé 8/10/16, ibid, 313 AP 109.
 - (4) Conversation with M. Jean Painlevé, 8/5/73.
 - (5) Sarrail to Painlevé 12/11/15, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.
 - (6) ibid 21/11/15, ibid.
 - (7) ibid 19/1/16, ibid.

the general overall command of the allied forces at Salonica in January 1916. This, he assured Sarrail, had involved a day long struggle with Joffre, but the latter had given way and, having given way once, he would, Painlevé argued, be obliged to give way again and again. Sarrail should not, therefore, hesitate to let Painlevé know his full needs in men and munitions. The general had friends in the government who would not let anyone lay a finger on him on any pretext. Sarrail's future achievements would, Painlevé assured him, glorify his position still further. (1)

Painlevé seems to have been a constant thorn in Joffre's side and, as early as February 1916, General Pellé was requesting that Painlevé should be restrained from presenting plans of operations to the Council of Ministers, without Joffre having prior knowledge of them. (2) Later that month

Painlevé was able to tell Sarrail that the latter's position was now excellent and that Chantilly was losing its war of attrition against Sarrail and was having to retreat to lick its wounds. (3) But in April Painlevé was still reporting daily battles to get Sarrail properly reinforced. (4) In

July Painlevé and Bourgeois launched an attack to recover for Sarrail his lost right to decorate and promote his own officers. Whatever happened, Sarrail was not to despair. His friends retained confidence in him and the Armée d'Orient as the only combination likely in the foreseeable future to make an impact on the otherwise futile stalemate of the war. Sarrail must concentrate on the task before him despite the difficulties with which he was surrounded. Painlevé concluded with passion: "Votre heure viendra et elle sera belle, plus belle et plus grande que votre page de Verdun". (5)

Later that month Painlevé secured satisfaction on the question of decorations and was also able to forewarn Sarrail of the likelihood of a separate commander being appointed for the French contingent in the allied forces. He trusted that matters would turn out for the best and that Sarrail would be able to play a great role in spite of the petty persecutions to which he was subjected. (6)

Not all French ministers, even those of a left of centre persuasion, shared Painlevé's conviction that Sarrail was harrassed because of his

(1) Painlevé to Sarrail 8/1/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(2) Pellé to 'M. le Ministre' 6/2/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 982.

(3) Painlevé to Sarrail 18/2/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(4) *ibid* 14/4/16, *ibid*.

(5) *ibid* 6/7/16, *ibid*.

(6) *ibid* 27/7/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

political views and at a meeting of the Cabinet on 27 August, when Sarrail's friends objected that it would not be acceptable to replace the only truly republican general, the Radical Socialist Gaston Doumergue⁽¹⁾ felt obliged to remind his colleagues that it was precisely because Sarrail was a republican that he had a command at all. His politics had served rather than hindered him. Any other general in his place would have been relieved a long time before.⁽²⁾ Le Roy Lewis reported to Lloyd George that opinion in the French cabinet was becoming increasingly heated. For three weeks Sarrail had sent hardly any communications at all to the Grand Quartier Général and the French authorities were being kept in ignorance of what was going on at Salonica. Lewis thought that if Sarrail only gave a reasonable pretext he would be relieved of his functions.⁽³⁾ He found it strange that Sarrail was being persistently maintained by Painlevé, a moderate republican, yet effectively attacked by Doumergue, one of the leaders of the rue de Valois faction. Lord Bertie, however, attributed this paradox to the fact that Doumergue, in his contempt for Sarrail, displayed a measure of common sense.⁽⁴⁾

Painlevé's gravest crisis came with Joffre's attempts to send out de Castelnau on a mission of inspection. Bertie reported that Joffre's first proposal of 25 August had been thwarted when Painlevé objected to de Castelnau as a clerical. General Gouraud had then been suggested but he was considerably junior to Sarrail. Bertie understood that the compromise arrived at was that Gouraud should be kept in reserve for use if Sarrail did not hurry up his offensive. Briand told Bertie on 5 September that Sarrail would be recalled if he did not take the offensive in a matter of days.⁽⁵⁾ While Sarrail stalled, Chantilly fumed and proclaimed that the Armée d'Orient had not kept the engagements made in its name vis à vis Roumania: "elle a failli à sa mission".⁽⁶⁾ Joffre called anxiously for information regarding Sarrail's intentions,⁽⁷⁾ but Bertie heard that nothing could be extracted from the general as to what he had done, was doing and meant to do.⁽⁸⁾ But

(1) Minister for the Colonies.

(2) Mermeix: Joffre p 207; Bertie: Diary, Vol. 2, pp 21-2.

(3) Le Roy Lewis to Lloyd George 12/9/16, Lloyd George MSS E 3/14/10.

(4) Bertie to Hardinge 3/9/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/168/Pr/16/70.

(5) *ibid* 7/9/16, *ibid* 800/172/Gx/16/24; Lloyd George MSS, E 3/14/9.

(6) Grand Quartier Général T.O.E. Note 8/9/16; A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.

(7) Joffre to Sarrail No. 9997-S, 11/9/16, 5N 148.

(8) Bertie: Diary, Vol. 2, p 27.

by 16 September Sarrail's opening of offensive operations had, Painlevé believed, removed all danger to the general for the time being. The minister sent out Fleurot in confidence with a detailed account of the way in which he had undermined Joffre's carefully laid plans.⁽¹⁾ Fleurot conveyed Sarrail's thanks to Painlevé for everything the minister had done for the general and said that Sarrail was going to follow Painlevé's advice and attempt to effect a rapprochement with the President of the Republic.⁽²⁾ Painlevé, perhaps aware of the grip which the Radical Socialists had over Poincaré, saw in the latter a useful lever against the intrigues of Briand and Joffre. Fleurot was also able to report that Sarrail was furious with General Cordonnier and that the latter was eulogising General Gouraud, whom he obviously saw as a more suitable commander of the Armée d'Orient.⁽³⁾

Painlevé's greatest service for Sarrail remained, however, still to be performed. As has been seen,⁽⁴⁾ Joffre renewed his attempts to secure approval for a de Castelnau mission in the course of October 1916. On 28 of the month Bourguignon was able to tell Fleurot how Painlevé had successfully parried this latest and most dangerous manoeuvre by the generalissimo. In the face of Joffre's insistence on de Castelnau and of a series of allied complaints against Sarrail, prompted, Bourguignon suspected, by Briand and Berthelot, Painlevé secured acceptance by the French Cabinet of the principle that the question of inspection was the preserve of the government and not of the High Command. The mission of General Roques was, therefore, the brainchild of Painlevé, and Bourguignon reported that Joffre and de Castelnau were furious at the minister's success. Roques should therefore be greeted by Sarrail with confidence, good humour and in a sentiment of genuine sympathy.⁽⁵⁾ Colonel Herbillon, Joffre's liaison officer at the Ministry of War, thought that the impartiality of General Roques was such as to remove all objections to his appointment,⁽⁶⁾ but the enthusiasm with which Painlevé and the Sarrail faction viewed his mission was so great that the conclusion is inescapable that Roques, under the influence of Painlevé, was as certain

(1) Painlevé to Sarrail 16/9/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(2) Fleurot to Painlevé 26/9/16, *ibid* 313 AP 109.

(3) Fleurot to Bourguignon 28/9/16, *ibid*.

(4) See above p 158.

(5) Bourguignon to Fleurot 28/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109; Painlevé to Sarrail 28/10/16, *ibid*, 313 AP 110; Suarez: *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p 463.

(6) Herbillon: *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p 353.

to report favourably upon Sarrail as de Castelnau would have been to recommend his recall.⁽¹⁾ Spirits at Chantilly were depressed in the conviction that Roques was bound to be deceived by Sarrail's cunning.⁽²⁾ Before setting out for Salonica on 28 October Roques confided to Poincaré his concern at the intrigues against Sarrail which he had discerned at Chantilly.⁽³⁾

Painlevé instructed Sarrail to furnish Roques with precise and minute details of the true strength of the Armée d'Orient in order to demonstrate to the Minister of War the systematic starvation which Chantilly had inflicted upon the Balkan front.⁽⁴⁾ Fleurot reported that Sarrail was very happy at the prospect of the ministerial visit⁽⁵⁾, and Sarrail wrote personally to Painlevé to say that he received Roques with a sympathy and complete confidence which went back to the days when both men had worked together at the ministry of war.⁽⁶⁾ Painlevé informed Lloyd George on 6 November, with something less than total frankness, that he had full confidence in the impartiality of General Roques, that he had no idea what Roques' first impressions were in Salonica and that he himself would be bound by any report which the General brought back to Paris.⁽⁷⁾ Meanwhile Joffre's own liaison officer in Salonica had returned to France and reported to Poincaré, Briand and Joffre that in his view the direction of operations from Salonica could only improve granted a radical transformation of the character of General Sarrail. This he considered to be a doubtful possibility.⁽⁸⁾ But this report was quite simply an irrelevancy since Joffre's agents were now acting in a void - their chief had been deprived of effective authority over the Salonica Campaign by the cabinet's decision to send out Roques.⁽⁹⁾ As the Grand Quartier Général was obliged to admit on 6 November, when drawing up a paper on Italian objections to the reinforcement of the Armée d'Orient, Joffre could do nothing about Italian dislike of General Sarrail. The question of the command of the Armée d'Orient was no longer within his jurisdiction.⁽¹⁰⁾

(1) c.f. Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 4, pp 14-15.

(2) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 355.

(3) Poincaré: op.cit., Vol. 9, p 13.

(4) Painlevé to Sarrail 30/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(5) Fleurot to Bourguignon 4/11/16, ibid, 313 AP 109.

(6) Sarrail to Painlevé 5/11/16, ibid, 313 AP 110.

(7) Note by Painlevé of conversation with Lloyd George 6/11/16, ibid, 313 AP 110.

(8) Requin to 'mon colonel' 31/10/16, 16N 3144; Report on the Armée d'Orient 2/11/16, Pellé MSS, 4429.

(9) c.f. Note by Painlevé on decree of 2/12/15, November 1916, Painlevé MSS 313 AP 110.

(10) G.Q.G. note on Italian reinforcements, 6/11/16, 16N 3058.

All that Chantilly could now do was to protest vainly that Sarrail's conduct of operations displayed "une méconnaissance complète de la guerre actuelle", that in view of allied complaints his continued presence at the head of the Salonica command daily became less opportune, and that his plans for future operations seemed merely to be constructed with the aim of justifying the use of a given figure of reinforcements, the number of which he had already fixed. ⁽¹⁾

The government's instructions to General Roques prior to his departure, although signed by Briand, were drawn up at Chantilly. The document read as an indictment of Sarrail's activities although the government continued to stress that Roques was leaving for Salonica simply on a fact finding mission and without 'idées fixes'. ⁽²⁾ Briand also gave Roques his own private instructions, stressing that Sarrail's involvement in Greek politics was unacceptable to the French government. ⁽³⁾ In his memoirs Joffre implies that he only consented to Roques' mission when Briand explained that his appointment would be useful and was the plan which he, Briand, had devised for getting rid of Sarrail. ⁽⁴⁾ If Briand and Joffre really did believe this they were to be grievously disappointed. At any rate Joffre seems to have overstated his capacity to change the course of events by this date.

Immediately upon arrival Roques remarked upon the deficiencies in the supply of the Salonica army and called for immediate reinforcements. ⁽⁵⁾ Two days later he vindicated Sarrail's role in the revolutionary uprising in Ekaterini, although Sarrail's explanation did not satisfy Briand. ⁽⁶⁾ Roques next reported that in view of Sarrail's extended front, the unfilled gaps in the French forces and the need to grant leave to exhausted soldiers, nothing greater than feeble offensive operations could be expected from the Armée d'Orient. ⁽⁷⁾ Roques' suggestion that Sarrail's army needed thirty-six divisions prompted shrieks of anguish at Chantilly ⁽⁸⁾, and the Grand Quartier Général hastily prepared supplementary questions on which Roques should obtain Sarrail's explanations. ⁽⁹⁾ But the exercise was now futile since the

(1) G.Q.G. notes, 25/10/16, 12/11/16, 18/11/16, 16N 3058.

(2) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 355; Briand to Roques 4/11/16, 16N 3144.

(3) Briand to Roques No. 15, 4/11/16, 16N 3144; A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040; ibid, Vol. 287.

(4) Joffre: Memoirs, Vol. 2, p 532.

(5) Roques to War Ministry No. 4, 4/11/16, 5N 152.

(6) Roques to War Ministry No. 8, 6/11/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040; Briand to Roques No. 29, 7/11/16, ibid; 16N 3144.

(7) ibid No. 21, 12/11/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040; 16N 3144.

(8) Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 358.

(9) Projet de questionnaire supplémentaire 10/11/16, 16N 3275.

likely tenor of Roques' report was becoming evident to all. Early hopes, such as that expressed by Robertson to Milne, that Sarrail might be recalled were quickly dispelled.⁽¹⁾ Around 15 November Briand received Roques' report which concluded in favour of the retention of Sarrail at Salonica. Sarrail was doing his best in a difficult situation: "Au point de vue politique, il fait ce qu'il peut pour conformer son attitude à celle du gouvernement, mais la situation complexe et mal définie rend sa tâche difficile".⁽²⁾ The extent to which the conclusion of the report was determined by Painlevé himself is impossible accurately to assess. One would perhaps be erring on the side of excessive caution in suggesting that Roques was an entirely free agent. Joffre's own days were in fact now numbered. Painlevé's success in making Sarrail answerable to Roques rather than an officer of the Grand Quartier Général had effectively destroyed the decree of 2 December 1915, which had placed the Armée d'Orient under Joffre's control. Briand now began to suspect that Joffre had outlived his usefulness and, as the crippling losses in France and Flanders built up, that the Western front too should be removed from his grasp. Since the outbreak of hostilities the direction of the war had been almost completely in the hands of Joffre, cloistered in irresponsible isolation at Chantilly. He had consistently rejected the advice of the government, had demanded the right to pursue his own strategy, and had created what amounted to a second government for France at Chantilly. All of this, irksome though it was to the politicians, might have been tolerated had it only been the prelude to victory. But it had not and the laurels of the 'Saviour of the Marne' were now permanently tarnished. By the end of the year Joffre would have lost all his authority and be left with nothing except the prestigious but empty title of Marshal of France.⁽³⁾

(1) Robertson to Milne 4/11/16, Robertson MSS 1/14/50.

(2) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 4, pp 12-13.

(3) R. M. Watt: Dare Call it Treason (1964), pp 128-9.

France, England and the Development of the Campaign, 1917

As 1917 opened the position of the allied Armées d'Orient based on Salonica appeared almost ludicrous. "A writer of fiction who introduced the political and military complications (of this campaign) would be reproached with disregard of plausibility."⁽¹⁾ As even the Grand Quartier Général was forced to concede, if the military results obtained by the expedition in the course of 1916 had been limited, this was because the military possibilities of the army were themselves very limited⁽²⁾. In England the situation had been confused by the accession to power of Lloyd George, who had long shown himself to be the most favourable of leading British politicians to the Salonica campaign⁽³⁾. He brought with him, moreover, a style of government which represented a reassertion of civilian control over the war effort and a reversal of the trend which had characterised 1916, in which the military, and in particular Robertson, had exercised a dominant voice in British strategy. As Robertson himself was later to reflect, "the constant aim of the new Prime Minister was to take the military direction of the war more and more into his own hands and to have carried out military plans of his own devising, which, more often than not, were utterly at variance with the views of his responsible military advisers."⁽⁴⁾ In the course of 1917, however, the difficulty of finding shipping to support the Balkan campaign became so extreme that Lloyd George and his War Cabinet somewhat reluctantly found themselves compelled to fall in line with the strong views expressed by the military chiefs in favour of reducing the British contingent at Salonica⁽⁵⁾. Robertson regretted that,

(1) C. Falls - The First World War, (1960), p. 217.

(2) G.Q.G. (T.O.E) note, 'Résultats obtenus en 1916 par l'Armée d'Orient', 24/2/17, 16N 3138.

(3) At the Paris Conference of May 1917 Lloyd George reminded his fellow delegates that he had always been in favour of the Salonica Campaign, often in opposition to the entire English Cabinet (Procès-verbal, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 994).

(4) Robertson - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 300.

(5) Hankey - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 633.

at a time when shipping was so valuable and men in short supply, France and England should each have around 200,000 men imprisoned in a distant theatre doing next to nothing. But he was becoming resigned to the fact that this was a permanently unsatisfactory feature of the campaign. "The two governments would agree neither to the troops being brought away nor to their being reduced to the requirements of passive defence and therefore the inactivity complained of had to continue."⁽¹⁾

At the beginning of the year Robertson let General Lyautey, the new French Minister of War, know that in his opinion nothing new had happened to make him change his mind on the question of reinforcements for Salonica. In any case the matter would be discussed at the forthcoming conference in Rome⁽²⁾. The French Naval Attaché in London reported that there persisted in English governmental circles a distaste for the whole campaign and especially for its enlargement⁽³⁾. Briand's reorganised government in Paris was also far from unanimous in its support of the campaign. At a meeting of the Comité de Guerre on New Year's Day Lyautey, who had discussed the matter with military authorities including Requin, Billote and Douglas Haig, expressed his anxiety and the feeling that the whole thing had gone wrong. At the same time, however, he recognised the impossibility of evacuation both from the practical and the moral point of view⁽⁴⁾. It was therefore in a mood of considerable uncertainty that the delegates to the Rome conference, this time including Sarrail himself, assembled on 5 January.

On the first day of the meeting Lloyd George distributed a memorandum which, according to Briand's biographer, displayed a misunderstanding of the situation, a whimsical evalu-

(1) Robertson - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 138.

(2) Military Attaché to Lyautey No. 783, 2/1/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1041.

(3) Lostende to Lacaze 4/1/17, cited in Lieutenant Guiot: 'L'Affaire Gréque', p. 628, (Service Historique de l'Etat-Major Général de la Marine). Lostende was perhaps insufficiently aware of the difference in outlook between Lloyd George's War Cabinet and Asquith's War Committee.

(4) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol. 9, p. 45; Suarez - op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 105.

ation of the problems involved and a generally puerile approach such as the French premier had never encountered in Asquith⁽¹⁾. Lloyd George invited the delegates to accept the British contention, reached after exhaustive examination, that the grave shipping situation provided an overwhelming argument against the despatch of further British divisions to Salonica. He envisaged, nonetheless, reinforcements from Italy since the sea transit from Italy to the Balkans was a comparatively short one and a considerable portion of the route was well protected⁽²⁾. Briand modified the tactics he had employed when trying to extract extra men from Britain in 1916 and, sensing perhaps that he was more likely to make headway with Lloyd George than with Robertson, argued that the question of Salonica was not really a military question, but one for the governments. He appealed that the French should not once again be referred to Robertson. The latter's answer was known in advance and his power of refusal was incomparable. But there were times when governments should by-pass their most authorised advisers and judge and decide for themselves. When it was a matter of transporting merely two or three divisions Briand could not believe that it was a physical impossibility. If the British government were to insist upon it, he was sure that transport would be found. With wild optimism he asserted his belief that with three more divisions victory on the Salonica front was certain. But to continue in the present manner might be to run into disaster. Briand felt that a very considerable responsibility was being incurred in rejecting the proposal for three divisions. The problem should be re-examined and not answered by a simple negative. If three divisions could avert a defeat, could the allies really say no? In addition Briand pressed that the allied generals at Salonica might all be placed completely under the orders of Sarrail for military operations. On the field of battle it was absolutely necessary that the orders of the Commander-in-chief should be carried out at once⁽³⁾.

(1) Suarez - op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 106

(2) Memorandum by Lloyd George, CAB 28 i.c. 15a.

(3) Procès-verbal, CAB 28 i.c. 15b; A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 991.

In the interval before Lloyd George replied on behalf of the British government, Robertson dropped a broad hint that his resignation would follow from any decision which ran counter to his advice. He did not know what effect Briand's powerful language had had on the Prime Minister "in regard to the wretched Salonica business", but he thought it right to tell him that he could never bring himself to sign an order for the despatch of further British divisions to Salonica. He told Lloyd George this "as a friend", and expressed the hope that he would not be compelled to say it to him "as Prime Minister".⁽¹⁾ What effect this scarcely veiled threat had on Lloyd George is impossible to assess. Briand's appeal to him to ignore Robertson's advice must also have had its attractions for Lloyd George, anxious as he was to curb 'Wully's' authority. At all events he was not blind to the French premier's powers of oratical persuasion, which rivalled his own, and he replied, when the conference reassembled, that if eloquence alone could transport divisions to Salonica, Briand's speech would already have accomplished the task. Regrettably, however, boats were needed and England had none⁽²⁾. Inevitably, therefore, the discussions ended in deadlock as far as an increase in the size of the Armée d'Orient was concerned. Lloyd George reported to the Cabinet that the conference had been impressed by the arguments of the British representatives that the required shipping was not available and that the first step to active operations in the Balkans was the opening up of communications in the Balkans themselves and the improvement of land transport facilities from Western Europe⁽³⁾. But in private conversation Lloyd George had been much impressed by the general who was anathema to almost the whole of the British and French military hierarchies -

(1) Robertson to Lloyd George 6/1/17, Lloyd George MSS F44/3/6.

(2) Suarez - op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 109. c.f. Lloyd George - War Memoirs, Vol. 3, p. 1429: "As a piece of oratory it was the finest exhibition I have ever heard at any Conference."

(3) War Cabinet, 10/1/17, CAB 23/1/31.

General Sarrail (1). Accordingly the British agreed that Sarrail should henceforth serve as Commander-in-Chief of the allied armies, with all the national commanders accepting his orders for military operations, but retaining a right of reference to their own government (2). Sarrail had not obtained all the powers he would have liked but his command was no longer in danger; despite all the criticisms of the preceding months he had secured a further lease of tenure from the allied governments (3). Although disappointed at not being reinforced, Sarrail was pleased that the united front of Robertson and the Italian Commander, General Cadorna, had been resisted. At least nothing had been decided, which was better than being obliged to retreat (4). But beneath everything Sarrail still felt resentment that the affairs of France were not being conducted by men who would support him to the hilt. He confided to his patron, Painlevé, his dissatisfaction at the outcome of the conference. Robertson, who "had no guts," had combined with Cadorna to prevent any reinforcements being sent. Sarrail's frustration was evident: "En tous cas je retiendrai du monde, je rendrai ainsi service pour les autres théâtres d'opérations - je ne peux faire plus, j'ai toujours été et je suis encore le parent pauvre." (5)

Following the Rome Conference Sarrail was issued with fresh directives. These represented a considerable distortion of what had been decided upon by the allied delegates. In the first instance it was suggested that Sarrail had been created Commander-in-chief of the allied armies, without reservation. Although told not to count on any additional reinforcements from either France or her allies, Sarrail was

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- (1) Lloyd George, like others including Mahon and Painlevé, had apparently fallen victim to Sarrail's charm, which could on occasions conceal his failings in the military sphere. His feelings were far from being shared at the Foreign Office where complaints continued to pour in concerning Sarrail's conduct of operations and treatment of his allies. On 5 January Harold Nicolson noted in despair, "General Sarrail is hopeless", F.O. 371/2870/4327.
- (2) Conference Conclusions, CAB 28, i.c. 15.
- (3) Suarez - op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 112.
- (4) Private note by Sarrail 10/1/17, Painlevé MSS, 313AP110.
- (5) Sarrail to Painlevé 15/2/17, ibid.

instructed to push ahead with preparations for an offensive in the first days of April. The scope of this would depend upon whether the Russian High Command decided to launch an attack on the Roumanian front, which would offer the possibility of a two-pronged assault on the Bulgarian forces⁽¹⁾. By contrast Milne was informed that although he was required to conform to Sarrail's directives in regard to military operations, he would nevertheless remain entirely responsible to the British government for the safety of his troops and for seeing that they were employed in accordance with the general policy of the British government, as communicated to him from time to time. This policy was for the present defensive. Where Milne considered that Sarrail's instructions were not in accord with British policy or would jeopardise his force, he was to refer to the War Office before complying⁽²⁾. In fact the military possibilities of the expedition remained remote. As Bertie noted, it had quite simply failed as far as joining with Roumania and severing connections between the Central Powers and Turkey were concerned. He understood from "soldiers of intelligence" that the expedition could by sham offensives hold a considerable enemy force from moving elsewhere, but that a penetrating offensive to get to Vienna was out of the question. It seemed that not much good could be done from Salonica, but that politically it would do much harm to withdraw⁽³⁾.

With yet another allied conference arranged for Petrograd in February, at which France would be represented by General de Castelnau and Gaston Doumergue⁽⁴⁾, a meeting was held at the French Ministry of War on 12 January between Lyautey, Lacaze, Thomas and de Castelnau to determine the French line. It was decided that in order to hold the present position two or three supplementary divisions would definitely be required and that this question would have to be taken up again with France's allies. The best result would be obtained from the Armée d'Orient if it were able to participate in a general

(1) Lyautey to Sarrail 23/1/17, 16N 2991; 16N 3139.

(2) Draft instructions, CAB 23/1/33.

(3) Bertie - Diary, Vol. 2, p. 107.

(4) Still Minister for the Colonies in the re-shaped Briand government.

allied offensive on all fronts⁽¹⁾. After Sarrail had been invited to prepare for an offensive at the beginning of April, de Castelnau was urged to press upon the Russian government the need for a corresponding action by the Russian and Roumanian armies on the Roumanian front⁽²⁾. As it turned out the Petrograd Conference decided that, in the existing circumstances, the Balkan theatre no longer offered the advantages and possibilities which had been attributed to it at Chantilly in the previous November. As a result the mission of the Armée d'Orient would now be to resist any attack the enemy might launch at it, holding on as long as possible to the strategically important town of Monastir, to immobilise the forces which opposed it and to be ready to go over to an offensive in the event of any substantial reduction of the forces of the enemy in the Balkans⁽³⁾. Nonetheless France still showed a lingering unwillingness to accept that the Salonica army's role must be limited rather than extended when she pressed throughout February for the occupation of the port of Volo to the south of Salonica as a base in addition to that of the entrenched camp of Salonica⁽⁴⁾. While the Petrograd Conference was in session, moreover, Sarrail produced a plan of offensive operations, which envisaged an advance as far as the Vardar river, and, if the development of events permitted, having Sofia as an ultimate objective⁽⁵⁾.

Although Lloyd George may have been impressed by the general, the same was scarcely the case with the representatives of the allied countries at Salonica. Lord Granville,⁽⁶⁾

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- (1) Directions à donner au Général de Castelnau pour la Conférence de Pétrograd 12/1/17, 16N 3058.
- (2) Lyautey to de Castelnau 4/2/17, 16N 3266.
- (3) Conference Decision - CAB 28/I.C. 16; A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 992.
- (4) Notes by the Marine, 13/2/17, and the GQG, 15/2/17, A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1041.
- (5) Sarrail to Lyautey, No. 1329, 9/2/17, 5N 149.
- (6) The British diplomatic representative accredited to Venizelos's Provisional Government at Salonica.

whom Lloyd George had invited at the Rome Conference to express his own views on the situation, reported that the most striking thing was the unpopularity of the French and particularly of Sarrail. This seemed to be quite universal among all the nationalities represented. In fact Granville felt that the British military authorities, much as they disliked Sarrail in their hearts, actually got on with him better than did anyone else. The Italians and Russians hated him, the Serbian Crown Prince had no regard for his military prowess, the Venizelists complained bitterly of the nonfulfilment of French promises, while even among his own troops Sarrail was losing his popularity. Granville, "like everyone else", had fallen victim to the general's personal charm, but this could not compensate for Sarrail's obsession with political and commercial affairs. Granville wondered whether it would be possible to try again to persuade the French government to recall Sarrail, since this would "very greatly improve conditions and prospects" at Salonica, and the relations between the different nationalities⁽¹⁾. Since his return from the Rome Conference, moreover, Sarrail had given Milne no information of his plans and no indication what his intentions were⁽²⁾. Lord Derby complained to Paris on behalf of the British government, but when Lyautey asked Sarrail for an explanation, the latter retorted that the sole wish of the English was to remain on the defensive. At heart they wanted to be completely independent and to do nothing on the Bulgarian front. Sarrail asserted that he would get them to march, but would need to revert to his "old methods" to do so, since Milne's forces considered themselves purely under the orders of the War Office⁽³⁾. Sarrail was also dissatisfied with the equipment of his army. If he did not receive additional heavy artillery he would attack with what he had, but the results which he might obtain would be proportionately

(1) Granville to Lloyd George 6/2/17, Lloyd George MSS, F 55/3/1.

(2) Milne to Robertson No. 604, 10/2/17, CAB 23/1/63.

(3) Sarrail to Lyautey No. 1421, 22/2/17, A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1041; undated note on the Attitude of the English, Painlevé MSS, 313AP 111.

diminished⁽¹⁾. But Lyautey worked on the principle, which he had explained to Sarrail at Rome and expounded before the Army Commission, that whereas on the Western front the aim was constant - to conquer - and the means to achieve it variable and capable of being increased, in the East a maximum expenditure in men and equipment had been fixed and the aim of the army would have to vary in relation to the extent to which this maximum could be maintained⁽²⁾. Sarrail was therefore informed that only a small part of his requests could be satisfied without reducing the strength of the armies of General Nivelle. As a result he should adapt his plan of operations to the resources available to him⁽³⁾. His chances of launching an effective military operation were further reduced when it became obvious that the Russians were not prepared to launch a major campaign on the Roumanian front and that the Roumanian army itself was greatly weakened. The Grand Quartier Général therefore determined that the elimination of Bulgaria in 1917 by the combined efforts of the Armée d'Orient and the Russo-Roumanian forces was no longer a feasible proposition⁽⁴⁾.

There was thus some chance of inter-allied agreement when the delegates of England and France met yet again, this time at the Hôtel Terminus in Calais, on 26 February and heard Robertson declare that he and Lloyd George were anxious that the first thing that should be settled and defined was the scope of Sarrail's mission. Robertson pointed out that Sarrail's present plans envisaged as an ultimate objective an advance to Sofia. He considered that this was most unlikely since it had always been agreed that such a movement would have to be combined with an offensive on the part of the Russians and Roumanians. Robertson therefore proposed that, as the co-operation of the Russo-Roumanian forces

(1) Sarrail to Lyautey No. 1401, 19/2/17, 16N 2991.

(2) Note on the reorganisation of the artillery of the Armée d'Orient 11/2/17, 16N 3058.

(3) Lyautey to Sarrail No. 392, 17/2/17, 16N 2991; 16N 3139.

(4) Q.Q.G., T.O.E. Note - 'Résultats à atteindre de l'Armée d'Orient en 1917', 25/2/17, 16N 3139.

against Bulgaria was not yet possible, the Conference should confirm the impression of the Rome meeting and decide that, for the present, the decisive defeat of the Bulgarian army was not a practical objective and that the mission of the allied forces should be to keep on their front the enemy forces then there. This formula was accepted by Briand and Lyautey, although they insisted on adding that Sarrail should take advantage of striking the enemy if the opportunity offered⁽¹⁾. But as the forces which it was Sarrail's mission to detain were unlikely in any case to make their presence felt in any other theatre of the war, it is with some justification that a recent observer has commented that "the end result of allied Balkan policy was to create a Salonica front which served no purpose whatsoever."⁽²⁾

It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that a study carried out at the Grand Quartier Général at the beginning of March concluded that, when everything had been weighed up, there was little chance of the Armée d'Orient achieving more in 1917 than it had the year before⁽³⁾, while a subsequent study suggested that the maintenance of such large forces in the Balkans was scarcely justified by the mission they were to pursue. This note argued for a resumption of the role of politico-military lever in Balkan diplomacy which Joffre had envisaged for the Armée d'Orient during most of 1916⁽⁴⁾. Yet surprisingly enough Lyautey told Sarrail on 9 March to be ready to launch an offensive around 15 April⁽⁵⁾. The English

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- (1) Procès-Verbal CAB 28 I.C. 17; A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 993. Falls - op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 296; Palmer - op. cit., p. 116.
- (2) C. J. Lowe - The Failure of British Policy in the Balkans 1914 - 16, (Canadian Historical Journal, 1969, p. 98)
- (3) G.Q.G. TOE Note on the Armée Alliée d'Orient 1/3/17, 16N 3138.
- (4) 'Conduite à tenir en Orient', 23/3/17, 16N 3138; 16N 3059.
- (5) Lyautey to Sarrail No. 616, 9/3/17, 16N 3139. The origins of this decision remain obscure. Maurice Hankey, Roskill's 'man of secrets', when drawing up a summary of the whole campaign for the War Cabinet in July 1918 could not date it with any precision inside the period between the Calais Conference of 27 February and that at St. Jean de Maurienne on 19 April (CAB 28/2).

War Office, as hostile as ever to offensive operations in the Balkans, viewed the situation with dismay. Without Russian cooperation no allied offensive in Macedonia was likely to effect important results. The nature of the country, the co-ordination of operations by forces of six different nationalities, the numbers opposed to the allies and the fact that the enemy was operating on interior lines and could concentrate on the front with greater ease and rapidity than the allies, rendered it "impossible to attain results in any way commensurate with the effort involved."⁽¹⁾ Similarly the British observer, Lieutenant-Colonel Plunkett, reported that the effect of any offensive that could be delivered from Salonica would probably only be temporary and would cease with the arrival of enemy reinforcements or as soon as it was clear that the offensive had come to an end. An offensive would only be decisive when the railway to Constantinople was cut or immediately threatened, and all military opinion at Salonica was agreed that this would be impossible in 1917⁽²⁾. Above all else, though, Plunkett had got the impression from Milne that Sarrail represented a stumbling block to effective cooperation between the different armies⁽³⁾.

Sarrail himself scarcely gave the impression of preparing for the offensive with any degree of method or application. There was "no coordination of command, no allied general staff and no real preparation". When the Serbs asked Sarrail what his plan of campaign was, Sarrail said he was studying it and would inform them in due course. Such slackness prevented any of the allied armies from constructing the necessary roads and communications. Losses among the French forces, which had not been made up, meant that five English divisions were equivalent to eight French. German aeroplanes were bombing the dumps and camps outside the town of Salonica with impunity. Sarrail may have had excuses for his slowness and lack of preparation. But he had none for the systematic way in which he ignored his allies. In this chaotic situation Alfred Stead found Milne unequal to his task. The latter would have made "an excellent Scotch Divisional Commander, but (had) no aptitude for commanding an army." His relations with Sarrail were

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- (1) 'A general review of the situation in all theatres of war', 20/3/17, CAB 24/8/229.
- (2) Plunkett - Military Situation on the Salonica Front, 31/3/17, CAB 24/9/337.
- (3) Report by Plunkett 31/3/17, CAB 24/9/338.

practically non-existent and Stead thought it would be best to change both generals and send out, if possible, an internationally minded British commander-in-chief. Otherwise "everything (would) fall into the water."⁽¹⁾ Stead's views were considered by the War Cabinet at the end of the month and gave rise to a discussion on the higher military command of the Salonica force. Robertson, coolly assessing the situation, suggested that the time might not be far distant when shipping considerations would demand a reduction of the force. Indeed there was general agreement that the army should either be diminished or that much greater military activity would have to be displayed to justify its continued presence. Lloyd George finally undertook to discuss the question with Painlevé, who was by now installed at the rue St. Dominique.⁽²⁾

Intent on following up the favourable reception which his views had had in the War Cabinet, Robertson drew up a fresh memorandum on the situation at Salonica in which he reminded the government of the allied policy as agreed upon at the Calais Conference and approved by the War Cabinet on 25 February. With the air of a man who had at long last been proved right, Robertson pointed out the obvious - that the expedition had been a failure from the start. This had been foreseen by the General Staff of the day and he, himself, had lost no occasion to assert that the campaign had no military justification and would probably never produce military results in any way commensurate with the expenditure of force entailed. The Admiralty, he noted, found the strain on shipping resources unendurable and thought it better to have the enemy established at Salonica than to be compelled to provide the naval force required for the maintenance of the allied armies. Perhaps sensing that Lloyd George's restless spirit, anxious as always to secure a victory somewhere, was beginning to lose faith in Salonica and to look around for alternative possibilities, Robertson argued that there was

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- (1) Stead to Lord Ranksborough 11/3/17, Balfour MSS, F.O. 800/202; Stead to Lloyd George 12/3/17, CAB 24/8/249.
 (2) War Cabinet 30/3/17, CAB 23/2/109.

ample scope for the profitable employment in Palestine⁽¹⁾ of any British troops that could be got away and that the results to be obtained there were likely to contribute far more to winning the war than anything that could be achieved in the Balkans⁽²⁾. Two days later the War Cabinet had a preliminary discussion as to the possible effects of withdrawing a portion of the forces based on Salonica to reinforce the Palestine Expedition. The arguments of Plunkett and Robertson were both considered, but it was agreed that no final decision could be made until after Sarrail's offensive⁽³⁾.

As the days passed, however, the spectre of political chaos in Paris as a result of Britain's refusal to toe the French line was again brought into play⁽⁴⁾. Robertson was anxious that this old argument should not once more be used to paralyse British initiative and he wrote to General Smuts, whose attitude in the War Cabinet approximated most closely to his own. There was no compromising now as Robertson stated that the expedition had been wrong from the start and would be wrong until the end. It had always been and still was for purely French political purposes. If Britain was not careful she might lose the war in a vain attempt to bolster up the French government. Ribot was not, he thought, likely to remain Prime Minister for long and it would be folly to undertake further commitments in the Balkans merely to save him. For more than a year Robertson had been endeavouring to get the government to take greater control over the war

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- (1) Lloyd George's alternative to the Balkan project was an all-British campaign for the conquest of Palestine and he told Robertson that if he consented to help the General Staff to extricate divisions from Salonica, he expected the troops thus set free to be used in furtherance of his Palestine plan (Robertson - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 143).
- (2) 'The Situation at Salonica', 2/4/17, CAB 24/9/347.
- (3) War Cabinet 4/4/17, CAB 23/2/113.
- (4) Ribot and Painlevé had come to England and the latter returned "content de son voyage", having insisted above all that Milne should participate in Sarrail's offensive. Herbillon - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 63.

effort, but to "attempt to win the war by constantly giving in to unsound French proposals was folly." The proper thing to do was to come away from Salonica altogether. Perhaps this was not possible for the moment, but there was no need on that account to increase British liabilities there⁽¹⁾. At all events the Foreign Office was at least anxious that events should be precipitated and Bertie was instructed to press upon the French government the need for Sarrail to attack as soon as possible⁽²⁾.

Robertson was uncertain of what he could expect from Lloyd George, but his own tactics were clear. When Sarrail launched his offensive and when, as Robertson confidently predicted, this failed to achieve very much, Robertson would then "go bald-headed for a reduction of the forces in Salonica", confident that he could count on the support of the Admiralty⁽³⁾. The problem, however, as he recognised only too well, was that the British were "tied to the tail of the French." Robertson just did not believe that the French nation attached the sort of importance to the campaign which its government claimed. "It has been a government blunder from the start and I have no doubt it will be the end of the government."⁽⁴⁾ When the War Cabinet met on 18 April Robertson reported that, according to Milne, Painlevé had taken measures to quicken up Sarrail's arrangements and that an attack in the near future might be anticipated. Admiral Jellicoe provided the sort of support Robertson was looking for when he said that owing to the submarine danger in the Mediterranean it was impracticable to continue to supply the Salonica Expedition with stores or to evacuate sick and wounded. The War Cabinet therefore took the decision that, after the impending attack, Britain should withdraw her forces from the field of operations and fall back on a defensive line in the vicinity of Salonica⁽⁵⁾.

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- (1) Robertson to Smuts 12/4/17, Robertson MSS 1/33/45.
 (2) Imperial War Cabinet 12/4/17, CAB 23/40/IWC9; Bertie to Cecil No. 352, 14/4/17, F.O. 371/2884/77375.
 (3) Robertson to Haig 14/4/17, Robertson MSS 1/23/18.
 (4) Robertson to Monro 19/4/17, Robertson MSS 1/32/57.
 (5) CAB 23/2/122.

Even Lloyd George was coming to look upon Sarrail's offensive as the last chance which could be given to the Armée d'Orient and at Saint-Jean de Maurienne he informed Ribot that, if considerable success were not achieved this time, the British government would be forced to consider a reduction of their troops in Macedonia, owing to the shipping difficulties⁽¹⁾. In the conversation which followed Ribot and Painlevé had shown less opposition to this proposal than Lloyd George had anticipated, provided that Britain assisted France to clear up the situation in Greece, including if necessary the removal of King Constantine from the throne. The British premier had formed the opinion that a bargain might be made along these lines for the reduction of the British forces in the Balkans⁽²⁾. It had eventually been agreed that the whole question should be considered at a further conference to be held two weeks later and for the first time Robertson was optimistic that this would result in getting some troops away from Salonica, "if not all of them in due course..... The great thing (was) to make a start."⁽³⁾ With confidence he informed the War Cabinet that it would take six or seven months for Britain to withdraw her troops from Salonica and that it was therefore necessary that she should begin at once. He proposed that at the Conference the French government should be informed that Britain could not possibly maintain her present forces at Salonica and that she intended to bring away two brigades of mounted troops and one division immediately, this to be followed by the whole or greater part of the remainder as soon as shipping could be made available. Anxious lest the politicians should once more fall victim to French persuasiveness, he suggested that the preliminary orders for shipping for these moves should be issued at once. Lloyd George, however, preferred to act more circumspectly and the question of withdrawal was again postponed for further consideration⁽⁴⁾. Cambon knew that Britain would argue at the forthcoming conference that she could not

(1) Memorandum on Conference, CAB 28 I.C. 20; Falls - op cit., Vol. 1, p. 302.

(2) War Cabinet 23/4/17, CAB 23/2/124.

(3) Robertson to Haig 28/4/17, Robertson MSS 1/23/24.

(4) War Cabinet 1/5/17, CAB 23/2/128; 'Withdrawal of the British from Salonica', (Robertson) 1/5/17, CAB 24/12/606.

continue to supply Salonica without depriving the allies of the transport needed to feed themselves. Such considerations were, the ambassador surmised, beyond the intellect of a French government whose vision was limited to the corridors of the parliamentary chamber. Ribot would therefore find himself in a difficult situation and Cambon wondered how he would try to extricate himself⁽¹⁾.

When the Conference met in Paris on 4 May, with Sarrail's offensive against Bulgaria apparently just getting underway, prolonged discussions ensued on the questions of Salonica and Greece. Eventually Lloyd George presented a series of resolutions to the French which represented the maximum concessions towards the French point of view which he and Lord Robert Cecil⁽²⁾ felt able to make. The British government, he stated, had been forced to the conclusion that the essential needs of the civil populations of the allies could only be met by a reduction of the force at Salonica to that required to hold an entrenched camp surrounding the harbour. The method of reducing the army could be settled later, but Britain considered it imperative to make immediate arrangements for the withdrawal of one division and two cavalry brigades beginning on 1 June. Predictably Ribot and Léon Bourgeois discussed the political question involved. They urged the impossible position of the French government towards its parliament and the French people if the British troops were withdrawn and the French troops left. If the British troops were taken away the French would have to follow. This meant that Serbia would be irretrievably lost, King Constantine and Germany masters of Greece, and Bulgaria and Turkey encouraged beyond their wildest dreams. Nonetheless the British delegates remained for once intransigent and their resolutions were reluctantly accepted ad referendum to the French cabinet⁽³⁾. Thus the usual roles of the allies in the diplomacy of the war had been reversed. The French had been presented at an international conference with a fait accompli by Britain in terms

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- (1) Cambon to Xavier Charmes 3/5/17, Cambon - Correspondance, Vol. 3, p. 166.
- (2) Representing the Foreign Office in the absence in America of Balfour.
- (3) Procès-verbal, A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 994; CAB 24/2/657; F.O. 371/2885/98556; Maurice - op. cit., p. 91; Falls - op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 318.

of a decision which had been reached prior to the meeting. The Grand Quartier Général did not like this trend and warned that, if it were repeated, it might lead to the political direction of the war passing increasingly into the orbit of the British government⁽¹⁾, but in fact the agreement was dependent on a tacit quid pro quo for France in her assumption into her own hands of the diplomatic affairs of Greece⁽²⁾.

Robertson was at least pleased to note that the French naval and military authorities had expressed the same opinions as himself and Jellicoe. He could not predict what the reaction of the French Cabinet would be, but if the reduction of the Salonica force was not carried out the French government alone would be responsible and he did not think they would like accepting this responsibility⁽³⁾.

The Quai d'Orsay was indeed not at all happy at the prospect of a systematic reduction in the strength of Sarrail's forces and attached considerable importance to Lloyd George's assurance, given in Paris, that if Sarrail's offensive was sufficiently successful to open the way for peace negotiations with Bulgaria, the situation would be reviewed. Jules Cambon was therefore given the task of letting Sarrail know unofficially how much importance the Ribot cabinet attached to the defeat of the Bulgarian forces by his army. Sarrail "aura ainsi bien mérité de la coalition. Il sera le grand homme, s'il peut, par une marche victorieuse appréciable, nous an-

(1) G.Q.G. TQE, Note on the Paris Conference, 6/5/17, 16N 3161.

(2) That such a bargain should be struck had been agreed by Lloyd George and Cecil at a meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet on 2 May (CAB 23/40/IWC 14) but it was presented to France at the Conference as a spontaneous suggestion, (Procès-verbal, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 994). Paul Cambon discovered from Hardinge that the whole arrangement represented a calculated British manoeuvre to free herself from the odium which she assumed would befall the power which executed an unpopular policy in Greece, and he made sure that Ribot realized he had not got the best of the bargain (P. Cambon to J. Cambon 11/5/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1; A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 293). Cambon was annoyed that the British representatives had given the impression of agreeing only reluctantly to French domination of the allies' diplomacy in Athens: "Nous nous sommes donc laissés mener par le bout du nez". (P. Cambon to de Fleuriau, 12/5/17, Cambon - Correspondance, Vol. 3, p. 168).

(3) Robertson to Stamfordham 7/5/17, Robertson MSS 1/33/70.

noncer que les Bulgares sont disposés à la paix." Cambon expressed an admiration for Sarrail which he scarcely felt at heart, but at all events, Sarrail's liaison officer in Paris was impressed by his vigorous insistence⁽¹⁾. At the same time the Foreign Office was informed that Paris insisted that any additional withdrawals could only take place after the representatives of the two governments had again conferred and in any case, if such a measure were decided upon, it was a French division which must be withdrawn, so as to maintain an equilibrium within the Armée d'Orient⁽²⁾. The Admiralty were not happy with the tone of this French despatch and Jellicoe insisted on the urgent necessity of informing the French government that England had no intention of abandoning her proposals for the immediate reduction of the force at Salonica. He noted that the French reply had entirely ignored the difficulties of the shipping situation, which were fundamental to the British case and that the whole question had been sidetracked by bringing into prominence the military and political difficulties that would follow reduction or withdrawal. The War Cabinet, in arriving at its conclusions, had been fully aware of these difficulties, but to start again at the beginning and discuss these results would simply be to work in a circle. Jellicoe hoped, therefore, that a decision would be reached not later than 1 June as to whether the next group of troops to be withdrawn should be British or French and that, if by then the French government had not signified its intention of withdrawing a division, an arrangement would at once be made to withdraw a second British division⁽³⁾. Jellicoe was supported at a meeting of the War Cabinet on 22 May by Robertson, who stated that withdrawal was a matter of imperative naval necessity, irrespective of any conditions. With Lloyd George's will any longer to defend the Salonica Campaign now a thing of the past, this line of argument was accepted and Robertson was instructed to discuss with General Foch the

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- (1) Decrais to Sarrail No. 223, 8/5/17 and No. 228-30, 11/5/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.
- (2) P. Cambon to Robert Cecil 11/5/17, F.O. 371/2885/98556.
- (3) Memorandum 18/5/17, CAB 24/13/775.

arrangements for the withdrawal of the next contingent of troops and to report the result to the War Cabinet⁽¹⁾.

Meanwhile Sarrail responded to Jules Cambon's appeal for a military success by reminding Painlevé that of the 15,000 reinforcements promised him on 26 April only 9,400 had arrived or were on their way⁽²⁾. He nonetheless launched his attack, but was warned by Painlevé not to incur losses out of proportion to the goal he might attain. Sarrail was therefore left to judge when to call a halt to his operations⁽³⁾. Painlevé wanted to know Sarrail's views on the general situation, bearing in mind the likely progressive diminution of the troops under his command⁽⁴⁾. The general replied that the important thing was to strike a knockout blow against the King of Greece and his dynasty, so as to leave him with a free hand to face Bulgaria⁽⁵⁾. Lord Derby, following a visit to France, was able to convey Painlevé's views to the War Cabinet. The French government had consented, much against their will, to the withdrawal of some British troops, but they did not intend to withdraw one of their own divisions. But the members of the War Cabinet were agreed that the shipping situation absolutely precluded Britain from modifying her declared policy in regard to the reduction of her forces⁽⁶⁾.

On 24 May Painlevé gave his approval to Sarrail's decision to call a halt to his offensive in view of the inaction of the Russo-Roumanian forces⁽⁷⁾. The whole thing had been an abject failure. Milne reported that throughout the operations there had appeared to be a lack of coordination in the Higher Command and that the time required for initial

(1) CAB 23/2/142.

(2) Sarrail to Painlevé No. 9821, 12/5/17, 5N 153.

(3) Painlevé to Sarrail No. 1616, 14/5/17, 16N 3139; Falls - op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 341.

(4) Painlevé to Sarrail No. 1762, 21/5/17, 16N 2991.

(5) Sarrail to Painlevé No. 1948, 24/5/17, 16N 3139.

(6) War Cabinet 23/5/17, CAB 23/2/144.

(7) Painlevé to Sarrail No. 1841, 24/5/17, 16N 2991.

preparation had not been taken into account⁽¹⁾. The Senate Army Commission was told that Lloyd George had described the offensive as a lamentable fiasco and that it had given rise to renewed calls for Sarrail's replacement⁽²⁾. But this ill-conceived attack looked like a minor setback when placed against the magnitude of Nivelle's defeat in France, and while the consequences of defeat for a commander on the Western front seemed automatic, no such writ ran in the Balkans. Rennell Rodd reported from Rome that Sarrail had sacrificed 2,500 Italians who were left in the lurch, not having received any notice that the French on their flank were withdrawing. With the force at his disposal, Rodd asserted, Sarrail could have been master of the situation and have recovered a great part of Serbia, if he had really been a soldier and not a politician. The ambassador's personal view was that Britain should demand as a quid pro quo for the deposition of King Constantine the removal of General Sarrail and the appointment of an allied General Staff. "Otherwise I think the outlook in the Balkans warrants a very pessimistic view".⁽³⁾ According to Captain Stead Sarrail was a "public danger" and ought to be removed. But the offensive's prospects of success had not been improved by the behaviour of Milne who "shelters himself behind the orders he receives from Sarrail" and who, before starting the offensive, had announced that the task allotted to him was impossible. Milne regarded the whole expedition as a fiasco and, according to Stead, his only desire was to clear out of the country⁽⁴⁾. Yet even after the failure of the May attack Milne declared to Robertson that he still thought the Bulgarians could be beaten, if only the means were provided⁽⁵⁾.

When, in accordance with previous agreements, an inter-allied conference was held in Downing Street on 28 May to discuss the question of further withdrawals, Ribot stated as

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- (1) Milne to Robertson 26/5/17, W.O. 106/1362.
 - (2) Speech by H. Berenger 19/7/17, Senate Army Commission Papers, Vol. 17.
 - (3) Rodd to Lloyd George 26/5/17, Lloyd George MSS, F 56/1/38.
 - (4) Note on Salonica by D. Davies 31/5/17, Lloyd George MSS, F 83/10/6.
 - (5) Falls - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 3.

the unanimous opinion of the French cabinet that they could not consent to any further reduction of the forces at Salonica until the Greek question had been settled. If the British decided on further withdrawals this would have a very adverse effect in France. Ribot was sure to be questioned on the subject in the Chamber and he considered that if Britain insisted on withdrawing troops before the Greek question was satisfactorily settled the political effect would be disastrous⁽¹⁾. With equal predictability Robertson stressed the shipping situation as the overriding difficulty. He did not think there was any necessity to give up the present line in the Balkans until the troops were actually compelled to do so. Then, if forced to retreat, the army could hold Salonica itself with a smaller force than was then being employed⁽²⁾. The War Cabinet, meeting between sessions of the conference, determined that the shortage of shipping made a steady reduction of the Salonica army essential whether or not a regime offering every guarantee to the allies had been installed at Athens⁽³⁾. But by the following day the same body was prepared to concede that no further reductions should be made for six weeks after 1 June and that a further consultation on this subject should be held between the two governments on 1 July⁽⁴⁾. Ribot was careful to stress that this new conference would be to discuss not the method of further withdrawals, but the possibility of them, thus showing that, as far as he was concerned, no systematic reduction of strength had been agreed upon⁽⁵⁾. Both he and Painlevé were anxious that France's other allies

- (1) Ribot had already had some indication of the trouble which might arise when the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission had discussed Salonica on 23 May. Then, de Chappedelaine had described the situation of the Armée d'Orient as precarious and had led the call for England to be made aware of the need to hold on to the Salonica front. The Greek question would have to be liquidated and this would make the problem of supplies, which England put forward as the major factor in favour of withdrawal, less intractable (C 7490).
- (2) Procès-verbal, CAB 28 I.C. 23, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 994; Ribot - Journal d'Alexandre Ribot et Correspondances Inédites 1914 - 22 (1936), p. 134.
- (3) War Cabinet 28/5/17, CAB 23/2/148.
- (4) War Cabinet 29/5/17, CAB 23/2/149.
- (5) Ribot to Cambon No. 2369, 30/5/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 293.

should know that any further withdrawals would depend entirely on the situation existing in Greece at the time⁽¹⁾.

The failure of Sarrail's spring offensive inevitably produced fresh efforts on the part of France's allies to have the general relieved of his command⁽²⁾. At the beginning of June the Italian ambassador in Paris called upon Jules Cambon to protest at the way in which Sarrail was treating the Italian contingent at Salonica. Fearful of Sarrail's interest in Greek politics, the ambassador voiced his government's concern that he was heading for disaster, "en cherchant en Grèce les lauriers qu'il n'a pas conquis en Macédoine".⁽³⁾ In the English Foreign Office Harold Nicolson produced a survey of the recent complaints that had been made against Sarrail. The Russian Foreign Minister considered him untrustworthy owing to his political ambition, the Serbian Prime Minister had stated that all the allied armies were critical of his conduct of the offensive, while the Italian commander-in-chief accused Sarrail of "unqualifiable irresponsibility", being a serious threat to "a situation already sufficiently grave."⁽⁴⁾ It was Robertson who brought the matter up at the War Cabinet pointing out that the consensus of opinion was that Sarrail had concerned himself more with the political aspect of the campaign than with the actual conduct of military operations. The members of the War Cabinet concluded that whatever instructions Sarrail might receive from the French government he

- (1) Ribot to Barrère No. 1294-6, 4/6/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 293 and Painlevé to Military Mission, Russia No. 2212, 4/6/17, *ibid*, Vol. 1042.
- (2) For a somewhat jaundiced analysis of Sarrail's growing unpopularity since the Rome Conference, see Suarez; *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 324. Reports of the failure of the April offensive also provoked parliamentary trouble within France. In July Painlevé found it necessary to stand up in defence of Sarrail in the Senate, arguing that he had only ordered the offensive because of the pressure of the English government. The War Minister's speech was very well received and Decrais spoke of the occasion as an excellent day for both Sarrail and his mentor in the rue St. Dominique. (Decrais to Sarrail, No. 325-6, 23/7/17, Fonds Clémenceau, 6N 200).
- (3) Note by J. Cambon 1/6/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1042.
- (4) "Recent criticisms of General Sarrail", 5/6/17, F.O. 371/2886/106211.

could not be relied upon to carry out the allied policy in Greece in a conciliatory manner. They effectively adopted therefore the advice which Rodd had offered to Lloyd George a fortnight earlier that Sarrail's removal should be demanded as a quid pro quo for the deposition of King Constantine⁽¹⁾. Lloyd George undertook to write to Ribot on behalf of the War Cabinet to express its unanimous view that Sarrail should be replaced in the command of the Armée d'Orient. The Prime Minister noted that reports received on the recent offensive reflected very gravely on the fitness of Sarrail to command a great force. Competent judges on the spot were generally agreed that with proper leadership there had been an excellent opportunity of dealing a heavy blow at the enemy. Yet the operations appeared to have been a fiasco. This result was due, Lloyd George suggested, to no lack of courage or determination on the part of the troops engaged, but entirely to failure on the part of the High Command. In these circumstances the British government had come to the conclusion that they were not justified in continuing to leave large British forces in the Balkans under Sarrail's command. Lloyd George made his remarks "with the deepest regret", since he had "by no means been an opponent of General Sarrail" and had been favourably impressed by him when they had met in Rome, but after reading all the reports he could not but associate himself with the demands of the War Cabinet that Sarrail should be replaced immediately.⁽²⁾

On receipt of Lloyd George's despatch Ribot admitted to Poincaré his own lack of confidence in Sarrail and appeared willing to relieve him of his command once the operation in Thessaly, which was the necessary military preliminary to the deposition of the Greek king, had been carried out⁽³⁾. The French War Committee considered the problem on 7 June. As usual Painlevé sprang to Sarrail's defence and stressed the difficulties of any general placed in command of troops of different nationalities. But he too agreed that the question would have to be reexamined after the Thessalian operation to

(1) War Cabinet 5/6/17, CAB 23/3/155.

(2) Lloyd George to Ribot 6/6/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1042; Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 209.

(3) Poincaré, op. cit., Vol. 9, p. 158.

see whether the British demands should be accepted⁽¹⁾. Ribot apparently considered making Sarrail Military Governor of Paris, but the idea of placing so politically minded a general in such a sensitive post would certainly have created difficulties for the French government, with the result that Ribot chose the less controversial course of doing nothing for the time being⁽²⁾. Ribot's argument was that it would be politically inexplicable for Sarrail to be replaced at the very moment when the allied agreements on Greece were about to be put into effect and when the commander of the Armée d'Orient needed all of his authority. The French premier could not take it upon himself to explain such a step to his parliament. The French government would agree to give Sarrail a fresh command when it could do so in safety, but Ribot begged Lloyd George not to insist upon an immediate action which could only produce the most deplorable consequences⁽³⁾. Cambon, reporting the English reaction to Ribot's stance, noted that Robert Cecil could not accept that Sarrail's replacement was actually impossible⁽⁴⁾, but at all events the matter was allowed to drop for the time being. Through unofficial channels Painlevé had used his influence with Lloyd George to impress upon the English Prime Minister that he had chosen the worst possible moment to present an ultimatum to the French which, if it were accepted, would bring down the Ribot ministry with a crash and the alliance with it. But Painlevé stressed that once the Greek question had been settled the French government would not continue to impose Sarrail's leadership on British troops against the wishes of the British government. They could then claim that Sarrail's mission was accomplished and that he could be withdrawn without disgrace. It may be surmised that what Painlevé really envisaged was the triumphal return of Sarrail to Paris to take over some higher function than the command of the Armée d'Orient⁽⁵⁾. At

(1) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol. 9, p. 159.

(2) Mermeix - Sarrail, p. 135.

(3) Ribot to Cambon No. 2469, 7/6/17; Ribot to Lloyd George 7/6/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1042.

(4) Cambon to Ribot No. 912, 8/6/17, *ibid.*

(5) see below , p 226.

all events Henry Norman, who was acting as intermediary between Painlevé and Lloyd George, was evidently impressed by what amounted to a delayed French promise to recall Sarrail, and he argued that this was all that could possibly be asked of them and that they were meeting Lloyd George's wishes "in every possible way". It was "really impossible for them to drag out their General by the scruff of the neck in the very middle of these operations". Furthermore the position of the Ribot government was so difficult that Britain should "refrain from doing anything to add gravely to their difficulties"⁽¹⁾. Assuming that it was Lloyd George's wish that the Salonica command should eventually be entrusted to General Smuts, Norman asked Painlevé how he would react to such a proposition. Provided that Sarrail's recall would in no sense be tainted with disgrace, that he would be decorated by the English and that Smuts would assume the command of an army in which English forces predominated, Painlevé undertook "to get that arrangement swallowed by the French government and by the Chamber"⁽²⁾.

Little then had changed since the very beginnings of the campaign. In June 1917 as in December 1915 the internal politics of France were determining the course of the Balkan expedition and now as then Lloyd George was among those who were prepared to let alarmist cries about the dangers to the Entente override all military considerations. On 11 June the War Cabinet authorised Lloyd George to express the British government's satisfaction at the willingness of Ribot to transfer Sarrail from the Macedonian command and to agree that this transfer should not be carried out until after the present critical situation in Greece had passed⁽³⁾. Admittedly there was a vague promise that Sarrail's recall had only been temporarily postponed. But, as Bertie warned, the situation was far from clear-cut since if, when the acute stage of the Greek difficulty had passed, the French government acceded to the British demand, there would be a great outcry from the Socialists

(1) Norman to Lloyd George 7/6/17, Lloyd George MSS F 41/6/2.

(2) *ibid* 8/6/17, *ibid* F 41/6/3.

(3) War Cabinet 11/6/17, CAB 23/3/160.

and a portion of the Radical Socialists at the general's handling of the Greek crisis being rewarded by recall⁽¹⁾. According to Henry Wilson the probability was that Painlevé was merely trimming and that when the Greek affair was over he would find another reason for not bringing Sarrail back, such as that public opinion in France would not sanction the recall of so successful a general⁽²⁾. The French War Minister certainly took the precaution of asking Sarrail to send a liaison officer who would provide him with information concerning the recent offensive and the difficulties the general had encountered from the allied contingents⁽³⁾. In fact Painlevé had no need of any additional excuses, since the English War Cabinet, meeting after the deposition of King Constantine, conceded that this was a policy which Sarrail had consistently recommended and that its success had eased the political situation in France. No steps therefore would be taken for the present to remind the French government of its engagement to transfer Sarrail from Salonica⁽⁴⁾. The Foreign Office had itself attempted to take a stronger line and on the instructions of Cecil a long indictment of Sarrail's military incompetence had been drawn up by the junior official Malkin with a view to presenting it as a memorandum to Cambon⁽⁵⁾. The veto of the Prime Minister appears, however, to have been imposed. But this did not stop the Italian ambassador in Paris from raising the question of Sarrail's removal when he again called upon Jules Cambon. Was it not possible, asked Salvaggio Reggi, to dispense with an officer who continually created tension between France and her allies?⁽⁶⁾

But for the time being, at least as far as Britain was concerned, the Salonica campaign was to continue as before. Within the War Cabinet Lord Milner complained that English policy seemed to be drifting. After all, the allies still had more than half a million men in the Balkans. The decision to dimi-

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- (1) Bertie to Balfour 24/6/17, Lloyd George MSS, F 51/4/25.
 (2) Record by Bertie of conversation with H. Wilson 24/6/17, Bertie MSS, F.O./800/169/Fr/17/51.
 (3) Painlevé to Sarrail No. 3061, 24/6/17, A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1042.
 (4) War Cabinet 26/6/17, CAB 23/3/169.
 (5) Memorandum by Malkin 25/6/17, F.O. 371/2889/122804.
 (6) Note by Jules Cambon 22/6/17, A.E. 'Guerre' Vol. 1042.

nish British forces there might be a good one, but, by itself, this was not a policy. Milner argued that it would be good business to free the 200,000 British soldiers, if in doing so Bulgaria could be detached from the Central Powers. But simply to withdraw and leave the French and others in the lurch either to surrender or to scuttle away as best they could would be "a débâcle of the first magnitude". It was no use going on living from hand to mouth in the matter, dealing with five or six different aspects of the case one by one as they happened to crop up. What was needed was a systematic analysis of the military and political situation in the Balkans as a whole to put before the War Cabinet a coherent plan. Such a review should not start from a dominating idée fixe, but should examine impartially the possible alternatives and their respective consequences. Ultimately the decision would have to rest with the Cabinet, but the Cabinet could not decide until the subject had been thoroughly threshed out and all possible courses put before it in a comprehensive review⁽¹⁾. In fact, after the deposition of Constantine and the return of Venizelos, the Cabinet's newly created War Policy Committee found itself in complete unanimity that the changed situation in Greece, now converted from a suspected neutral into an active ally, rendered it no longer necessary to cling to the policy of withdrawal to an entrenched camp surrounding Salonica. It was decided that the best long term course was to withdraw from the fighting line in the Balkans as many divisions of the British army as possible, replacing them with Greek or other allied troops⁽²⁾. Paul Cambon went so far as to say that the conference arranged for 1 July was losing its raison d'être as far as Salonica was concerned, since the British no longer spoke of withdrawal⁽³⁾. The French Military Attaché in London had got the impression that the War Office had become less militant since arrangements had been begun to create a supply line between Cherbourg and Tarente, thus alleviating the shipping situation⁽⁴⁾.

(1) Note by Milner 7/6/17, CAB 23/16/159a.

(2) Hankey - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 684.

(3) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 29/6/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(4) P. Cambon to Fleuriau 21/6/17, Cambon - Correspondance, Vol. 3, p. 177.

Milner, however, was concerned lest Lloyd George should go to France without the War Cabinet having formulated a policy towards Salonica. If he were to go "without our knowing our own minds" he would be "as wax in the hands of any French Minister". As far as Milner was concerned the whole thing was still "the most hopeless impasse and muddle imaginable". He appreciated that France was opposed to further withdrawals of British troops, while Robertson was as determined as ever to effect them and that the French were as resolved as ever not to remove Sarrail. Milner thought that some sort of bargain would have to be reached. If Britain agreed to leave her troops, she should certainly make it a condition that Sarrail went. On the other hand if the French insisted on keeping Sarrail, they could not also insist on retaining the British troops⁽¹⁾. In response to Milner's concern Captain Leo Amery, an expert of Balkan affairs, drew up a paper on the military possibilities of the campaign which concluded that a decisive strategic result was only possible if the enemy armies were so hard pressed elsewhere that they could not make use of their superior system of communications to prevent Bulgaria being overwhelmed and Turkey cut off. It seemed better to concentrate on strengthening existing defence, improving communications and creating a reserve available either for operations elsewhere or for defence in case of a serious enemy offensive in the Balkans⁽²⁾. Milner himself considered that the Salonica theatre offered great possibilities, but he informed the Cabinet's War Policy Committee that there appeared no prospects of success as long as Sarrail retained the command⁽³⁾. Similarly Plunkett, returning from a further tour to Salonica, reported that the removal of Sarrail was as necessary as before. The lack of confidence of all ranks in their Commander had discouraged both officers and men and only his replacement by an able soldier could restore the spirit of the army⁽⁴⁾. But

(1) Milner to Hankey 3/7/17, CAB 27/7/WP 31.

(2) 'The situation in the Balkans', 4/7/17, CAB 27/7/WP 31.

(3) Meeting of War Policy Committee 6/7/17, CAB 27/6.

(4) 'Military Situation at Salonica, July 1917', 13/7/17, CAB 24/19/1400.

Milner realised that the French, whatever they might say, would be most unlikely ever to remove Sarrail. He was therefore thrown back on a policy of withdrawal. He felt convinced, however, that, when it came to the crunch, England would not be able to resist the combined pressure of her allies not to evacuate completely. There was probably no other subject in the world about which the French, Italians, Serbians and Venizelists could all be induced to see eye to eye. But assuming that the assistance of the Greek army materialised, the allies would have more than enough troops and it would be quite a reasonable thing to anticipate that some months hence England might be able to withdraw the bulk of her own troops to some quarter where they could be actively employed to greater profit. Milner hoped that at the very least a British political officer would be attached to the command of the Armée d'Orient in order to exercise some restraint upon Sarrail. It would also make it easier to induce the French to acquiesce in the withdrawal of British troops at a later date if they "did not continue to have them, so to speak, for nothing"⁽¹⁾. Milner advocated telling the French that Britain would have to remove her troops unless there was a prospect of a large offensive in conjunction with the Russians. By the autumn the Greeks would be able gradually to replace the British contingents, although the government might "leave a division or two to show the flag". But to leave the whole allied army in the Balkans was "a terrible waste of effort"⁽²⁾.

Largely under Milner's influence, therefore, the draft report of the War Policy Committee recommended that British policy in the Balkans should aim at the gradual withdrawal of the British divisions from the fighting line with a view to the formation of a reserve, which could be used either to support a great offensive in conjunction with a Russian attack on Bulgaria or preferably for transfer to some other theatre. No opposition should be offered to any French proposals for the withdrawal of part of their Balkan army for independent operations in Syria or for any other purpose, provided they

(1) Memorandum by Milner 8/7/17, CAB 27/7/WP 35; Lloyd George MSS F 38/2/20.

(2) Meeting of the War Policy Committee 18/7/17, CAB 27/6.

did not involve the use of British troops or shipping⁽¹⁾. Robertson gave the weight of his authority to the findings of the War Policy Committee when he advised the Cabinet that he saw no reasonable prospect of carrying out an offensive campaign in 1917 which would bring about the collapse of Bulgaria. He considered that the correct course was to limit the forces in Salonica to what was necessary for defensive purposes and that it would be possible to hold the present allied line with three divisions fewer than the number then under Sarrail's orders⁽²⁾. This policy, including the immediate withdrawal from Salonica of one division as a reinforcement for the British Expeditionary Force in Egypt, was adopted by the War Cabinet on 20 July. It was realised that the British representatives in Paris might find themselves in a very difficult position in pressing this policy, so the War Cabinet decided that some latitude would have to be left to their delegates at the Conference⁽³⁾.

As the time approached for Lloyd George once again to consult with his French allies there existed, therefore, increasing subtleties in the policies of the English administration, which were not fully appreciated in Paris. Rather misleadingly Paul Cambon confirmed Ribot's declared suspicions that the English attitude was conforming increasingly with that of his own government⁽⁴⁾. Similarly Decrais reported that while Salonica remained a nightmare for Robertson, the latter was no longer master of the situation and that the English cabinet's own ideas about Sarrail's command had changed⁽⁵⁾. In fact the British delegates were more than usually well prepared when the conference assembled in Paris on 25 July. The British government announced its intention of removing at once to Palestine one division and a proportion of heavy artillery and of withdrawing further troops as Greek divisions became available to replace them. The discussions

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- (1) War Policy Committee's Draft Report 19/7/17, CAB 27/7/WP 42.
 - (2) Paper by Robertson 19/7/17, CAB 27/7/WP 44.
 - (3) CAB 23/13/191a.
 - (4) Ribot to Cambon No. 3137, 8/7/17 and Cambon to Ribot No. 1086, 9/7/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1042.
 - (5) Decrais to Sarrail No. 313, 12/7/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

centred almost entirely round this question of whether one British division should be removed, a proposal which evoked considerable opposition from all the other allied governments represented at the conference. Robertson stressed that the allies were making very bad use of their men as there were 600,000 troops at Salonica as against some 400,000 of the enemy. He surveyed all the ground which had been covered by the War Policy Committee and stated that an offensive from Salonica had no practical advantage unless it was combined with a Russo-Roumanian attack on Bulgaria from the north, of which there was little prospect. Foch was less sanguine than the British of the possibility of the early arrival of Greek reinforcements. The strength of the Armée d'Orient could not at present be reduced owing to the extent of the front and the difficulty of communications which prevented the rapid movement of reserves. Once the Greek army had materialised in 1918 it might be possible to settle the Eastern front once and for all, but to do so it would be necessary to retain the means to carry this out. Foch argued that the new British proposal could only be considered towards the end of October, when the situation would have stabilised⁽¹⁾. Ribot felt obliged to remind the British that when the question of withdrawing a further division had been discussed at an earlier conference it had been agreed that it would be a French division which would be withdrawn first. In the face of such deadlock, therefore, all that could be done was to postpone a decision until yet another conference had been held in London⁽²⁾. The question of Sarrail's command did not even arise. Private conversations before the conference between Painlevé and the British representatives had the effect of preventing all formal discussion of the issue⁽³⁾.

- (1) Paris Conference: "Opinions of Robertson, Foch and Cadorna", CAB 24/21/1530.
- (2) Procès-verbal, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 996; Note by Hankey, CAB 28/2/I.C. 24. There had been an element of "déjà vu" about the whole of the proceedings. Paul Cambon commented: "La discussion a été interminable. C'était la même qu'avec Briand l'an dernier et avec Ribot il y a deux mois. On n'a pas conclu". (P. Cambon to Fleuriau 28/7/17, Cambon - Correspondance, Vol. 3, p. 187).
- (3) Decrais to Sarrail No. 301, 27/7/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

Robertson remained as dissatisfied as ever with his government's performance. The only policy he had discovered at Paris was to hold the ground then held at Salonica, keep all the troops there and wait until the following year to see what would happen. This was "a poor apology for a policy" and he begged the Cabinet to try to arrive at a clear strategy for the future in the Balkans. He could offer no advice save to repeat what had always been his conviction, that the Salonica force would never materially contribute to the winning of the war, while the Entente might lose it if it failed to have sufficient strength on the Western Front and sufficient shipping to meet all requirements. The expedition had from the first been strategically unsound and, if the apparent Russian collapse continued, the allies must be prepared for a prolongation of the war and be ready to put more men on the Western Front, "where undoubtedly the issue of the war will be decided".⁽¹⁾ The general's patience was evidently beginning to wear rather thin. Scathingly he noted that at the Paris Conference 43 men had talked about the Salonica issue for three days, eventually arriving at no decision except to have another conference. It was a bad case and had been so from the start. Robertson did not think it an exaggeration to say that the soldiers and politicians in France and England had spent at least half their time in the war discussing and worrying over "this wretched matter"⁽²⁾. Discussions with Plunkett confirmed his impression that nothing constructive would ever be done at Salonica as long as Sarrail remained. He had even heard that the French general had got married on the very day the last offensive had begun⁽³⁾. Not relaxing his pressure for one minute Robertson induced the War Cabinet to adhere to their previous declaration in favour of withdrawal of one division and some heavy artillery from the front. The question was raised as to whether the removal of Sarrail should be pressed at the London conference. It was suggested that, if this were insisted upon, Britain would encounter still greater opposition in regard to the one division. But

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- (1) 'The Present Military Situation in Russia and its effect on our Future Plans', 29/7/17, Robertson MSS, 1/17/3.
 (2) Robertson to Monro, 1/8/17, *ibid* 1/32/65.
 (3) Robertson to Lloyd George, 1/8/17, Lloyd George MSS, F 44/3/18.

the point was made that as no offensive appeared likely in the Balkans there was less objection than formerly to Sarrail's retention of the command for the present and that it might be better to postpone the matter for some more favourable opportunity. The Cabinet, in fact, took no definite decision regarding Sarrail and the matter was left to be raised or not according to the course of the discussion at the Conference⁽¹⁾. Robertson, however, considered that it was impossible to separate the question of the withdrawal of the division from that of the removal of Sarrail. In his opinion if the troops were not properly commanded there would be a risk in taking the division away. Sarrail might, for example, still insist upon the remaining British divisions continuing to hold the 90 miles of front which they had held hitherto. While ministers protested that Sarrail's removal would provoke a serious crisis, leading possibly to the fall of the French government, Robertson persuaded the Cabinet to reverse their earlier decision and definitely to raise the question of Sarrail's replacement informally, either before the conference adjourned or afterwards⁽²⁾.

As the conference opened Lloyd George announced that the British determination to withdraw a division for use in Palestine had not wavered. Ribot countered by saying that the French government too had not changed its mind. If Britain acted against French advice, the French premier would be obliged to say so to the Chamber. Would a serious disagreement between the two governments, he asked, be worth the single division in question? Somewhat astonishingly Ribot announced that he would prefer Britain to reinforce her armies in Mesopotamia and Palestine at the expense of the Western Front rather than Salonica. It was not acceptable that Britain should gradually withdraw her forces leaving France sole responsibility for the expedition. The first effect of the British action would be to discourage Greece and to impede her efforts to provide a useful addition to the allied armies⁽³⁾.

(1) War Cabinet 3/8/17, CAB 23/3/204

(2) War Cabinet 7/8/17, CAB 23/3/205.

(3) Procès-verbal 7/8/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 997, CAB 28/2/I.C.25.

The War Cabinet retired to consider what appeared to be an unpromising situation and prepared draft conclusions to be put before the second session of the conference. The immediate withdrawal of one British division must be confirmed, while two French divisions should be taken from the front and retained in the Balkan theatre as a general reserve for employment in any theatre in accordance with military developments⁽¹⁾. While the British were in consultation de Fleuriau was suggesting to Ribot and Painlevé that it would be impossible to tell the French Chamber that England had been advised to weaken the French front in order to keep that of Salonica intact. His advice seems to have been taken, for Ribot made no further mention of this idea⁽²⁾. Indeed when the conference reassembled and the British proposals were presented to the French, Ribot changed his tactics and pressed for an undertaking that no more British troops should be withdrawn beyond the one division. He expressed the conviction that Robertson certainly did intend a systematic reduction of the British force. With perhaps something less than frankness Robertson denied that this was the case and, on the suggestion of Lloyd George, the conference adopted the conclusion that the British government recognised the necessity of maintaining the strength of the allied forces at Salonica and undertook not to withdraw any further British troops unless unexpected events occurred in which case the question would be submitted for discussion by the allies⁽³⁾. Thus the Salonica question had at last got itself in some way settled. The withdrawal of the British division had been agreed to, but in order to secure this concession the British government had virtually committed the remainder of its forces to the Balkan theatre for the duration of the war. The proposal to create a reserve force from two French divisions had, moreover, been dropped⁽⁴⁾.

Soon after the Conference dispersed the War Policy

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- (1) War Cabinet 7/8/17, CAB 23/3/206.
 - (2) de Fleuriau to P. Cambon 9/8/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.
 - (3) Procès-verbal 7-8/8/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 997, CAB 28/2/I.C. 25a.
 - (4) Note by Hankey 7/8/17, CAB 24/22/33.

Committee issued its interim report which appeared to owe little to the decisions just arrived at. It argued that the proper course to adopt in the Balkans was to limit the forces in Salonica to what was necessary for defensive purposes. The immediate policy should be gradually to withdraw the English forces from the front line, replacing them with allied or Greek troops. If there was any prospect of an offensive at Salonica in conjunction with the Russians, then the government should insist, as a condition of British cooperation, on the replacement of Sarrail⁽¹⁾. From now until his dismissal in December Sarrail would, in fact, be the chief obstacle to the smooth running of the campaign. After the May offensive no further operations of much account were attempted during Sarrail's tenure of office. This was the result of the heavy fighting in Flanders and Italy during the late summer and autumn, the collapse of Russia and the intervention of the United States, which combined to fix the final military trial of strength more and more in the Western theatre. The whole Macedonian front once more lapsed into a state of stagnation⁽²⁾. Inevitably, therefore, attention focused more on personalities than on policies during the closing months of the year.

Lloyd George had not "found an opportunity" to raise the question of Sarrail's replacement with the French ministers while they were in London⁽³⁾, but in the middle of August Milne reported that Sarrail had refused to take over any portion of the front held by British troops, who were holding a length as great as that held by the remainder of the Armée d'Orient⁽⁴⁾. Robertson took the matter up with Foch, since Sarrail's intransigence was preventing the despatch of the British division to Palestine⁽⁵⁾. Foch instructed Sarrail to carry out an equitable repartition of the front, according to the strength and value of the allied contingents,⁽⁶⁾ and

(1) Interim report 10/8/17, CAB 27/8/WP46.

(2) Robertson - op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 144.

(3) War Cabinet 20/8/17, CAB 27/3/219.

(4) War Cabinet 13/8/17, CAB 23/3/213.

(5) Robertson to Spiers 13/8/17, CAB 24/23/1795.

(6) Spiers to Robertson 14/8/17, *ibid.*

Painlevé, while renewing the expression of his confidence in Sarrail and acknowledging the difficulties inherent in the command of a multinational army, asked him to be as conciliatory as possible towards the allied contingents and commanders⁽¹⁾. Milne, however, was informed by Sarrail that the latter was unable to relieve any portion of the English front with French troops. Milne would go ahead with the withdrawal of one division, but did not consider that the troops remaining at his disposal afterwards would be sufficient to hold the front allotted to him in the event of a determined enemy attack⁽²⁾. At 10 p.m. on 19 August, therefore, Painlevé urgently told Sarrail that he should help out the English so as to avoid difficulties between the two governments⁽³⁾. Before the news of Painlevé's démarche reached London the War Cabinet were considering the situation and concluding that Sarrail's refusal provided an additional reason for pressing upon Paris the necessity of his removal, or at least the appointment of someone of political status as the head of a mission to investigate and report on the situation⁽⁴⁾. Painlevé, after telegraphing to Sarrail, tried to shift the focus of the incident, sending for the British liaison officer, Colonel Spiers, and suggesting that underground attacks were being made against the general⁽⁵⁾. Sarrail informed Painlevé that for the moment, "owing to special difficulties" he could only place two cavalry regiments at Milne's disposal. Robertson asked Milne for precise details of the stretches of front held by each of the allied armies, in order that he could put the case to the War Cabinet with a view to government action⁽⁶⁾. But General Maurice told the War Cabinet that the French contingent at Salonica was considerably under-strength. No less than 20,000 troops had been withdrawn and sent on leave to France. Such being the case, Maurice argued that it was not difficult to

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- (1) Painlevé to Sarrail No. 5668, 17/8/17, 16N 3139; A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1043.
- (2) Robertson to Spiers 19/8/17, CAB 24/23/1795.
- (3) Painlevé to Sarrail No. 5814, 19/8/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 256.
- (4) War Cabinet 20/8/17, CAB 23/3/219.
- (5) War Cabinet 21/8/17, CAB 23/3/221.
- (6) Robertson to Milne 23/8/17, CAB 24/24/1848.

understand why Sarrail said it was impossible for him to take over any of the British line⁽¹⁾.

Once again the matter was allowed to fall into abeyance. Harold Nicolson suggested that the answer might lie in the appointment of an allied military council to be attached to Sarrail's Headquarters. The French government "could scarcely refuse such a suggestion" and the institution of such a Council might carry with it the automatic resignation of the French commander⁽²⁾. The English War Minister, Lord Derby, even reported that if Lloyd George were to write unofficially to Painlevé, Sarrail could be persuaded to resign of his own accord, whereas if the matter were put forward officially there would be opposition⁽³⁾. Lloyd George appears not to have responded to this suggestion, perhaps because he had a greater appreciation of Painlevé's loyalty to Sarrail than did Derby⁽⁴⁾. Painlevé had certainly spoken in praise of Sarrail, arguing that the only decisive victory which had been won during the war had been the general's victory at Monastir⁽⁵⁾. At all events the fall of the Ribot government made it still more difficult to broach the question and even Robertson suggested that it would be best to wait until the French political situation had been cleared up⁽⁶⁾. No mention was made of Sarrail's position, at least in the formal discussions, when English and French delegates, including Lloyd George and Painlevé, consulted at Boulogne towards the end of September. But Decrais was able to report to Salonica that Painlevé's private interviews with Lloyd George and General Cadorna had produced a favourable effect as far as Sarrail was concerned: "Les alliés ont trouvé une fois de plus en lui(Painlevé) le défenseur fidèle de l'Armée d'Orient et de son chef".⁽⁷⁾

(1) War Cabinet 27/8/17, CAB 23/3/224.

(2) Minute by Nicolson 2/9/17, F.O. 371/2885/169472.

(3) Derby to Lloyd George 8/9/17, Lloyd George MSS, F 14/4/68.

(4) Derby appears to have been a very impressionable figure and may have been taken in by Painlevé. Douglas Haig said of him: "like the feather pillow he bears the mark of the last person who sat on him". (A. J. P. Taylor - English History 1914-45, 1970 Edition, p. 86).

(5) War Cabinet 21/9/17, CAB 23/4/237.

(6) War Cabinet 10/9/17, CAB 23/4/230.

(7) Decrais to Sarrail No. 413, 27/9/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

What certainly seems to be true of the last months of 1917 was a progressive waning in the influence of Sir William Robertson. Robertson's fortunes sank steadily, like those of the Western offensive of 1917, into the mud of Passchendaele, and he came increasingly to be outshone by the former Director of Military Operations, Henry Wilson. As Robertson's continuous struggle with Lloyd George moved increasingly in favour of the Prime Minister, the most consistent and vehement opponent of the Salonica Campaign was gradually pushed into the wings. By contrast the Quai d'Orsay heard that Milner and Smuts, two influential members of the Imperial War Cabinet, fully recognised the importance of the Balkan front⁽¹⁾. But for the time being no one was prepared to countenance the resumption of major operations and Painlevé defined the mission of the Armée d'Orient as to protect conquered territory against any enemy attacks⁽²⁾. Sarrail, in fact, remained dissatisfied with the reinforcements which he received, even with Painlevé at the rue St. Dominique. He had been inundated with promises and official telegrams, but had been sent "rien ou presque rien". He would continue to make something out of nothing, but was not prepared to be duped by the redtape of the French War Office⁽³⁾. The French government had at least decided on 7 November to replace losses in the Armée d'Orient so far as this was compatible with the needs of the Western Front, to send the material already promised and to speed up the organisation of the Greek army⁽⁴⁾.

For the most part the close cooperation between Painlevé and Sarrail was such that the general's actions at Salonica were shrouded more than ever in mystery. Robertson complained to the French that Britain had for a long time been entirely in the dark as to the real situation. He found that the French War Ministry staff knew nothing of Sarrail's views, that the general received his orders directly from Painlevé and that he was in no way under the French staff. "In fact he seems

(1) Graillet to Ribot (from de Fontenay) No. 229, 19/10/17 and No. 232, 24/10/17, 5N 194.

(2) Painlevé to Sarrail No. 9129, 20/10/17, 16N 2991.

(3) Sarrail to Decrais No. 202, 15/11/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(4) Note on the situation of the Armée d'Orient 26/11/17, 16N 3060.

to be allowed to do as he wishes and apparently no soldier dares to interfere with him". Robertson invited the War Cabinet to compare the knowledge they possessed of the general situation, of the Commander's intentions and of the feasibility of attack and defence in other theatres with the knowledge they possessed in regard to Macedonia and to note how defective their knowledge was. Robertson thought it only right to insist upon a first class general being appointed upon whom the War Cabinet could rely to keep them fully informed. He viewed the situation at Salonica with "grave concern" because of the unsatisfactory qualities of the command and the uncertainty as to what the state of affairs was. Unless immediate steps were taken to improve matters, Robertson feared that a disaster might ensue⁽¹⁾. Under the present conditions it was unlikely that any of the allied army commanders at Salonica would be willing to send troops to reinforce another section of the front, for Sarrail kept no one informed of the situation or of his own intentions and the different nationalities always feared being exploited to suit the purposes of the French. Plunkett, reporting on a sixth visit to Salonica, suggested that to replace Sarrail by an "honest, direct and hard-hitting general with no political aims or interests" would be greatly to increase the fighting value of the allied forces at a stroke⁽²⁾. The one bright spot as far as Britain was concerned was the fall of Painlevé's government on 13 November. Hope was expressed in the War Cabinet that, in the event of Clemenceau succeeding in forming a ministry, it might again be possible to approach the French with a view to Sarrail's removal⁽³⁾.

Shortly afterwards, with rumours circulating of an impending enemy attack on the Armée d'Orient, the War Cabinet instructed Balfour to send to the French government a copy of Lloyd George's letter to Ribot of 6 June requesting Sarrail's replacement and to indicate that the views of the British government in regard to Sarrail had not been modified in the meantime⁽⁴⁾. Lloyd George himself wrote privately to

(1) "The Situation in Macedonia", 14/11/17, CAB 24/32/2615.

(2) Note by Plunkett, 17/11/17, CAB 24/11/2687.

(3) War Cabinet 16/11/17, CAB 23/4/275.

(4) War Cabinet 19/11/17, CAB 23/4/277.

Clemenceau as soon as the new French government was installed to point out the mistrust with which Sarrail was regarded in British army circles⁽¹⁾. Clemenceau expressed misgivings about the Salonica situation and had asked Robertson's liaison officer in Paris whether the British government was satisfied with the existing state of affairs⁽²⁾. Despite instructions given as a result of Robertson's complaints, Sarrail had given no indication of the military position other than a meagre statement of the disposition of certain units⁽³⁾. In the French Cabinet Clemenceau read out the correspondence exchanged by Ribot and Lloyd George in the preceding June and expressed his willingness to satisfy the English demands by recalling Sarrail. Henri Simon⁽⁴⁾ warned of possible difficulties in the Chamber of Deputies and suggested that it would be best to draw up a list of military reasons for Sarrail's replacement. Foch indicated that his attempts to elicit information from the general had always been met by Painlevé's refusal, on the grounds that this would be a sign of distrust on the part of the government. In the end the Cabinet left Clemenceau free to reply to Lloyd George that Ribot's promise would be honoured⁽⁵⁾. As a result Clemenceau made it known that he had agreed to recall Sarrail and replace him with General Franchet d'Espérey⁽⁶⁾.

At the new Supreme War Council, meeting on 1 December, Clemenceau frankly declared that all that was known of the situation at Salonica was that nothing was known. He had asked Sarrail for a report on the situation, but had received only a brief reply which was in no sense a report. The French government was proposing to make important changes in the command, but as these were not finally settled and were of purely French concern he could not discuss the matter further⁽⁷⁾. Even

(1) Lloyd George to Clemenceau 21/11/17, Fonds Clemenceau 6N 209.

(2) War Cabinet 21/11/17, CAB 23/4/279.

(3) *ibid* 26/11/17, CAB 23/4/282.

(4) Minister for the Colonies.

(5) Poincaré - *op. cit.*, Vol. 9, pp 388-90. For an indication of the Grand Quartier Général's ignorance of Sarrail's plans, see 'Note sur les Armées Alliées d'Orient', 28/11/17, No. 11722, 16N 2991.

(6) Bertie to Balfour 28/11/17, F.O. 371/2895/234840.

(7) CAB 28/3/I.C. 36.

with this prospect of more fruitful developments now that Clemenceau was in power, Robertson showed his irritation as soon as the discussion moved on to Balkan affairs. He passed a scrap of paper to Henry Wilson on which he had written, "we always get on to this subject and waste all our time over it"⁽¹⁾. It was the cry of the westerner par excellence, who had long seen the prosecution of the war thwarted by the intervention of politics and politicians. Perhaps, even now, he could not bring himself to believe that a French government could actually dispense with Sarrail's services. When the French cabinet met on 4 December Clemenceau stated his belief that Sarrail could not be allowed to remain. But now his choice for the succession was veering towards the former War Minister, General Roques. Clemenceau indicated that he could not then be accused of having sacrificed Sarrail to a political reactionary⁽²⁾. Two days later Robertson voiced his impatience that no action yet appeared to have been taken by the French premier. He was authorised by the War Cabinet to draft a strongly worded note to be sent to Clemenceau in Lloyd George's name⁽³⁾. This complained that while further reports continued to be received regarding probable hostile attacks on the allied forces in Macedonia, the British government still had no knowledge whether adequate defensive preparations had been made to meet such attacks⁽⁴⁾.

The question of Sarrail's command was finally settled at the first meeting under the presidency of Poincaré of the French Cabinet de Guerre. Clemenceau stressed the need to replace the general, but Pétain was anxious that he should not be placed at the disposition of the High Command since this would be to leave Pétain the responsibility of sacking Sarrail. This, after all, was a prospect from which French politicians had consistently retreated over the past two years. In Clemenceau's opinion the military situation at Salonica was hopeless. This being the case he was not pre-

(1) Hankey - op. cit., Vol. 2, pp 732-3.

(2) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol. 9, p. 400.

(3) War Cabinet, 6/12/17, CAB 23/4/293.

(4) Lloyd George to Clemenceau, 6/12/17, F.O. 371/295/232631; A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1043.

pared to send out one of France's better generals. But Poincaré, Leygues⁽¹⁾, and Foch objected that a serious situation would arise if the enemy were allowed to take Salonica. Foch insisted, therefore, that a capable man must be appointed and on Pétain's suggestion the choice was made of General Guillaumat, who had commanded at Verdun after Nivelle had become commander-in-chief⁽²⁾. The decision was conveyed to the English War Cabinet that Sarrail would learn of his replacement as soon as Guillaumat arrived at Salonica⁽³⁾. In fact Clemenceau himself informed Sarrail that the government, "acting on general considerations" had decided to recall him to France. This bitter pill was sugared as attractively as possible. The government, Clemenceau stated, appreciated the difficulties which Sarrail had encountered and the services which he had rendered, and was disposed eventually to envisage the possibility of giving him a new post⁽⁴⁾. In all probability, however, there was no chance of this, for Clemenceau had ample evidence of Sarrail's ineptitude. The French premier explained to the Chamber Army Commission that on the eve of what might be a strong enemy offensive he could not have left the allied troops in a state of complete disorganisation and lack of command⁽⁵⁾. Sarrail's relations with the allies, particularly England, had been strained and Clemenceau had felt obliged to carry out Ribot's promise and relieve the general⁽⁶⁾.

After two bitter years, then, Sarrail's command was at an end. The resolution of Clemenceau had succeeded in doing what seemingly countless allied conferences had failed to achieve. At last it had been accepted by the French government that they could expect no whole-hearted cooperation from

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- (1) now Minister of the Marine.
 - (2) Poincaré - op. cit., Vol. 9, pp 402-3; Cabinet de Guerre, procès-verbal, 3N2.
 - (3) Clemenceau to War Cabinet 7/12/17, CAB 25/27; A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1043.
 - (4) Clemenceau to Sarrail No. 1629, 9/12/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 209.
 - (5) Meeting of 12/12/17, Parliamentary archives, C 7499.
 - (6) Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission 16/12/17, C 7490.

Britain at Salonica while as distrusted a commander as Sarrail remained at the head of the Armée d'Orient. The lasting impression left by these two years is indeed of the futile waste of time involved in the periodic meetings of the statesmen of the two countries. As Lloyd George came to realise, these were not really conferences at all, but meetings of people with pre-conceived ideas who desired only to find a formula which could reconcile them. They were really nothing but a "tailoring" operation at which different plans were stitched together⁽¹⁾. The conduct of the Great War has frequently been castigated by historians as amateurish. But it is perhaps the conduct of the allies' diplomacy which most merits this description. The Salonica campaign, moreover, exhibits this element at its startling worst. What was needed was the construction of an inter-allied General Staff, designed to examine and advise on the military situation. No government could abdicate to it the right to issue orders, but if Germany were to be defeated the allies needed to concede that there was far more to participation in a coalition than the mere lip-service involved in the periodic gatherings of soldiers and politicians.⁽²⁾

(1) War Cabinet 30/10/17, CAB 23/13/259a.

(2) c.f. Lloyd George - War Memoirs, Vol. 4, p. 2407.

CHAPTER 8

The Political Background in France (1917) - The Ascendancy
and Fall of Sarrail.

Painlevé's success in protecting Sarrail against Joffre's vindictiveness was indeed considerable. He had, nonetheless, certain factors working in his favour. Joffre's absence from the meetings of the Council of Ministers made it easier for his arguments to be destroyed and he was in any case not the most subtle of political strategists. The opposition of premier Briand posed an altogether more difficult proposition for Painlevé, especially as Berthelot's position at the head of the Maison de la Presse gave Briand a very firm grip on the media. At the beginning of September 1916 governmental fury grew with Sarrail's lack of activity to support the offensive of the Roumanian army. On 5 September Le Matin carried a portrait of General Gouraud, carrying the caption: "Le général qui a commandé en chef l'Armée d'Orient". The justifiable conclusion was reached that Sarrail's replacement had been decided upon. Gouraud, having commanded the Dardanelles forces, was a logical choice to take over from the man who had originally been designated to replace him.⁽¹⁾ Rumours of this nature circulated throughout Paris, although the English Embassy received a denial that Gouraud's presence in Paris had any connection with Sarrail's position at Salonica.⁽²⁾ Sarrail, on the other hand, heard that, in the absence of Painlevé, Thomas, Viviani and Combes from the Cabinet, his enemies had pushed through the appointment of Gouraud as his successor. Only Painlevé's subsequent protests had secured the reversal of this decision.⁽³⁾ Austin Lee also heard that Gouraud's nomination had held good for a period of three days before being revoked.⁽⁴⁾

The ominously meaningful appearance of Gouraud's photograph in Le Matin coincided with the beginnings of a widespread press campaign against Sarrail. This in itself was strange, considering that the government's powers of censorship were extensive. Sarrail's friends

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- (1) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 10/9/16, Cambon - Correspondance, vol. 3, p. 123.
- (2) Granville to Grey, No. 1971, 10/9/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/16/25.
- (3) Sarrail - op. cit., p. 175.
- (4) Minute by Sir H. Austin Lee, 7/11/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/162/Bal/16/7.

immediately cried out at what they saw as a flagrant undermining of the Sacred Union.⁽¹⁾ The suspicion that the government, or at least the Quai d'Orsay, was giving tacit approval to these newspaper attacks against a serving French general obliged Briand to make a statement to the Chamber on 22 September. In reply to the Socialist deputy, Paul Poncelet, who argued that the press had launched a concerted offensive with the authorisation of the censor, Briand had no alternative but to say that Sarrail, who was just then beginning to achieve some military successes, had the full confidence of the government and that the unfair attacks upon him would be ended.⁽²⁾ The left-wing press was not, however, particularly impressed with Briand's explanations. L'Oeuvre pointed out that a drawback of the current system of censorship was that it gave to anything that was published the character of official approval and support. As there was no newspaper prepared to defy the censor on military matters, L'Oeuvre concluded that, had the government really disapproved of the anti-Sarrail articles, they would never have appeared in the first place. Three days after Briand's explanation Painlevé heard of the existence of governmental instructions to permit articles critical of Sarrail to appear and of one specific anti-Sarrail piece, censored by Le Matin on its own initiative, which had been restored by order of the authorities.⁽³⁾

Painlevé's loyalty to the Briand government was becoming increasingly questionable and by the middle of November Bertie noted that the Minister of Public Instruction might use Sarrail as a lever with which to overthrow the government.⁽⁴⁾ The English ambassador also detected Painlevé's hand in the organisation of the cabal which

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- (1) Herbillon - op. cit., vol. I, p. 339; censored article by Gustave Hervé in La Victoire of 6/9/16, 5M 364.
- (2) Mermeix - Joffre, p. 216; Herbillon - op. cit., vol. I, p. 344; Le Radical, 23/9/16.
- (3) Note of conversation with M. Matte 25/9/16, Painlevé MSS, 313AP110.
- (4) Bertie - Diary, vol. 2, p. 55; Bertie to Grey 12/11/16, Bertie MSS, P.O. 600/168/Pr/16/86.

got up a transport debate in the hope of upsetting the ministry.⁽¹⁾ Painlevé spread a report that Briand, in order to get rid of Sarrail had solicited complaints against him from the British and other allied governments.⁽²⁾ Bertie assured Jules Cambon that the representations made by the British government were spontaneous and were the feelings of the Russian, Italian and British military authorities in regard to Sarrail's performance at Salonica.⁽³⁾ Yet when the question of Sarrail's replacement had come up for discussion in the English War Committee Lloyd George had stated his impression that "the French rather wanted us to suggest it".⁽⁴⁾ Similarly, as early as July, Robertson had "received a hint that the French would like to have a hint from him that we did not like General Sarrail",⁽⁵⁾ while Bertie himself had noted that Briand had not been sorry to receive the English remonstrances since he could use them as a weapon against his Radical-Socialist Cabinet colleagues in demonstrating the dangers of having a military commander who too willingly dabbled in politics.⁽⁶⁾ Painlevé, in fact, detected a conspiracy by representatives of the G.Q.G. and Quai d'Orsay in the allied capitals to encourage 'boomerang' complaints against Sarrail, which had their true origins inside France.⁽⁷⁾

As a corollary to prompting complaints against Sarrail from his English allies, Briand consistently fell back on the alliance as his excuse for resisting pressure inside his government to pursue more energetic policies at Salonica and in Greece such as Sarrail demanded.

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- (1) Bertie to Grey 14/11/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/16/55.
 - (2) Bertie to Hardinge 9/4/17, Lloyd George MSS, F51/4/19.
 - (3) Bertie to Grey 9/11/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/168/Fr/16/83.
 - (4) War Committee 24/10/16, CAB 42/22/5.
 - (5) War Committee 29/7/16, CAB 42/16/10.
 - (6) Bertie to Grey 19/10/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/16/43.
 - (7) Private note by Painlevé, Nov. 1916, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

England would not tolerate, Briand insisted, any sterner action against the Greek government to protect the rear of the Armée d'Orient. This line of argument often involved a distortion of English policies and came increasingly to isolate Briand from his cabinet colleagues and from the wishes of the French diplomatic and military agents on the spot. From Salonica Lecoq⁽¹⁾ respectfully asked Léon Bourgeois whether the resistance of France's allies was not in fact being exaggerated and whether Briand's policy of inactivity did not entail a rather desperate search for excuses.⁽²⁾ In better informed circles, however, it became increasingly evident that Briand's policies had rather more personal and intimate explanations.⁽³⁾

By the time that Roques returned to Paris from Salonica it was becoming evident that the triumvirate around which the French government had been fashioned for the preceding year was composed of increasingly uncomfortable bedfellows. A cynical observer noted that since November 1915 the affairs of France had been conducted by the union of a man of great talent but no character [Briand] with a general of character but no talent [Joffre], under the aegis of an irresponsible and intellectually limited chief magistrate [Poincaré].⁽⁴⁾ With his failure to achieve a military breakthrough in the course of 1916 and in the face of an ever escalating casualty list, Joffre's prestige began to sink rapidly from the middle of the year. Of this loss of popularity Chantilly remained sublimely unaware or at least impotent to do anything about it.⁽⁵⁾ But politically Joffre's lack of success became a growing embarrassment. As Briand pointed out to Joffre's liaison officer at the end of November, it was the much criticised Sarrail who was obtaining military victories. What could

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- (1) Directeur général des Etablissements de la Mission Laïque.
 - (2) Lecoq to Bourgeois (incorrectly dated), Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 9.
 - (3) See below p. 218.
 - (4) Confidential note on the direction of the war by Henri Niche, 26/12/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 56.
 - (5) Berthelot to Tardieu 29/6/16, Berthelot MSS.

Joffre offer by comparison.¹ Roques' report would greatly ease Briand's way towards disposing of this incubus.

France, faced with the threatening international situation of 1913, had resorted to the unusual step under the Third Republic of appointing to the Elysée a man who was not a political nonentity. Briand's relationship with Raymond Poincaré had been considerably eased by the fact that the latter feared the consequences for himself of a government formed by one of the premier's more likely successors, Georges Clemenceau. Nonetheless, in the course of 1916, Poincaré came to the fore among those members of the Council of Ministers who resented Briand's supine policy towards Greece and the Salonica Campaign, and his evident hostility towards Sarraill. Briand was becoming increasingly isolated within his own cabinet, the majority of which was pressing for sterner action against Greece and its monarchy.²

The role of Poincaré in the government of the country during the war is one of the immeasurable factors in the history of these years.³ The image spread by Clemenceau in which Poincaré appeared as the effective ruler of the country, with Briand little more than a 'beau parleur' and lazy cigarette smoker sheltering beneath a façade of fine phrases is unquestionably an exaggeration.⁴ But it seems safe to say that Poincaré exercised his prerogatives to the full, did have a say in the construction of policy and made his presence felt at meetings of the Council of Ministers. The President

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- (1) Herbillon - op. cit., vol. 1, p. 359.
- (2) A. Ferry - op. cit., p. 152.
- (3) G. Wright - Raymond Poincaré and the French Presidency (1942), p. 144. Poincaré's large collection of private papers housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale [N.A.F. 15992-16055] offers no clue as to his role in political affairs during the war. They are of virtually no interest for the present study, since they appear to have been divested of political material.
- (4) Report by G. Saunders, 25/1/16, Lloyd George MSS, D 19/7/9.

objected to the attacks made on Sarrail and considered that the latter had never been given the necessary forces and equipment.¹ The hold which the Radical Socialists appear to have had over Mme Poincaré may account for this attitude.² Bertie noted that "for private and personal reasons the President of the Republic is in awe of the rue de Valois faction which supports Sarrail. He is therefore inclined to favour him and those who support him."³ Whatever the motivation, differences between Poincaré and Briand came to a head over policy towards Greece, where the former favoured "the mailed fist" and the latter "oratorical persuasion."⁴ Poincaré wanted to use force to settle any differences with the Greek government, but Briand continued to dismiss the warnings which poured out of Greece as the excesses of embittered men.⁵

In the first of a series of increasingly biting reproaches to the French Minister in Athens, Briand wrote to Guillemin in January 1916 saying that he found in the diplomat's telegrams traces of the exaggerations and lack of judgment of which he had already had cause to complain in the naval attaché's despatches. Guillemin should be careful not to involve himself in party political struggles in Greece nor to awaken Greek susceptibilities in a way which might later rebound upon himself and his government.⁶ When Poincaré made reference to the despatches of de Roquefeuil and Braquet in the Council of Ministers, Briand turned angrily upon him and said that certain French agents, tacitly supported by Sarrail and Guillemin, wanted to pursue

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- (1) Herbillon - op. cit., vol. 1, p. 349.
 - (2) Bertie to Grey 21/2/17, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/169/Pr/17/18.
 - (3) *ibid*, 11/11/16, *ibid.*, F.O. 800/172/Gz/16/52.
 - (4) Bertie - Diary, vol. 2, p. 19.
 - (5) Poincaré - op. cit., vol. 8, p. 41.
 - (6) Briand to Guillemin, No. 108, 21/1/16, A.E. 'Guerre', vol. 250.

a policy of violence towards Greece, but that he would not associate himself with their ill-conceived ideas.⁽¹⁾ Briand complained in January to Guillemin of loose talk about a naval demonstration, a bombardment of Athens, the complete occupation of Greece and even the removal of Constantine. He was at a loss to see what was behind all this. Did Guillemin really think France could secure the support of her allies for such policies?⁽²⁾ Less than a fortnight later Briand renewed his criticisms. Guillemin was too preoccupied with press campaigns and Greek internal politics. His avalanche of telegrams to the Quai d'Orsay served only to conceal the real importance of events and he should not forget that the unity of view so carefully established with France's allies could only be maintained if France kept away from excessive actions in Greece. The suggestions coming from France's agents "ne répondent en rien à nos vues ni à la situation et ne pourraient que jeter la Grèce dans les bras de nos ennemis".⁽³⁾ Elliot thought that Guillemin was doing his best to "take his cue" from Paris, but that he was unable to keep pace with his government's changes of behaviour towards Greece. Sarrail, he felt, was even "further behindhand".⁽⁴⁾

With Briand for once absent from a meeting of the French Cabinet at the beginning of April 1916, all the ministers felt able to express their anxiety that French policy towards Greece was too weak.⁽⁵⁾ When it became apparent that the Greek government was resisting the passage of the reformed Serbian army, even such an arch philhellene as Denys Cochin raised his arms in indignation and spoke of treason. Briand alone still attempted to defend Constantine and his government, but his only line of defence was to say that England was not prepared to force the hand of Greece and that France could not act alone.⁽⁶⁾ He used the same argument at the beginning of June, following the entry of Bulgarian forces on to Greek soil, to mitigate the more energetic suggestions of his colleagues in the French Cabinet.⁽⁷⁾ With Poincaré taking the lead, the Council of Ministers tried to open Briand's eyes to Constantine's treachery but, while temporarily absent from the Quai d'Orsay at the beginning of May, Briand was careful to leave de Margerie

(1) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, pp 42-3.

(2) Briand to Guillemin No. 127, 25/1/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 250.

(3) *ibid* No. 196-7, 6/2/16, *ibid*, Vol. 251.

(4) Elliot to Grey 13/12/16, F.O. 371/2616/29147.

(5) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, p 163.

(6) *ibid*, p 166.

(7) *ibid*, p 267.

and Berthelot with instructions to concert with the veteran Minister without Portfolio, de Freycinet. Jules Cambon, nominally senior to both the other officials and anxious to insist to the Greek government on the unhindered passage of the Serbian army, felt that he had been deliberately by-passed.⁽¹⁾ Poincaré's interventions at meetings of the Cabinet led to violent language on both sides,⁽²⁾ and on one occasion in August 1916 the two men nearly came to blows after Poincaré had accused Briand of lying and suggested that Briand's policies were explicable only in terms of his liaison with the Princess Georges of Greece. Only Doumergue's timely intervention and urgent entreaties to put patriotism first restored a semblance of order to the situation.⁽³⁾

Poincaré had only said what an increasing number of figures in France were coming to accept - that the country's Balkan policy was in the last resort dictated by the whims of the Prime Minister's Greek mistress. Briand's biographer skates tastefully over this question and asserts that, as always, *raison d'état* was his subject's dominating motivation. Briand's attempts to pursue more energetic policies, he asserts, invariably came up against the resistance of France's allies and, in particular, of England.⁽⁴⁾ From London, however, Cambon noted Briand's tendency to use any sign of hesitation in England as an excuse for his own inertia.⁽⁵⁾ He naturally resented Briand's suggestion that the fault lay in the ambassador's presentation of France's arguments to the English government.⁽⁶⁾ The English were in fact more prepared to pursue a vigorous policy towards Greece than Briand was willing to accept. Indeed by October 1916 the Greek monarchy rested on one prop alone - Briand himself.⁽⁷⁾ Cambon found this intrusion of personal factors into his country's diplomacy extremely distasteful and asserted that the only two considerations which bore any weight with Briand were his own instinct for survival and his desire to be as obliging as possible to the Greek princess.⁽⁸⁾ Le Roy Lewis thought the whole affair was significant only in so far as it showed that Briand's opponents were "scratching around here to find stones to throw at him",⁽⁹⁾

(1) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 8, p 199.

(2) A. Ribot: Letters to a Friend, p 24.

(3) J. Caillaux: Mes Mémoires (1947), Vol. 3, p 391; Wright: op. cit., p 164.

(4) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 284.

(5) Cambon to Fleuriau 31/8/16, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 121.

(6) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 6/10/16, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(7) *ibid*, 14/10/16, *ibid*.

(8) *ibid* 21/10/16, *ibid*.

(9) Le Roy Lewis to Lloyd George 23/10/16, Lloyd George MSS, E 3/14/21.

but in the present context it is indicative that anything other than military considerations were determining the conduct of the Salonica Campaign and problems associated with it.

At the same time that Briand's authority within his own government was weakening his parliamentary difficulties also began to increase. The Chamber had first assembled in secret session with the aim of a completely frank interrogation of the government's policies as early as June. Then Briand had used his gift of eloquence and his capacity to circumvent detailed criticism in a welter of oratorical persuasion to score a notable triumph. Paul Cambon had been contemptuous of the whole operation: "On prononcera quelques vagues paroles auxquelles Briand répondra par quelques vagues annonces et le Cabinet sera sauvé", and concluded that the Prime Minister was safe because of the lack of an obvious successor.⁽¹⁾ In fact Briand gave an able and moving account of his Balkan policy, concluding that conditions for an offensive were improving all the while. This completely nullified the effect of Delcassé's speech, in which the former foreign minister disclosed for the first time that his resignation had been prompted by the anxiety which he felt at sending French soldiers overseas when the enemy remained on French soil.⁽²⁾ Parliamentary hostility was not, however, completely stilled and in September the Radical deputy Abrami gave a cogent criticism of the government's Balkan policy to the Chamber Army Commission.⁽³⁾ Moreover disappointments over the Somme campaign and the Roumanian reverses so seriously discredited the government that the Chamber once more constituted itself into a Secret Committee at the end of November. This time the problems for the executive would be far more serious than those of June.

The tone of the meeting was determined by Roques' long-awaited eulogy of Sarrail on 30 November. As Painlevé was able to report to Salonica the whole Chamber acclaimed Sarrail when Roques gave his exposé of the operations of the Armée d'Orient and Sarrail's role in them.⁽⁴⁾ Roques' defence of Sarrail served to deflect parliamentary criticism away from Briand and the government and towards Joffre and the High Command. Figures prominent in Chantilly's campaign against Sarrail were now at obvious risk and Briand

(1) Cambon to X. Charmes 16/6/16, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 115.

(2) Parliamentary archives, C 7647.

(3) Audition de M. Abrami 27/9/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1039.

(4) Painlevé to Sarrail 2/12/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

suggested to General Pellé that the latter might like to take up a command at the front to escape the revenge of Sarrail's associates.⁽¹⁾ No such easy way out awaited General Joffre, severely discredited by the course of events on the Western front. Briand's own survival now necessitated the effective removal of Joffre from the higher direction of the war and a governmental reshuffle to try to inject some new vigour into a near moribund régime. The premier carried out neither task with any great expertise. Inside the secret session Augagneur, Minister of Marine at the conception of the Salonica Expedition, argued that the power of Chantilly made for the existence of two governments within France. This, he believed had had a particularly pernicious effect on Sarrail's conduct of operations: "Nous pouvons affirmer que les malheurs qui frappent la Roumanie sont la conséquence fatale de la soumission du gouvernement au grand commandement qui n'a jamais voulu comprendre l'importance des opérations en Orient". The centre and left greeted with wild enthusiasm Abrami's conclusion that the names of General Joffre and the Chantilly General Staff "sont loin ... d'évoquer les échos, les rumeurs, l'enthousiasme et les illusions qu'ils ont fait naître au début". Sensing that his own career depended upon it, Briand yielded to his critics by agreeing to remove Sarrail from Joffre's control, explaining that he was giving the latter a new rank - that of general-in-chief, technical adviser to the government.⁽²⁾

For the rest Briand managed somehow to survive his parliamentary ordeal. In the premier's opening speech "the soporific qualities of his oratory were at their best", and Le Roy Lewis believed most deputies were left wondering why they had asked to have a secret sitting after they had listened to Briand.⁽³⁾ His Greek policy was predictably a source of weakness and his relationship with the Princess Georges did not strengthen his position in dealing with it. But, by concentrating attention on the future of the High Command, Briand was able to avoid detailed explanations of his own policy, such as were called for by seven searching questions posed by Charles Benoist,⁽⁴⁾ and by the widespread realisation of Berthelot's

(1) Pellé to Albert Thomas 3/12/16, Thomas MSS, 94AP 237.

(2) Parliamentary archives, c 7648.

(3) Le Roy Lewis to Lloyd George 30/11/16, Lloyd George MSS, E 3/14/32.

(4) Benoist MSS, 4542.

involvement in the campaign against Sarrail.⁽¹⁾ Austin Lee heard that the French premier's defence of his Greek policy on 4 December was weak and that Tardieu had made a violent and loudly applauded attack on the Roumanian policy of the government. But two days later Briand told Bertie he was certain of triumph in the Chamber.⁽²⁾ Briand could leave Benoist's questions and the allegations against Berthelot unanswered by quelling parliamentary discontent through the sacrifice of Joffre. As Le Roy Lewis reported to Lloyd George, Briand "has managed to escape somehow or other".⁽³⁾

General Pellé had suspected that Salonica might be removed from Joffre's orbit even before the Chamber went into Secret Session and reflected upon the fact that French political divisions were being allowed to undermine the work done towards unity of command in the war and French supremacy among the allies based on Joffre's prestige.⁽⁴⁾ Joffre later claimed in his memoirs that Briand misled him by assuring him that his new position as technical adviser would leave him with the general direction of the war, very much as before,⁽⁵⁾ but Pellé soon appreciated that this was a delusion: "Le Général Joffre", he told Albert Thomas, "qu'on le veuille ou non n'existe plus".⁽⁶⁾ Sensing the government's predicament Pellé thought Briand had first wanted to get rid of Joffre completely and had then considered keeping him with ill-defined functions which the general would find it impossible to fulfil.⁽⁷⁾ Not surprisingly Joffre soon found himself unable to remain at his new post, especially when the new Minister of War, General Lyautey, appeared anxious to restrict his powers still further.⁽⁸⁾ So the hero of the Marne departed, consoled perhaps by the honorific title of Marshal of France now granted to him, for, as Berthelot noted, if France might lack gratitude she could still show generosity.⁽⁹⁾ Sarrail was thus now free of Chantilly's tutelage, his authority deriving solely from the government, as it had before the decree of 2 December 1915.⁽¹⁰⁾

(1) Abrami's assertion that Sarrail's enemies "n'étaient très éloignés ... de votre [Briand's] cabinet" was met by the cry, "Berthelot!", C 7648.

(2) Bertie to Hardinge 6/12/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/16/57.

(3) Le Roy Lewis to Lloyd George 5/12/16, Lloyd George MSS, E 3/14/33.

(4) Pellé to Thomas 25/11/16, Thomas MSS, 94 AP 237.

(5) Joffre: Memoirs, Vol. 2, p 533 ff.

(6) Pellé to Thomas 15/12/16, Thomas MSS, 94 AP 237.

(7) Pellé to Berthelot 15/12/16, Berthelot MSS.

(8) J. C. King: op. cit., p 138.

(9) Note by Berthelot 23/12/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 983.

(10) Note sur les Decrets du 13/12/16, 16N 3058.

Briand's governmental manoeuvrings produced a less radical reorganisation. The elderly ministers without portfolio were finally dispensed with and Roques was replaced at the rue St. Dominique by General Iyautey. Briand's motive here may well have been the way in which Roques had handled his inspection of Sarraill.⁽¹⁾ But perhaps the most significant governmental change in the context of the Salonica expedition was the departure of Paul Painlevé. Before the final disappearance of Joffre, Painlevé told Briand that he was not satisfied with the Prime Minister's reorganisation of the High Command, which still seemed to leave the general-in-chief with extensive authority.⁽²⁾ But Painlevé's hesitations in the period of governmental instability encouraged the belief that he was angling for a bigger prize for himself.⁽³⁾ In fact Painlevé seems to have set his mind on obtaining the Ministry of War. When it became evident that this was not forthcoming, he probably surmised that his own fortunes could best be served by severing all connections with what was evidently an ailing administration. Briand's reshaped cabinet survived for a further precarious three months. By contrast, out at Salonica, Sarraill was enjoying a period of relative immunity. With Joffre out of the way and Briand now too weak to attempt any further initiatives, the general's enemies within France were for the time being at bay. He was perhaps the only figure to emerge from the governmental crisis stronger than before.⁽⁴⁾

Briand's ministerial survival was now very much on a day to day basis and within a fortnight of his governmental changes he was obliged to face a Secret Session of the Senate. Paul Cambon noted the premier's principal enemies as Painlevé, Clemenceau and Poincaré, but thought that once again he would pull through because of the lack of an obvious candidate to replace him at the head of the government. The questions of Salonica and Greece remained, however, "son point faible".⁽⁵⁾ De Margerie considered that Briand was imposing a crushing burden upon himself by retaining control at the Quai d'Orsay at the same time as he remained Prime Minister,⁽⁶⁾ while patriotic

(1) c.f. King: op. cit., pp 137-8.

(2) Painlevé to Briand 11/12/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 56.

(3) Painlevé to Thomas 20/12/16, *ibid*, 313 AP 55.

(4) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 4, p 103.

(5) Cambon to Barrère 22/12/16, Barrère MSS, Vol. 1.

(6) de Margerie to Barrère 20/12/16, *ibid*, Vol. 3.

observers regretted the obsession with party politics, when the war continued to drag on, seemingly interminably.⁽¹⁾ Briand's parliamentary majorities rose and fell, but as 1917 began the trend seemed to be that the opposition was gaining ground. Only Briand's persuasive eloquence and his skilful parliamentary manoeuvring, together with a widespread fear of having Clemenceau as his successor, kept him in power.⁽²⁾ An order of the day, respecting the affairs of Greece and Salonica, adopted by the inter-parliamentary 'groupes d'action nationale' in the middle of January amounted to a vote of censure on the military and diplomatic action of the French government since 1 December 1916.⁽³⁾ During the last days of the month, therefore, the Chamber for a third time resolved itself into a secret session. Salonica, as a matter of course, was the first subject of the interpellations, with Abrami attacking Briand's thesis that France's conciliatory policy towards Greece was largely dictated by the pressure of her allies.⁽⁴⁾ Cambon reflected with concern on the possibility of Briand being removed from power: "S'il tombe ce ne sera ni Ribot, ni Bourgeois, mais Painlevé avec son cortège maçonnique qui formera le Cabinet. Painlevé à la guerre, Sarrail généralissime voilà le rêve des radicaux-socialistes".⁽⁵⁾ For the last time, however, Briand was able to extricate himself with a flow of elegant rhetoric and Bertie predicted a handsome majority for the government.⁽⁶⁾ Briand spoke for 4½ hours on the second day of the Secret Session and for 1½ hours on the third day, and told Bertie that he was well satisfied with his majority of 313 votes to 135.⁽⁷⁾ But for most people it was not so much Briand's qualities as the failure of the opposition to come up with a viable alternative which had produced this result.

Feeling in informed circles within the administration that Sarrail should be removed was not completely dispelled by Roques' report and Joffre's departure. The new Minister of War, General Iyautey, did not hide his opinion from de Margerie, and the latter, who held a similar view, startled Briand by suggesting that the Salonica question could not be settled without a change in the command.⁽⁸⁾ The fragility of the government's parliamentary position,

(1) Albert Legrand to Barrère 29/12/16, *ibid.*

(2) Bertie to Hardinge 11/1/17, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/169/Fr/17/4.

(3) Bertie to Balfour 19/1/17, F.O. 371/2876/18217.

(4) Parliamentary archives, C 7651.

(5) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 22/1/17, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 139.

(6) Bertie to Balfour 26/1/17, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/169/Fr/17/14.

(7) Bertie: Diary, Vol. 2, p 109.

(8) de Margerie to Barrère 3/1/17, Barrère MSS, Vol. 3.

however, ruled this out, even though the cabinet no longer contained Sarrail's chief defender. Indeed parliament only received confirmation of Roques' impressions when the deputy Benazet reported to the chamber in the course of January 1917 that the Armée d'Orient and its commander had done all and more than could be expected of them, given the severe deprivation under which they had laboured. The G.Q.G. had never looked further afield than the fields of Flanders and had never thought of trying to nip in the bud Germany's quest to establish her supremacy from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf. Benazet concluded hopefully, "Quelles que soient les fautes du passé, quand une armée a des chefs comme ceux qui ont commandé à Salonique et des soldats qui ont supporté tant de maux sans une défaillance, il y a toujours lieu d'espérer".⁽¹⁾ Consequently all that Briand could attempt to do was to try to replace Guillemin by Jonnart, the former foreign minister, in the belief that the latter would be more capable of keeping Sarrail in check.⁽²⁾

Painlevé may have been out of office, but he was not idle in making preparations for what he believed would be his imminent return - a return in which he envisaged being powerful enough to make full use of Sarrail's talents. Using now the intermediary of Sarrail's new liaison officer at the Ministry of War, Commandant Decrais, who sympathised with both Painlevé and Sarrail, Painlevé asked of the general what post he would like for himself if Painlevé were in a position to determine such matters. Sarrail replied that he was entirely at the disposition of his political mentor, but went on to show that he believed his abilities to be underused in the Salonica side-show. Whatever his faults, these did not extend to undue modesty or lack of ambition: "S'il n'a pas idée spéciale sur rôle à me donner, il pourrait me désigner comme chef d'Etat major de l'armée, directeur général de personnel et du matériel. Avec ces fonctions je pourrais m'occuper des opérations et de l'organisation de l'avant aussi bien que de l'intérieur".⁽³⁾ Whatever Painlevé decided, Sarrail unreservedly placed the future of the Armée d'Orient in his hands after learning at the Rome Conference of all that Painlevé had done for him.⁽⁴⁾ Painlevé, who before

(1) Benazet's report, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1041; Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 209.

(2) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 8/2/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(3) Sarrail to Decrais 20/1/17, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110; Fonds Clemenceau 6N 200.

(4) Sarrail to Painlevé(undated), Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

entering parliament had battled in favour of the revision of the Dreyfus case, could be counted on to show equal fervour in his defence of this second martyred hero of the republican institution. Many were surprised that Painlevé had become "un fanatique de Sarrail".⁽¹⁾ He scarcely knew the general as an individual, but "il lui avait voué un culte et le considérait comme le seul homme capable de nous assurer la victoire."⁽²⁾ But since Sarrail could not really expect ever to receive the supplies at Salonica necessary to carry out a major operation, he had to consider it merely as a waiting post. The conduct of operations in France filled him with no confidence, but, when the ineffectiveness of the High Command's methods had been demonstrated, when his friends had been called to power, when the emasculating effect imposed upon French democracy by the Sacred Union had been removed, then, Sarrail believed, he would return to France as the representative of a different school of warfare.⁽³⁾

Although Joffre was now out of the way the Armée d'Orient had a new enemy, admittedly of lesser stature, in the person of General Nivelle, Joffre's successor as commander on the Western front. With the air of a father defending his children, Nivelle had protested at the end of February at the frequent reinforcements of the Armée d'Orient at the expense of the main front and called for the return to France of two of the extra divisions.⁽⁴⁾ But before the Comité de Guerre had chance to pursue Nivelle's propositions Painlevé would have arrived at the rue St. Dominique. The possibility that he would support Nivelle against Sarrail was, of course, remote, if not non-existent.⁽⁵⁾ For the most part, therefore, Sarrail's position seemed to be increasingly secure. The deputy Chappedelaine, inspecting the Armée d'Orient on behalf of the Chamber, accepted Roques conclusion that Sarrail had done "tout ce qu'il était militairement possible de faire dans l'état de ses forces".⁽⁶⁾ But he deplored the tendency to supply Sarrail with inferior equipment - "bon pour l'Orient" - as if "les français qui se font tués ici étaient d'une qualité secondaire".⁽⁷⁾

(1) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 10/6/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1; c.f. P. Cambon to X. Charmes 11/6/17, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 173:

"Quant à Painlevé, il a un Dieu et un prophète, c'est Sarrail".

(2) P. Cambon to X. Charmes 21/3/17, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 154
M. Jean Painlevé has no knowledge of his father having had any dealings with Sarrail before the outbreak of the war.

(3) Mermeix: Sarrail, p 12.

(4) G.Q.G., T.O.E. Study on the situation of the Armée d'Orient, 7/3/17, 16N 3017.

(5) Note sur les effectifs de l'Armée d'Orient, 27/3/17, 16N 3018.

(6) Report on the Armée d'Orient, Spring 1917, 16N 3273; Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109; Fonds Poincaré, 6N5.

(7) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 20/2/17 and 5/3/17, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 8.

Briand's government was widely seen to be at the mercy of the first serious internal or external disturbance. The crunch came with the mis-handling of a parliamentary debate on aviation by General Lyautey, after which the War Minister resigned. Briand fought desperately for survival but his options were becoming increasingly limited. From London Cambon contemptuously surveyed the final death-throes of the French government: "Il lui suffit d'avoir devant lui quelques heures pour se sentir tranquille, c'est la vie ministérielle à la journée. En de pareils moments c'est pitié".⁽¹⁾ Briand had, Cambon asserted, brought into the government "ses habitudes de bohème".⁽²⁾ But what the ambassador feared above all was a ministerial comeback by Painlevé. In fact Briand appears to have approached Painlevé but the latter's terms proved too high. In this prevailing confusion Sarraill was encouraged to believe in the possibility of his own return to Paris to fill an as yet undefined role at the side of the next Minister of War.⁽³⁾

Briand had finally to admit defeat and on 19 March the elderly Minister of Finance in the outgoing régime, Alexandre Ribot, succeeded in forming a cabinet. In this the key post of Minister of War went to Paul Painlevé. De Margerie considered that the combination of the Presidency of the Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which Ribot undertook for himself after the fashion of his predecessor, would prove a crushing burden for a man already well into his eighth decade,⁽⁴⁾ and there was widespread belief that the new war minister would be the real master of the situation.⁽⁵⁾ At all events the appointment of Ribot would calm the fears of the parliamentary left-wing with regard to the powers of the military, since no one was "plus civil, moins militariste" than he. Moreover it had been evident from the time that Painlevé left Briand's government that he would be indispensable to Ribot in any attempt by the latter to construct an administration. The reception Painlevé had received on 13 December 1916 on entering the Chamber, whilst Briand presented his reshaped cabinet, had testified to his parliamentary following.⁽⁶⁾ But Cambon thought Painlevé's appointment raised a huge question mark over the future direction of the war,

(1) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 16/3/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(2) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 16/3/17, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 149.

(3) Decrais to Sarraill 17/3/17, Fonds Clemenceau 6N 200.

(4) de Margerie to Barrère 20/3/17, Barrère MSS, Vol. 3.

(5) see, for example, J. de Pierrefeu to Pellé 20/3/17, Pellé MSS 4437.

(6) Mermeix: Nivelle et Painlevé pp 41-6.

since it would be difficult for him to cooperate with Joffre's successor, General Nivelle. Might not Painlevé decide to bring back Sarrail to replace the commander-in-chief, himself newly installed?⁽¹⁾ Nine ministers in the new government were designated to form an inner War Cabinet, such as had been created in England. The Radical-Socialist Minister of the Interior, Louis Malvy, was not originally included in this group, but took his place within a matter of days following a protest by his party's hierarchy. This was an immediate indication of the strength of the Sarrail faction in the new administration.⁽²⁾

Not surprisingly Sarrail was overjoyed to be placed under Painlevé's orders.⁽³⁾ He immediately made known his wish to be created Major General of the French Armies. He needed a wider scope for his activities than that provided by Salonica which had proved a veritable burial ground for his military ambition.⁽⁴⁾ Of necessity, however, Painlevé could not fully satisfy Sarrail's desires. The general was informed that Painlevé did not rule out the possibility of his return to France, but that this would have to come later when Painlevé was strong enough to impose his will.⁽⁵⁾ Sarrail, therefore, should not create difficulties, but wait rather for the great role which would eventually fall to him.⁽⁶⁾ In fact Painlevé would never, even as Prime Minister, have sufficient parliamentary strength to effect so controversial a change in the High Command.⁽⁷⁾

The end of the Briand government inevitably brought about changes at the Quai d'Orsay, the most important of which was the effective exclusion of Philippe Berthelot from the higher direction of policy. Although Berthelot retained nominal authority his characteristic signature is missing from the draft despatches of the Ribot administration. The senator Bérard urged that

(1) P. Cambon to H. Cambon 20/3/17, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 153.

(2) Mermeix: Nivelle et Painlevé, p 39.

(3) Sarrail to Painlevé 22/3/17, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(4) Sarrail to Decrais 21/3/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(5) When Painlevé pressed the English government to instruct Milne to participate in Sarrail's April offensive, Herbillon began to wonder whether the ultimate aim was not, by ensuring a success for Sarrail, to build him up to such an extent that he could be recalled to an elevated post in France: "L'idée de généralissime ne paraîtrait peut-être plus absurde alors". [Herbillon: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 63.]

(6) Decrais to Sarrail 18/4/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(7) Bertie noted of Painlevé: "He is charming, intelligent and speaks well, but he has not sufficient grit". [Diary: Vol. 2, p 149]

Berthelot, as the man who had accused Sarraill of failing adequately to support the Roumanians, should be expelled from the Foreign Ministry: "Faites donc justice de ce misérable, dont les agissements dans les affaires balkaniques ... ont été si profondément criminels".⁽¹⁾ Close links between the Berthelot and Painlevé families were perhaps responsible for avoiding so extreme a solution,⁽²⁾ but Cambon feared that Berthelot might use his control of the Maison de la Presse to launch a campaign against Ribot, since, having been all-powerful at the Quai d'Orsay, Berthelot was unlikely to relish being reduced to impotence.⁽³⁾ As Briand's man, Berthelot recognised that he would be an object of hostility in the new government,⁽⁴⁾ but when Ribot used Jules Cambon to offer Berthelot a diplomatic post abroad to ease his embarrassment, the latter declined.⁽⁵⁾

The reorganisation at the Quai d'Orsay inevitably manifested itself in the Greek and Salonica policies of the new government. Reviewing the changed situation for the British government, Harold Nicolson suggested that, after the personal attacks to which Briand had been subjected, Ribot's policies were not likely to err on the side of leniency.⁽⁶⁾ He declared that the new French government was "determined to support an active policy in Greece and that the rather intermittent check which we have hitherto been able to place upon General Sarraill's ambition will now be removed".⁽⁷⁾ Robert Cecil concluded that the Ribot cabinet was more afraid of Sarraill than its predecessor had been.⁽⁸⁾ One immediate effect was felt in the field of censorship where items of news of a nature to weaken the Greek royalist government, which had been stopped under Briand, were now allowed to appear.⁽⁹⁾ Fontenay voiced the hopes of French agents on the spot in trusting that French diplomatic activity would no longer be determined by the personal feelings of the Prime Minister and that the unholy alliance

(1) Bérard to Painlevé 3/4/17, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 94.

(2) Conversation with M. Daniel Langlois-Berthelot, 4/5/73.

(3) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 24/3/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(4) Berthelot to Pellé 1/5/17, Pellé MSS, 4435.

(5) Berthelot to Ribot 6/6/17, Berthelot MSS.

(6) Nicolson Memorandum on the Greek Situation, 2/4/17, F.O. 371/2884/82365.

(7) Minute on Bertie to Balfour 30/3/17, F.O. 371/2865/67185.

(8) Minute on ibid, Balfour MSS, F.O. 800/202.

(9) Note by Jules Cambon 25/3/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 290.

of Briand and the courts of London and St. Petersburg would not be able further to shield the Greek monarchy from its just deserts.⁽¹⁾ Jules Cambon gave Sarraill to understand that he would face fewer obstacles to the pursuance of a forceful policy than in the past,⁽²⁾ but his brother Paul was not impressed by what he saw of the first weeks of Ribot's 'new' policy. This seemed to be governed above all by the desire to be as different as possible from Briand in order to curry favour. The visions of the new government were, he feared, restricted to the corridors of the parliamentary chamber.⁽³⁾ It was, Cambon urged, only these parliamentary considerations together with his fear of Painlevé which finally induced Ribot by the early summer of 1917 to agree to the deposition of King Constantine.⁽⁴⁾

The niceties of Ribot's motivation were probably of little concern to Sarraill. The fact remained that this government and its successor, in which Painlevé himself became Prime Minister, represented the high summer of Sarraill's command and the period in which he had least to fear from his opponents. After returning from an inspection at Salonica, the deputy Lagrossillière confided to the Chamber at the end of March his hope that at long last France had a government which would treat Sarraill fairly and recognise the importance of the Balkan theatre of war. At all events perhaps the systematic starvation of the Armée d'Orient in men and munitions would be ended.⁽⁵⁾ Not surprisingly Painlevé proved the most sympathetic to Sarraill of the War Ministers who occupied the rue St. Dominique in the course of the Salonica expedition. Decrais reported that Painlevé's attitude towards the Armée d'Orient was excellent, that he would provide the maximum possible supplies for the army and indeed that the general had a true friend in the new Minister of War.⁽⁶⁾ The Comité de Guerre meeting on 28 March decided that, although the full extent of Sarraill's demands could not be satisfied because of insufficient resources within France, an effort would be made in favour of the Armée d'Orient involving the despatch of a further 15,000 men before the middle of May.⁽⁷⁾

(1) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 23/3/17, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 8.

(2) Decrais to Sarraill 2/4/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(3) P. Cambon to X. Charmes 3/5/17, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 166.

(4) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 10/6/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1.

(5) Report presented 30/3/17, 16N 3139.

(6) Decrais to Sarraill 22/4/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(7) G.Q.G., T.O.E. Note pour l'Etat-Major de l'Armée, 31/3/17, 16N 3017.

As far as policy towards Greece was concerned, Painlevé's greatest wish was to remain in complete agreement with Sarrail - the latter's feelings would guide and fortify his own conviction.⁽¹⁾ Whenever Sarrail was under attack, as for example following a tour of inspection by the army health and sanitation group of deputies, Painlevé would leap to his defence,⁽²⁾ while at interallied conferences France's allies found an implacable opponent to any diminution of the Armée d'Orient or of the authority of its commander.⁽³⁾ The English War Cabinet might insist upon Sarrail's recall, but Painlevé would find excuses to postpone the issue and ultimately to ignore it.⁽⁴⁾ Apart from his official communications with Sarrail through the Ministry of War, Painlevé employed Commandant Decrais, who had been Sarrail's liaison officer with Iyautey, to convey his more personal thoughts to Salonica. This semi-private channel of communication was a great source of satisfaction to Painlevé,⁽⁵⁾ but was to prove an embarrassment to himself and to Sarrail, since the body of their correspondence fell into the hands of Clemenceau, when the latter took office in November. A new position in the Armée d'Orient was also found for Paul Fleurot, who had been such a useful means of communication when Painlevé had occupied only a minor post under Briand.⁽⁶⁾ Thus the French government came increasingly to be dominated by the political views of the group which Sarrail himself represented, and Denys Cochin, the only right-of-centre member of the Ribot cabinet, wrote despairingly of the end of the Sacred Union in France.⁽⁷⁾ Ironically, however, Sarrail's position was less secure than it seemed and both he and Painlevé were soon to be swept away in the wake of the political scandals which rocked both France and her war effort in the autumn of 1917.

Inevitably Painlevé was not the complete master of the situation as long as Ribot remained premier. When, however, in September 1917, Painlevé formed his own ministry it was to prove the weakest in the history of wartime France and the only one which fell as a direct result of an adverse vote in the Chamber of Deputies. Painlevé's chief difficulty derived from the unwillingness of the Socialists within the cabinet to

(1) Decrais to Sarrail 4/6/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(2) *ibid* 1/7/17, *ibid*.

(3) *ibid* 27/9/17, *ibid*.

(4) Note by Bertie of conversation with Sir H. Wilson 24/6/17, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/169/Fr/17/51.

(5) Decrais to Sarrail 19/4/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(6) *ibid* 17/5/17, *ibid*.

(7) Cochin to Ribot 27/7/17, Delcassé MSS, Vol. 6.

serve in a government in which Ribot retained the portfolio of foreign affairs.⁽¹⁾ Painlevé himself appeared very much under the influence of his Minister of State, Franklin Bouillon, who tended to treat the new premier as if it were in fact he who headed the government.⁽²⁾ Albert Thomas suggested that Painlevé was fearful of having anyone hostile to Sarraill in an important position and found this a sad commentary on the political situation in time of war.⁽³⁾ Even the eventual replacement of Ribot by Barthou at the Quai d'Orsay failed significantly to improve Painlevé's standing and, as the weeks passed, his parliamentary majority fell and discussion as to his successor grew ever louder. But the whole position of the government was undermined by the series of scandals which broke whilst Ribot was still Prime Minister.

While in London for an allied conference Ribot received an urgent despatch from the Minister of Justice, Viviani, informing him that a series of confidential documents and private letters relating to the Salonica Campaign had been found in the safe of the spy Almeyreda.⁽⁴⁾ President Poincaré learnt that Almeyreda had received the documents from an officer of Sarraill's headquarters staff, who had Sarraill's authorisation to hand them over in order to create a patriotic campaign in favour of the Salonica expedition. Sarraill was, however, apparently not implicated in the second stage of the process, by which the documents had passed into enemy hands.⁽⁵⁾ Almeyreda had communicated a report, in which Sarraill had described the state of the Armée d'Orient in the darkest colours, to agents of the German government, who thus came to know of the weakness of the Macedonian force. Had the enemy been in a position to act upon this knowledge, the Balkan campaign might have ended disastrously. The pieces found in Almeyreda's safe, which all dated from 1916, included a telegram from Joffre to Sarraill concerning the date and conditions of offensive operations, a telegram from Guillemin to Sarraill sending Briand's instructions, a private letter from Sarraill to General Noulens,⁽⁶⁾ former Minister of War

(1) Decrais to Sarraill 12/9/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(2) P. Cambon to J. Cambon 18/10/17, Jules Cambon MSS, Vol. 1. Paul Cambon was not impressed by Painlevé or Franklin Bouillon and wrote of "ces deux hannetons bouillonnants et impuissants". [P. Cambon to X. Charmes, 21/11/17, Cambon: Correspondance, Vol. 3, p 199.]

(3) Undated note by Thomas, Thomas MSS, 94AP 356.

(4) Viviani to Ribot 6/8/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1043.

(5) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 9, p 231.

(6) A. Palmer op. cit., p 161 incorrectly suggests that this letter was addressed to General Roques.

and at the time of the discovery ambassador in St. Petersburg, and several letters from a Captain Mathieu in Sarrail's general staff to his friend, Paix-Séailles, in Paris, who, interestingly enough, was a secretary of Paul Painlevé. In these letters Mathieu sought to demonstrate the way in which Sarrail was being persecuted by both Joffre and Briand. He pointed out that the effective size of the Armée d'Orient was nothing like as large as Joffre was suggesting, that the English General Mahon had been replaced because he got on too well with Sarrail, that Briand was trying to create difficulties by inventing stories about Sarrail's political activities and that evidently the government and high command were determined to destroy him⁽¹⁾:

"le but cherché est de mettre Sarrail dans l'impossibilité de faire quoi que ce soit et de crier ensuite à l'incapacité; quant au pays on s'en f... et voilà".⁽²⁾ Among the politicians whom Paix-Séailles was instructed to contact in order that they might use their influence to counteract the hostility and distortions of Joffre and Briand were Caillaux and Painlevé. A similar motive underlay Sarrail's letter to Noulens, who, at the date of the letter, was President of the Chamber Army Commission and a prominent figure in the Radical-Socialist group. In this Sarrail stressed that he could not tolerate being made the slave of the Greek court and the valet of the English government.⁽³⁾

The arrest of Almeyreda proved an immediate embarrassment to Painlevé and he saw in it an attempt to cause difficulties for him over his relationship with Sarrail.⁽⁴⁾ In the war committee on 28 August he went to great pains to stress that there was no direct link between Sarrail and Almeyreda and that the blame obviously lay only with the officer who had sent the documents from Salonica, that is, Captain Mathieu.⁽⁵⁾ Decrais kept Sarrail in close touch with the development of the scandal in Paris. He counselled caution in a delicate situation,⁽⁶⁾ and warned that the matter would become serious if Paix-Séailles and Mathieu were brought to trial. If they were not charged, Decrais believed that Sarrail would be

(1) Mathieu to Paix-Séailles 10/5/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 56.

(2) *ibid* 3/5/16, *ibid*, 313 AP 118.

(3) Sarrail to Noulens 15/6/16, *ibid*, 313 AP 110.

(4) A. Ribot: Journal, p 193.

(5) R. Poincaré: *op. cit.*, Vol. 9, pp 257-8.

(6) Decrais to Sarrail 28/8/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

required to cover Mathieu or to mete out disciplinary punishment to him. At all events the parliamentary situation was grave and the position of the government critical. Decrais had heard that the issue would be used against Painlevé and Sarraill by their enemies.⁽¹⁾ Under pressure from Painlevé the government repeatedly put off a decision on the matter,⁽²⁾ but by early October Painlevé did not think it would be possible to delay judicial proceedings against the two men much longer.⁽³⁾ Sarraill seemed less aware of the gravity of the situation and wrote that it would be unjust and clumsy to punish Mathieu. The general did not wish to do anything which could give the impression that he in the least regretted the letter he had sent to Noulens.⁽⁴⁾ He was "complètement indifférent" to the whole affair and suggested that his enemies would have to find a more effective stick with which to beat him.⁽⁵⁾ By the beginning of November, however, such accusations were being bandied about in the press that the government had no alternative but to bring Paix-Séailles to trial under the espionage law of 1886.⁽⁶⁾

Despite Sarraill's apparent lack of concern there can be no doubt that it was the delay and hesitation which characterised Painlevé's whole handling of the incident, together with his similar reluctance to act upon the charges being made at the same time against Caillaux and the former Minister of the Interior, Malvy, that successively decimated his parliamentary majority. The feeling was gaining ground that the whole administration was riddled with corruption and that only a complete overhaul of the government could restore its tarnished reputation. The famous Caillaux dossier contained a plan for the appointment of General Sarraill as Commander-in-Chief of the French army.⁽⁷⁾ The appointment was apparently to be made after a coup d'état which Caillaux was contemplating. The saviour fetched back from the East was to play Bonaparte to Caillaux's Sieyes. Even if Sarraill himself had no knowledge of this scheme, the mere fact that his name appeared among the persons in whom Caillaux had confidence made a very bad impression. The general did show a measure of anxiety when

(1) Decrais to Sarraill 8/10/17, Fonds Clemenceau 6N 200.

(2) Sometime after 20 September Painlevé wrote to the Military Governor of Paris, "J'estime qu'il n'a pas lieu, en l'état, d'ouvrir une information contre le Capitaine Mathieu et contre le sergent Paix-Séailles." Painlevé to Military Governor, undated, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 118. A. Palmer op. cit., p 161 grossly misinterprets the whole affair, suggesting that "Ribot and Painlevé insisted on an enquiry".

(3) Decrais to Sarraill 9/10/17, Fonds Clemenceau 6N 200.

(4) Sarraill to Decrais 13/10/17, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 105.

(5) ibid 9/10/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(6) Decrais to Sarraill 7/11/17, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 200.

(7) G. Bonnefous: Histoire Politique de la Troisième République, Vol. 2, (1957), p 370.

he wrote privately to Painlevé to express his hope that, whatever else happened, the latter would remain Minister of War. For the Armée d'Orient this was a necessity. ⁽¹⁾ But Sarrail's pious hopes could not refurbish Painlevé's parliamentary standing, and on 13 November, finding himself in a minority in the Chamber, he handed in his resignation to Poincaré. ⁽²⁾ With Painlevé's fall from power the whole question of Sarrail's retention of the army command at Salonica would be raised with new intensity.

The question remains, however, of why Painlevé had been so inept in his handling of the Almeyreda affair. The answer would seem to lie in his own involvement in the matter and his consequent fear of what the opening of judicial proceedings might do to his political career. There seems no doubt that Painlevé had received copies of many of the documents found in Almeyreda's safe, including the letter to Noulens, at the time they were first sent to Paris in the early summer of 1916. He was after all, according to the letters themselves, one of the politicians on whom Sarrail and his supporters were counting to offset the attacks of the government and high command, and his tireless efforts in this direction have already been examined. The speech which Painlevé prepared for the trial of Louis Malvy before the High Court in July 1918 ingenuously limited the scope of the correspondence involved to a simple exchange between Mathieu and Paix-Séailles. ⁽³⁾ He conceded that the documents had been passed on to "quelques hommes politiques", but made no mention of his own involvement. In fact what was really at stake was a political campaign against Briand and Joffre in which both Painlevé and Sarrail were deeply committed. ⁽⁴⁾ The confidential information contained in the despatches and letters argued strongly against the assumption of any offensive operations in the Balkans. It was all designed to show how the government had deprived the Armée d'Orient of all possibility of meaningful action. Moreover, Painlevé's part in the affair was all the more irregular in that

(1) Sarrail to Painlevé 15/11/17, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(2) c.f. Lloyd George: War Memoirs, Vol. 5, p 2673: "What he [Painlevé] lacked was the manoeuvring skill and the force necessary to convert his ideas into the action which sweeps aside obstacles, cuts through entanglements, and bears down the intrigues of parliamentary and military cliques".

(3) Project of speech 20/7/18, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 117.

(4) c.f. Villari: op. cit., p 188.

he had at the time been a cabinet minister in the Briand government. He must also have been fearful lest disclosures from the Paix-Séailles affair uncovered the whole of his clandestine correspondence with Sarraill conducted through Fleurot and Bourguignon. Herein, after all, he had provided Sarraill with confidential information about meetings of the Council of Ministers and openly revealed that he had worked to thwart the intentions of the majority of his colleagues, including the Prime Minister. Unlike men such as Caillaux, who could claim to owe no loyalty to the administration other than that imposed by the state of war, Painlevé had been working to undermine the authority over an army commander of a government of which he was a member. Whatever the justice of the cause, such disclosures could only have had a disastrous impact upon Painlevé's political future.⁽¹⁾

With the accession to power of Georges Clemenceau in the middle of November 1917, the possibility that the combination of allied pressure⁽²⁾ and the weight of opinion within France might lead to the recall of Sarraill became real for the first time since Painlevé had arrived at the rue St. Dominique in the preceding March. Sarraill's contacts with Clemenceau had been frigid even before the Salonica expedition. In 1911 Clemenceau had split with the Radical Socialists, accusing Caillaux of seeking to appease Germany. His attitude towards any of Caillaux's associates was inevitably coloured by this basic political antipathy. When, upon receipt of a letter from Lloyd George, Clemenceau brought up the question of Sarraill's replacement at the Council meeting of 27 November, one of the grievances raised against the general was his secret correspondence with Decrais.⁽³⁾ This had come into Clemenceau's hands when he took over the War Ministry from Painlevé and had of course revealed the political ambition of Sarraill and his discussions with Painlevé regarding a future military appointment at a time when Painlevé did not even hold ministerial office. Not surprisingly, therefore, at the Cabinet de Guerre meeting on 6 December, Sarraill's dismissal and replacement by General Guillaumat

(1) On 19 December Clemenceau informed Poincaré that Painlevé would like the Paix-Séailles affair stopped. Clemenceau indicated that the situation could become difficult for the ex-premier. [Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 9, p 421.]

(2) see above, pp 206-9.

(3) Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 9, p 389.

was decided upon. For his political associates and admirers Sarrail's recall was inevitably a shattering blow. Lecoq consoled himself with the thought that "il reste pour le pays et pour son parti une force et une force à peu près intacte", and that he returned to France with his stature increased.⁽¹⁾ In fact, however, Sarrail's wartime career was effectively over and the dream of the Radical Socialists rudely ended. The firm government of Clemenceau soon produced such substantial majorities in the Chamber that Sarrail's recall never provoked the parliamentary eruptions, which it had always been assumed it would do under weaker administrations. The new premier handled what was potentially an explosive situation with consummate skill. On 11 December he forwarded to the Chamber a report on the treasonable activities of Sarrail's associate, Caillaux. In the next fortnight the case against the Radical Socialist leader grew blacker and blacker. He was found to have sent hundreds of letters to men who had turned out to be German agents. When the warrant was issued for Caillaux's arrest on 13 January, Sarrail was judiciously at home in Montauban. His days of political intrigues were over. But the removal of Sarrail did at least open up the possibility that the Salonica expedition might emerge for the first time as a serious military proposition. Political intrigues might give way to genuine military action - the struggles surrounding personalities to the serious business of winning the war. In August Sir William Robertson had stated that "Salonica is a bad case and has been so from the start". He argued that "it had been like a millstone round our neck ... and will be till the end of the war".⁽²⁾ Sarrail's successor had at least the chance to prove him wrong.

(1) Lecoq to Painlevé 26/1/18, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(2) Robertson to Monro 1/8/17, Robertson MSS, 1/32/65.

CHAPTER 9Underlying motives

The close interaction between French domestic politics and the developing course of the Salonica Campaign and its associated problem of policy towards Greece has already been examined at length.⁽¹⁾ That military considerations and in particular the hope that the expedition might have a material effect on the defeat of the Central Powers, played only a secondary role has become evident. Yet the question must inevitably be asked whether the pressure of internal political affairs is alone sufficient to explain the fervour with which sections of French political society and most of the leading agents involved in the campaign championed and justified its continuation. France, after all, was not in a position where she could afford to deploy her military resources indiscriminately. The paradox must be faced that for three years France maintained a large army in the Balkans, the military activity of which was severely limited, until the last few months of the war, in both scope and effect, while at the same time many of her national provinces were under constant enemy occupation and when German forces were within striking distance of Paris. Half of France's coalfields and the iron ore of Briey and Longwy had fallen into the clutches of Germany together with a big proportion of her industrial power. There exists therefore the possibility that the origins of French enthusiasm for the Salonica campaign go deeper than the struggles within the corridors of the parliamentary chamber.

Certainly British observers gradually came to the conclusion that some sinister territorial, strategic or economic motivation must underlie French persistence in the campaign. But as often as not their suspicions were ill-defined and based more on instinct than concrete evidence. Typically Robertson had felt since the beginning of the expedition that there was "something behind the French mind in regard to their policy in that part of the world". What it was he had never been able to discover,⁽²⁾ but he had learnt that there was "a great deal of Finance as well as Politics mixed up in this French enterprise", which explained why the French would not think of coming away from Salonica if they could help it.⁽³⁾ Moreover he believed that France and Italy had "conflicting aims in that part of the world" and

(1) See above, chapters 6 and 8.

(2) Robertson to Balfour 26/8/16, Robertson MSS 1/35/5.

(3) Robertson to Murray 5/4/16, Robertson MSS 1/32/19.

that they refused to make concessions "for reasons other than those they give".⁽¹⁾ Similarly Lord Hardinge did not "quite know what the French were up to in Greece". But it appeared that they had some "ulterior object in view" which was perhaps the aspiration to "a sort of position of eventual protector of Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean".⁽²⁾ As Robert Cecil told his colleagues in the Imperial War Cabinet in May 1917, there seemed to be "a section in France which aimed at utilising the war in order to secure for France some special political or financial position in Greece". It appeared as if there had been a real unwillingness to restore peace and harmony in Greek affairs and whenever there had seemed to be an opportunity of getting things back on a better plain it had somehow been prevented.⁽³⁾ Both the vagueness of Cecil's charge and the uncertainty with which it was directed merit attention. They reflect the inadequate understanding with which Englishmen viewed the French political structure in the course of the war. No one was really sure where the direction of French policy lay. Even as late as July 1918 Maurice Hankey could only confide to his diary that "there are and always have been subtle influences, possibly of a financial character, behind the French attitude towards the Salonica expedition."⁽⁴⁾

Reviewing the problem for the Cabinet Committee on War Policy in the summer of 1917 Lord Milner preferred to shift the element of uncertainty on to the French themselves. He conceded that they were "playing a game of their own", but did not believe that they themselves quite knew what they wanted, except to exercise a predominant influence in Greece and to get some economic advantage out of it in the future. The policy was one of "indefinite grab" and Milner thought that Sarrail was the living embodiment of it, being only interested in "schemes of future exploitation".⁽⁵⁾ From Salonica itself General Milne also focussed attention on Sarrail and suggested that he was doing all he could for French interests in the Near-East after the war.⁽⁶⁾ As Milner informed the Imperial War Cabinet the French policy was "a bad one and one whose object was loot."⁽⁷⁾ This emphasis on a financial motive was confirmed by observers on the spot, who were also able to give greater

(1) Robertson to Monro 1/8/17, Robertson MSS 1/32/19.

(2) Hardinge to Bertie 10/10/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/16/38.

(3) Imperial War Cabinet 2/5/17, CAB 23/40/LWC 14.

(4) Hankey: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 821.

(5) Memorandum by Lord Milner 8/7/17, CAB 27/7/WP 35; Lloyd George MSS, F/38/2/20.

(6) Milne to Robertson 27/10/16, Robertson MSS, 1/14/48.

(7) Imperial War Cabinet 2/5/17, CAB 23/40/LWC 14.

precision to their accusations. Milne reported that Sarraïl paid little attention to the military front but was giving a good deal to Greece. The French wanted to occupy Thessaly, a base more commercial than military in its uses, to secure a certain outlet for French trade. French concern with the post-war world was evidently galling to the British military commander, who argued that it was costing Britain a good deal in men, money and material with no compensatory advantages, to get Greek affairs entirely into French hands with a view to French supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Milne wondered how long the process of being made a catspaw was going to go on. He would have no objection to these French activities if they ended the war, but in fact they seemed to have little effect on the main issues.⁽¹⁾ Similarly Alfred Stead⁽²⁾ considered that the French were out for financial and economic control of the Balkans after the war and that Sarraïl paid far more attention to attaining this end than to prosecuting the war. But like Milner he argued that there was "no finality and no definition to be found in the French idea".⁽³⁾

Even King George voiced concern about what was going on and was informed by Balfour that "the Italians suspect the French and the French suspect the Italians of entertaining schemes (vague perhaps but not negligible) which will enable them respectively to use Greece as a pawn in the game of rivalry which they are playing in the Eastern Mediterranean".⁽⁴⁾ For personal and family reasons the English monarch was also worried that France might intend to alter completely the form of government in Greece. Bertie reported that, although Sarraïl and some Frenchmen on the spot and a few ministers in the cabinet might desire a revolution, Briand did not wish to upset the King with the view to setting up a republic, for he knew that it would quickly break up into several republics which would not suit French interests.⁽⁵⁾ Bertie took the fact that suspicions of this nature continued to exist as indicating that the English Foreign Office did not have much knowledge of the policy of France.⁽⁶⁾

(1) Milne to Robertson 28/1/17, Balfour MSS, F.O. 800/202.

(2) A.D.C. to Admiral Troubridge.

(3) Stead to Lord Ranksborough 11/3/17, Balfour MSS, F.O. 800/202.

(4) Note by Balfour, 27/2/17, concerning a letter to Stamfordham, CAB 24/6/GT 84.

(5) Bertie to Grey 5/10/16, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr/16/36.

(6) Bertie: Diary, Vol. 2, p 23.

One very clear opinion of the long term aims of French diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean was enthusiastically conveyed to the Foreign Office in March 1917 by Sir Francis Elliot from the British Intelligence Officer in Greece, Compton Mackenzie. Searching for the French rationale Mackenzie argued⁽¹⁾ that it was not surprising that when General Sarrail had secured the military safety of Salonica and realised, as he must have realised in the face of universally hostile military opinion on the western front, the impossibility of a serious advance, the French brain should have looked around for something to do. The reproach often cast against Sarrail of being too political a general accorded, Mackenzie thought, with the lazy English way of thinking that he was "up to something", without trying to find out what it was, yet it might be assumed that the whole of Sarrail's policy after the English refusal to consider an advance from Salonica had been dictated by nothing else but political considerations. Sarrail, however, had always been clever enough to mask French political ambitions under the plea of military necessity. Throughout the tortuous negotiations with Greece the safety of the Armée d'Orient had always been an excuse for any action the French had taken and it was only now being realised that French policy in Greece had nothing whatever to do with the army's wellbeing. Yet even now, to Mackenzie's irritation, the explanation of French policy in the Near-East was either that Sarrail, as a member of the 'Financial Democratic Party', was engineering a scheme for French Jews to make money, that his personal dislike of King Constantine had unreasonably coloured his whole attitude, or even that he aimed at a military coup d'état in France itself, after the style of Boulanger. It seemed to be generally assumed that it was Sarrail who was dictating the policy and that, if Sarrail were removed, the policy would change. Mackenzie, however, believed the contrary view - that Sarrail was but the agent of his government's schemes - to be equally possible.⁽²⁾

Mackenzie argued that political schemes of a far-reaching nature had been behind the arrival of the French naval mission under Commandant de Roquefeuil in January 1916.⁽³⁾ As early as February Venizelos had been approached with a view to creating a revolution in Greece and by April the occupation of the country by French forces had been definitely envisaged. De Roquefeuil's ambition was "to make Greece the halfway house to a French domination of the Levant".⁽⁴⁾ Any action the French wished to take in Greece had been facilitated by the attitude of the English government, which

(1) Memorandum by Compton Mackenzie 5/3/17, F.O. 371/2865/60223.

(2) c.f. G. Mackenzie: Greek Memories (1939), p 75.

(3) c.f. *ibid.*, pp 74-5.

(4) Mackenzie: *op. cit.*, p 336.

throughout 1916, steadily allowed them to take the lead in every matter connected with Greek politics. At that time, March 1917, the French were still persevering in their efforts to occupy Greece and the moment had come, Mackenzie thought, to decide on British policy. The French now wished to occupy Greece as a means of interfering with Italian aspirations in the Near-East. Probably the reason why they hung on so ardently to Salonica was their nervousness over Syria. "Salonica was the expression of their aspirations in the Near-East".⁽¹⁾ It was, Mackenzie concluded, time to prevent English policy from being made any longer the rubbing-rag of the ill-considered aspirations and unreasonable ambitions of two rival Latin nations.

In Athens Elliot was greatly impressed with Mackenzie's analysis of the situation and very much under his influence, although, in arguing that Sarraill was dictating his own personal policy, he disagreed with the Intelligence Officer.⁽²⁾ The preceding November, on Mackenzie's inspiration, he had already warned that de Roquefeuil would soon be returning from Paris with greatly increased powers to enable him to exercise a practical sovereignty over Greece independent of the allied ministers. This, he had urged upon Grey, was symptomatic of the way in which France was determined to obtain complete control over Greece with a view to using the country as a stepping stone between Marseilles and Syria.⁽³⁾ Now, with the Foreign Office in new hands, Elliot reiterated that the French had a definite policy to bring Greece under their exclusive or at least predominant influence.⁽⁴⁾

On the surface, at least, Mackenzie's report had a less conspicuous impact at the Foreign Office. George Clerk felt it "worth reading", but rightly commented that Mackenzie lacked knowledge of the general political position of the British government.⁽⁵⁾ But the memorandum would seem to have had some effect on Foreign Office thinking to judge from the reaction to a despatch from Bertie later in the same month, indicating that the recent fall of the Briand government was likely to precipitate a stiffening

(1) Mackenzie: op. cit., p 66.

(2) Elliot to Mackenzie 7/3/17, F.O. 371/2865/60223.

(3) Elliot to Grey 18/11/16, F.O. 371/2632/232768; Mackenzie: op. cit., pp 350-2.

(4) Elliot to Balfour No. 537, 9/3/17, F.O. 371/2876/51525.

(5) Minute on F.O. 371/2865/60223.

of French policy in Greece. Harold Nicolson argued that an early occasion should be taken to discuss with the French the essential objects of Allied policy in Greece and to discover what they were really aiming at in the Near East. Discussions had previously been limited to the local problems of the moment, but Nicolson thought it was clear that the French regarded it as more than this and that Greece was to play an important role in their future Mediterranean policy - a policy to which, on Imperial grounds, Britain could scarcely remain indifferent. The essential issue, he concluded, was "are we or are we not going to allow France to assume a protectorate in Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean?". Clerk showed even more clearly the impact of Mackenzie's strictures. He argued that the time had come not only for a frank discussion with the French government about Greece, but also for Britain, when met, as she would be, by the old arguments about the safety of the Armée d'Orient and the obvious bad faith of the Greek Government to insist on concrete proofs and to go further and say that the question of Greece was vital to Britain and that she would no longer tolerate the lines of present French action. ⁽¹⁾ In fact Mackenzie's analysis appears to have played a part in stiffening the will of the Foreign Office to make its last attempt to reassert British initiative in the allied conduct of the Salonica campaign and of policy in Greece. ⁽²⁾

(1) Minutes on Bertie to Balfour No. 290, 30/3/17, F.O. 371/2865/67185.

(2) With Balfour absent in America, an extremely long despatch to Bertie was drafted in the Foreign Office by Harold Nicolson. After amendments by Hardinge and Cecil, it was signed by the latter. The despatch argued the urgent need of a frank and comprehensive discussion of the attitude to be adopted towards Greece. Nominally there was no indictment of French policy as opposed to that pursued by the British government, yet the whole tone of the telegram was critical of French actions and suspicious of French motives. It was argued that the actions and language of several of the French agents in Greece had raised the suspicion that an influential section of French opinion was anxious to utilise the present situation to secure for France something like a permanent protectorate over Greece. Bertie, however, was given no opportunity to lay these observations before the French government, for, on the intervention of Lloyd George, still playing the role of guardian of the French body politic, the despatch was never sent. [Draft of Cecil to Bertie, April/May 1917, F.O. 371/2878/83403]

The suspicion which Mackenzie cast upon the role of de Roquefeuil in the fostering of devious French plans would appear to have been misplaced. Ironically enough a matter of days before Mackenzie presented his analysis of the situation to Elliot the Quai d'Orsay was hearing of the perfect collaboration which existed between the British officer and his French opposite number, Ricaud, de Roquefeuil's right-hand man.⁽¹⁾ De Roquefeuil's abrupt and impatient manner, together with his conviction that the defeat of the German enemy in the anomalous situation by which allied forces were occupying a neutral country imposed upon him an almost total disregard for the susceptibilities of Greece, inevitably gave the impression that his policies were directed as much with the neutral as the enemy state in mind. But de Roquefeuil genuinely regretted that his duties in counteracting German propaganda and submarine activity got him involved in internal Greek politics. As he told the French Minister of the Marine this was an unlooked-for role which he had assumed with reluctance.⁽²⁾ His actions, he stressed, were dominated by his original anti-German mission but "les circonstances du temps du guerre actuel créent des situations imprévues auxquelles il faut faire face avec discernement mais avec décision".⁽³⁾ But de Roquefeuil was not above attributing to the English the same sort of devious designs of which he was accused by Mackenzie, as, for instance, when he reported to the Ministry of Marine on the behaviour of the English authorities in Crete and Mitylene, which seemed to suggest the preparations of a permanent occupation.⁽⁴⁾

Mackenzie's charge of French negotiations with Venizelos at the beginning of 1916 to bring about a Greek revolution remains, however, unanswered. In fact knowledge of such intrigue had been in the hands of at least one member of the British government over a year before Mackenzie produced his memorandum. Indeed Lord Kitchener appears to have decided that French enthusiasm for Salonica masked more sinister intentions long before any of his colleagues came to a similar conclusion. On 21 March 1916 he mysteriously informed the War Committee of his belief that the French were following out part of a general scheme and were using the war for purposes of future expansion in the East⁽⁵⁾, and a week later in conversation with Douglas Haig he suggested that

(1) Note sur les Services de Renseignements 22/2/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 270.

(2) de Roquefeuil to Lacaze No. 163, 31/3/16, Marine archives xf 4.

(3) *ibid* No. 183, 7/4/16, xf 4.

(4) *ibid* No. 26, 25/5/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 256.

(5) CAB 42/11/6.

the French were aiming at the development of their dominions in the Eastern Mediterranean and would not now fight actively to beat the Germans in France. (1) The editor of Haig's papers, analysing this "remarkable conversation", has concluded that "Kitchener was wrong". The French refusal to withdraw their army from Salonica was based "neither on strategy nor a subtle foreign policy; it was based on the character of General Sarrail... Therefore despite its normal reluctance to countenance Eastern diversions the French government was most unwilling to withdraw the army from Salonica in case such action would be interpreted as an attack on General Sarrail". (2) In fact Kitchener was in all probability basing his analysis of the situation not on France's refusal to contemplate evacuation but on information he had received from Yarde Buller in Paris. In January and February the latter had reported on the "Briand-Buonaparte intrigue" in Greece, which appeared designed to change the ruling royal family in Athens. By the beginning of February a new factor had arisen in the shape of a Russian counter intrigue to put up Prince Nicholas of Greece as an aspirant for the throne in the event of "a development of the revolutionary scheme". Yarde-Buller considered that this might prove a "serious obstacle to M. Briand's aims". But he understood that Prince Roland Buonaparte had managed, by disbursing nine million francs to buy up most of the Greek newspapers. Guillemin was to be recalled and his successor would "certainly be carefully selected with a view to furthering the scheme". (3) There is no evidence of Kitchener having shared any of this information with his colleagues in the British government. Such behaviour is consistent with the contempt with which he regarded the politicians. The previous September Hankey had taken the opportunity of letting Kitchener know the strength of feeling in the Cabinet at his giving them so little information - a practice which was causing discontent. Kitchener replied that he could not tell them everything because they were "so leaky". But he assured Hankey that "if they will only all divorce their wives-I will tell them everything!" (4)

(1) R. Blake: op. cit., p 137.

(2) *ibid*, p 52.

(3) Yarde-Buller to Kitchener 6/2/16, W.O. 159/12. An earlier letter of 23 January on the same theme is referred to in this letter, but has not come to light.

(4) Hankey: op. cit., Vol. 1, p 221. c.f. Murray to Hamilton: "He seldom told the Cabinet the truth and the whole truth." - quoted, V. Bonham Carter: Soldier True (1963) pp 132-3.

The plot which Kitchener had at least partly uncovered remains shrouded in mystery⁽¹⁾, but would seem to have been associated with the mission to Greece at the end of 1915 of a certain Henri Turot. When the Quai d'Orsay had put sums of money at the disposal of Guillemin for the purpose of organising French propaganda in the Greek press, the latter had felt obliged to say that it would be preferable if France's official representatives were not involved in such activities.⁽²⁾ The arrival of Turot, in his capacity of Director of the Agence Radio, an organisation conceived as an agent of French propaganda⁽³⁾, appears to have fulfilled this requirement and it was not long before he also assumed confidential diplomatic functions to the exclusion of the French Legation in Athens. Moreover, contrary to the practice of the other allied diplomats, Guillemin had instructions to use the diplomatic privileges of his legation to support the Agence Radio⁽⁴⁾. But it was above all as a liaison with the former premier Venizelos that Turot acted on behalf of the French Foreign Ministry. The Greek statesman informed Turot in December 1915 of his confidence in being able to carry the country with him in his policy of bringing Greece into the war on the side of the allies. The massive abstentions by his supporters in the Greek elections had convinced Venizelos of the strength of his position in the country and he now appealed to France, through Turot, to give him support and await concrete results in the spring of 1916.⁽⁵⁾

Turot accordingly asked for a contribution from the French government of 350,000 francs, but at the same time informed Briand that he had been engaged in discussions with the Serbian minister with a view to creating

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- (1) Information on this and many other problems of French war-time politics may lie in the private papers of Aristide Briand. These were apparently used by Georges Suarez for his authorised biography, but have not been made available to historians since. The very existence of the papers is now open to doubt, although an unpublished study by the historical section of the Quai d'Orsay reveals that Briand's family have been befriended by a former head of the French National archives and that the papers "doivent être surveillés".
- (2) Guillemin to Viviani No. 592, 22/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 246.
- (3) Note sur L'Agence Radio à Salonique 17/9/16, *ibid*, Vol. 1039.
- (4) Guillemin to Briand No. 892, 23/4/16, 16N 3163.
- (5) *ibid*, No. 1019, 20/12/15, 16N 3162.

'incidents' on the graeco-bulgarian frontier.⁽¹⁾ In reply Berthelot warned against giving the impression of intervention in internal Greek politics,⁽²⁾ but was able to tell Guillemin that the wealthy Greek financier, Zaharof, a long-time Francophile, was prepared to place a sum of several million francs at Venizelos' disposal.⁽³⁾ Venizelos accepted this offer with enthusiasm and Turot forwarded to Paris the opinions of the Liberal leader on the political situation. The latter felt that force would be necessary to deal with the King, although he did not wish to create a revolution for fear of disrupting the army. He suggested in addition that France should occupy the Greek islands on the pretext that this was necessary to counteract enemy submarine activity and announce that they would be returned to Greece as soon as the country once more enjoyed constitutional government.⁽⁴⁾ Early in the new year, following reports from Braquet and de Roquefeuil, Gallieni's cabinet du ministre came to the conclusion that it was necessary immediately to take charge of the situation in Greece. The country should be subjected to a total blockade and the King and royal family deported. France's interest was, its report suggested, to place a Vendome or Bonaparte on the Greek throne.⁽⁵⁾ Meanwhile a further agent of Briand, acting on the instructions of M. Clementel⁽⁶⁾, and assuming the name of Garibaldi, had made contact with Venizelos with a view to the creation of paramilitary organisations of Greek volunteers. But this mission appears to have proved abortive in the face of Venizelos' assertion that he was not prepared to overthrow the government by illegal means.⁽⁷⁾

Turot rapidly became impatient with the way in which Venizelos employed the money given him by Zaharof and he urged upon the Greek leader the necessity of acting with greater zest and without undue concern for possible economies.⁽⁸⁾ But, perhaps for the reason which Yarde Buller conveyed to Kitchenier, the movement seems to have hung fire and Turot was left to defend

(1) Guillemin to Briand No. 1026, 22/12/15, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 285.

(2) Briand to Guillemin No. 954, 23/12/15, *ibid.*

(3) *ibid* No. 985, 28/12/15, *ibid.*

(4) Guillemin to Briand No. 1111, 31/12/15, *ibid.*

(5) Note sur la situation en Grèce, 18/1/16, 5N 147.

(6) Minister for Trade and Industry.

(7) Braquet to Joffre, 14/1/16, 16N 3162; Garibaldi to Briand 30/1/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1036.

(8) Guillemin to Briand No. 461, 27/2/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 252.

French interests to the best of his ability. He wrote, for example, to recommend to the Quai d'Orsay the services of a certain Maurice Mollard, who was working on projects for the development of French commerce in Greece.⁽¹⁾ By April, however, Venizelos's will appeared to have stiffened and de Roquefeuil confidently predicted that the movement which was developing would be strong enough to sweep away the existing government and perhaps produce an internal revolution. Further demonstrations had been arranged to take place in Athens on 16 April.⁽²⁾ Turot reported with pride that the popular movements were not entirely spontaneous. Through the astute use of funds he had sparked off meetings and demonstrations without Venizelos even suspecting his involvement. Now Venizelos had been caught up in events and it would be impossible for him to draw back.⁽³⁾ Turot next became involved in negotiations for the purchase of the leading Greek newspaper Embros and appealed to Paris for assistance.⁽⁴⁾ A sum of 200,000 francs appears to have been provided. Turot gave account of the way in which he had employed the total sum of half a million francs put at his disposal, but suggested that it would be disagreeable for him to have to ask a certain M. Averoff, even on behalf of Briand, to justify the two million francs which appear to have been entrusted to the latter.⁽⁵⁾ The project to purchase Embros had, however, to be dropped when it came to the knowledge of other Venizelist newspapers which feared competition.⁽⁶⁾

Shortly afterwards, moreover, Turot, was obliged to return to France because of the illness of his son. Reporting to the Quai d'Orsay on his return, he stressed that France would get no where while she refused to recognise that King Constantine was irrevocably won over to the German cause and that it was consequently futile to negotiate with him. He candidly added that France could not retain her influence in Greece and indeed develop it in the future unless the King and twenty-five or thirty other individuals were exiled. After such a coup d'état there would be no further resistance and the only problem facing France would be the decision whether to replace Constantine with a member of the existing royal family or to look elsewhere.

(1) Turot to Berthelot 14/3/16, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 253.

(2) de Roquefeuil to Lacaze 7/4/16, No. 183, xf. 4.

(3) Guillemin to Briand No. 820, 11/4/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 254.

(4) *ibid* No. 872, 18/4/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 254.

(5) *ibid* No. 915-6, 26/4/16, *ibid*.

(6) *ibid* No. 941, 30/4/16, *ibid*.

After recounting the reasons why he had been obliged to foresake the Embros project Turot hesitantly broached the delicate question of Guillemin's position. Pointing to the French minister's complete lack of favour with the King and his absence of self confidence, Turot said that he and Venizelos had come to the same conclusion. They believed that it would be advisable, during the "critical period"⁽¹⁾ to leave Guillemin in titular authority, but effectively to replace him with an extraordinary envoy - preferably a general or an admiral. Turot concluded by saying that in all his suggestions he was merely conveying the opinions of all Frenchmen who had been in Greece long enough to understand the Greek character and to get to grips with the problems of the hour.⁽²⁾

The solutions proposed by Turot had however to wait more than a year before they were put into effect by Jonnart.⁽³⁾ As for Turot himself, he now disappeared from the Greek scene leaving behind him the reputation of "un homme mystérieux, assez roublard, et qui a manié des fonds assez importants."⁽⁴⁾ What happened to Briand's 'plot' - if it ever genuinely existed as a consciously thought-out strategem - remains uncertain, although as late as the end of June 1916 Elliot reported to Grey that he had most secret and confidential information to the effect that Guillemin and Sarraill were concocting a scheme for the overthrow of Constantine and his replacement by Prince Louis Napoleon. "It sounds like lunacy but it is sober earnest on the part of the conspirators"⁽⁵⁾ Indeed it is a matter of conjecture how closely the Turot mission reflected the "Briand-Buonaparte intrigue" as uncovered by Yarde Buller. What has been seen-already of the defence of the Greek monarchy by Briand⁽⁶⁾ is scarcely in tune with a plan hatched by the French premier to remove Constantine. But as regards the sort of empire-building in the Near-East of which Kitchener was so fearful, evidence is not lacking to suggest that Briand was alive to the possibilities of furthering French interests.

When Lloyd George had visited France in February 1915 he had received an interesting indication of the motivation behind Briand's enthusiasm for a Balkan campaign - at a time moreover before the whole idea became inextricably bound up with the political position of General Sarraill. As

(1) presumably the proposed revolutionary situation.

(2) Note by Turot 30/4/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 254.

(3) It was Jonnart, who as diplomatic representative of both France and England, effected the deposition of King Constantine in the summer of 1917.

(4) Note by Abrami 11/5/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(5) Elliot to Grey 28/6/16, Grey MSS, F.O. 800/63.

(6) See above, pp 216 ff.

Lloyd George reported to Grey, the French were very anxious to be represented in any expeditionary force. Briand thought it desirable from the point of view of the final settlement that France and England should establish a right to a voice in the settlement of the Balkans by having a force there. He did not want Russia to feel that she alone was the arbiter of the fate of the Balkan peoples.⁽¹⁾ In a future more or less near when Russia might become too powerful it was important that the peoples of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Roumania should realise that Russia was not the only state to interest itself in their welfare. They should be so constituted as to be a barrier to Russian omnipotence and possession of Constantinople and to all the exclusive advantages which such a possession would give to Russia.⁽²⁾ To a certain extent Briand appears to have been responding to pressure groups within and outside the Chamber, which clamoured for the protection of French interests, largely economic, in the Mediterranean. One historian has gone so far as to say that the Salonica enterprise was conceived by Briand "predominantly as a French bid for power in the Near-East".⁽³⁾

Relatively early in the war the Chamber of Deputies voiced its concern at the Mediterranean situation. When the question of Italian intervention in the war came up for discussion, Georges Leygues, a future President of the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission, reminded his colleagues that France had vital interests in the Mediterranean. When the war had been ended France would be in need of a period of economic reconstruction. This could only take place if France now protected and acquired bases and lines of communication without which industrial and commercial prosperity were impossible. Such considerations would have to be borne in mind in any diplomatic negotiations with Italy concerning the Mediterranean,⁽⁴⁾ and the attention of the government was constantly brought to the defence of the vital eastern basin of the Mediterranean.⁽⁵⁾ Similar concern was expressed at the damage which would result to French interests if Germany were allowed to pursue her political and economic ambitions 'en Orient' and thus create "an immense economic domination from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf by way of Constantinople and from the North Sea to the Indian Ocean".⁽⁶⁾ Indeed members of the Commission formulated as a primary war aim the supplanting of German economic

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- (1) Lloyd George to Grey 7/2/15, Lloyd George MSS, E2/15/4; Lloyd George War Memoirs, Vol. 1, p 409; Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 3, p 96.
- (2) Note by Bertie of talk between Lloyd George and Briand 5/2/15, Bertie MSS, F.O. 800/172/Gr./15/5.
- (3) W.W. Gottlieb: Studies in Secret Diplomacy during the First World War (1957), p 82.
- (4) Meeting of the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission 26/4/15, C 7488.
- (5) See for example Leygues to Briand 20/6/16, C 7490.
- (6) Chamber F.A. Commission, ordre du jour 20/7/15, C 7488.

predominance in both allied and neutral countries.⁽¹⁾ Significantly the Radical-Socialist leader, Joseph Caillaux, was among the figures most anxious to persuade the government to determine the future economic régime of Europe.⁽²⁾

Briand was not slow to reveal that his strategy and diplomacy were largely determined by the sort of considerations which influenced the left-wing dominated parliamentary commission. In the course of the first secret session of the war he argued that the government had recognised the Balkans to be an essential theatre and that he and his colleagues had not been acting for the present but with an eye to the future. States like France did not, he suggested, have the right to allow their prestige to be lost in the countries of the East, and it was as a result of the decision to remain at Salonica that such a catastrophe had been avoided.⁽³⁾ Later in the year, when appearing before the Foreign Affairs Commission to give an account of the course of the Balkan expedition, Briand revealed the overriding importance which he attached to this area when he said that the age-old Eastern Question, in its widest sense, would remain the vital issue even after the war was over. Moreover the countries which had assured for themselves a preponderant voice in its solution would be the masters of the world.⁽⁴⁾

The Foreign Affairs Commission also took the lead in urging upon Briand the necessity of creating an efficient system of propaganda in Greece itself. A substantial propaganda fund had been established under Berthelot's management. Bertie warned Grey that Briand's chef de cabinet was of "anti-British sentiment, without judgement, but of a pushing and intriguing nature".⁽⁵⁾ But the Chamber Commission was not happy with the organisation of the propaganda service in Greece itself and appealed to Briand to enforce the will of parliament by placing it under unified direction in Athens. At that time the defence of French interests seemed to be entrusted to a variety of semi-official agents all acting independently.⁽⁶⁾ But Briand appeared to place his faith in the co-operation of Venizelos with the newly created Agence Radio⁽⁷⁾, although he assured Leygues that the official propaganda organisation dealing with relations with the press which was functioning under

(1) Chamber F.A. Commission, ordre du jour, speech by M. Cruppi 17/11/15, C7490.

(2) *ibid*, speech by Caillaux 22/11/16, C7490.

(3) Secret Session 20/6/16, C 7647.

(4) Foreign Affairs Commission 26/10/16, C 7490.

(5) Bertie to Grey 14/2/16, Lloyd-George MSS, D/19/7/10.

(6) Leygues to Briand-15/2/16, Berthelot MSS (Propaganda), Carton 6.

(7) *ibid* 3/3/16, *ibid*.

the director of the School of Athens, M. Fougères, would retain its independent existence, although working in cooperation with Turot's agents.⁽¹⁾ But in fact, as Colonel Braquet noted, an element of confusion remained since Fougères' activities were limited to intellectual propaganda, while Salanson⁽²⁾ dealt with the press under the ultimate direction of Guillemin. Moreover Bertrand, the correspondent of Le Temps, and Braquet himself were also carrying out propaganda activities in their own way and the whole network lacked unified organisation, largely because Guillemin had no concept of what was required by an efficient propaganda service.⁽³⁾

As the war progressed Berthelot's propaganda agency became increasingly concerned with economic expansion in the Balkans.⁽⁴⁾ From Bucharest his agent at the French legation, Edouard Tavernier, reported that if Roumania entered the war it would be necessary to direct French propaganda to the replacement of the Central powers by France in the Roumanian market for the post-war years.⁽⁵⁾ As Tavernier reported "notre influence politique [doit] être dans l'avenir fonction de notre influence économique".⁽⁶⁾ If after defeating the enemy on the field of battle France found herself vanquished on the economic plain, it would be as if nothing had been achieved: "Nous sortirions, au contraire, de ce terrible conflit, complètement diminué et appauvri".⁽⁷⁾ Within the Quai d'Orsay de Margerie gave the weight of his authority to the idea of a campaign of economic and political propaganda in Roumania, which would become for France an outpost of the Latin civilisation, protecting her against both German and Slav expansion, and at the same time providing a counter-weight to the growing Italian influence in the area.⁽⁸⁾ The conclusion is thus inescapable that the development of French propaganda

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- (1) Briand to Leygues 8/3/16, Berthelot MSS (Propaganda), Carton 6.
- (2) Abrami wrote that Salanson was "l'homme d'Europe qui perd le plus de temps en conversations oiseuses, sans principes, sans connaissance du pays et de la langue". [Note by Abrami 11/5/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.]
- (3) Braquet to 'Mon cher camarade' 22/3/16, 7N 1339.
- (4) The economic sphere has been noted as one of the first areas in which France consciously formulated war aims. From the very beginning of the war enquiries were made to determine how French industrial products could be made to replace German competitors in foreign markets. [P. Renouvin: Les buts de guerre du gouvernement français, Revue historique, (1966), p 8; Briand to Diplomatic, Consular and Commercial Agents (circular letter), 1/1/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1499.]
- (5) Tavernier to Perroy 11/7/16, Berthelot MSS (Propaganda), Carton 6.
- (6) Report by Tavernier 3/10/16, *ibid.*
- (7) Gabriel Doumergue to Ministry of Commerce 18/7/16, *ibid.*
- (8) Undated note of visit of M. Perroy to de Margerie, *ibid.*

in the Near-East, encouraged by left-wing agitation in the Chamber, assumed a deeper significance than the mere influencing of native peoples with a view to winning their confidence so as to defeat the Central powers in the current war. It was inextricably bound up with the preparation of France's position in the post-war world - a position in which the Eastern Mediterranean was seen to occupy a crucial role. In the light of this underlying strategy the continued survival of the Armée d'Orient takes on a new importance.

France's interest in the Near-East was, of course, no new phenomenon. Her connections with this part of the world were centuries old. Under the Ancien Régime a treaty had been concluded with the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, which granted France far-reaching rights and concessions. These so-called 'capitulations' were to prove the basis of France's long standing interest in the maintenance of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. This had become a conscious aim of French diplomacy and a cornerstone of her foreign policy long before England gave serious thought to the Eastern Question in the nineteenth century. France's involvement in the Turkish Empire had been strengthened when her government assumed the role of protector of the Catholic Christian subjects of the Sultan. Educational and missionary activities, supported by the French government, had resulted and by the outbreak of the war French had become the cultural and literary language of all educated classes in the Levant. Moreover France's political, diplomatic and cultural entanglement in the area had marched hand in hand in the second half of the nineteenth century with a growing economic and financial commitment. As the great creditor nation of the pre-war era she held the bulk of Turkey's public debt, controlled the Imperial Ottoman Bank and administered the régie des tabacs. Similarly, in Syria, France had acquired a monopoly of transport facilities and when war broke out was in control of all but two railway lines.⁽¹⁾ "Constantinople in short was the heart of an Empire enmeshed by immense French political interests and financial investments amounting to 3,000 million francs".⁽²⁾ Organisations interested in the affairs of the Near-East had naturally enough proliferated in France and were constantly alert to anything that might undermine French predominance in the area. It was the apprehensions of these groups which were voiced in the Chamber of Deputies in the course of 1915 and 1916 and to which Briand proved responsive. But Briand was in no sense the originator of a French Mediterranean strategy - merely an exponent of a continuing trend

(1) Cassar: op. cit., pp 34-5.

(2) Gottlieb: op. cit., p 98.

in French foreign policy. In the 1880's Gambetta had declared that "the Mediterranean will always be the theatre of French activity", while in 1921 Flandin would assert that "the Mediterranean is the axis of French policy".⁽¹⁾ In the years immediately preceding the war, moreover, the Mediterranean had, if anything, come to occupy an increasingly important position in the French mind. By 1907 France's armoured cruisers had been recalled from the Far-East and her first line battleship strength was concentrated in the Mediterranean.⁽²⁾ As a result of staff conversations with the British the Mediterranean was envisaged by France as her primary naval theatre of operations in any forthcoming confrontation with the Triple Alliance. But the Mediterranean concentration of September 1912 was not a new policy, but merely a reversion to one agreed upon by the Etat-Major Général and the Conseil Supérieur de la Marine in 1906.⁽³⁾ Significantly enough one of the figures to the forefront in the parliamentary debates of 1912 leading to the Mediterranean concentration was the "rapporteur du budget de la marine", Paul Painlevé, newly elected to the Chamber of Deputies and who was to prove the most ardent champion of the Salonica expedition.⁽⁴⁾

In this general Mediterranean strategy Greece occupied an important, but not overriding position for France. An indication of this country's significance was the establishment of a military mission under General Eydoux in 1910 which was largely responsible for the reorganisation of the Greek army that made possible its victories in the Balkan wars of 1912-13. The then French Minister in Athens reported that the Greek government's orientation towards France was to a large extent the result of the constant efforts of the French military attaché⁽⁵⁾. By 1914 Braquet could point to the spread of French influence in Greece by the officers of the mission who were "des agents porteurs de microbes francophiles qu'ils distillent à jets discrets et continus". The implantation of French ideas in the Greek army could well, Braquet suggested, lead to substantial armaments contracts for French industry.⁽⁶⁾ In the summer of 1913 the French were also considering the

(1) S. H. Roberts: History of French Colonial Policy, Vol. 2, (1928), p 591.

(2) P. G. Halpern: The Mediterranean Naval Situation 1908-14, (1971), p 65.

(3) *ibid*, p 84.

(4) G. A. Hesse: Painlevé, Grand savant, grand citoyen (1933), p 88.

(5) Deville to Pichon No. 52, 31/3/10, 7N 1352.

(6) Braquet to Joffre 20/3/14, 7N 1339.

possibility of sending a naval attaché to Athens. The purpose of the exercise would be largely commercial. If the French minister had the assistance of a senior naval officer he would be in a better position to counteract German naval influence in the question of future shipbuilding contracts. The matter was discussed in the French Cabinet and the Minister of Marine, Baudin, offered to attach an officer to the Athens legation in view of the benefits which French industry might derive.⁽¹⁾ Braquet also pressed for the appointment of a naval attaché in the summer of 1915, arguing that while Russia, England, Italy and Germany were all adequately represented only France, despite "les intérêts considérables que nous possédons sur mer à l'ouest comme à l'est de la Grèce", continued to have no one.⁽²⁾ The appointment of de Roquefeuil at the end of 1915 was the government's eventual response to this pressure.

The abortive decision to send two divisions to Greece, in February 1915, was greeted with enthusiasm by Paléologue, the influential French ambassador in St. Petersburg. He noted that it showed that the French government, despite all its other cares, had not forgotten France's age-old interests in the Near-East.⁽³⁾ Similarly, with Sarrail hard pressed in December 1915, Lecoq called urgently for reinforcements on the grounds that failure to provide them would result in the destruction of the accumulated efforts of Frenchmen over the centuries.⁽⁴⁾ As the war progressed, moreover, the French government and its agents in Greece showed a constant concern for the protection of French influence and interests in Greece, the latter being generally of an economic character. The Quai d'Orsay instructed Guillemin to safeguard France's commercial situation on the Greek market so far as circumstances permitted so as to ensure that France maintained her position in the foreign purchases made by Greece and that the direction of economic affairs did not fall under the exclusive direction of Sir Francis Elliot.⁽⁵⁾ In reply Guillemin expressed his regret that he was unable to devote to commercial matters the time and attention which he would have liked because of the burden of duties under which he laboured.⁽⁶⁾ The

(1) Halpern: op. cit., p 336.

(2) Braquet to ? 5/7/15, 7N 1339.

(3) Paléologue to Delcassé No. 193, 5/2/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 219.

(4) Lecoq to Bourgeois 10/12/15, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 9.

(5) Briand to Guillemin No. 935, 22/12/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 297.

(6) Guillemin to Briand No. 1045, 23/12/15, ibid, Vol. 248.

situation was, however, rectified by the appointment of a commercial attaché at the beginning of 1916. French trade with Greece had increased steadily since the end of the nineteenth century and stood at the outbreak of war at around 24 million francs per annum. Nonetheless France occupied only the fifth place among Greece's trading partners and the volume of her exports to Greece had remained almost static since 1906. (1)

Normal consular activities in support of French trade continued during the war and in some cases were given an incentive by it. In December 1914, for example, the Vice-Consul at Janina reported on the possibilities of using the war to replace Austria as the dominant commercial power in the basin of the Adriatic: "Je crois même qu'il nous serait possible de tirer parti dès maintenant de l'état de guerre pour substituer nos articles à ceux de nos ennemis". (2) His colleague at Patras came to a similar conclusion provided that French navigation companies set about providing the necessary transport facilities, (3) while in Corfu the French representative argued that, if direct trading links were established between that island and Marseilles, this would have excellent results for the future of France's export trade to the surrounding area. (4) Acting on the advice of Lecoq, the French Consul General at Salonica, Séon, set up the Association France-Grèce with a view to the development of economic and commercial relations between the two countries. He envisaged it as a typical instrument of France's wartime strategy, being a response "to the measures taken since the beginning of the war to develop France's foreign trade", and it was well received in commercial and financial circles in Salonica. Séon thought it best not to make an immediate appeal to Frenchmen in the area, but to leave the new organisation to appear as a local and spontaneous movement. He hoped, nonetheless, that it would be an addition to the existing instruments of French political propaganda and that it might even be "appelée à devenir ici le principal facteur de l'influence française". (5) The Quai d'Orsay greeted

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- (1) Report in 1916 by Lefevre-Mésaulle, Attaché Commercial de la France en Orient, A. E. N.S. Vol. 53. The Quai d'Orsay, conscious of the "raisons de politique générale qui ne nous permettent pas de nous désintéresser de la Grèce", hoped to use a loan to Greece as a guarantee that future industrial orders would be placed with French industry. [Undated note by Berthelot on 'Emprunt Grec'. A. E. N.S., Vol. 19.]
- (2) Vice-consul, Janina to Deville-1/12/14, A. E. N.S., Vol. 53.
- (3) Consul, Patras to Delcassé 10/12/14, *ibid.*
- (4) Benigni to Briand 9/2/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 299.
- (5) Séon to Delcassé 19/4/15, A. E. N.S., Vol. 53.

the new creation with approval and expressed the hope that it would act in conjunction with similar organisations in Serbia which were working for the expansion of French commercial activity in that country. (1)

The policy pursued by Briand towards the Greek monarchy in the course of his premiership was not, however, ideally designed to develop France's standing in Greece. With sorrow de Fontenay noted that those with French interests at heart despaired at the vacillating behaviour of the French government. France's prestige had suffered enormously and she was in no position to assume the role of Greece's moral protector at the end of the war. (2) He urged that France should think of her own interests and pursue a French policy, rather than allow herself to be unduly influenced by her allies. It was necessary to look to the future and safeguard French prestige in the Near-East. (3) With the successful conclusion of his mission, therefore, and the deposition of Constantine, Jennart noted an immediate improvement in France's standing and confidently predicted that she would soon regain her predominant position in Greece. (4) He called for an exchange of views between the Quai d'Orsay, the English Foreign Office and himself to prepare for the re-establishment of the allies' prestige to the benefit of their political, economic and financial interests. (5) Similarly, the Grand Quartier Général considered that the new situation in Greece offered to France not only a considerable amelioration in her political position in the Near-East but also the prospect of substantial military and economic advantages. (6) But from the Athens legation Clausese warned that the errors of three years ill-judged diplomacy could only be put right by the establishment of a central propaganda service which would control all branches of French propaganda - commercial, literary, intellectual, artistic and press. (7) Braquet even argued that France would not get the best out of Greece from any point of view unless the country were placed under a French protectorate. But failing this extreme solution, which he rightly judged to be impracticable, he urged that French hands should assume as much control as possible and in particular that the personnel of the military mission should be enlarged. (8)

(1) Delcassé to Sazon 17/6/15; Boppé, Belgrade to Delcassé 17/7/15, A.E. N.S. Vol. 53.

(2) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 15/9/16, Bourgeois MSS Vol. 8.

(3) *ibid* 26/12/16, *ibid*.

(4) Jennart to Ribot No. 94, 25/6/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 295.

(5) *ibid* No. 129, 1/7/17, *ibid*.

(6) Note by 3^e Bureau-16/6/17, 16N 3161.

(7) Clausese to Ribot No. 255, 13/8/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 276.

(8) Braquet to Foch 28/10/17, 7N-1339.

The concern of French agents in Greece to maintain their country's prestige during the course of the war manifested itself among some of them in an almost neurotic fear of English intentions in the same area. Soon after his arrival in Greece de Roquefeuil reported his impressions on England's interest in the future of Crete.⁽¹⁾ He feared that the English would favour a Venizelist movement there with the ultimate aim of becoming masters of the island themselves⁽²⁾ and when Crete was placed in the English zone of surveillance de Roquefeuil thought he could discern all the features of a long-term occupation. Moreover the naval attaché warned of similar developments on the islands of Lemnos and Mitylene.⁽³⁾ Similar warnings came directly from Colonel Mas at Mytilene, who reported that England was making efforts to monopolise trade with the island and his observations were supported by Braquet who passed the information on to the Ministry of War.⁽⁴⁾ By January 1917 de Roquefeuil was sensing the complete effacement of French influence in the Aegean before the activities of the English Secret Service⁽⁵⁾, while in the early summer Commandant Thalamas reported on the necessity of installing French consuls in the islands of the Greek archipelago if France did not wish to find herself completely supplanted by Britain after the war.⁽⁶⁾ At the same time de Billy⁽⁷⁾ took up again the question of English activities in Crete and argued that the French representative in the island should be upgraded so as to counteract the English drive for commercial domination⁽⁸⁾, while the French intelligence chief in Mytilene stressed that France should not give up a land which in the past had only survived because of France and which it was France's duty to assure lived in the future for France alone.⁽⁹⁾ In fact English commercial aspirations remained a permanent concern for French agents throughout the war and indeed into the peace. The constant fear was expressed that French interests were being excluded, particularly in the Greek islands, as a result of the more effective organisation of the British consular and diplomatic services.⁽¹⁰⁾

(1) de Roquefeuil to Lacaze No. 89, 15/1/16, 5N 115.

(2) *ibid* No. 382, 28/3/16, x.f. 1.

(3) *ibid* No. 261, 25/5/16, x.f. 4.

(4) Mas to Braquet 27/9/16, 7N 1350; Braquet to Roques 8/6/16, 5N 115.

(5) de Roquefeuil to Lacaze No. 577, 13/1/17, x.f. 5.

(6) Rapport du délégué de la Mission française auprès de la Division grecque de l'Archipel 27/5/17, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 277.

(7) French diplomatic representative accredited to the Venizelist provisional government in Salonica, he became French Minister in Athens at the completion of Jonnart's mission.

(8) de Billy to Ribot No. 64, 30/5/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 273.

(9) Pluot to Revol 16/8/17, 7N 1341.

(10) See for example report of Service de Renseignements 2/2/18, 7N 1340.

France, then, possessed considerable interests in Greece which she understandably enough sought to safeguard and augment pending the ultimate decision of the conflict with the Central powers. As the war progressed, however, Greece came to assume for France an importance out of all proportion to her pre-war interests there or indeed to the fact that allied troops were based in Greece's northern provinces. By a secret arrangement of March 1915 the allies, largely on British initiative, agreed to the acquisition of Constantinople by Russia, providing the war was fought to a successful conclusion. This then would have been the first step towards the possible dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover for the associations of Russian nobles, industrialists, business men and the Cadets, possession of Constantinople and the Straits was not an end in itself but the prelude to ultimate supremacy in the Near-East and the possession of naval power in the Mediterranean.⁽¹⁾ By satisfying this age old desire of St. Petersburg the secret treaty provided not the end but the beginning of Russian expansion. Given the imperialist nature of Tsarist foreign policy it would be only the first step into the Mediterranean forum and further quests for power and security in the area.⁽²⁾ Thus a cardinal principle of French foreign policy had been breached - but with only the very reluctant approval of her government. Bertie noted that the Quai d'Orsay had suggested that the Viviani government would have been quite ready to take a firm line towards Russia if the British government had shown any disposition to support the French, but the former had on the contrary been in a hurry to yield everything to Russia.⁽³⁾ In addition the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission showed great signs of dissatisfaction with any formal engagements to Russia. Many public figures in France hoped that the British and French forces would get to Constantinople before the Russians.⁽⁴⁾

For years France had tried to check the slow disintegration of the 'sick man of Europe', for there existed in Paris a genuine fear that, should the Turkish Empire collapse, the relative strength of France in the Near-East might be reduced. As Delcassé stressed at the opening of the Dardanelles operations, the aim of France was not fatally to destroy the Ottoman Empire.

(1) Gottlieb: *op. cit.*, p 65.

(2) *ibid* p 331.

(3) Bertie: Diary, Vol. 1, p 132. (24/3/15).

(4) *ibid* pp 132, 134-5, 141.

Evidently the taking of Constantinople would probably involve some loss of territory by Turkey, but Delcassé hoped that this would be compatible with the maintenance of a Turkish Empire, which was desirable for "la sauvegarde des intérêts politiques et économiques français".⁽¹⁾ In subsequent arrangements after the treaty of March 1915, however, the break-up of Turkey became well-nigh accepted as a principal allied war aim. But, as the Secretary-General of the Society of Colonial and Maritime Studies noted, the power which would lose most from the partition of the Ottoman Empire would be France, for in place of the effectively preponderant influence which she exercised before the war throughout the Empire, would be substituted a total influence in the relatively small areas now designated for French domination.⁽²⁾

When the question of Constantinople was first mooted Poincaré stressed that France could not sacrifice her own interests to the satisfaction of those of Russia. The possession of the Straits would give to Russia the possibility of becoming a great naval power and introduce her for the first time to the Mediterranean. Everything would thus be changed in the European equilibrium and France could not acquiesce in such annexations unless she herself extracted from the war equivalent compensations. "Tout est donc forcément lié!" concluded Poincaré. "Nous ne pourrions seconder les désirs de la Russie que proportionnellement aux satisfactions que nous recevrons nous-mêmes."⁽³⁾ In reply France's ambassador in St. Petersburg blamed England for the situation in which France now found herself, for as early as November 1914 King George V had intimated to the Russian ambassador in London that he and his government considered that Constantinople should be attributed to Russia.⁽⁴⁾ At all events France found herself in a position in which her concept of the Mediterranean balance of power in the post-war settlement had been overturned because the linchpin of her existing policy had fallen away, and in which she was anxious to compensate herself elsewhere in the area. France therefore secured inclusion in her adherence to the Russian agreement of a clause to the effect that the attribution of Constantinople was dependent on France and Britain realising their own aims in the

(1) Delcassé to Millerand 28/4/15, 7N 1344.

(2) Report by Camille Fidel, November 1916, A. E. 'A.-Paix', Vol. 131.

(3) Poincaré to Paléologue 9/3/15, Pichon MSS 4397; quoted Poincaré: op. cit., Vol. 6, p 94.

(4) Paléologue to Poincaré 16/4/15, P. Cambon MSS, Vol. 5.

Near-East as elsewhere. In the first instance this meant securing for France absolute rights over Syria and Cilicia - which were no more than "la contre-partie et la légitime compensation des droits et intérêts considérables dont nous faisons le sacrifice à la Russie".⁽¹⁾ But it also meant that France looked again at the whole question of her standing throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. In this situation Greece and the Balkan peninsula in general assumed a new importance. The conclusion was reached at the Grand Quartier Général that France's Mediterranean policy demanded that in the future she should be able to rely on a strong and friendly Greece. France could no longer count on Turkey and if, after the war, she occupied Syria side by side with English, Italian and Russian influences in the Levant, she would have need of an additional point of support.⁽²⁾ Thus when England and France began tentatively to discuss the possible conditions of a future peace, Berthelot reminded Cambon that the Balkans were of direct interest to France and that their settlement was entirely a function of the cession of Constantinople to Russia.⁽³⁾

The promise made to Russia in March 1915 was one of the factors lessening the enthusiasm with which France involved herself in the Dardanelles Campaign. This expedition has been described as a bid "for the last link in the British power chain encircling the future Levantine Empire from Cyprus and Suez to Aden and the Persian Gulf."⁽⁴⁾ As such it was scarcely congenial to many French minds determined to use the war for the construction of French spheres of influence. Before the attribution of Constantinople had taken place, the Senate Foreign Affairs Commission had expressed its anger at the French government accepting a secondary role in a region where France possessed "the right of command".⁽⁵⁾ Clemenceau asserted that English command of the Dardanelles expedition meant "l'abandon par nous de notre maîtrise dans la Méditerranée",⁽⁶⁾ but French interest in the operation waned as her chances of gaining from it anything tangible diminished. As

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- (1) Berthelot to Barrere No. 1367, 21/9/16, A. E. 'Paix', Vol. 130. A. Ribot: Lettres à un Ami, p 130; M.S. Anderson: The Eastern Question 1774-1923 (1966) p 325.
- (2) Note sur la politique française vis à vis la Grèce, 31/8/16, 16N 3057.
- (3) Berthelot to Cambon 12/1/17, Berthelot MSS; Pichon Papers (Quai d'Orsay), Vol. 4.
- (4) Gottlieb: op. cit., p 103.
- (5) Speech by Freycinet 22/2/15, Pichon MSS 4398.
- (6) Speech by Clemenceau 30/4/15, ibid.

the Salonica expedition got underway the Grand Quartier Général urged that a French presence should be maintained at Gallipoli - but only because of the undesirability of leaving England in total control of the situation.⁽¹⁾ In fact France preferred Salonica as a base for the sphere of influence she now sought in the Balkans and as the main stage overland to the Golden Horn.⁽²⁾ There was perhaps more than nominal significance in the French government order of 7 October 1915 by which the announcement of the formation of Sarrail's Armée d'Orient was made. The Gallipoli force, previously known as the Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient was now reduced to the title of Corps Expéditionnaire des Dardanelles. The Salonica army thus became the expression of France's aspirations 'en Orient', while that of the Dardanelles, which was pursuing an essentially Russian goal, was symbolically reduced in status.⁽³⁾ From Greece Colonel Bordeaux argued that France's influence and interests in the Levant obliged her not to end the war without affirming her power in the Near-East.⁽⁴⁾ As the Dardanelles operation petered out the Salonica expedition remained as the only means of achieving this triumph, and France became increasingly nervous at the prospect of any other military activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, as for example when Kitchener came up with a planned campaign from Alexandretta, which appeared to challenge French claims to exclusive rights in Syria.⁽⁵⁾ For the same reason, therefore, France struggled throughout the Salonica Campaign to maintain her own direction of it. Similarly, from Sarrail's Headquarters Staff Mathieu argued that it was of cardinal importance for France to assert her control of the Greek situation so as to erect Greece as a barrier against Russian panslavism. As he warned "le danger du Drang Nach Osten est aussi bien du côté russe que du côté austro-allemand".⁽⁶⁾

Developments in relation to the Ottoman Empire were not the only factors affecting France's standing in the Near-East in the course of the Great War. After being wooed by both sides in the conflict, Italy renounced her allegiance to the Triple Alliance and concluded the Secret Treaty of London

(1) erased extract from Joffre to Millerand 3/10/15, 16N 1678.

(2) Gottlieb: op. cit., p 103.

(3) Note by War Ministry 7/10/15, A. E. 'Guerret', Vol. 1030.

(4) Note on Balkans by Bordeaux 26/11/15, ibid, Vol. 250.

(5) Panouse to Gallieni No. 1555 12/11/15, 16N 2967.

(6) Mathieu to Paix-Séailles 9/6/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 118.

with the allies on 24 April 1915. By this she was promised the south Tyrol, Trieste and Istria, many of the Dalmatian islands and reversionary rights to Turkish possessions if there were to be a colonial partition. She would thus emerge at the end of the war as an Adriatic and Mediterranean power of the first magnitude. These concessions naturally caused concern in Serbia, as the allied power most immediately affected, especially as their exact scope was unrevealed,⁽¹⁾ but with France's own growing interest in the Balkans she too began to regard with apprehension the prospect of too great an Italian expansion. From Rome Barrère warned the Quai d'Orsay that Italian motives for participation in the Balkan expedition were far from disinterested. Italy hoped that by raising her standard in the Near East she would stake her claim to rights and compensations commensurate with her military effort. The government of Sonnino had been widely criticised for allowing France, Russia and England to acquire territorial pawns as a result of their physical presence in the Armée d'Orient, and there was considerable nervousness in Italy as to the nature of the secret agreements already existing between the three allies. Italy had thus seen herself arriving at the conclusion of the war in a position of marked inferiority.⁽²⁾

French agents in Greece were not slow to reach similar conclusions and Lecoq argued that it was necessary for France to erect a strong Greece to act as a barrier against further Italian ambitions.⁽³⁾ The existence of Greece was indispensable, argued de Fontenay, for the equilibrium of the Mediterranean. She represented the obvious counterpoise to Italy and her ever growing appetite for territorial expansion.⁽⁴⁾ Not satisfied with what had already been reserved for her, Italy's eyes wandered ever further over the Eastern Mediterranean and by the beginning of 1917 she was voicing a claim to Smyrna.⁽⁵⁾ De Fontenay warned that Italy was opposed to the triumph of Venizelos since a Venizelist Greece meant a strong Greece and this was the last thing Rome wanted. French support for Venizelos should therefore be given with a view to opposing the plans of Italy, for if France abandoned Greece this would mean throwing the country into the hands of Germany for the

(1) See for example Note from Bertie 4/5/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 220.

(2) Barrère to Briand No. 560, 9/8/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1038.

(3) Lecoq to Bourgeois 7/9/16, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 9.

(4) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 28/11/16, *ibid*, Vol. 8.

(5) Paléologue to Briand (from Doumergue) No. 163, 5/2/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 992.

foreseeable future, since only in Germany could Greece then hope to find a guarantee against Italian encroachments.⁽¹⁾ French and Italian interests in regard to Greece were thus "diametralement opposés" and de Fontenay appealed for a stronger French stand to resist her competitor. Was France, he asked, going to sacrifice her vital Mediterranean interests in order to satisfy her friends of the day, who, in the not too distant future, would become her rivals? With Serbia in need of a long period of reconstruction at the end of the war, only Greece could provide France with the support of which she was in need.⁽²⁾

Lecoq, stressing that he was only interested in Greek affairs so far as they were a function of French interests, warned that Italian ambitions in the Aegean threatened to exclude French influence entirely, from a zone moreover where France had made her presence felt over a period of centuries.⁽³⁾ From Corfu, for example, the French agent urged upon Braquet the need to take measures to counterbalance Italian expansion.⁽⁴⁾ Lecoq almost welcomed the Italian declaration of a protectorate over Albania, for it had at least the merit of revealing overtly the nature of her aspirations, while, being a unilateral act, it would be subject to revision.⁽⁵⁾ The Balkans thus focused a power struggle between France and Italy for the right to assert a preponderant voice in the post-war situation. Moreover, when the allies agreed in the late spring of 1917 to leave France with a free hand in the settlement of the Greek question, Italy attempted vainly to make her agreement conditional on French acceptance of her territorial claims in Asia Minor.⁽⁶⁾ Despairingly Elliot noted that both nations were constantly looking to the future and to the partition which would come after the war, while Britain alone was devoting her "whole faculties to the one object of winning it."⁽⁷⁾

The ambitions of two of France's allies - Russia and Italy - thus exercised a marked effect upon the way in which she examined her own position in the Near-East - a position which had been materially altered by the claims and aspirations of these other two powers. French policy in the

(1) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 1/12/16, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 8.

(2) *ibid* 22/12/16, *ibid*.

(3) Lecoq to Bourgeois 30/3/17, *ibid*, Vol. 9.

(4) Braquet to Sous-Lieutenant Rufenacht 23/5/17, 7N 1340.

(5) Lecoq to Bourgeois 9/6/17, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 9.

(6) Ribot to Barrère No. 1113, 6/5/17, A. E. 'A Paix' Vol. 132.

(7) Elliot to Hardinge 9/4/17, Lloyd George MSS, F/55/3/2.

Balkans was, however, also determined by her appreciation of the war aims of her greatest enemy, Germany. In no sense was France's understanding of the situation restricted to her desire to recover Alsace-Lorraine. Both Britain and France were conscious of the underlying expansionist push eastwards which fashioned German strategy in the Great War - the age-old Drang Nach Osten. For Britain this obviously posed a threat to her continued presence in Egypt, to her interests in the Near and Middle East and to her route to the Indian Empire. The British mind, however, never really saw in the Balkan campaign a barrier against German expansion. It was appreciated that the Salonica Expedition might make it more difficult for Germany to draw upon the resources of the Ottoman Empire, by blocking her path to Constantinople, but the British military and political hierarchy never saw the Balkans as the cockpit in which the future destinies of the great powers in the Near-East were being determined. The same, however, was not true of France. As the Grand Quartier Général concluded, the Berlin-Constantinople rail link was of vital importance to Germany and represented for her "le gage le plus précieux qu'elle puisse obtenir en vue des négociations futures, en attendant qu'il devienne entre ses mains, la paix conclue, son plus puissant instrument de domination sur la Turquie d'Asie".⁽¹⁾ German aspirations in the Near East imposed upon France the necessity of defending her own interests there. As one contemporary observer remarked, "the Balkans are the hinge and pivot of Germany's schemes of conquest in this war. Northern France, Belgium, perhaps even Alsace-Lorraine she would abandon with equanimity if only she can keep her hold on this avenue to the East."⁽²⁾ In engaging in military activities in Macedonia, therefore, France was not merely seeking to defeat the Central powers, but to nullify specific German ambitions for the post-war settlement, which ran directly counter to her own. Moreover, as the Grand Quartier Général argued, the German initiative in the Balkans imposed upon France the need to envisage the war situation in that theatre in the same way that Germany did. The German aim was not so much to force a decision of the conflict as to "prendre des garanties pour l'avenir."⁽³⁾ France's position was identical; she therefore should employ similar tactics.

(1) 2^e Bureau: Note sur la Situation sur le Front Oriental 2/11/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1040.

(2) G. Ward Price: op. cit., p 10.

(3) G.Q.G. Note on 'Situation en Orient' 10/10/15, 16N 3266.

When Benazet reported to the Chamber of Deputies, following his ill-fated voyage to Greece at the end of 1916⁽¹⁾, he argued that the Balkan theatre represented the key to the whole war. Germany was not really interested in annexations on the Western Front. What she aimed for was the establishment of her hegemony from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, reducing to vassal status Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Serbia and, if possible, Roumania. Furthermore, if France was not on her guard, the German dream of aggrandisement would become a reality. Benazet was appalled at the way in which the French government had ignored events in the Balkans and at the dilatory manner in which she had finally decided to act.⁽²⁾ The deputy was perhaps underestimating the government's appreciation of the situation, for, in May 1917, the Grand Quartier Général concluded that the Salonica army had been maintained "pour empêcher à l'ennemi de régler à sa façon la question d'Orient".⁽³⁾ When the Ribot government seemed to be hesitating to impose a radical solution, de Fontenay urged that the Greek question should be settled without delay in such a way that the new Greek government would look to France to organise and instruct its army, to inspect its finances and to provide its teachers. Only thus could German influence be eliminated and her plan to install herself in Greece with the connivance of King Constantine, so as to dominate the Mediterranean, be destroyed.⁽⁴⁾ The danger was that if France did not act decisively while the war was still in progress Germany would be able, with the advent of peace, to renew her push to the east with Greece as a base. What ends would then have been served, de Fontenay rhetorically enquired, by the Salonica Campaign and the great sacrifices which it had involved?⁽⁵⁾

For a variety of reasons, therefore, the war obliged France to re-examine the bases of her authority and influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and forced upon her the realisation that the balance of power in the post-war world would not closely resemble that to which she had grown accustomed. Greece, in particular, came to acquire a totally new importance for France

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- (1) Benazet's semi-official negotiations with King Constantine, in which the former appears to have been completely duped by the Greek monarch, provide the starting point in the train of events leading to the death of several French troops on 1 December in what was evidently an ambush arranged by the royal authorities.
- (2) Report to Chamber of Deputies, sent to Quai d'Orsay 31/1/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1041.
- (3) G.Q.G. Note (Section des Théâtres d'Opérations Extérieures), May 1917, 16N 3161.
- (4) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 8/4/17, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 8.
- (5) *ibid* 14/8/17, *ibid*.

- a position which she had never previously occupied. It is against this background, moreover, that the presence of a French army in Northern Greece must be viewed. The Armée d'Orient inevitably became as much an instrument of French strategic and diplomatic policy as of military policy. Indeed when de Castelnau carried out his inspection of the army at the end of 1915 he reported that, from a military point of view, its prospects were extremely limited. No one, he thought, could argue that the presence of 150,000 allied troops had any effect on whether or not Greece and Roumania remained neutral. Similarly the possibility of an offensive against Bulgaria should be ruled out, at least for the time being, since France was likely to find herself alone in shouldering the burden of such an operation. But, de Castelnau argued, the question appeared in an entirely different light if one considered it not from the military, but from the diplomatic, point of view. Salonica and its hinterland, because of the facilities of the port and the richness of the area, were already the object of widespread envy. Was France really intending at the end of the war to disinterest herself from this area and leave the Greeks to reap the harvest of its potential wealth? Such a policy would be unacceptable because "à l'heure des traités, les intérêts de la France devront être mis bien au dessus de tous les sentiments personnels". Salonica should therefore be considered as a precious pawn and France should retain the arrière pensée of one day using it as a bargaining counter in negotiations to secure the best settlement of French interests.⁽¹⁾ De Castelnau regretted that Guillemin could not see the occupation of Salonica in such a light, but stressed instead its military advantages, which the general himself doubted.⁽²⁾ In retrospect this report of de Castelnau appears crucial to an understanding of French policy in the Balkans for at least the next two years. Only through an acceptance of such a rationale could the French government have acquiesced in the maintenance of an army which, militarily at least, was so unproductive.

Taking up the theme of de Castelnau's argument the Grand Quartier Général concluded in January 1916 that Salonica "constitue entre nos mains un gage précieux pour l'avenir". Its abandonment was consequently unthinkable.⁽³⁾ Salonica's strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean, given the circumstances of the war, made it the focal point of the eternal Eastern Question, and, as an officer in Sarrail's army noted, the solution of this offered the key to three continents.⁽⁴⁾ As the general war situation failed

(1) Report to Joffre 31/12/15, 5N 110.

(2) Note of conversation with Guillemin 26/12/15, 16N 3142.

(3) Note sur l'Emploi des Troupes Alliées en Orient 5/1/16, 16N 3056.

(4) Lettre d'un officier de l'Armée Française d'Orient 18/10/16, 16N 3144.

to improve in the course of 1916 de Margerie called for the complete occupation of Greece to use as a pawn in future negotiations with the enemy.⁽¹⁾ He was probably thinking in terms of joint allied action, but from Salonica itself, in late December, Lecoq stressed the need to see Greece in the French sphere of influence. He argued that the maintenance of King Constantine would mean the total Germanisation of the Balkans. Lecoq thought it was inevitable that France would lose ground in the Near-East as a result of the war, but he hoped at least that she would not lose everything in an area where so much effort had been expended over a period of centuries. Greece, because of her geographical position was ideally suited for this role of the last bastion of French influence.⁽²⁾ On the same day de Fontenay argued that France was paying too much attention to the interests of her allies in the affairs of Greece. The over-riding need was to think of French interests and carry out a French policy.⁽³⁾ A Francophile Greece would be necessary to maintain the equilibrium of the eastern basin of the Mediterranean. Support of Venizelos was thus vital to France not only in terms of winning the war, but above all for the future. The Greek question would have to be settled before the end of the war, since France could not count on the acquiescence of her allies in her plans once peace had come and the sacred union of nations imposed by the state of belligerency had ended.⁽⁴⁾ Moreover de Fontenay argued that France's future moral authority in the Balkans would be dependent on how she acted in the course of the war. Regrettably the catalogue of events did not make very impressive reading and yet "c'est là-dessus que la France de demain compte pour réinstaller son prestige en Orient".⁽⁵⁾

But if the French government could be reproached with not always keeping to the forefront of its considerations the effect of its actions in Greece on France's post-war standing the same charge could not justifiably be directed at the chief agent of French policy in the Near-East, General Sarrail. Writing after the war was over Sarrail disclaimed all intentions beyond what were proper in a military commander: "J'étais en Orient non pour édifier l'après-guerre, mais pour arriver par la guerre à un résultat de guerre".⁽⁶⁾ His line of conduct was simple - to carry out the policy of the

(1) Note by de Margerie 19/12/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 265.

(2) Lecoq to Bourgeois 26/12/16, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 9.

(3) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 26/12/16, *ibid*, Vol. 8.

(4) *ibid* 18/1/17, *ibid*.

(5) *ibid* 5/3/17, *ibid*.

(6) Sarrail: *op. cit.*, p 271.

Entente not for the 'after-war', but for the war itself.⁽¹⁾ An examination of Sarrail's activities at Salonica reveals, however, that the General's ingenuous behaviour extended no further than the pages of his memoirs. Ineffective as a military commander he may have been but as the leading architect of a planned invisible French Empire in the post-war world he proved singularly adept. Moreover it was this use of a military occupation in the course of a war against the Central powers to carve out for France a sphere of influence which would exclude both enemy and ally alike which was so abhorrent to France's allies and particularly to England. Whereas the British probably realised that for strategic reasons France could not simply ignore Greece, they viewed with distaste the subordination of the military aspects of the Macedonian Campaign to the fostering of France's post-war influence. Sarrail gave an interesting insight into his strategic thinking as early as August 1915, when, in considering the possibilities of an operation from Alexandretta, he pointed out that possession of this port would give France a possession in the Near-East which would be a useful bargaining counter when the time came to talk of peace. He thought it unwise for France to arrive at the conference table empty handed as far as this part of the world was concerned.⁽²⁾ Once installed at Salonica the General invariably put French interests before those of the allies. Having acquired a preponderant voice for France in the direction of the Salonica railway commission, Sarrail argued that this should be carefully maintained against the designs of the other powers.⁽³⁾ Leaving aside any future developments in the Balkan railway network, the existing importance of the lines ending up at Salonica was such that "il apparait indispensable que la France ait une politique de chemins de fer dans ces régions et que l'on sache profiter des circonstances militaires actuelles pour l'asseoir sur des bases solides".⁽⁴⁾ But it was above all in the field of financial and commercial affairs that Sarrail was most active. Supported perhaps by backers on the Paris Bourse, the French military commander proved not uninterested in the economic well-being of Salonica and its hinterland.⁽⁵⁾

(1) Sarrail: op. cit., p 293. Compare what Sarrail told Joffre in August 1916: "Malgré les travaux considérables dont il eut à s'occuper le général Sarrail ne négligea pas tout ce qui pourrait servir l'influence française". [Sarrail to Joffre No. 3571, 10/8/16, 16N 3143.]

(2) Note au sujet de la situation militaire en Orient 11/8/15, 5N 132.

(3) Sarrail to Jugal No. 1120, 14/11/16, 5N 149.

(4) Note du Colonel Delauney, chef du Service des Chemins de Fer à l'Etat-Major des Armées Alliées 18/2/17, (presented by Lagrosillière to the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission, 30/3/17), 16N 3139.

(5) Palmer: op. cit., p 93.

Salonica itself was not the worst possible choice as a base for French commercial penetration and expansion. Its crucial geographical position meant that it inevitably dominated the economic life of the Balkans and its influence radiated throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore the Society of the Port of Salonica, which had been responsible for its construction and exploitation was Turkish in name, but, because of overwhelming financial commitments, French in fact.⁽¹⁾ In addition the Bank of Salonica, whose capital was almost exclusively French, was closely connected with the great French financial houses and as the French consul noted, "son concours nous sera précieux pour l'expansion commerciale qui ne manquera pas de se produire à la suite des événements en cours".⁽²⁾ But French commerce had incurred a setback with the imposition at the end of 1913 of heavy new tariffs at Salonica following the annexation of the port by Greece as a result of the Balkan Wars.⁽³⁾ As has already been noted, French commercial interests in Greece itself were far from negligible. In April 1916 the Grand Quartier Général argued that agreements should be made to take over part of the Greek merchant fleet and use it to establish a commercial current between Marseilles and Greece which would continue after the war.⁽⁴⁾ Similarly Guillemin thought that France should make use of the exceptional war circumstances, which enabled her to exclude all Austrian and German imports to develop her own trading links with Greece.⁽⁵⁾ From the Armée d'Orient Intendant Bonnier urged that the control of Greek food supplies by the allies could be used to favour French imports,⁽⁶⁾ while de Vitrolles, the Commercial Attaché in Athens, stated that he saw his mission as not only to control all imports into Greece but also, as far as possible, to favour French commerce.⁽⁷⁾ But he was pleased to report that he and his English opposite number were working in loyal cooperation.⁽⁸⁾ These efforts, however, were as nought when compared with the single-minded determination with which, under Sarrail's direction, the attempt was made to use the military presence of the Armée d'Orient at Salonica to create an almost monopolistic control by France of the commercial life of Macedonia.

(1) Delcassé to Millerand 1/10/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1030.

(2) Graillet to Briand No. 24, 19/2/16, *ibid*, Vol. 252.

(3) See, for example, complaints of Union des Chambres Syndicales Lyonnaises, 10/1/14, A. E. 'N.S.', Vol. 11.

(4) Note by 2^e Bureau 1/4/16, 16N 2917.

(5) Guillemin to Briand No. 502, 3/3/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 300.

(6) Note sur le ravitaillement de la population civile en Grèce 31/3/16, *ibid*.

(7) Report by de Vitrolles 2/5/16, *ibid* Vol. 301.

(8) *ibid* 11/5/16, *ibid*.

Bonnier indeed was very critical of de Vitrolles for doing next to nothing to create a movement of French products into Greece and claimed that the Commercial Attaché had expressed his reluctance to "chercher à faire gagner de l'argent à la France en un pareil moment".⁽¹⁾ The result was that a divergence arose between the policies of the commercial bureaux of Athens and Salonica, the latter under the direction of Bonnier, which persisted under de Vitrolles' successor Grenard. Lecoq noted that Grenard believed his job was in the first instance to intercept contraband and only secondarily to favour French commerce. The essential task of the Salonica Bureau, on the other hand, was seen to be the development of France's trading links. Lecoq saw Grenard's attitude as an abuse of an exceptional and privileged situation which gave the allies a practical monopoly of all Greek transactions. Never had such an occasion presented itself to develop commercial relations which it would be the task of French producers and exporters to confirm and render permanent. Lecoq had heard it said that Germany was building up in her factories huge stocks of manufactured goods, which she would release upon the world as soon as the high seas had been reopened to her trade. This might or might not be true, but Lecoq asserted that Frenchmen must be "bien naïfs ou bien imprévoyants" not to profit from their effective control of the Greek economy. He himself had recognised the problem as early as 1915 when he had created the Association France-Grèce to facilitate economic intercourse between France and Salonica. But now France's diplomatic agents in Greece were in danger of letting escape "une occasion qui ne se retournera plus d'augmenter notre rayonnement commercial et de nous créer en ce pays une clientèle durable et fidèle". In criticising the activities of the Salonica bureau Grenard failed to realise that contraband was materially impossible at Salonica because France was in control of the port and of the customs. He could not understand that there was absolutely no danger in imports to Salonica, which, on the contrary, offered substantial advantages to French trade. At Athens, moreover, he was in danger of allowing England to take the lead in the competition for the Greek market. The contrast with Salonica was stark: "Ici on lutte; à Athènes on ne lutte pas; au contraire on suit l'Angleterre".

Lecoq noted with satisfaction that Sarrail, on the other hand, had a clear understanding of the role of the army which he commanded in the extension of French influence. It was, for example, entirely within the orbit of the Armée d'Orient, Lecoq argued, that it should assist in the founding of schools which would spread the French language and, by extension, French influence.

(1) Note by Abrami 11/5/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

Undoubtedly it had a primary military task to accomplish when the awaited reinforcements, the climate and the political situation in the Balkans permitted, but in the meantime the army should not forget its duty to leave behind it other traces in Macedonia than those of blood. It would bequeath something permanent and durable in the form of increased economic activity with France. At the time Lecoq wrote, the army was in the process of drawing up a commercial dossier to put French and Macedonian merchants and businessmen in touch with one another. Special contacts had already been established with Lyons through the enthusiasm of its radical-socialist mayor, Edouard Herriot, with the result that Macedonian industrialists would be represented at the next Lyonnaise trade fair. Under the influence of Bonnier, moreover, - "un des esprits les plus ouverts et les plus précis de l'Armée d'Orient et dont l'activité égale la lucidité d'esprit" - Sarrail had given his approval to a proposed circular to be signed by himself and widely distributed among commercial organisations in France. So Lecoq concluded by expressing his wish that France would continue to interest herself in the Salonica market, which offered a potential outlet for commerce, the extent of which people in France had as yet no concept.⁽¹⁾

Lecoq also set out his views in a letter to Grenard. While the blockade of Greece should be rigorous for military goods, at the same time it was in all other cases indispensable to develop French exports. From this moment onwards it was France's obligation to enlarge the volume of her foreign trade and in an area such as Macedonia, placed under her direct supervision, it would indeed be shortsighted not to profit from an exceptionally favourable situation to further French interests in the Near-East.⁽²⁾ Shortly afterwards General Sarrail himself showed that he fully merited the faith which Lecoq had in his foresight when he gave a detailed exposé of the Macedonian commercial situation and the role which France ought to play in it in a long despatch to Briand. Sarrail argued that it would be fatal for France's economic interests in the area for Macedonia to be treated as one with Greece. Because of her military presence France exercised an absolute control over imports coming into Salonica. Her situation in Macedonia was thus unprecedented and was tantamount to an economic sovereignty. The position of Salonica, moreover, with a quarter of a million inhabitants itself and being the port of transit for the whole of the Balkan peninsula, made the

(1) Lecoq to Bourgeois 26/7/16, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 9.

(2) Lecoq to Grenard 24/7/16, *ibid.*

prospects particularly favourable for French industrialists and merchants to replace the pre-war Austro-German domination of a very sizeable market. In addition Sarrail expressed the belief that when finally he was able to launch an offensive from Salonica this held out the hope of bringing Serbian and Bulgarian territories within the economic orbit of the port. In such a situation the task of the Armée d'Orient would be self-evident: "Là encore ... nous aurons à préparer l'après-guerre par l'introduction immédiate de nos produits et de nos marques sur les places reconquises par nos armées". As far as articles not restricted by the blockade were concerned, one could not encourage French industry too forcefully to export as much as possible so as to create, while the war was still in progress, "l'habitude et le goût des produits français". The need was to draw the merchants of Salonica both politically and economically into the French orbit. Import permits should therefore be granted on a scale commensurate with the great economic future which lay open to France in Macedonia. Sarrail concluded by showing how far he envisaged the activities of his army as the vehicle of post-war French domination: "Ainsi seraient sauvegardés ... les intérêts des populations qu'il nous appartient de gagner à l'influence française et l'avenir du commerce et de l'industrie français dont l'expansion doit suivre en Orient plus que partout ailleurs la victoire de nos armes".⁽¹⁾

Grenard took advantage of this specific statement of Sarrail's views to put before the Quai d'Orsay his own opinions on the problem. He agreed that the commercial bureaux of Athens and Salonica should show the liveliest regard for the present and future development of French commerce and also that Macedonia offered excellent opportunities to deflect the current of Salonica's trade away from the Austro-German stranglehold in which it had previously existed. But he believed that a restricted importation, compatible with the maintenance of the blockade, would be adequate to acquaint the market with French goods and to prepare for the future. Whatever France did now, the merchants of Salonica would return after the war to those suppliers whose conditions they found most favourable. Indeed France was in no position to supply more than a small proportion of the needs of the area. The majority would have to come from England and Egypt, and English trade should be treated on a basis of equality.⁽²⁾ Grenard noted that the Salonica bureau took no notice of the limitations imposed on imports into Greece with a view to reducing

(1) Sarrail to Briand No. 164, 3/8/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 302.

(2) Grenard to Briand No. 10, 26/8/16, *ibid.*

enemy contraband. It even ignored the quotas which it itself had fixed for certain articles.⁽¹⁾

Interestingly enough the Quai d'Orsay came down on the side of Grenard and Briand informed Sarrail that he could not be party to a plan which took no account of the Anglo-Egyptian trade and which ignored the necessity for an agreement with the British government. Sarrail was therefore instructed to conform the principles upon which his commercial bureau was organised with those of its counterpart in Athens.⁽²⁾ The government had seemed to be losing touch with the divergence of policy between its agents in Greece and, as a Quai d'Orsay official noted, it was as well to profit from the fact that both parties had written to Paris to let them know that above them both was "un gouvernement qui dirige l'action française au dehors et qu'eux n'ont qu'à exécuter".⁽³⁾ But in fact Sarrail had already taken major initiatives to put his own policies into effect.

On the first day of August the General had addressed a circular to the Presidents of the Chambers of Commerce in France, setting out the organisation at Salonica of the 'Commercial Bureau for French Importations'. He expressed his conviction that they would wish to be associated with an enterprise whose aim was to create immediately an outlet for French industry which would greatly expand after the war. "Développer à l'heure présente l'exportation française, c'est préparer la victoire et s'en assurer d'avance tous les fruits". Sarrail explained that the creation of the Commercial Bureau under Bonnier responded to a unique situation in which the Macedonian market found itself devoid of goods and in which French suppliers had no serious competition. Sarrail therefore proposed to act as liaison between French producers, who would write to inform him of the nature of their goods and the quantities they were able to supply, and potential buyers in Salonica. Once contact had been established the two parties would be able to conduct their business directly. A certain and stable clientele would thus be built up for French manufacturers, which would assure for France "sur ce marché, pour l'après-guerre, la première place".⁽⁴⁾ As Berthelot noted, Sarrail was looking to prepare for the

(1) Grenard to Briand No. 28, 16/9/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 302.

(2) Briand to Sarrail 26/9/16, *ibid.*

(3) minute by Pean on *ibid.*

(4) Sarrail to Presidents of French Chambers of Commerce 1/8/16, A. E. 'N.S.', Vol. 53.

"economic conquest of Macedonia" by profiting from the exceptional situation which resulted from France's military occupation.⁽¹⁾ At all events Sarrail must have been heartened by the response in France to his initiative. Lecoq reported on 20 August that the last mailbag had contained thirty letters from French merchants wishing to start trading with Salonica,⁽²⁾ while after less than three months an increase in business in the order of 600,000 francs was noted. Such organisations as the Salonica Commercial Bureau thus represented a "precious hope for the future", and should be regarded as a model to be copied elsewhere.⁽³⁾ Bonnier found the success of the new enterprise encouraging. In a fortnight he had received 300 letters from French industrialists, whom he had put in touch with business houses in Salonica. His only regret was that the administrative authorities in France had sometimes been intransigent over the question of exportation permits. Bonnier hoped that these restrictions would be removed for all goods unrelated to warfare. All the efforts of France should be united to facilitate the extension of her economic interests in the area, which was the basic prerequisite of French influence in the Near-East.⁽⁴⁾ Indeed by the end of January 1917 Bonnier noted with satisfaction that permits were now granted by the Customs Offices in Marseilles instead of the Derogations Commission in Paris. This was calculated to speed up considerably the administration involved in the export of goods to Salonica and reflected "l'intérêt que témoigne le Gouvernement de la République au développement des relations ... qui unissent la France au grand port de la Mer Egée".⁽⁵⁾ By the beginning of October Bonnier had received 850 enquiries as a direct result of Sarrail's circular, and confidently predicted that the re-occupation of Serbian territories would lead to an extension of the Bureau's activities and service. This expansion would, he trusted, enable him to make use of Painlevé's agent in the Armée d'Orient, Paul Fleurot.⁽⁶⁾

Gradually Frenchmen were made aware of the possibilities which resulted in the Balkan peninsula from the occupation of their army. Charles Debierre, Senator for the Nord, noted that Salonica could become one of the chief ports of the Mediterranean, capable of receiving the largest merchant vessels.

(1) Minute by Berthelot on Sarrail to Presidents of French Chambers of Commerce 1/8/16, A. E. 'N.S.', Vol. 53.

(2) Lecoq to Bourgeois 20/8/16, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 9.

(3) Report by Meunier-Surcouf (Deputy) 25/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(4) Bonnier to Péan 7/9/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 302.

(5) *ibid* 30/1/17, *ibid*, Vol. 304.

(6) Bonnier to Bourguignon 3/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 58.

Moreover the hinterland of the port was extremely fertile and offered genuine prospects of agricultural development: "Les plaines de la Macédoine peuvent être d'un grand avenir pour qui saura les mettre en valeur". And in the face of all this potential wealth Debierre was gratified to see that Sarrail "ne néglige rien pour augmenter l'influence de la France en Orient".⁽¹⁾ By the beginning of the new year Bonnier sensed that a fresh spirit was animating French businessmen and industrialists. The Chambers of Commerce had responded splendidly to the initiative of Sarrail and had given their fullest support. The example of Senator Herriot in creating a permanent Lyons-Macedonia Committee had been followed in Dijon, Grenoble and Marseilles.⁽²⁾ In addition the Chambers of Commerce in Bordeaux, Rouen, Toulouse, Beauvais, Orléans, Angoulême, Nancy, Belfort, Besançon and Limoges were in the process of organising regional committees, which would be grouped in Paris. The initial results by which 75% of goods arriving at Salonica were French were such as to promise the widest extension of French economic power in Macedonia and, as a result, throughout the Near East.⁽³⁾ Apart from simply putting the two sides in touch with one another, the Commercial Bureau offered several more specific services. By building up a collection of French samples and catalogues open to the inspection of the local merchants, the Bureau was able to supply potential buyers in Macedonia with accurate information necessary to complete their orders. Secondly, by tapping the information provided by banks and private informers, the Bureau had built up a file on 1200 firms in Macedonia, the details of which were at the disposal of French traders. Bonnier guaranteed to provide information within three days on any Salonican firm about which he had received an enquiry from France. Then the Bureau published a monthly Commercial Bulletin which contained studies on the natural resources of Macedonia and the needs of the area in terms of manufactured goods.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Article in Le Journal 11/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 111.

(2) Interestingly enough the Marseilles and Lyons Chambers of Commerce had campaigned for the establishment of a French protectorate in Syria as early as 1915, C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya Forstner: The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims 1914-18 - Historical Journal, March 1974, p 98.

(3) Note by Bonnier in Circular of National Association of Economic Expansion 25/1/17, A. E. 'N.S.', Vol. 53.

(4) Note on the Commercial Bureau 24/10/17, 5N 287.

The first of these publications set out succinctly the aims of the economic activity of the Armée d'Orient: "Il faut dès à présent créer un courant d'affaires entre la France et la Macédoine où la présence et le prestige de nos armes aussi bien que l'emploi très répandu de notre langue nous procurent une place privilégiée et nous permettent d'espérer un grand avenir". At the end of the war French commerce would thus find the way open and the route prepared. But at that point it would not be Salonica and Macedonia alone, but all the Balkan states which would be in need of supplies. The effort expended during the war would then bear fruit. To export to Macedonia while the war continued would no doubt have its own immediate advantages, but above all it meant reserving in advance the Balkan peninsula for the French sphere of influence.⁽¹⁾ This theme was taken up in the November issue of the Bulletin, which stressed the need for French commerce and industry to interest themselves in the Serbian market. When Serbia had recovered her territorial integrity her population would be in need of almost complete re-equipment as a result of the devastations of the war. This situation would offer particularly favourable opportunities to French suppliers, who at the current moment occupied only a very lowly place among Serbia's commercial partners.⁽²⁾ The crucial period in the struggle for economic supremacy was seen to be that which would immediately follow the cessation of hostilities. At that time immense works of reconstruction would have to be undertaken involving vast orders for manufactured goods. But the country which could seize these opportunities would be that which offered favourable credit facilities to its merchants: "La nation qui pourra à ce moment-là offrir du crédit à ses exportateurs sera assurée de la prééminence future sur ce marché". The Commercial Bulletin therefore proposed the creation of a National Commercial Bank for the Near-East, which would offer extensive credit facilities. If France wanted her influence in the area to survive the passage of her soldiers, this influence must be based on positive and concrete interests and the provision of credit remained the basic and indispensable condition of all economic activity.⁽³⁾ Other issues of the journal dealt with the need to provide adequate transport facilities between Macedonia and France commensurate with the efforts being made at both ends of the route to develop French interests.

(1) Bulletin Commercial de Macédoine No. 1, 1/9/16, A. E. 'Guerre' Vol. 302.

(2) *ibid* No. 3, 1/11/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(3) *ibid* No. 4, 1/12/16, *ibid*.

The danger was that commercial activity would be built up at Salonica for the benefit of others, for if the Greek merchant was obliged to receive his goods from Italian vessels he would soon come to the conclusion that it would be easier to place his orders in Naples than in Marseilles. It would be impolitic and dangerous to allow the French flag to be surpassed in the Eastern Mediterranean - an area whose freedom was guaranteed by the presence of French arms - when it could and ought to occupy "la place que nul ne songe à lui contester: la première".⁽¹⁾ A further issue examined the agricultural potential of Macedonia and concluded that Salonica could become, what it had been in ancient times, the granary of the southern Balkans.⁽²⁾

In all this preparation for 'l'après-guerre' Sarrail himself was deeply committed. Stead reported that Sarrail was a political general, not a military one and that he knew that financial and economic success would better please his political supporters than military progress.⁽³⁾ Bonnier informed Lord Granville that Sarrail passed or refused and signed with his own hand every single application for a permit to export goods from the district. This was "hardly the work for a Commander-in-chief of allied armies in the field".⁽⁴⁾ Sarrail also made use of the postal censorship and by it learnt which local merchants sent their orders to France and which to other countries. The latter were not infrequently the objects of thinly veiled threats and persecutions inflicted with a view to persuading them to change their ways.⁽⁵⁾ With pride the general informed War Minister, Painlevé, that of a monthly total value of 22 million francs in imports to Salonica 16 millions were French. But he warned that shipping facilities were quite inadequate to sustain this commercial expansion and that Genoa might replace Marseilles as the principal port for the Salonica trade if steps were not taken immediately.⁽⁶⁾ Yet, surprisingly enough, Grenard reported that since Briand's strictures to Sarrail the commercial bureaux of Salonica and Athens had worked hand in hand and that agreement had been reached on the quantities of imports which could be authorised into

(1) Bulletin Commercial de Macédoine No. 2, 1/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 58.

(2) *ibid* No. 10, 1/6/17, *ibid* 313 AP 95.

(3) Stead to Lloyd George 12/3/17, CAB 24/8/249.

(4) Granville to Lloyd George 6/2/17, Lloyd George MSS, F 55/3/1.

(5) Villari: *op. cit.*, p 59.

(6) Sarrail to Painlevé No. 657, 2/4/17, 5N 153.

Macedonia.⁽¹⁾ But whatever Grenard might believe the contrast between the two offices remained marked. Admittedly the Athens Bureau ensured that France benefitted substantially from the disappearance of Germany from the Greek market, but relations with the English authorities had been conducted on a basis of a "partage égal des importations et de la clientèle".⁽²⁾

Concern for France's economic standing in Macedonia received a boost with the appointment of de Billy as French representative to the Greek provisional government of Venizelos. On arrival de Billy made it known to the Greek statesman that he could count on his support for Venizelos' ideas only in so far as they were compatible with the interests of France.⁽³⁾ Indeed it was not long before de Billy reflected that the gratitude of the peoples of the area was directed more towards the allies who had enriched the province of Macedonia than to Venizelos himself. The need therefore for a pact with the commercial element in Greece to safeguard France's future.⁽⁴⁾ To strengthen France's standing at Salonica itself de Billy called for a subtle campaign of propaganda among the large Jewish population of the port to convince them of the benefits of a French 'economic protectorate'. Their natural inclination was to favour the commerce of Germany, but France would, after the war, need to rely in the Eastern Mediterranean on a community familiar with the methods of modern trade.⁽⁵⁾ But de Billy was also anxious that the commercial effects of the military occupation of Macedonia should be felt over Greece as a whole, where the economic situation of France, despite large capital investment, was not strong. He noted that of a total volume of imports into Greece of 173½ million francs per annum, France on pre-war figures was supplying only 10½ millions against the 37 millions of Germany and Austria.⁽⁶⁾

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- (1) Grenard to Briand No. 62, 20/11/16, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 303.
 (2) Commercial attaché for the Levant to Briand No. 15, 4/3/17, *ibid* Vol. 305.
 (3) de Billy to Briand No. 1, 10/1/17, *ibid* Vol. 289.
 (4) *ibid* No. 22, 28/2/17, *ibid*.
 (5) de Billy to Ribot No. 42, 10/4/17, *ibid* Vol. 291.
 (6) *ibid* No. 39, 24/3/17, A. E. 'N.S.', Vol. 19. French financial commitments in Greece far exceeded those of the other great powers. The Chamber heard in June 1917 that "en évaluant à un milliard et demi le chiffre de l'argent français en Grèce nous tenons à une limite certainement inférieure à la vérité". This figure was double that of England, ten times that of Russia, thirty times greater than that of Germany and fifty times the contribution made by Italy. Report of de Chappedelaine and others on the Armée d'Orient 1/6/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1042.

Activity among the Israelites of Salonica inevitably brought France into conflict once more with the ambitions of Italy. De Billy reported in February 1917 that France's rival had installed a Commercial Bureau at Salonica and that her navigation services were more frequent than those between Macedonia and Marseilles. Italy was delaying as long as possible her recognition of the Provisional Government so as to ingratiate herself with the Salonica Jews who were opposed to Venizelos' policy of hellenisation, since they feared that this would have a damaging effect on their commerce. France's representative concluded that "l'Italie cherche donc à accroître ses intérêts et à se créer une clientèle à notre détriment".⁽¹⁾ A report on the same problem, originating at Sarrail's headquarters, remarked that, had Italy been thinking in terms of serious military operations from Salonica, she would have sent a substantial armed force. But by sending only a division the Italians revealed their concern only to defend a position where they considered they had interests to safeguard and to undertake an economic propaganda, the essential features of which had been determined by the Italian government. Their true intentions had been revealed by the creation at Salonica of a Magazine Italiano, destined not only to compete with French establishments, but to become, after the war, an immense depot of Italian merchandise.⁽²⁾ As the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber heard in March 1917, the danger existed, if France did nothing to avert it, that it would be Italy which would occupy the position previously held by Germany and Austria in the Macedonian market. The action of the Italian consul at Salonica was "très dangereuse" for the interests of France. He cultivated the friendship of the leading local businessmen and was ambitious and extremely active in his country's interests. France could expect to find Italian competition stronger than ever after the war. The need therefore was to resist this threat and to do so immediately.⁽³⁾

The warnings of the Armée d'Orient on Italy's commercial aspirations were widely circulated among France's diplomatic and consular agents. Not surprisingly the most forthright and interesting response came from Barrère in Rome. In the first instance he was anxious to point out that this revelation of Italy's determination to use her military presence to foster her

(1) de Billy to Briand No. 10, 5/2/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 289.

(2) Rapport sur la Propagande Italienne auprès de la population israelite de Salonique 14/2/17, 16N 3144; 16N 3139.

(3) Note sur les procédés de concurrence commerciale des Italiens à Salonique - annexed to report of M. Lagrosillière (presented 30/3/17) 16N 3139.

commercial and political ambitions in the Near-East only confirmed his own earlier warnings. (1) He believed moreover that Italy's aspirations were not restricted to the area of Salonica itself but amounted to a desire to exercise a voice in the final arrangement of all the problems of the Near-East - whether they were in Salonica, Greece or Asia Minor. But at the same time Barrère was now struck by the fact that the Italians at Salonica had done no more than imitate the example of France. For the report of the Armée d'Orient itself revealed that the French themselves, before Italian troops even arrived on the scene, had been doing all they could to develop France's influence and favour her commerce. Pertinently Barrère noted that it was not with the Chambers of Commerce of Liverpool or Manchester, but rather those of Lyons, Marseilles and Bordeaux that the Salonica Commercial Bureau had sought to establish links. In such circumstances could France really feign surprise that Italy now sought to bring on to the Salonica market the goods of Milan, Turin and Naples? (2)

Thus, because of the exceptional circumstances imposed by France's military occupation, Macedonia, and particularly Salonica, came to appear as a separate entity under its own administration, for France was never able to exert the same sort of absolute control over the whole of Greece. As one observer put it, the port of Salonica became marked with the French stamp. (3) Indeed, in terms of recent history, Macedonia was but tenuously connected with Greece, since Greece had come into possession of the province only as a result of her victories in the Balkan Wars. The imposition of Greek administration upon the area had, moreover, exercised a damaging effect on its economy. In the early months of the war French diplomacy, under the influence of Delcassé's wooing of Bulgaria, had shown no fixed view of the map of the Balkans. Macedonia had been seen rather as a pawn in a territorial power game, the correct conclusion of which might be hoped to settle the tranquility of the peninsula. (4) At the beginning of the Salonica campaign Boissonnas had reported to Briand that the Jews of the port, sensitive to the damage which was being done to their interests by Greek rule, would become distinctly francophile at

(1) See above p 262

(2) Barrère to Briand 17/3/17, No. 163, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1041.

(3) Report by Meunier-Surcouf on "Situation navale en Orient" for the "Commission de la Marine de Guerre" 27/10/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(4) A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 217 (Balkans, Dossier Général), passim.

the prospect of Salonica being made a free city and placed under allied protection. If such a solution were not possible the Jewish colony would prefer to see Salonica fall under Austrian rather than Greek rule. (1)

The future administration of Macedonia was thus of obvious concern to Frenchmen and a particularly influential paper on the subject was written and widely circulated by the journalist and expert on Balkan affairs, René Pinon. In a cogent analysis of the Balkan situation in the summer of 1916, entitled L'Avenir Balkanique, Pinon argued that the area was a crossroads for both armies and historic trade routes. The Germans saw the line from Hamburg to Bagdad as the axis of a future German Empire dominating the Old World, and the key to breaking this vision now and for the future lay in the Balkans. But the aims of Germany were not the only considerations which France must bear in mind. At the end of the war the quest for a stable peace in the war-torn peninsula would necessitate the establishment of a strong Greece to counterbalance Italian aspirations. Moreover if after the war Constantinople should fall under the domination of Russia the policy of the western allies would naturally be to look for a counterweight in the Balkans to an over-mighty Russian Empire. Pinon argued that many inhabitants of the area shared his conviction that there could never be genuine stability in the Balkans until Macedonia, which was coveted by all its neighbours, was set up as an independent, autonomous state under the protection of the Allies. After a period of perhaps a decade it might be politic to allow Macedonia to join one of its neighbours if it so wished. But in the meantime the allies would have in their hands "cette ville de Salonique qui est le véritable centre économique du Balkan occidental et le débouché des plaines danubiennes sur la mer Egée". The port might become the centre of a Balkan federation which would close permanently the door through which Germany hoped to extend eastwards. Moreover to take Macedonia away from Greece would have the positive value of removing her from the eternal territorial wrangles of the Balkan states and leave her better prepared to resist Italian expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean. But above all else it had to be realised that if Germany succeeded in constituting a Mittleuropa extending into the Balkans and beyond, where it would be based on a subservient Bulgaria and a reorganised

(1) Boissonas to Briand No. 1, 7/12/15, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1035.

Ottoman Empire under German protection, the hegemony of the German Empire would be established in Europe once and for all. At all costs, therefore, the allies must cut this menacing chain of territorial control. Furthermore it was France herself who was most gravely threatened for, even if Germany exhausted and half-conquered, agreed to return to France Alsace-Lorraine and to Belgium her independence, if she still succeeded in realising her schemes in the Near-East, she would have obtained such an advantage that there would be no room in Europe for more than one great power - Germany herself. Russia would be able to look to Asia and think in terms of expansion eastwards; England would remain the great maritime power with a vast colonial Empire; but France would be left alone in Europe to face an overlarge Germany. It was imperative therefore that a barrage against German expansion should be erected in the Balkans to save France from "un péril de mort." (1)

Pinon developed his idea that the solution to this menacing situation lay in the creation of an autonomous Macedonia in a second paper written a little over a month later. Stressing that such an arrangement would receive the overwhelming support of the commercial community in Salonica, Pinon argued that the great port, because of its geographical position, would always be of cardinal economic importance and consequently of equivalent political importance. Whoever held Salonica was automatically master of the economic development of the peninsula and here of its political future. From the point of view of the allies, therefore, the retention of Salonica should be seen as a precious counter in the process of reorganising the Balkans to the best of their interests. Macedonia could thus represent, when the war was over, the means by which the allies would retain a commanding say in the affairs of the area - and it was an area where past experience had shown that they could not afford to become disinterested. (2)

Writing from the War Ministry, to which he was attached, Pinon sent both memoranda to the Quai d'Orsay and expressed the hope that they might receive attention. He was often asked his opinion on such questions and wanted to be sure that he was in line with the broad framework of the

(1) L'Avenir Balkanique 12/6/16, 16N 2944; A.E. 'Guerre', Vol 221.

(2) L'Autonomie de la Macédoine 20/7/16, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol 221; Vol. 257.

Foreign Ministry's policy. (1) Although conscious of the advantages which France herself might gain from his projects, Pinon did at least envisage the creation of an autonomous Macedonia under joint allied protection. Others who took up his ideas, however, showed a more partisan approach. In August 1916 the Society of National Propaganda in Paris produced a paper on La Question Macédonienne, which pointed out that many officers and men in the Armée d'Orient favoured the straightforward annexation of Macedonia. For a variety of self-evident reasons, however, this was not a practical solution. What was possible, though, was the creation of an autonomous state which would become in the course of a generation "une colonie morale de la France, dont la Valeur par le rayonnement de la culture française dans le monde serait très considérable". In return for loans to the new state France would claim for her own industrialists and engineers orders for public works and mining rights. French would be made the official language and France would gain a commanding say in the education and upbringing of the country's youth. (2) From the Mission Laïque at Salonica itself Lecoq reported that he had been in contact with Pinon and that he shared the latter's conclusions. Lecoq was convinced that the peace of the world required the definitive solution of the Macedonian question. This could only be done by a drastic revision of the Treaty of Bucharest to remove the province from the control of Greece. He realised that the question must be broached with extreme prudence at the present moment, but was certain that there could never be tranquility in Europe while the problem remained unresolved. (3) Lecoq admitted that any individual was liable to exaggerate the importance of the issues with which he was in daily contact, but thought nonetheless that the Macedonian question was of paramount significance. He felt justified, therefore, in preparing his own report on the subject, which he circulated to sympathetic readers including Painlevé and Léon Bourgeois. (4)

Whether one liked it or not, Lecoq argued, Macedonia was of interest to France and would continue to be so after the cessation of hostilities.

(1) Pinon to de Margerie or BertheLot (incorrectly dated), A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 221.

(2) La Question Macédonienne, 17/8/16, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 8.

(3) Lecoq to Bourgeois 21/9/16, *ibid*, Vol. 9.

(4) *ibid* 11/11/16, *ibid*.

The commercial, agricultural and even industrial potential of the region had not escaped the soldiers of the Armée d'Orient and they would not accept that nothing permanent should survive from the military effort which France had made. Indeed they tried to bring home to people in France the fact that Macedonia contained resources of unexploited richness which it would be possible to tap without great difficulty. Sarrail's creation of a Commercial Bureau had ensured sound economic relationships between France and Salonica which would continue to grow providing France did not abandon Macedonia to its own fate at the end of the war. It was after all "un pays dont les richesses virtuelles sont pratiquement illimitées et où nous avons pris pied non seulement militairement mais aussi commercialement". But no solution to the age-old Macedonian Question tried so far had proved successful: a completely new approach was evidently called for. From a somewhat different starting point, therefore, Lecoq arrived at the same conclusion as Pinon that the salvation of the Balkans and of France's position there lay in the creation of an autonomous Macedonia. Although vague ideas of world-wide hegemony might exist, all German and Austrian strategy was centred on the creation of an Empire in the Near-East. The infamous Drang Nach Osten, so dangerous for France's future, could only be halted and prevented from materialising at a future date, in this crucial area of the Balkans. Lecoq saw no reason to wish to weaken Greece - indeed a strong Greece would be required to contain within reasonable limits the ambitions of Italy - but the fact was that the Greek administration of Macedonia had not been a success and her customs policy was in the process of ruining the commerce of Salonica. But to remove Macedonia from Greece would not be to weaken her, but rather to relieve her of the need to guard the province against the covetousness of other states. The need was evidently for an autonomous Macedonia placed under the protectorate of one of the powers - since a condominium would prove a disaster which could only aggravate the situation still further. But who could exercise this protectorate? With impeccable logic Lecoq concluded that the territorial ambitions of Italy and Russia ruled them out, while England was excluded by her lack of interest in the Near-East outside Egypt. Only France therefore had "une situation morale lui permettant de briguer ce mandat". In this way French commerce and industry would reap benefits, while the peace of Europe would be assured. (1)

(1) Le problème macédonien 1/11/16, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109; Bourgeois MSS Vol. 8.

Whether the concept of an autonomous Macedonia ever became an accepted aspect of French policy at the highest level is not clear. Although certain factors, such as the creation of a neutral zone, at the end of 1916, tending to perpetuate the division of Greece into two parts, would give support to such an idea, the available evidence is inconclusive. On arrival at Salonica de Billy argued that to make the town a free port would be to leave the way open for the Central Powers to resume their preeminent position there with the arrival of peace. The interest of the allies, therefore, was to heal the schism and not to confirm it.⁽¹⁾ Moreover de Billy stressed that in sending representatives to the provisional government, England and France had rejected the idea of supporting Macedonian autonomy.⁽²⁾ But even if this had never been adopted as French policy, it remains an indication of the way in which the problem was being examined in French policy-making circles. After all it was a means rather than an end, and although de Billy ruled it out on the grounds that it opened the way to German domination, the aim of his strategy was essentially the same as that of Lecoq - to find the best way of leaving the area open to French influence and commercial penetration. Indeed the very fact that de Billy mentioned the idea of autonomy suggests that it was widely regarded as at least a possibility.

The question received a wider airing before the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission at the end of March 1917, when it was revealed that the acquisition of Salonica by Greece had resulted in a 25% reduction in the volume of trade at the port from the level of 1912. This was largely the result of tariff policy and of the Greek Government's determination to favour the Piraeus rather than Salonica.⁽³⁾ It was therefore argued that a strong power should establish itself in Macedonia and France was the country designated to give peace to the Balkans. She could establish a sort of protectorate over the province beneath which the area would be essentially autonomous. The advance of Germans and Slavs alike would thus be halted and use could be made of the agricultural, mineral and industrial potential

(1) de Billy to Briand No. 1, 22/1/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 289.

(2) *ibid* No. 10, 5/2/17, *ibid*.

(3) Note sur les conséquences de l'établissement de la Grèce à Salonique (Lagrosillière's report of 30/3/17), 16N 3139.

of the land. "La France elle-même trouverait en Macédoine des placements très fructueux, en même temps qu'elle maintiendrait et développerait sa suprématie intellectuelle et morale dans le pays".⁽¹⁾ Moreover a memorandum presented on behalf of the Jewish merchants of Salonica suggested that they wanted nothing more than for the port to be placed under "the definitive occupation of France".⁽²⁾

Jules Cambon noted in June 1917 that the officers close to Sarrail spoke freely of the need to create an autonomous Macedonia. This sort of language was causing concern to the Serbian government.⁽³⁾ Complaints had been received from the Serbian minister and Painlevé thought it prudent to remind Sarrail that such indiscretions might give rise to misconceptions concerning the real intentions of the French government. The war minister therefore requested Sarrail to remind his officers that they should never express in public their private views on matters of foreign policy.⁽⁴⁾ In reply Sarrail ingenuously suggested that the allegations were false and probably derived from the inventive brain of the Serbian government.⁽⁵⁾

But although the Paris government may have disowned the concept of Macedonian subnomy, which was obviously widely favoured among the French military and civil community at Salonica, support for the idea that the Armée d'Orient was the harbinger of post-war advantages for France grew with the advent of the Ribot-Painlevé administration. With the new government just installed de Fontenay wrote of the scandal which existed by which French boats left their ports half or even three-quarters empty. Moreover a solitary French vessel reached Salonica every four or five weeks with 6 or 700 tons of goods, while the Italians sent a steamboat every week. Yet it was through this service that France hoped to implant her commerce in Macedonia.⁽⁶⁾ At the beginning of April 1917 both de Billy and Lecoq warned of an impending crisis. The Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes was intending to transfer the steamer which covered the Marseilles - Salonica route to Madagascar and was not likely to replace it for at least

(1) Note sur le régime qu'il conviendrait d'établir en Macédoine, *ibid.*

(2) Mémoire des commerçants israélites de Salonique, *ibid.*

(3) Note by Cambon 9/6/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1042.

(4) Painlevé to Sarrail No. 3009, 23/6/17, 16N 2991.

(5) Sarrail to Painlevé No. 1724, 24/6/17, 16N 3145.

(6) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 24/3/17, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 8.

three months. In the meantime it was certain that Genoa would gain from what Marseilles lost and that the immense efforts made to open up Salonica to French commerce would be sacrificed in favour of France's "most dangerous economic and political rival in the Near-East, Italy". De Billy appealed to Ribot, and Lecoq to Bourgeois to rectify this disastrous prospect which would reduce almost to nothing the now 75% of the Salonica market occupied by France. ⁽¹⁾

De Fontenay warned that already 5 or 6,000 tons of goods were awaiting despatch to Salonica at Marseilles because of the absence of transport facilities, and that this backlog would increase by 4000 tons a month until it reached the point where disheartened Salonica merchants would place no more orders with France. He felt that the need was for the state to take over a service which private enterprise was evidently unable to fulfil. Only thus could one "remédier à ce suicide que notre administration impose à notre commerce". Otherwise Italians would soon step into the breach in providing transport and it would not be long before their powers of persuasion convinced the businessmen of Macedonia that it would be advisable to buy directly from Italy. "Et voilà comment nous perdons une clientèle nouvelle qui ne demandait qu'à s'adresser à nous". A revolution was required in the bureaucratic machinery in France, which was placing so many impediments in the way of French commerce. Every Frenchman in the Near-East placed his faith in War Minister, Painlevé, because if he "ne réussit pas à nous sauver de notre 'administration', il n'y aura plus qu'à se résigner". ⁽²⁾ Graillet reiterated these warnings, stressing that France was in danger of surrendering to Italy the preponderant place which had been won in the Macedonian market by the great efforts of the comitate and Sarrail's commercial organisations. He saw the solution as lying in the use of requisitioned vessels under state direction. ⁽³⁾ In Paris the Quai d'Orsay took the matter up with the Ministry of the Marine and the latter, conscious of the need to "maintenir notre influence en Orient", set up between Marseilles and Salonica a service run by three vessels taken over by its own department and operating services as regularly as possible. ⁽⁴⁾ On these steamships

(1) de Billy to Ribot No. 96/^{4/4/17} A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 306; Lecoq to Bourgeois 4/4/17, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 9.

(2) de Fontenay to Bourgeois 7/4/17, Bourgeois MSS, Vol. 8.

(3) Graillet to Ribot No. 28, 30/4/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 306.

(4) Marine to Foreign Affairs No. 454, 22/6/17, *ibid*, Vol. 307.

200 tons were to be reserved for French firms which had contracts with the Armée d'Orient, while the rest would be left for the use of private French merchants.⁽¹⁾ De Fontenay stressed that there could be no letting up in France's efforts. For, apart from the Italian threat, only vigorous French economic activity, sustained even after the war was over, could prevent the return of Austrian influence and her renewed economic domination at Salonica.⁽²⁾

The reunion of Greece following the deposition of King Constantine allowed those interested in the subject to think in terms of applying to the whole of the country the aspects of French commercial penetration which had been so successful in Macedonia. Bonnier thought the time had come seriously to "prepare for the development of economic relations between French industry and Greek commerce". Even if some French industrialists were unable at that moment to export goods Bonnier felt it was still important for them to send samples to "leurs clients grecs d'après-guerre". It was a question of the basic interests of France. After the war, if France was going to face her obligations and assure her prosperity, she would have to find new openings for her trade. And nowhere, Bonnier argued, was more open to French economic action than the Hellenic world where France had just dramatically affirmed her authority.⁽³⁾ The problem of the transport crisis remained, however, one which was never fully overcome.

In the last weeks of his command Sarrail interested himself in the need for the reconstruction of the town of Salonica following the fire of 18 August. He reminded the War Ministry that the destruction of many Greek schools opened the possibility of French institutions gaining a near monopoly of education in Salonica, which was so important in the development of French influence.⁽⁴⁾ But with the war still undecided and his work in preparing France's situation at the advent of peace incomplete, Sarrail was of course recalled. Lecoq recorded that Sarrail had borne high the name of France and had never allowed her pre-eminence to be disputed in any field. Now the danger existed that England might use the occasion of Sarrail's removal to launch her own policy of extending her influence in Greece and the Balkans.

(1) Merchant Marine to Foreign Affairs 27/6/17, *ibid.*

(2) de Fontenay to Ribot 18/9/17, *ibid.*, Vol. 277.

(3) Bonnier to Presidents of French Chambers of Commerce 1/7/17, Painlevé MSS 313 AP 96.

(4) Sarrail to Painlevé 5/9/17, No. 2561, 16N 3145.

This should be guarded against so that France could retain her preponderant position. Her interests in the Near-East demanded it: "nous n'avons pas le moyen de subir ici un échec".⁽¹⁾

The extent of France's strategic, political and commercial interests in the Near-East in general and of her more specific concerns in particular parts of the area should now be apparent. The war served to magnify and accentuate these in their wider context and in certain cases afforded France the opportunity to develop them. In both instances, moreover, the Armée d'Orient became the expression of French aspirations. Its value extended, therefore, far beyond what it might offer towards the winning of the war (which was of only limited importance) to the area of determining what sort of victory France was likely to win. Sarrail's army focused above all the determination of Frenchmen to ensure that the peace settlement would represent, not only the defeat of Germany, but also the victory of France - and a victory which would be expressed in tangible gains, territorial, strategic, commercial and political. The abandonment of the Salonica Campaign was thus unthinkable on the basis of purely French considerations, leaving aside whatever might have been desirable in terms of the total allied war effort. "Si nous rembarquons nous perdons de ce fait à tout jamais notre action en Orient. L'abandon de Salonique ... serait la fin de la France dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée".⁽²⁾

The problem crystallises the difference in attitudes towards the Great War of the two leading participants on the allied side. For France the struggle against Germany was essentially to decide whether Germany was going to be allowed to establish her own hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe and the Near East. This was an issue in which France was immediately and vitally involved. But while the prevention of an over-strong power on the continent of Europe was, of course, a long-standing principle of British foreign policy, such a consideration affected Britain far less centrally than it did France, and she could not share the latter's overriding concern at the outcome of the war in the Eastern Mediterranean.

(1) Lecoq to Painlevé 26/1/18, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 109.

(2) Parliamentary report on the Armée d'Orient by de Chappedelaine and others 1/6/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1042.

British war aims inevitably reflected her own status as the world's leading naval power and centred on her desire to protect her existing Empire. The defence of Egypt naturally entered into such calculations, but Britain never saw in the Salonica Campaign a means of defending her post-war interests in the Near-East and the route to India. These would be guaranteed as they always had been by the Royal Navy. The belief existed in France, on the other hand, that only through the maintenance of the Armée d'Orient could she secure for herself the right to a say in the post-war arrangement of the Near-East. Sheer physical, military presence was seen to bestow on a power the right to a commanding voice at the final settlement. As Briand remarked when discussing Italian aspirations in the Near-East in September 1916, her claims were not justified by her war effort in the Balkans.⁽¹⁾ Moreover, because of the ambitions and encroachments of France's rivals, it came to be seen that the Armée d'Orient was based on a country where France would need to interest herself to a far greater degree than in pre-war days. The war increased the importance of Greece for France just as her military presence there did the temptation to use this country as a foothold for her own Mediterranean ambitions.

France obviously had certain territorial designs in the Eastern Mediterranean: in the first instance this involved the possession of Syria and Cilicia, and included as well, at least in the first half of the war, Palestine.⁽²⁾ As French diplomats recognised, however, the English government's interest in acquiring more territory to add to its already vast Empire was minimal.⁽³⁾ But the possession of Syria merely reflected a deeply held conviction that France's future was inextricably bound up with her standing in the Near East. It masked, therefore, a much broader aim to carve out as wide a sphere of influence as possible in the whole area. Thus while campaigns on the Western front might help France win the war, those in the East would play no less important a role in aiding her to win the peace.

In a strategic sense, then, the Salonica Expedition was a lever of French ambition in a wide area. More immediately, however, it came to

(1) Briand to Cambon No. 3089, 22/9/16, A. E. 'A Paix' Vol. 130.

(2) Note by Berthelet 27/8/15, *ibid.*

(3) see, for example, P. Cambon to Delcassé No. 183, 27/3/15, Paul Cambon MSS, Dossier 9.

be used as the vehicle by which France would acquire direct economic and hence political influence in the area closely affected by the presence of the Armée d'Orient. It was calculated in October 1917 that more than 825 million francs of French money were tied up in the Greek economy,⁽¹⁾ but in pre-war circumstances only a very small proportion of this sum was taken up by French commerce with Greece. Sarrail's army attempted to rectify this situation by using its control of the Macedonian economy to favour the development of trading links with France. With the return of peace and with Salonica established as the great port of transit for the Balkans, it might be hoped to increase to around 200 million francs per annum the volume of French trade passing through Macedonia. French industry at the end of the war would find itself in a difficult position. The vast plant which had been employed in the manufacture of armaments would have to be converted to peace-time production if serious unemployment was to be averted. But to cope with the inevitable increase in production France would need new markets and the Balkans, which would be in great need of agricultural equipment and manufactured goods, were ideally suited to fill this role.⁽²⁾ "La Macédoine est un pays absolument neuf ouvrant aux initiatives intelligentes des horizons illimités ... Il appartiendra à nos jeunes et intelligentes initiatives d'en faire un des plus beaux et plus riches domaines d'influence de notre pays".⁽³⁾ The Armée d'Orient therefore fought a commercial war for France in addition to the efforts it made on the battle-field - and its opponents in the two struggles were not necessarily the same, since that for economic supremacy involved "une lutte pacifique contre nos alliés".⁽⁴⁾

All of these factors made it most unlikely that France and England would be able to cooperate fully in the Salonica venture, especially, as has been seen, when there were few advocates to be found in England even for the continuance of the campaign. France's underlying strategic motivation inevitably cut across British interests in the Mediterranean balance of power, while her commercial and political aspirations in Greece and Macedonia ran counter to British policy, which in this part of the world at least, was more concerned with winning the war as soon as possible. What

(1) Note by M. Bompard, October 1917, A. E. 'N.S.', Vol. 53.

(2) Note sur les relations commerciales entre la France et la Macédoine 3/12/17, 5N 287.

(3) Report of de Chappedelaine, op. cit.

(4) *ibid.*

is difficult to determine, however, is the extent to which what have been seen as 'French ambitions' permeated the whole of the French governmental hierarchy - whether in fact they can be seen to represent government policy rather than the sectional and vested interests of pressure groups in France and of French agents in Athens and Salonica.⁽¹⁾ No satisfactory study of French war aims has yet appeared and any attempt to remedy this situation will be confronted with enormous difficulties in terms of archival material.⁽²⁾ While it may still be true to say that "le but de guerre essentiel, le seul qui soit soutenu par un grand mouvement d'opinion dans tous les secteurs de l'extrême-droite à l'extrême-gauche ... c'est la restitution de l'Alsace-Lorraine",⁽³⁾ the present study has perhaps done something to indicate that there was also widespread concern among Frenchmen for what happened in South-East Europe and the Mediterranean. What seems unquestionable is that French agents on the spot and in particular those closely associated with the Armée d'Orient, were almost unanimous in appreciating and championing at least some of the non-military advantages deriving from France's participation in the Eastern theatre. While no coherent and precise governmental policy ever seems to have emerged, this understanding of the situation was apparently shared, to varying degrees, by the changing governments in Paris. Not surprisingly it appears that Paris and its agents were most closely in tune on this matter during the ascendancy in 1917 of those politicians most sympathetic to General Sarrail himself.

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- (1) "Only Clemenceau, the strongest prime minister of the Third Republic, possessed the power and determination to shape Middle East policy according to his own design". C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner: The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims 1914-18 (Historical Journal March 1974, p 106).
- (2) The Foreign Ministry documents for the Great War were divided from the outset into two basic categories: those concerned with the prosecution of the war itself and those appertaining to war aims and the question of the future peace. Approximately 80 per cent of the second category (Série A-Paix) were destroyed in the course of the Second World War. But the very fact that two such categories were devised perhaps suggests a greater interest in France than in England in the early stages of the conflict with war aims and the conditions upon which France would be prepared to make peace.
- (3) P. Renouin: Les buts de guerre du gouvernement français, Revue historique 1966, p 3.

CHAPTER 10Conclusion - 1918 and the End of the Campaign

No one can look at the documents relating to the last year of the Salonica Campaign without realising that radical changes had occurred since the beginning of the expedition in 1915. The divisive problems which had so frequently threatened to tear the Entente apart are no longer to the forefront and one witnesses instead, perhaps for the first time, a genuine assessment on both sides of the Channel of the military prospects of the campaign. No longer is the diplomacy of the allies fatally hamstrung by political considerations. Thus, as political intrigue sinks further into the background, attention focuses instead on the actual military struggle against the enemy. The problem of Greece no longer occupies the centre of the stage. The decision of the British government in the early summer of 1917 to accede to the deposition of King Constantine and to leave to France the directing hand in allied diplomacy in Athens had effectively removed this bone of contention. As the Quai d'Orsay concluded in February 1918, "les affaires de Grèce donnent lieu à des difficultés d'ordre secondaire, mais ont cessé de tenir désormais, dans les préoccupations des Alliés, la place si importante qui avait été la leur pendant longtemps".⁽¹⁾ But the changing situation is explicable above all else in terms of personalities. The succession of Clemenceau to the Presidency of the Council and the removal of Sarrail from the command of the Armée d'Orient were as significant as any events in the history of the campaign.

The diplomatic instructions personally given by the new foreign minister, Stephen Pichon, to Guillaumat, before the latter left Paris to take up his new command, contained a tacit recognition that the presence of Sarrail as Commander-in-chief had been one of the principal causes of the lack of inter-allied cooperation on the Salonica front: "Ils [the English] n'ont jamais envisagé qu'avec répugnance le concours qu'ils nous ont donné. La prise de possession de votre haut commandement permettra, je l'espère, de faire disparaître les divergences de vues qui n'ont plus leur place et qui seraient nuisibles à nos efforts concertés".⁽²⁾ For long past

(1) Note sur les affaires de Grèce 15/2/18, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 281; Vol. 310.

(2) Pichon's instructions for Guillaumat 17/12/17, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1043. See also Note for Pichon 24/3/18, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 1044: "La question de Salonique qui avait été l'objet à plusieurs reprises de débats assez mouvementés entre les Alliés ... ne donne plus, depuis quelque temps, de sujets graves de discussion ... La personnalité du Général en chef a pu être aussi un élément de cette attitude ... Son passé et la réputation qu'il a de ne considérer les choses qu'au point de vue militaire ... lui assurent un ascendant moral incontesté".

no other single factor had so prevented Britain's whole hearted cooperation in the campaign as the fact that the army was under the command of a general whose interests appeared to lie anywhere other than the battle-field. Whatever Sarrail's military worth may have been, and he was not without his admirers, British politicians and soldiers were almost unanimously convinced that no good could be done at Salonica while he remained in charge. With the arrival of Guillaumat, therefore, a fresh wind blew through the allied headquarters at Salonica which could not but be beneficial. On 12 December 1917 the English War Cabinet heard that the new commander was a "plain, blunt Soldier", who had commanded at Verdun after Nivelle had become commander-in-chief, and that he was regarded by Clemenceau as "a first-class man". (1) Within days of Guillaumat's arrival Milne assured Robertson that it would "tend to ease the situation as far as this theatre of war is concerned". The action of the various armies would be co-ordinated, future events considered and preparations made to meet them. After "two years of uncertainty", Milne found it refreshing to have someone with a definite plan, even if that plan was a purely defensive one. (2) Early in the new year Milne concluded that Guillaumat was "essentially a soldier", and that in marked contrast to Sarrail, he regarded the situation from a military point of view. He appeared to be a firm believer in thorough organisation and was willing to listen to the opinions of others, while at the same time having very clear views of his own. (3) Guillaumat made a similarly favourable first impression on Plunkett. The latter heard that Guillaumat had spent a fortnight at the French War Office getting in touch with the situation and that he had been particularly warned against becoming influenced by, or interested too great an extent in political and economic considerations. Guillaumat had been instructed to confine himself to the command of the allied armies and had also been informed of the necessity of getting on good terms socially with the other allied generals and their staffs. (4)

As important as the changeover between Guillaumat and Sarrail was that between Clemenceau and Painlevé, or rather between Clemenceau and that political system which Painlevé represented and to which, to one degree or

(1) War Cabinet 12/12/17, CAB 23/4/296.

(2) Milne to Robertson 30/12/17, CAB 25/27/9A

(3) *ibid* 17/1/18, *ibid*

(4) Report on seventh visit to Salonica 22/1/18, W.O. 106/1347.

another, the ministries of Viviani, Briand and Ribot had all conformed. That the recall of Sarraill did not give rise to the great outcry which might have been expected was in large measure due to the forceful personality of the new Prime Minister. As one observer put it, "Le général Sarraill revient, tout reste calme et ce retour ne produit pas d'effet". (1)

For almost the first time in the war France found herself with a government which could govern without undue concern for the fluctuating votes of the Chamber of Deputies or for the party political intrigues of the parliamentary corridors. (2) With the formation of Clemenceau's ministry in November 1917 France accepted what amounted to a ministerial dictatorship and, after initial trials of strength in the Chamber and Senate had revealed that the premier could command a comfortable majority, the French parliament relapsed into the secondary role which it had not occupied since the early months of the war and the ascendancy of Joffre. The possibility now existed, therefore, that the Salonica campaign would be viewed in Paris on its intrinsic merits and removed from the nuance of political implications in which it had hitherto been enveloped. With so dominant a figure as Clemenceau, completely overshadowing the men who surrounded him, (3) at the head of the government, the future of the Balkan venture lay very much in the hands of the new premier. Clemenceau's views on the Salonica expedition, moreover, were likely to place him nearer to the point of view of his English allies than any of his predecessors had been.

Ever since October 1915 there had not been a more ardent or vociferous critic in Paris of the French government's conduct of the campaign than 'the Tiger'. Ruthlessly attacking what he saw to be a wasted effort, Clemenceau had launched a series of bitter assaults on the champions of the Balkan front through his notorious newspaper L'homme Enchaîné. Frequent clashes with the censor had failed to lessen the severity of his pen. An article written in May 1917 epitomised the attitude which Clemenceau had held throughout: "Pour moi, sans vouloir entrer dans cet examen délicat, je continue de me demander si les quelques centaines de mille hommes jetés en Orient, avec un précieux matériel, n'auraient pas été d'un profit plus décisif pour nous sur notre front d'Occident. Nous payerons jusqu'au bout, et de trop de manières, le coup de génie de M. Briand". (4)

(1) Herbillon - op,cit, vol 2, p 186

(2) For the almost miraculous effect which Clemenceau's command of the parliamentary situation had on the political life of France, see D.R. Watson - Georges Clemenceau - A Political Biography (1974), p 281

(3) P. Cambon to Barrère 19/12/17, Barrère MSS, vol 1.

(4) L'homme Enchaîné, 6/5/17.

Sarrail was to argue that for many months Clemenceau subjected successive French governments to flagrant blackmail to prevent them from sending the reinforcements which were indispensable to success. In office, however, Clemenceau seems to have concluded that it was now too late in the day to pull out from Salonica and "on my successors in the East he lavished cooperation and support - the reinforcements he had defied successive governments to grant me even piecemeal". (1) Sarrail's words were an exaggeration. To the end of the war Clemenceau remained a convinced Westerner. As he told the Chamber Foreign Affairs Commission in May 1918, "Je ne suis pas très 'Saloniquais'". But he was not prepared to abandon the expedition when it had already consumed so much in terms of energy and resources. (2) General Franchet d'Espérey, who succeeded Guillaumat in the summer of 1918, was probably near the mark when he argued that "M. Clemenceau n'a jamais aimé l'Orient: cependant, comme c'est un grand Français, il se rend compte de l'importance des intérêts qui s'y débattent". (3) At all events, with Clemenceau in power England could be sure that political factors would no longer dominate the direction of the French war effort. In February 1918 Guillaumat reported from Salonica that "La France et l'Angleterre sont les seules ici à s'occuper de la guerre, Les autres puissances ne pensent qu'à l'après guerre. (4) What was significant in this was not that other powers were still concentrating on the post-war settlement but that France could now be counted among those who put the war itself to the forefront. Less concerned than others with the peace and the post-war world Clemenceau came to office obsessed only with the war itself and with a determination to fight it to a victorious conclusion. Any other solution was, for him, tantamount to defeat and treason. This primacy of military considerations was implicitly recognised in the choice of Lord Derby to replace the ailing Bertie at the British embassy in Paris in April 1918. As Lloyd George pointed out to the War Cabinet there was "not very much diplomacy required in Paris". What was needed was some representative who was in close touch

(1) Coblenz - op. cit., p 111

(2) Meeting 3/5/18, C7491. of Cambon to Charmes 9/10/18: "Clemenceau ne s'intéresse nullement à l'Orient". (Cambon - Correspondance, vol 3, p 275) and for a very recent view, Andrew and Kanya - Forstner - op. cit., p 96 "The prime minister (Clemenceau) had no war aims outside Europe and his single-minded concentration on the Western front ended all hope of effective French action in the Middle East".

(3) d'Espérey to C. de Freycinet 4/2/19, de Freycinet MSS, vol. 1.

(4) Guillaumat to Foch 13/2/18, 16N 3146

with the views of the British government on the innumerable questions, essentially of a military character, which arose from day to day between the two countries.⁽¹⁾

These crucial changes in personnel coincided with significant improvements in the allied direction of the war as a whole, resulting from a regularisation of the relationship between the political and military authorities in England and France. The task of coordinating the activities of the allied armies, which for the first two years of the war had, almost by default, been entrusted to the French G.Q.G., had, owing to the supersession of Joffre and the failure of his successor, gradually fallen out of French hands. Nonetheless the groundwork for a more satisfactory arrangement had been carried out while Painlevé was at the Ministère de la Guerre. On 29 April 1917 there were recreated for Pétain the functions of military technical adviser of the Comité de Guerre which Joffre had exercised for a single week in December 1916. Moreover the disastrous campaign of Chemin des Dames had, by making inevitable the removal of Nivelle, the compensatory effect of harmonising relations between the High Command and the government in France to a greater degree than at any time since the opening months of the war.⁽²⁾ Painlevé's nomination of Foch and Pétain to the two highest offices in the French army command was the first step in the creation in an acceptable form of a unified allied control of the war. Upon the prestige of Foch it would be possible to build a unified command structure. When Clemenceau assumed the premiership he did no more than follow in the paths already charted by his predecessor.⁽³⁾

As Painlevé himself was to write, although in the light of his role in the Salonica expedition his words seem somewhat inappropriate, "pour que la victoire fût possible, il a fallu que s'établissent entre les alliés une confiance mutuelle, une bonne volonté réciproque de se comprendre et une absolue loyauté".⁽⁴⁾ Painlevé had begun preliminary talks with the British on the ticklish question of a unification of strategy on the Western front as early as August 1917, but Lloyd George and Milner had counselled patience

(1) War Cabinet 18/4/18. CAB 23/6/394.

(2) J. C. King: op. cit., pp 165, 170.

(3) J. M. Bourget: op. cit., p 109.

(4) P. Painlevé: op. cit., p ix.

in trying to obtain the appointment of Foch as chief of an inter-allied General Staff.⁽¹⁾ The Italian disaster at Caporetto in October, however, demonstrated the urgent need of unification and Painlevé hurried to London for renewed consultation. From this conference there emerged the so-called Supreme War Council - a body to be made up of the premier (whenever possible) and a permanent military representative from each of the countries to be included. "The Supreme War Council did not supersede the Commanders-in-Chief but gave them for their guidance an expression of the definite policy of the Allied Governments. It was not to act as a Commander-in-Chief, but as an agency for the adoption and maintenance of a general policy for the Allies in the prosecution of the war, consistent with the total resources available and the most effective distribution of those resources among the various theatres of operations".⁽²⁾ But it was left to Clemenceau at the Doullens Conference of March 1918 to secure for Foch functions which amounted to those of commander-in-chief of the Anglo-French armies. Thereafter Foch's title and powers expanded haphazardly with the course of events. In the Supreme War Council, however, the allies found a far more satisfactory means of conducting the Salonica campaign than the series of ad hoc conferences of the preceding two years, which had proved so barren of achievement.

While all these developments were taking place politico-military relations in England were also being put on a firmer footing with the replacement of Robertson by Sir Henry Wilson on 18 February 1918. Sir John French's downfall and Kitchener's loss of authority had contributed as much as any positive achievement on his own part to raise Robertson to a higher plane. Grimly Robertson had held on to office, defying a Prime Minister who was eager to be free of his official advisers, and in the end he had virtually to be ejected from office. There is little direct evidence of the personal views of Wilson on the Macedonian campaign. But during the remaining months of the war the situation on the Western front was such that Wilson was to have little time to devote to Salonica. It appears,

(1) P. Painlevé: *op. cit.*, p 241.

(2) T. H. Bliss: The Evolution of the Unified Command, Foreign Affairs (Dec 1922) p 6.

however, that he was on the whole less opposed to it than his predecessor had been. At all events he was not prepared to make such an issue of the campaign as Robertson had.⁽¹⁾

With the premiership of Clemenceau, then, the Salonica campaign inevitably decreased in importance. It was not possible, however, that it would disappear altogether, nor that the interests of France in the area, which had provided the underlying motivation behind the expedition and fed the suspicions of her allies, would vanish overnight. Indeed the same Quai d'Orsay note, which concluded that the affairs of Greece were no longer giving rise to great problems, stressed that efforts were being made to develop commercial relations between France and Greece and to surmount the difficulties posed by the dearth of shipping available. The French Chamber of Commerce and the Athens Commercial Bureau were working hand in hand with the French Legation and were supported by the Foreign Ministry in Paris.⁽²⁾ General Bordeaux, who had replaced Braquet as French Military Attaché at the end of 1917, warned that the struggles for influence in Greece between the great powers would start up again with the end of hostilities.⁽³⁾ French consuls in Greece continued their attempts to use the extraordinary situation of the war to foster trade between France and the towns and districts to which they were accredited. In February 1918, for example, Dussap sought Pichon's assistance in favouring the importation of French products in Epirus, "en vue de créer un courant d'affaires entre notre pays et cette région".⁽⁴⁾ Similarly, with a view to facilitating large scale purchases of French goods by the Greek government, there was created in Paris a special office with the title "Service des Travaux Publics en Grèce".⁽⁵⁾

The French government retained a strong interest in the commercial and financial affairs of Greece throughout 1918. As Pichon stated in March 1918 the support of the Quai d'Orsay was assured for all enterprises which aimed at the development of French economic activity in Greece.⁽⁶⁾ Similarly

(1) Falls: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 62.

(2) Note sur les Affaires de Grèce 15/2/18, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 281.

(3) Note concernant le roi Alexandre 1^{er} de Grèce, 11/1/18, 16N 3161.

(4) Dussap to Pichon No. 14, 21/2/18, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 310.

(5) A. Romanos to Pichon 5/2/18, 7N 1342.

(6) Pichon to Ministries of Finance and Commerce 12/3/18, A. E. 'N.S.' Vol. 53.

Klotz, the Minister of Finance, declared that "nous devrions nous efforcer de développer en Grèce nos ventes dans toute la mesure où le permettent les moyens de transport".⁽¹⁾ From Athens de Billy urged that Greece should be disabused of the idea that at the end of hostilities she would be allowed to resume the unrestricted commercial intercourse with the Central Powers which she had enjoyed in the years before the war. It was not thinkable that the financial assistance afforded by France and England had not imposed obligations and restrictions on Greece in this field.⁽²⁾ De Billy even seemed worried that the Greek government might have sufficient money to pay off its debts to the allies since this would remove from France her power of control.⁽³⁾ The Military Attaché in Greece called in March 1918 for the country to be made the point of departure "de tout notre rayonnement futur dans les Balkans et en Turquie".⁽⁴⁾ Similarly the French consul at Salonica, Graillet, consistently pressed upon Paris the need to preserve the Commercial Bureau set up by Sarraill and Bonnier in 1916. It had provided France with the opportunity of acquiring a preponderant position in the commerce of the area and must be retained after the departure of the Army under whose auspices it had flourished.⁽⁵⁾ But the fostering of French trade in the post-war world could not, in the circumstances of 1918, occupy the crucial and central role which men such as Sarraill and Bonnier had attempted to give it in 1916 and 1917. With the German offensive on the Western front of the spring of 1918 France faced what was possibly the most serious crisis of the war and, in the words of Jonnart, now Clemenceau's Minister of Blockade, "la question de la création de nouveaux courants commerciaux ne peut plus actuellement que jouer un rôle secondaire dans la politique économique française; il s'agit avant tout d'assurer l'existence du pays".⁽⁶⁾ Bonnier was therefore to be informed not to arrange for Greek purchases in France without first acquainting himself with the resources available on the French market. The tonnage crisis, moreover, became so acute that in April 1918 it was found necessary to halt all French

(1) Klotz to Ministries of Commerce, Industry, Posts and Telegraphs and Merchant Marine 22/3/18, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 310.

(2) de Billy to Pichon No. 67, 15/3/18, *ibid.*

(3) Granville to Balfour No. 228, 12/9/18, F.O. 371/3158/163493.

(4) Note on propaganda, 31/3/18, 7N 1344.

(5) Graillet to Pichon No. 82, 20/11/18, No. 267, 13/12/18, A. E. "Z", Grèce, Vol. 98.

(6) Jonnart to Pichon No. 297, 4/4/18, A. E. 'Guerre', Vol. 310.

commercial services between France and Greece.⁽¹⁾ The French Commercial Attaché, Bargeton, warned de Billy that if this situation continued the commercial future of France in Greece would be gravely compromised. In no other country were preparations for post-war economic expansion more justified than in Greece, where it was imperative "de profiter des circonstances qui l'isolent momentanément des Empires Centraux". The needs of the hour obviously imposed a reduction of French exports but French manufacturers and Greek merchants would be deeply discouraged if all means were refused them of carrying out the transactions which "doivent être l'embryon de rapports économiques intenses dès la fin de la guerre".⁽²⁾ But Bargeton did not receive from Guillaumat the sort of support which Bonnier would have expected from Sarrail. The new commander insisted that, although the expansion of French influence in the Near-East was an entirely admirable goal, he could not spare space on boats arriving at Salonica and Athens for the benefit of purely commercial traffic: "avant de préparer l'après-guerre, il faut faire face aux nécessités de l'heure présente".⁽³⁾ His conclusions, moreover, were upheld by Clemenceau in Paris.⁽⁴⁾

France simply did not have the resources to replace German commerce in areas from which the latter had been excluded as a result of the war. The French Commercial Bureau in Athens received, therefore, from Paris a list of the products which France could provide and another of those for which Greece should look to other markets.⁽⁵⁾ The dilemma existed of either compromising the supplies of the Armée d'Orient in favour of French commercial interests, "très légitimes en soi, mais impossible à concilier avec cette nécessité militaire", or of sacrificing these same commercial interests, "confondus ... avec l'avenir même de notre expansion en Orient", to the advantage of the security of the French forces in the Balkans. In such circumstances no real choice existed and the decision imposed itself.⁽⁶⁾ The consequences in Greece were inevitable and Dussap complained of the daily visits he received from Greek merchants, frustrated in their attempts

(1) Commission aux Transports Maritimes to Affaires Etrangères 25/4/18 A.E. 'N.S.', Vol. 19.

(2) Bargeton to de Billy 12/4/18, A.E. 'Z', Grèce, Vol. 128.

(3) Guillaumat to Clemenceau No.613/3, 5/5/18, A.E. 'Z', Grèce, Vol. 128.

(4) Clemenceau to Commissaire aux Transports Maritimes, No. 22176, 19/5/18, *ibid.*

(5) Ministry of Blockade to Pichon No. 702, 12/7/18, *ibid.*

(6) Commissaire aux Transports Maritimes to Pichon 30/7/18, *ibid.*

to place orders on the French market. "Cette situation est bien regrettable car ... l'occasion est unique pour nous de nous ouvrir le marché épirote qui avant la guerre était en grande partie approvisionné par l'Autriche et l'Italie".⁽¹⁾ At the beginning of 1919 the French Military Mission in Greece noted with regret that France was not well placed to benefit from the important orders which were being placed by Greek merchants. The devastation caused by the German invasion would occupy the attention of France for the foreseeable future, leaving to France's "allies" unrestricted opportunities on the Greek market.⁽²⁾

In fact French interest in Greece and Salonica declined rather more than did her interest in the Near-East as a whole. The reason for this is to be found in a reversal of those peculiar circumstances which had given the area a crucial importance for France in the first instance. As early as May 1917 the Russian Provisional Government had been obliged to declare that it had no territorial designs and that it proposed to conclude a peace without annexations. In July of the same year Michaelis had specifically renounced interest in Constantinople since this city was not Russian. Indeed the implications for France of the Russian Revolution and the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the war, finalised by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, but apparent for some time before, were enormous. The whole question of the settlement of the Near-East, which had appeared to be determined by the attribution of Constantinople to Russia in March 1915, was now reopened, giving France a second chance to assert herself in an area where she had come to feel herself excluded. With victory over Bulgaria assured in October 1918 General Guillaumat asserted that this had to be viewed in conjunction with the eclipse of Russia. "Le problème oriental se présente sous un aspect entièrement différent de celui que des succès analogues, obtenus il y a deux ans, lui auraient donné".⁽³⁾ Consequently Greece and the port of Salonica, which had never been more than a second-best in France's quest for a 'point d'appui' in her oriental aspirations, resumed the secondary role in French thinking which they had occupied until 1915.

(1) Dussap to Pichon No. 5, 6/6/18, A.E. "Z", Grèce, Vol. 128.

(2) Situation Générale en Grèce 28/2/19, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 168.

(3) Note by Guillaumat on military situation in the Balkans 2/10/18, 16N 3147.

With Bulgaria finally eliminated from the conflict Lloyd George noted in October 1918 that the French government was anxious to have full control of an attack on Constantinople. The British army had for three years occupied at Salonica a position on the right flank in a most unhealthy situation, but now Franchet d'Espérey issued orders for the British contingent to be broken up and for another army under a French general to take its place in that position.⁽¹⁾ General Wilson even proposed that the French should be informed that Milne was to be removed from d'Espérey's command.⁽²⁾ Under pressure from Britain, however, Milne was given command of the Constantinople operation, much to Franchet d'Espérey's dismay.⁽³⁾ When England began to exploit this situation to her own advantage, the cry was raised in Paris for the transference of d'Espérey's headquarters to Constantinople: "La situation de Salonique est devenue doublement négative". The struggle for commercial and political domination thus began to shift eastwards. "La victoire économique sera acquise à ceux qui sauront faire signer, dès maintenant, des contrats de longue durée avec les gouvernements ou les hommes d'affaires de ces pays". The military victories of the Balkans could not be ignored, "il est impossible d'admettre que la France qui a fait tous les sacrifices dans les Balkans et y a tous les droits n'y gagne pas au moins cet avantage", but in the overall plan of French expansion in the Near-East Salonica could no longer be the central point of radiation.⁽⁴⁾ Charles Meunier, when urging upon the Chamber Army Commission the need to follow up the commercial activities of the Armée d'Orient, was no longer thinking only in terms of Greece or even of the Balkans, but of Turkey as well: "Avoir les portes ouvertes dans tous ces pays serait un des grands bénéfices de la guerre".⁽⁵⁾ Even the Salonica Commercial Bureau began to set its horizons further afield than Macedonia and Greece. As the Commercial Bulletin pointed out in the autumn of 1918, Roumania, Bulgaria and Turkey were going to become a vast plain of economic activity, where France should seek a leading role. Circulars were sent to the French consuls in these countries immediately after the conclusion of the armistice to inform them that the Salonica Bureau was now at the disposal of merchants in these states. The important thing was to act straight away

(1) War Cabinet 11/10/18, CAB 23/8/484.

(2) *ibid* 13/11/18, CAB 23/8/501.

(3) Franchet d'Espérey to Clemenceau No. 5407, 9/10/18, 16N 3147.

(4) Note on "Situation générale en Orient", for the Cabinet of Marshal Joffre 15/12/18, Fonds Joffre 14N 23.

(5) Report on Mission to the Armée d'Orient, presented 22/5/19, C 7503.

before German and Austrian commerce had had time to recover. Once again, moreover, the idea of an economic victory being the necessary corollary of a military triumph came to the fore: "Nous avons remporté la plus belle des victoires militaires; il nous la faut compléter par une victoire économique".⁽¹⁾

By March 1919 d'Espérey reported that each of the allies was pursuing its own aims in Asia Minor, exploiting the situation to the best of its ability in support of individual political and commercial interests.⁽²⁾ The head of the French legation at the Turkish Ministry of War concluded in July 1919 that French interests demanded the maintenance of a large Turkish Empire. Nowhere else, Greece included, would France find so solid a prop in the Near-East. The condition of international politics, he argued, had not changed so radically since the days of the nineteenth century that France could afford to be without such a support.⁽³⁾ All the signs were therefore that France was reverting to her traditional policy, which she had been forced to abandon in the three years following the Secret Treaty with Russia of March 1915. In December 1918 Pichon had joined in the call for the Armée d'Orient to be based on Constantinople. The choice of Salonica had been imposed by circumstances but was now becoming increasingly inopportune.⁽⁴⁾ But France lacked the resources at the end of four years of war, and perhaps also her leaders lacked the will, to pursue a new struggle in Asia Minor and as the months passed it became increasingly apparent that the dominant influence in the area was that of England.⁽⁵⁾ The British armies in the Near and Middle East gave British negotiators a position of strength which France, with what became only a token contingent, could never hope to challenge.⁽⁶⁾ By February 1919 Franchet d'Espérey was complaining bitterly of the systematic demobilisation of the French troops in

(1) Commercial Bulletin, September-October 1918, Painlevé MSS, 313 AP 110.

(2) d'Espérey to Foch No. 7012 3/3/19, A.E. 'Z', Grèce, Vol. 32.

(3) Rapport sur le rôle que doit jouer la France en Orient, 20/7/19, 16N 3194. See also 'Note au sujet des effectifs et des possibilités d'action de l'Armée d'Orient', 19/2/20, which stresses the importance for France of avoiding the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire; 16N 3061.

(4) Pichon to Clemenceau No. 5113, 21/12/18, A.E. 'Z', Grèce, Vol. 33.

(5) Report on the situation in Turkey by Lieutenant de V. Rollin 26/9/20, 20N 168; Clemenceau to Pichon 16/6/19, 16N 3140.

(6) Andrew and Kanya-Forstner: op. cit., p 105.

the Armée d'Orient and of the government's failure to replace them. By contrast the English reinforced their contingents by taking men from their armies in Syria and Egypt. D'Espérey found the means at his disposal ridiculously insufficient when compared with those of his English rival. "C'est très bien de vouloir tenir une place dans le monde, mais encore faut-il faire le nécessaire".⁽¹⁾ A Quai d'Orsay note prepared for Pichon reflected sadly on the failure of France to follow up her military triumph with a political one - that is on the failure to achieve what had always been seen to underlie the Salonica Expedition - a post-war French domination of the Near East: "On ne saurait donc concevoir que la France qui a exercé le commandement supérieur en Orient, qui a largement pris sa part des pertes subies par les Alliés aux Dardanelles, qui a maintenu, même dans les circonstances les plus difficiles, l'occupation de Salonique et le front de Macédoine, soit aujourd'hui exclus du commandement en Turquie".⁽²⁾

But the ousting of France as the dominant influence was particularly noticeable in Greece. As Pichery reported to the Chamber of Deputies as early as March 1918, it was England and not France which was ingratiating herself with the new Greek government. "Notre gouvernement semble se désintéresser de la question, le gouvernement hellénique s'en félicite et les Anglais en abusent".⁽³⁾ As Pichon heard in May French interests were no longer spoken of except to sacrifice them to the insatiable appetite of Italy or to the requirements of England. "Nous ne faisons rien. Nos consuls ne font rien, trois fois rien".⁽⁴⁾ De Fontenay warned that England was cashing in on Venizelos's tenderness for the British and that there was already talk of placing an English prince on the throne of Greece instead of the present king who had failed to win the affection of his subjects.⁽⁵⁾ As a sign of the times the Greek premier was constantly accompanied by the British Naval Attaché, Commander Talbot.⁽⁶⁾

With the termination of the war Astraud wrote from the military mission in Athens that it was England which sought to draw the benefits from both a

(1) d'Espérey to de Freycinet 4/2/19, de Freycinet MSS, Vol. 1.

(2) Note pour le Ministre 21/4/19, A.E. 'Z', Grèce, Vol. 33.

(3) Rapport sur une Mission en Orient, March 1918, A.E. 'Guerre', Vol. 281.

(4) de Billy to Pichon No. 166, 29/5/18, *ibid*, Vol. 282; see also Bargenton to de Billy 6/5/18 and 12/5/18, A.E. 'Z', Grèce, Vol. 128.

(5) de Fontenay to Pichon No. 157, 28/7/18, 7N 1342.

(6) de Billy to Pichon, No. 499, 4/12/18, *ibid*.

political and commercial point of view, while "la France ne paraît faire aucun effort pour jeter les premières bases d'un essor commercial dans le Levant après la guerre". The post of French commercial attaché, whose holder had been changed three times in two years, had been allowed to lapse in the summer of 1918, whereas the head of the English Commercial Bureau had had his staff substantially increased. Moreover, as Astraud noted with regret, the French merchant fleet completely ignored private commerce.⁽¹⁾ The English Bureau, on the other hand, seemed to know more about Greek trade than did the native government and was soon preparing an industrial exhibition in Athens.⁽²⁾ A group of Greek industrialists, headed by the Minister of Agriculture visited England at the invitation of the British Industrial Union, and "rien ne fut épargné pour les convaincre de la puissance industrielle de la Grande Bretagne".⁽³⁾ Similarly the British fostered the creation of pro-British sentiment in the Greek press by providing paper at a time of acute shortage.⁽⁴⁾ In general, then, England gave the impression of understanding the needs of the hour and showed a willingness to try to satisfy the requirements of the Greek population.⁽⁵⁾ French commerce never developed, therefore, in Greece to the extent to which the supporters of the Salonica Campaign had hoped. Even around Salonica itself, French trading interests remained relatively underdeveloped throughout the inter-war years.⁽⁶⁾

What then of the last year of the Salonica Expedition? Upon Guillaumat's appointment Foch defined the mission of the Armée d'Orient as first and foremost to prevent the conquest of Greece by the enemy. When defensive arrangements had been finalised it would be up to the new commander to study the possibility of offensive action according to the circumstances of the moment.⁽⁷⁾ These instructions differed materially from those issued to Sarrail and clearly implied that it was considered to be of more importance to cover Old Greece than Salonica, which might in case of need be left as an

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- (1) Astraud to Clemenceau No. 184, 29/10/18, *ibid*; *ibid* No. 10, 26/1/19, 7N 1344.
- (2) de Billy to Pichon No. 489, 2/12/18 and No. 513 12/12/18, 7N 1342.
- (3) Undated note on British propaganda in Greece, 7N 1344.
- (4) French Military Mission note: "Situation Générale en Grèce", September 1918 20N 274.
- (5) Naval Attaché: Bulletin d'Informations 31/3/19, 7N 1342.
- (6) Conversation with M.R.J.E. Clouet, French Consul at Salonica 1934-9, (15/2/73).
- (7) Directives pour le Général Commandant en Chef des Armées Alliées d'Orient No. 12838, 16/12/17, 16N 2991; Note from S.W.C., 19/12/17, F.O. 371/2895/240045.

isolated fortress while the allied armies found new bases elsewhere.⁽¹⁾ Even now, in what was supposed to be a new period of cooperation, these important changes were made without reference to the Supreme War Council or consultation with the British War Cabinet.⁽²⁾ Fortunately, however, the instructions to Guillaumat corresponded almost exactly with the suggestions of the Permanent Military Advisers to the Supreme War Council.⁽³⁾ But an over-riding consideration which lurked ominously in the background was the defection of Russia from the allied cause. It was widely recognised that this might at any moment enable Germany to throw the weight of her forces against the Western front, thus necessitating at least the partial evacuation of secondary theatres by the allies.⁽⁴⁾ This, however, was a hurdle which would be crossed if and when the need arose and a proposal by Haig at a military conference in Compiègne in January 1918 that all the British and French forces in Macedonia should be brought back to France received little support.⁽⁵⁾ Nonetheless, as divisions of the Greek regular army became available for the forward zone, they were counted delightedly by the War Office which hoped that as soon as there were enough it would be possible to withdraw the British troops altogether.⁽⁶⁾ For the time being, though, the Balkan campaign would have to remain "a considerable drag" for Britain. From a war point of view Salonica was now of questionable value and the Admiralty had expressed the opinion that it would be pleased to be rid of it. But if the town were abandoned a great mass of stores would have to be destroyed, as there was such a collection there that it would take about nine months to clear the place even if all military and shipping resources were used for the purpose.⁽⁷⁾

Guillaumat's initial examination of the troops under his command revealed severe shortcomings and difficulties. While the Italian and British contingents were in relatively good condition, the French forces were short of supplies, suffering from hunger and 28,000 men below strength.⁽⁸⁾

(1) Falls: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 49.

(2) Maurice: op. cit., p112

(3) War Cabinet, 27/12/17, CAB 23/4/307.

(4) See, for example, G.Q.G. note on General Situation, 19/12/17, 16N 3060.

(5) Palmer: op. cit., p 169.

(6) Note by Smuts on the mobilisation of Greece 17/4/18, CAB 23/6/395.

(7) Note by General Studd, 15/1/18, CAB 25/25/8A.

(8) War Cabinet 25/1/18, CAB 23/5/331.

The Italian division, moreover, had been maintained not to "faire la guerre, mais bien pour préparer l'après-guerre". Italy was using no opportunity in trying to create for herself a sphere of influence to the north of Greece in her avowed quest to become mistress of the Adriatic.⁽¹⁾ The Germans too, though, had withdrawn forces from the Balkans with the result that something approaching numerical equality existed between the two sides.⁽²⁾ From the Supreme War Council Brigadier-General Studd reflected on how far removed the Balkan campaign now was from producing the sort of easy victory in the war which had been envisaged by some optimists at the beginning of 1915. Military activity for some time past had been confined to normal trench warfare, such as had plagued the fighting on the Western front. The attitude of the Entente had been due to lack of troops and to the fact that there existed no tactical or strategic objective within range to justify an offensive on a large scale. At the beginning of 1918 reinforcements were even less likely than before to be available for an offensive. Moreover, no offensive in the Balkans, concluded Studd, however successful, would have any decisive effect in bringing the war to a conclusion. To fritter away men there would only weaken the forces available for a decisive attack in France or Flanders.⁽³⁾ But the British War Cabinet agreed in March that for the time being none of their divisions should be brought back to France, since, although up to strength numerically, they were now weakened by malaria.⁽⁴⁾

Inevitably some anxiety was expressed in the French Chamber at the inactivity of the Armée d'Orient⁽⁵⁾ and in March 1918 Guillaumat told Foch that he could undertake a modest operation along the Vardar and the Struma.⁽⁶⁾ But when Lloyd George and Wilson met Clemenceau and Foch at the townhall in Beauvais at the beginning of April the attitude of the British government had altered significantly and the Prime Minister now pressed for the withdrawal of British troops. Foch retorted that as far as the French government was concerned the possibility of a reduction of the allied force had only been envisaged in the event of a military setback.⁽⁷⁾ Wilson

(1) Rapport sur le déplacement de la 35^e Division Italienne, No. 3187, 25/1/18, 16N 3017.

(2) War Cabinet 20/2/18, CAB 23/5/350.

(3) Notes on the Situation in the Balkans 21/2/18, CAB 25/25/21H.

(4) War Cabinet 23/3/18, CAB 23/5/371.

(5) Foreign Affairs Commission 25/3/18, C 7491.

(6) Palmer: op. cit., p 178.

(7) Procès-verbal 3/4/18, CAB 28/3/1C 55a.

now informed the War Cabinet that only eight German battalions were left in Macedonia as far as was known.⁽¹⁾ The English General Staff were considering the advisability of withdrawing troops and would report to the War Cabinet when they had deliberated.⁽²⁾ At the same time Clemenceau reminded Guillaumat that, with the German offensive on the Western front underway, the decisive act of the war appeared to have been engaged. In such circumstances there could be no question of reinforcements for the Armée d'Orient and Guillaumat could only count on the resources already at his disposal.⁽³⁾ At the same time, however, it was the general's duty to ensure that no enemy forces could be withdrawn from the Balkan theatre to be used in the offensive in France. In such circumstances it was indispensable that the Armée d'Orient should be ready to take the offensive if the situation demanded it.⁽⁴⁾ Wilson was understandably concerned at this suggestion of an offensive and proposed to Foch that allied policy should be to develop the Greek army and use it to draw French and British troops into reserve as required. With enemy forces steadily withdrawing an allied offensive at Salonica would achieve no good purpose.⁽⁵⁾ Clemenceau, however, would not countenance Wilson's suggestion that twelve battalions should be withdrawn from Salonica to reinforce the Western front.⁽⁶⁾ Belin, the French military representative at the Supreme War Council, argued that it was essential that any reduction of the Anglo-French force should be compensated by the arrival of new Greek units, thus keeping the overall strength of the Armée d'Orient at its current level.⁽⁷⁾ Clemenceau was determined to do nothing which would weaken the Macedonian front or lessen the possibility of minor offensives there and he secured the agreement of Britain to having the matter decided by the Supreme War Council.⁽⁸⁾

Meeting at the beginning of May in Abbeville, the Supreme War Council reached conclusions which largely satisfied the British point of view. Because of the fact that the allied Salonica force was being reinforced by the addition of Greek divisions, the Council argued that it ought to be possible

(1) War Cabinet 6/4/18, CAB 23/6/384.

(2) *ibid* 10/4/18, CAB 23/6/388.

(3) Clemenceau to Guillaumat No. 5658, 7/4/18, 16N 3139.

(4) *ibid* 4/4/18, CAB 25/26.

(5) Wilson to Milne 12/4/18, CAB 25/26/04A; Wilson to Foch 12/4/18, CAB 25/27/5FF.

(6) War Cabinet 26/4/18, CAB 23/6/400 ; Maurice; *opcit.*, p 146.

(7) Belin to Sackville-West 30/4/18, CAB 25/27/52A.

(8) Clemenceau to Guillaumat No. 6652, 28/4/18, Fonds Clemenceau 6N 256.

to transfer some battalions to the Western front, where every man was urgently needed. It was agreed, however, that no transfer should take place without consultation with Guillaumat, although attention was drawn to the general's suggestion that Indian battalions could be substituted for British troops withdrawn to the Western front.⁽¹⁾ But concern was being voiced in the British War Cabinet at reports that the help being received from the Greeks had become insignificant and that if things did not go well on the French front, all of Greece and possibly Serbia as well might turn against the allies.⁽²⁾ The War Office also expressed anxiety that Guillaumat's plans had not been disclosed to Britain in sufficient detail, while what was known of their general scope left some cause for concern.⁽³⁾ In fact Guillaumat was casting off much of his caution and his staff were preparing for a powerful offensive on both sides of the Vardar, with Greek attacks on the Struma and a Serbian diversion further to the West.⁽⁴⁾ Yet by the end of the month Wilson was able to inform the War Cabinet that the French were removing about 12,000 of their troops from the Salonica front. This seemed surprising in view of their attitude at Abbeville, but Wilson felt that no action was necessary as the arrival of Indian forces would also make possible the withdrawal of a few British battalions.⁽⁵⁾

But the War Cabinet was still anxious about the general nature of the allies' defensive policy in the Balkans. Guillaumat had been repeatedly asked for his plans in the event of a retirement, but these had still not been obtained. If, as there was reason to fear, there were no proper plans, it was quite possible that a disaster might ensue. Wilson, however, informed the Cabinet that the problem was taking on a new aspect, since he understood that Guillaumat was being recalled from Salonica, to be replaced by General Franchet d'Espérey, whose name had been mentioned when the possibility of a Balkan expedition had first been canvassed at the beginning of 1915.⁽⁶⁾ It was assumed that, with the crisis on the Western front at its peak, Guillaumat was to assume the military governorship of Paris. Then, if the

(1) Procès-verbal 2/5/18, CAB 28/3/I.C.58.

(2) War Cabinet 3/5/18, CAB 23/6/404.

(3) Note by the Director of Military Operations on Guillaumat's Defensive Dispositions, 13/5/18, W.O. 106/1374; Note by Major Currie 30/5/18, CAB 25/27/60B.

(4) Palmer: op. cit., p 178.

(5) War Cabinet 30/5/18, CAB 23/6/421.

(6) *ibid* 12/6/18, CAB 23/6/430.

allies suffered a reverse, he would be at hand to replace Pétain or even Foch. At the same time the Military Attaché, General Bordeaux, was also recalled, probably as a result of his differences of opinion with Guillaumat.⁽¹⁾ Bordeaux had wished to maintain his independent authority over the small groups of French officers detached by himself to the staffs of the various Greek army corps actually on the Salonica front, whereas Guillaumat had naturally wanted to be master in his own house. But it was the departure of Guillaumat which was viewed with particular regret. Admittedly, not everything had run smoothly since the dismissal of Sarraill, yet in a matter of six months Guillaumat's actions and influence had had an extraordinarily beneficial effect upon the Salonica command and upon the relations between the various contingents. Franchet d'Espérey had to feel his way to the confidence of the allied armies in the face of their almost universal sorrow at his predecessor's recall. Something of a scapegoat for recent setbacks on the Western front, d'Espérey's reputation did not stand very high at his arrival in the Balkans.⁽²⁾ But at least the British representative at the Supreme War Council was able to assure his government that the recall of Guillaumat was dictated solely by military considerations and did not portend a change of French policy at Salonica.⁽³⁾ In fact Guillaumat continued, in Paris, to have an influential voice in the direction of France's Balkan strategy.⁽⁴⁾

On 22 June Clemenceau informed the newly installed Franchet d'Espérey that the general military situation demanded the assumption of offensive action by the Armée d'Orient.⁽⁵⁾ It was essential to relieve the Western front by going over to the offensive in the outer theatres of war and the allies should accordingly seek to crack the Bulgarian defences by a general and concerted action. Five days later the military representatives on the Supreme War Council produced a joint note which declared that it was indispensable for the allied forces, within the limits considered possible by the Commander-in-Chief, to contribute to the common action against the

(1) Granville to Balfour No. 474, 29/5/18, F.O. 371/3150/96015; *ibid* No. 550 15/6/18, F.O. 371/3150/107373.

(2) Falls: *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p 102 ; Palmer: *op. cit.*, p 180; Maurice: *op. cit.*, p 151; Graillet to Pichon No. 58, 20/6/18, A.E. 'Z' Grèce Vol. 33.

(3) Sackville-West to War Office 22/6/18, CAB 25/27/65A.

(4) Suarez: *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p 377; see, for example, Guillaumat's note of 11/7/18, pressing for a Balkan offensive, CAB 25/26/15B.

(5) Clemenceau to Franchet d'Espérey No. 9562, 22/6/18, 16N 3139.

enemy by active offensive operations. Moreover, in a revision of the instructions given to Guillaumat, it was now stated that the retention at all costs of the Salonica base was of the greatest importance for the Entente, although bases and communications in Old Greece should at the same time be developed.⁽¹⁾

Lloyd George, however, was not happy at the way in which matters had been carried on since the recall of General Guillaumat. The Supreme War Council of 3 July was distinguished by a "terrific, sudden and extremely violent" outburst by the English premier against the French for appointing Franchet d'Espérey to command at Salonica and for issuing orders for an offensive there without consulting the Council. Maurice Hankey found the whole situation rather strange since Clemenceau, as he asserted during the course of the meeting, had always been and still professed to be an ardent opponent of the expedition. Part of the difficulty lay in the vaguely defined position of General Foch. The instructions issued to d'Espérey and only later communicated to the allied military representatives had been sent by Foch and counter-signed by Clemenceau. Unquestionably Foch and Clemenceau had not been over-tactful in this episode, since Foch's authority did not go beyond the Western and Italian fronts and Clemenceau ought not to have approved instructions to an allied army in another theatre without consulting the governments concerned.⁽²⁾ The French premier managed, however, to extricate himself from a difficult situation by arguing that with his record of opposition to the campaign - "Je suis l'homme qui a le plus critiqué l'opération balkanique ... Je n'ai jamais cru aux résultats d'une offensive là-bas" - he could not now be suspected of wishing to launch a major offensive in the Balkans. But the arrival of American troops on the Western front made it possible to reconsider the decision to transfer allied soldiers from the Balkans to France and gave force to the instructions issued to Guillaumat as early as December 1917 that he should study the possibilities of offensive action.⁽³⁾ Nonetheless the incident did revive an element of unrest in English circles and concern was expressed in the Imperial War Cabinet on 9 July at the French tendency to take things into their own hands without

(1) Joint note: 'Situation in the Balkans', 27/6/18, CAB 25/26/6BA.

(2) Palmer: op.cit., p 189; Hankey: op. cit., Vol. 2, p 821; Maurice: op. dit., p 155.

(3) Procès-verbal 3/7/18, 16N 3140; CAB 28/4/I.C. 70.

regard for the views of the Supreme War Council.⁽¹⁾

Two days later, however, the military and diplomatic representatives of England and France meeting at Versailles determined that it was advisable to study the question of a general offensive in the Balkans, but that it was not desirable to carry out this offensive unless it led to a victory of more than local importance.⁽²⁾ Guillaumat, present at Versailles, expounded upon his plan for an offensive designed to keep up the morale of the Serbians and Greeks and to undermine that of the Bulgarians. But he now argued that the offensive should not take place before the month of October.⁽³⁾ For once, though, it was the British commander at Salonica who now believed that the moment of the Armée d'Orient might finally have arrived. With the Bulgarians beginning to get war-weary, the Austrians in difficulties in Italy and the Germans held up in France, Milne argued that the time appeared to be approaching when the Salonica army would be able to take action "possibly with far-reaching results" and that it should be ready to do so when the necessity arose.⁽⁴⁾ Franchet d'Espérey gave Milne the impression of being less cautious than his predecessor and by the end of July the English commander informed the War Office that d'Espérey appeared to be contemplating a more ambitious project than his original instructions had authorised.⁽⁵⁾ Consequently the Supreme War Council agreed at the beginning of August that preparations for an offensive should be pushed ahead with all speed and that d'Espérey was to be left free to launch this offensive when he thought fit, unless new and unforeseen circumstances arose.⁽⁶⁾ The one proviso was that preparations for a Balkan offensive should not in any way weaken the Western front.⁽⁷⁾ At the beginning of September the French government sent over Guillaumat to London for discussions with English political and military chiefs. The general put before Lloyd George, Milner, Cecil and Wilson the reasons which favoured the early assumption of offensive operations and secured their agreement to British participation in them.⁽⁸⁾ The aim of the operations

(1) CAB 23/41/1.W.C. 23.

(2) Resolutions of the Supreme War Council, 11/7/18, CAB 25/26/11A.

(3) Imperial War Cabinet 18/7/18, CAB 23/41/I.W.C. 25.

(4) Milne to Wilson 22/7/18, CAB 25/26/19A.

(5) Palmer: op. cit., p 191.

(6) *ibid* p 192.

(7) Note au sujet de l'offensive en Orient 27/8/18, 16N 3140.

(8) Cambon to Clemenceau No. 1039, 4/9/18, *ibid*.

was to defeat and remove from the conflict the enemy armies, to invade Bulgaria and to occupy Sofia.⁽¹⁾

The advance began in the middle of September and produced an immediate débacle among the now disintegrating Bulgarian army. Briand, the foremost architect of the campaign, noted sadly in his diary the irony of seeing Clemenceau, "qui fut l'adversaire acharné de l'expédition", at the head of the government at this moment of victory.⁽²⁾ In fact the success of the operation had taken just about everyone by surprise. On 21 September the French General Staff actually considered the possibility of withdrawing more troops from Macedonia, in anticipation of which d'Espérey was to give thought to measures "for limiting his offensive and stabilising his new front". Even as late as 25 September, with the Armée d'Orient well on the way to a decisive success, the British representative on the Supreme War Council telegraphed to Wilson to ask to be informed of the scope of the operations and whether any reinforcements had been promised to the French commander.⁽³⁾ Clemenceau, indeed, was embarrassed by the success of the offensive and feared that he might become too involved in it. He confided to Poincaré that he had supported the offensive with the aim of then bringing back to France a part of the French contingent. If the allies now marched on Sofia this would not be possible. But Clemenceau remained as convinced as ever that it was in France and not the Balkans that the war would be decided.⁽⁴⁾

Franchet d'Espérey was in fact taking matters very much into his own hands and it was he who laid down the terms upon which an armistice was concluded with Bulgaria. The course of events dragged Clemenceau along with it and the French premier was obliged to authorise d'Espérey to go on to the Danube as quickly as possible in order to cut off supplies from the enemy. When the English War Cabinet assembled on 1 October, there was considerable uncertainty as to the true state of affairs. But there was general agreement that the allied governments would have to be consulted before any further military operations took place and that this consultation

(1) Historique des opérations en Serbie, Septembre 1918, *ibid.*

(2) Suarez: *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p 379.

(3) Falls: *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p 203.

(4) Poincaré: *op. cit.*, Vol. 10, p 357.

could only take place at a meeting of the Supreme War Council.⁽¹⁾ This ignorance in England was matched in the French press, where the government imposed a silence on reports of the allies' successes on 2 and 3 October. Was Clemenceau, even at this late date, reluctant for it to be known that the Salonica campaign was, after all, playing its part in the determination of the conflict?⁽²⁾ At all events, with d'Espérey preparing to march on Vienna and Berlin, the general received a curt despatch from Clemenceau demanding that he should put an end to such personal initiative and ordering him to restore the British divisions to General Milne, who was to assume the high command at Constantinople.⁽³⁾ The Supreme War Council decided that operations against Germany should be subordinated to General Foch, while Foch himself assigned the chief responsibility for an advance through Austria and into southern Germany to the victorious forces of Italy.⁽⁴⁾ No glorious finale was to be permitted to the ill-fated Armée d'Orient.

For two years the Salonica campaign illustrated the allies' conduct of the war at its worst. Policies were not arrived at by any straightforward assessment of military factors but rather by the juxtaposition of outside pressures with personal wills and weaknesses. These ranged from the vested economic interests of French commerce to the personal antipathy between Joffre and Sarrail - from the ever-present politico-military tension within France to the infatuation of Paul Painlevé with Sarrail and Aristide Briand with his Greek mistress. From these diverse sources arose strange policies, but unless these sources are examined the whole campaign becomes

(1) CAB 23/8/480.

(2) Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 4, p 378.

(3) Article by d'Espérey in *Le Matin* 15/9/22; Suarez: op. cit., Vol. 4, p 382. Briand's biographer argues that Clemenceau was not willing to allow the former premier to take any credit for the final victory: "C'était pour que ce mérite ne fut pas reconnu aux autres, justement, que Clemenceau n'avait pas voulu de la victoire d'Orient." *ibid* p 388; c.f. David: op. cit., p 298: "Les souvenirs du polémiste influencèrent-ils les actes du chef du gouvernement?" Both David and Suarez, however, are of course anxious to stress the inherent military possibilities of the campaign which, they argue, could have brought victory much earlier, and they attempt to do this by overstating the significance of the final breakthrough in September/October 1918.

(4) Palmer: op; cit., p 234.

inexplicable. The Salonica Expedition testifies to the importance of personalities in the determination of history. But it was above all else this excessive obtrusion of personal factors which made the campaign such a disaster. If this ineptitude had been maintained throughout the conflict in all theatres then it seems unlikely that England and France could have emerged victorious at the end of 1918. But Salonica was unique. Starting off as an unhappy compromise between, on the one hand, the strategy of the Easterners, which had already been partly discredited by the relative failure of the Dardanelles Expedition and, on the other, a piece of party political intrigue in France, its prospects never looked good from the outset. Militarily the campaign proved largely irrelevant to the outcome of the war and to this extent the attention lavished upon it by the politicians and statesmen of the Great War exaggerates its intrinsic significance. But the very fact that it did become so great a preoccupation, indeed almost an obsession, in its own day imposes upon the historian - at least the diplomatic historian, if not his military colleague - the need to examine and analyse it. As the campaign progressed the element of French political intrigue became entwined with the vaguely defined aspirations of France to play a dominant role in the Near-East in the post-war world. These partly predated the expedition, but were inevitably given new intensity by it. As a result, the French concept of the Salonica Campaign, instead of moving closer to that of Britain as the months passed, drifted further and further away from it, making meaningful cooperation between the two powers increasingly improbable. British observers consequently developed progressively jaundiced opinions of the motives and intentions of their allies. As Brigadier-General Wake wrote as late as July 1918, "It must always be remembered in dealing with the French that they generally have another motive, besides their avowed one for what they do and that they never can believe in a disinterested or generous motive in anyone else".⁽¹⁾ For Britain Salonica appeared to offer none of the ulterior attractions which it did for France. If the campaign had a value, therefore, it could only be a military one, and, as military opinion in Britain was virtually unanimous in condemning the expedition as a useless dissipation of resources, the attitude of Britain was remarkably fixed and consistent throughout the three years of its duration. The French mind, however, was on the whole prepared to ignore the unpromising military aspect of the whole affair, since the campaign was, in the first instance, a practical necessity for stability within the French political arena and was

(1) Notes on the Political Situation in the Balkans 3/7/18, CAB 25/35/3A.

not, in the second, unattractive for France from the point of view of ultimate strategic, diplomatic and economic advantage. To this extent, then, England and France were fighting not one but two separate wars in the Balkan theatre. Not even the enemies were identical for France soon recognised her nominal allies of the battlefield to be her post-war adversaries in less violent fields. The last year of the campaign was not without its problems from the point of view of interallied cooperation. This could not be otherwise since the solutions found to the question of unified command of the war effort were far from perfect. But at least 1918 saw the effective disappearance of that profound suspicion of French intentions, which came to see military activities in the Balkans as little more than a charade beneath which the real political, diplomatic and economic issues were being decided. This improvement can largely be explained in terms of personalities.

The Salonica campaign, then, tells us much about the workings of the Entente in wartime. It tells us perhaps even more about the struggles within France itself and the quest of that country for stability between its political and military factions. The abrupt dismissal of General Sarrail in the summer of 1915 extended the scope of the politico-military conflict in France by pitting a substantial part of the Chamber and Senate and even some ministers against the War Ministry and the High Command. This extension of friction foreshadowed the abandonment of the government's resolution to defend the command against parliamentary attack, come what may. The gaucherie of Sarrail's removal redounded to the political advantage of the general's supporters and an open rupture of the Sacred Union was only narrowly averted. But the victory of Joffre was a Pyrrhic one and the beginning of the Salonica Campaign marked also the beginning of the end for the victor of the Marne. For L'Affaire Sarrail reopened those internal political conflicts in France which made it impossible for parliament and the ministry to sit back and accept the military dictatorship of Joffre. From then on the fortunes of the Macedonian Expedition were irretrievably bound up with the wider struggle for control of war policy inside France; thereafter military considerations became increasingly secondary, passions and animosities progressively more bitter and the prospect of smooth cooperation with England correspondingly more improbable. Appropriately enough it was Briand who was reputed to have remarked to Lloyd George during the course of the conflict: "War is much too serious a thing to be left to military men".⁽¹⁾ The Salonica Campaign certainly epitomised this maxim.

(1) Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (1953), p 526.

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