

MISCELLANEOUS. No. 14 (1914).



DESPATCH

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FROM

HIS MAJESTY'S AMBASSADOR AT CONSTANTINOPLE

SUMMARISING EVENTS LEADING UP TO  
RUPTURE OF RELATIONS WITH TURKEY,  
AND REPLY THERETO.

[In continuation of "Miscellaneous, No. 13 (1914)": Cd. 7628.]

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*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.  
December 1914.*

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Despatch from His Majesty's Ambassador at Constantinople  
summarising Events leading up to Rupture of Relations  
with Turkey, and Reply thereto.

[In continuation of "Miscellaneous, No. 13 (1914)": Cd. 7628.]

Sir,

London, November 20, 1914.

I HAVE the honour to report on the circumstances which preceded and accompanied my departure from Constantinople on the 1st November.

On my return to my post on the 16th August, a fortnight after the outbreak of the European war, the situation was already such as to give ground for the apprehension that Turkey would be driven by Germany sooner or later to take part in it as her ally. The Ottoman army, under the supreme command of Enver Pasha, who was entirely in German hands, had been mobilised, and although the Government had declared their intention of preserving their neutrality, they had taken no proper steps to ensure its maintenance. They had, on the contrary, jeopardised their ability to do so by the admission of the German warships "Goeben" and "Breslau" into the Dardanelles on the 10th August. Events have confirmed what I and my French and Russian colleagues constantly impressed upon the Grand Vizier and other Ministers at the time, that so long as the German admiral and crews remained on board the German warships, the German Government were masters of the situation, and were in a position to force the hand of the Turkish Government if at any given moment it suited them to do so.

So far as the Grand Vizier was concerned, the warning fell upon deaf ears, and it was at no time possible to persuade his Highness to admit that he would not be able to control developments to which he was himself opposed and which had not the approval of the whole Government. It is quite possible that he was sincere in this conviction, but he was fully alive to the precarious nature of his own position and to the fact that any real attempt on his part to run counter to the policy of Enver Pasha and the military authorities would have meant his elimination. This event would have brought matters to a head at once, which would have been contrary to the policy of the allied Powers of postponing for as long as possible, if they were unable to avert altogether, the intervention of Turkey in the war, with the vast and complicated issues involved in the raising of the Eastern question, so that my rôle and that of my French and Russian colleagues, with whom I acted in complete accord throughout, was necessarily restricted to one of remonstrance and to an endeavour to expose and defeat the German intrigues.

In pursuance of a long-prepared policy, the greatest pressure was at once exercised by Germany to force Turkey into hostilities. German success in the European war was said to be assured. The perpetual menace to Turkey from Russia might, it was suggested, be averted by a timely alliance with Germany and Austria. Egypt might be recovered for the Empire. India and other Moslem countries represented as groaning under Christian rule might be kindled into a flame of infinite possibilities for the Caliphate of Constantinople. Turkey would emerge from the war the one great Power of the East, even as Germany would be the one great Power of the West. Such was the substance of German misrepresentations. It is a matter of common consent that Enver Pasha, dominated by a quasi-Napoleonic ideal, by political Pan-Islamism, and by a conviction of the superiority of the German arms, was from the first a strong partisan of the German alliance. How far his several colleagues and other directing spirits outside the Ministry entered into his views is to some extent a matter of speculation; but it may be taken as certain that the Sultan, the Heir Apparent, the Grand Vizier, Djavid Bey, a majority of the Ministry, and a considerable section of the Committee of Union and Progress were opposed to so desperate an adventure as war with the allies. At what moment Talaat Bey, the most powerful civilian in the Cabinet and the most conspicuous of the Committee leaders, finally threw in his lot with the war party cannot be ascertained precisely. His sympathies were undoubtedly with them from the beginning, but the part which he actually played in the earlier stages is shrouded in mystery. I have reason to think that for some time he may have thought it possible, by steering a middle course, to postpone a decision until it was

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clearer what would be the result of the European war; and he may well have been anxious to gain time and to secure in exchange for Turkey's adhesion to the German cause something more solid than promises. These were tendered, indeed, on a lavish scale, but I am not aware that they were given in a form which could be considered binding. It is certain in any case that Talaat Bey's hesitations were overcome, and that he had definitely joined the conspiracy to bring about war this autumn some three weeks before the crisis was precipitated.

Whatever the views of individual Ministers or others may have been, the Turkish Government made no effort to emancipate themselves from German influence or to stem the tide of its progress. The material hold established by the introduction of the two German ships was on the contrary allowed to be strengthened. Not only did these ships remain under effective German control, but a strong German element was imported into the remainder of the fleet, even before the British naval mission, which had been reduced to impotence by order of the Minister of Marine, had been recalled by His Majesty's Government. Large numbers of Germans were imported from Germany as unostentatiously as possible, to be employed in the forts of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus and at other crucial points. Numerous German merchant vessels, of which the most important were the "Corcovado" and the "General," served as bases of communication and as auxiliaries to what had become, in effect, a German Black Sea Fleet. Secret communications with the German General Staff were established at the outbreak of the war by means of the wireless apparatus of the "Corcovado," which was anchored opposite the German Embassy at Therapia, and which was continuously used for this among other purposes throughout the whole period under review, in spite of my urgent representations and those of my French and Russian colleagues. Other German ships played with the Turkish flag as they pleased, in order to facilitate their voyages or cloak their real character while in port, and a department was constituted at the German Embassy for the purpose of requisitioning supplies for the use of the German Government and their ships. All these things were tolerated by a complaisant Turkish Government, who appeared to be indifferent to the incessant encroachments on their sovereignty if not to welcome them.

On land, the officers of the German military mission displayed a ubiquitous activity. Their supremacy at the Ministry of War, combined with the close co-operation which existed between them and the Militarist party, made it easy to fortify an already strong position. Acting in conjunction with other less accredited agents of their own nationality, they were the main organisers of those military preparations in Syria which so directly menaced Egypt, and which became a serious source of preoccupation and a constant theme of my remonstrances.

The evidence of these preparations became daily more convincing. Emissaries of Enver Pasha were present on the frontier, bribing and organising the Bedouins. Warlike stores were despatched south, and battalions of regular troops were posted at Rafah, whilst the Syrian and Mosul army corps were held in readiness to move south at short notice. The Syrian towns were full of German officers, who were provided with large sums of money for suborning the local chiefs. As an illustration of the thoroughness of the German preparations, I was credibly informed that orders were given to obtain estimates for the making of Indian military costumes at Aleppo in order to simulate the appearance of British Indian troops. Under directions from the Central Government the civil authorities of the Syrian coast towns removed all their archives and ready money to the interior, and Moslem families were warned to leave to avoid the consequences of bombardment by the British fleet. The Khedive himself was a party to the conspiracy, and arrangements were actually made with the German Embassy for his presence with a military expedition across the frontier.

However difficult it would have been for the Ottoman Government to regain their control over the armed forces of the State after the arrival of the "Goeben" and "Breslau," the insidious campaign carried on with their encouragement by means of the press, the preachers in the mosques, and the pamphleteers, is evidence that its most powerful members were in sympathy with the anti-British movement. I had, indeed, actual proof of the inspiration by Talaat Bey and Djemal Pasha of articles directed against Great Britain. Every agency which could be used to stimulate public opinion in favour of Germany and to inflame it against the allies was set at work with the connivance, and often with the co-operation, of the Turkish authorities. All the Turkish newspapers in Constantinople became German organs; they glorified every real or imaginary success of Germany or Austria; they minimised everything favourable to the allies.

The enclosures in an earlier despatch will have shown to what depths of scurrility

some of the more corrupt and unbridled of them descended in their onslaughts on Great Britain, and how unequally the censors of the press held the balance when exercising their practically unlimited powers. The provincial papers were no less enthusiastically pro-German; the semi-official telegraphic agency, which is practically worked by the Ministry of the Interior, was placed at the disposal of German propaganda. Through these agencies unlimited use was made of Turkey's one concrete and substantial grievance against Great Britain as distinguished from other European Powers, that is, the detention of the "Sultan Osman" and the "Reshadie" at the beginning of the European war. Other grievances, older and less substantial, were raked out of the past; and the indictment of Great Britain and her allies was completed by a series of inventions and distortions of the truth designed to represent them as the enemy, not merely of Turkey, but of the whole of Islam. Attacks of the latter kind became especially frequent in the latter half of October, and were undoubtedly directly inspired by Germany. My urgent representations to the Grand Vizier and to Talaat Bey, both verbal and written, had hardly even a temporary effect in checking this campaign.

It may seem strange that, thus equipped and thus abetted, those who sought to involve Turkey in the European war failed so long to achieve their object. The reasons were manifold. As I have already indicated, the party which stood for neutrality contained men who, lacking though they were in any material means of enforcing their views, could not easily be ignored. By whatever various routes they may have been arrived at, the ideas of these men coincided with a body of less sophisticated and hardly articulate opinion which, however wounded by England's action in preventing delivery of the "Sultan Osman" and the "Reshadie," could still not reconcile itself to a war with England and France. In my despatch of the 22nd September I had the honour to report how frankly and how emphatically the Sultan himself voiced this feeling in conversation with me. There can be little doubt that the Grand Vizier exercised what influence he had in favour of neutrality. Djavid Bey, the Minister of Finance, whose influence in favour of neutrality was of weight as representing the Jewish element, and whose arguments in favour of peace were supported by the fact that Turkey was already absolutely bankrupt, and not in a position to embark upon war with the allies, became towards the end so formidable an obstacle to the fulfilment of the German plan that instructions were sent from Berlin to force his resignation.

Again, seriously convinced as most prominent Turks appear to have been of the ultimate success of Germany, their confidence could not but be a little dashed by the actual course of events in the two main theatres of war; and the more thoughtful realised that even in the event of Germany being victorious, the fact of Turkey having fought by her side would not necessarily ensure any advantage to the Ottoman Empire. As for the Germans themselves, it was true, as I have said, that they could at any moment force Turkey to march with them, but to do so before every means of suasion had proved useless would obviously not have been politic. It was clearly only in the last resort that the Monarch whom Pan-Islamic pro-Germans acclaimed as the hope of Islam, and whom the devout in some places had been taught to regard as hardly distinguishable from a true believer, would run the risk of scandalising the Moslem world, whom he hoped to set ablaze to the undoing of England, Russia, and France, by using the guns of the "Goeben" to force the hands of the Sultan-Caliph. But the factor which more than any other delayed the realisation of the German plans, and which enabled me and my French and Russian colleagues to protract the crisis until they could only be realised in such a way as to open the eyes of the Moslem world to the real nature of the conspiracy, was the inherent tendency of Turkish statesmen to procrastinate, in the hope that by playing off one side against the other they might gain more in the long run.

However slender the chances in our favour, it was obviously my duty, in conjunction with my French and Russian colleagues, to support and encourage by all possible means those forces which were obscurely striving for the preservation of peace.

If this policy necessarily involved the acceptance of acts on the part of the Ottoman Government which, in ordinary circumstances, would have called for more than remonstrance and the reservation of our rights, and which it would have been easy to make the occasion of a rupture of relations, the patience displayed by the allies was justified by the results achieved.

Although unsuccessful in averting war, two objects of main importance were gained by delaying its commencement. On the one hand, the allied Powers are now in a position to deal with the problem with a freer hand, and, on the other, Germany has been forced to show her cards and to act independently of a majority of the Turkish Cabinet.

Under the stress of events in the main theatre of the war, and owing to the vital necessity of providing a diversion in the Near East, Germany was constrained to intensify still further their pressure on the Turks. During the first three weeks of October their pressure took yet another form, and a new weight was cast into the scale by the importation into Constantinople, with every circumstance of secrecy, of large quantities of bullion consigned to the German Ambassador and delivered under military guard at the Deutsche Bank. The total amount was estimated at some 4,000,000*l.* This sum was far more than was necessary for the maintenance of the German military and naval establishments, and I have every reason to believe that a definite arrangement was arrived at between the Germans and a group of Ministers, including Enver Pasha, Talaat Bey, and Djemal Pasha, that Turkey should declare war as soon as the financial provision should have attained a stated figure. My information establishes the fact that a climax was reached about the middle of the third week in October, when it had been decided to confront the Grand Vizier with the alternative of complicity or resignation, and that only the Russian successes on the Vistula, or some other more obscure cause, prevented this plan from being carried out.

Whatever the exact history of the first three weeks of October, it is certain that on or about the 26th of that month the German conspirators realised that the pace must be forced by still more drastic measures than they had yet used, and that any further attempts to win over the Grand Vizier and the Turkish Government as a whole to their ideas and to induce them to declare war would be useless. On that afternoon an important meeting of Committee leaders was held, at which Enver Pasha was present, but which only decided to send Halil Bey, the President of the Chamber, on a mission to Berlin. In the circles in which this decision became known it was regarded as a partial triumph for the Peace party, and as a fresh attempt to gain time for the sake either of mere procrastination or of securing more concrete offers from Germany. Be that as it may, Halil Bey never left on his mission, and it is believed that its abandonment was due to a more than usually blunt hint from the German representative in Constantinople. Whilst Constantinople generally was comforting itself with the reflection that nothing could well happen until after the four days' Bairam festival, beginning on the 30th October, two events of capital importance occurred.

On the morning of the 29th I received intelligence from Egypt of the incursion into the Sinai peninsula of an armed body of 2,000 Bedouins, who had occupied the wells of Magdaba, and whose objective was an attack upon the Suez Canal. On learning this news I at once proceeded to the Yali of the Grand Vizier, to acquaint him of the serious consequences which must ensue if the expedition were not at once recalled. His Highness received the intelligence with every appearance of surprise. He emphatically disclaimed all knowledge of it, and gave me the most solemn assurance that if the facts were as stated he would at once issue orders for the withdrawal of the invading party. He assured me once more that nothing was further from the intention of the Government than war with Great Britain. It was unthinkable, he said, that an expedition of this kind could have been organised by any member of the Government; and he felt certain that if anything of the kind had occurred, it could only have been a raid by irresponsible Bedouins. I told his Highness that I feared that he deceived himself. I reminded him of the various occasions on which he had given me similar assurances, and of the negative results of the instructions which he had given on previous occasions. I warned him of the disastrous consequences to the Ottoman Empire of a crisis which could not now be long postponed unless he and the friends of peace were prepared to take some serious stand against the conspiracy of which I was fully cognisant, to involve it irretrievably in the general war. On this, as on every occasion of my interviews with the Grand Vizier, I was impressed with his inability to realise the facts or to disabuse himself of the conviction, in spite of his many unfortunate experiences, that he would be able, in a really serious crisis, to exert his authority with effect.

The second event of capital importance was the attack on Odessa and other Russian ports in the Black Sea on the morning of the same day, the 29th October. It is now certain that the actual orders for these attacks were given by the German admiral on the evening of the 27th October, but it was not until after they had actually taken place, that is, on the afternoon of the 29th October, when news of the raid on Odessa was telegraphed to me direct by Mr. Consul-General Roberts, that my Russian and French colleagues and myself realised that the die had actually been cast and the crisis that we had so long feared and striven to avert had occurred. Immediately on receiving the news M. Bompard and I called on M. de Giers and decided to ask for authority from our respective Governments to confront the Porte with the alternative of rupture or dismissal of the German naval and military missions. On the

morning of the 30th, however, I learnt from my Russian colleague that he had received instructions from his Government immediately to ask for his passports. He had written to the Grand Vizier to ask for an interview, which his Highness had begged him to postpone until the following day owing to indisposition. The instructions of my Russian colleague being in a categorical form, he had therefore been constrained to address a note to the Grand Vizier demanding his passports; and I and my French colleague, acting on the instructions with which the Ambassadors of the allied Powers had at my suggestion already been furnished to leave Constantinople simultaneously, should any one of them be compelled to ask for his passports, owing either to a Turkish declaration of war or to some intolerable act of hostility, decided without further delay to write to the Grand Vizier and ask in our turn for interviews to enable us to carry out these instructions. In view of his Highness's indisposition we had not expected to be received that day, but a few hours later the Grand Vizier sent us word that he would, nevertheless, be glad to see us, and notwithstanding the excuse which he had made earlier in the day he received the Russian Ambassador also in the course of the afternoon. My interview with the Grand Vizier partly coincided with that of M. de Giers, and preceded that of M. Bompard. It was of a painful description. His Highness convinced me of his sincerity in disclaiming all knowledge of or participation in the events which had led to the rupture, and entreated me to believe that the situation was even now not irretrievable. I replied that the time had passed for assurances. The crisis which I had predicted to his Highness at almost every interview which I had had with him since my return had actually occurred, and unless some adequate satisfaction were immediately given by the dismissal of the German missions, which could alone prevent the recurrence of attempts upon Egyptian territory and attacks on Russia, war with the allies was inevitable. My Russian colleague had already demanded his passports, and I must, in pursuance of the instructions I had received, follow the same course. The Grand Vizier again protested that even now he could undo what the War party had done without his knowledge or consent. In reply to the doubt which I expressed as to the means at his disposal, he said that he had on his side moral forces which could not but triumph, and that he meant to fight on to the end. He did not, indeed, hint at a possibility of immediately dismissing the German mission, but he informed me that there was to be a meeting of the Council at his house that evening, when he would call upon his colleagues to support him in his determination to avert war with the allied Powers.

The Council was duly held, and, as he had predicted, the majority of the Ministers supported the Grand Vizier, who made a strong appeal in favour of peace, and was seconded by Djavid Bey. But the powerlessness of the Sultan's Ministers to do more than vote in the Council Chamber was evident. The question of dismissing the German naval officers was discussed, but no decision to do so was taken, and no Minister ventured even to propose the expulsion of the military mission. In the interval the War party had sealed their resolution to go forward, by publishing a communiqué in which it was stated that the first acts of hostility in the Black Sea had come from the Russian side. Untrue and grotesque as it was, this invention succeeded in deceiving many of the public.

It is not possible to establish by proof which of the Ministers had pre-knowledge of the German admiral's *coup*, but it may be regarded as certain that Enver Pasha was aware of it, and highly probable that Talaat Bey was also an accomplice.

The story of a Russian provocation was plainly an afterthought, and if the official report of the Russian Government were not sufficient to disprove it, I could produce independent evidence to show that the orders to begin hostilities were given at the mouth of the Bosphorus on the evening of the 27th October, as the result of a conspiracy hatched between the German representatives in Constantinople and a small and unscrupulous Turkish faction.

My Russian colleague left Constantinople without incident on the evening of the 31st October. My own departure was eventually arranged for the following evening, when I left for Dedeagatch, accompanied by my staff of sixty officials and their families, the British advisers in the service of the Turkish Government and some other British subjects also travelled with me. My French colleague and his staff left by the same train.

Owing to the wanton refusal of the military authorities at the last moment to allow the departure of a great number of British and French subjects who were to have left by an earlier train than that which had been placed at my disposal, the station was for some hours the scene of indescribable confusion and turmoil.

My protests and those of the French Ambassador were disregarded, and after



protracted discussion, we agreed to leave matters in the hands of the United States Ambassador, who undertook to use all his influence to procure the departure of our fellow subjects on the following day. The "sous-chef de protocole" of the Sublime Porte and the "chef de cabinet particulier" of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were sent to bid farewell to M. Bompard and myself at the railway station, and two Secretaries of the Political Department of the Ministry accompanied us to the frontier.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the assistance which I have received from Mr. Morgenthau, the United States Ambassador. During the last two days especially the difficulties arising out of the abnormality of the situation would have been immeasurably greater had it not been for his invaluable help and his untiring efforts on behalf of myself and my staff. We are heavily indebted not only to Mr. Morgenthau himself, but to every member of the United States Embassy. It is entirely owing to their exertions that the British and French subjects who were detained at the station on the night of my departure were allowed to leave on the following evening.

Before concluding this despatch I desire also to place on record my sense of the cheerful courage displayed by the British community in Constantinople, as well as in other towns, during the whole of this trying period. A large proportion of them have suffered severely in their business from the instability of the situation in Turkey. Many have suffered heavily and more directly by the military requisitions which from the beginning of August were carried out in an inconceivably arbitrary manner. By the suppression of the Capitulations all saw themselves deprived at a moment's notice of the secular privileges which had hitherto secured the persons and the property of foreigners against caprice and injustice. But they have one and all faced these adversities with a reasonable and manly fortitude.

Shortly after my return to my post, I recommended those British subjects who applied to me for advice to send home, when opportunity offered, those members of their families who had no particular reason to stay in the country.

A certain number left during the autumn, and many have left since. Those who have chosen to stay, or who have not been in a position to leave, remain under the protection of the United States Ambassador. As regards the British community at Bagdad, I instructed the acting British consul-general at Bagdad, early in October, to charter a steamer for the conveyance to the coast of any British subjects who might wish to leave. A large number of British and British-Indian subjects availed themselves of this opportunity.

I cannot conclude this report without calling your attention to the zeal shown by the junior members of my staff, including Mr. Ovey, Lord Gerald Wellesley, Mr. Charles Lister, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Astell, and by Mr. Fuller, Archivist to His Majesty's Embassy, in the performance of their duties in the Chancery, as well as to the able and conscientious work of the members of the Dragomanate and consulate-general.

The Chancery was greatly assisted by the voluntary help kindly offered to them by Judge Cator, the Rev. Canon Whitehouse, Chaplain to His Majesty's Embassy, and by Dr. Clemow, Physician to His Majesty's Embassy, as well as by Mr. Weakley, Commercial Attaché.

I need not do more than refer to the work of Lieutenant-Colonel Cunliffe Owen, Military Attaché to His Majesty's Embassy, whose information respecting the military preparations was often obtained with considerable difficulty.

I should like to place on record my high appreciation of the conduct of His Majesty's consular officers throughout the Ottoman Empire during the whole period of the crisis. They one and all performed their often difficult duties with zeal and discretion. I was especially indebted to Mr. Cumberbatch, His Majesty's consul-general at Beirut, Mr. Heathcote Smith, acting British consul-general at Smyrna, and to Mr. Palmer, vice-consul at the Dardanelles, for the valuable information which they supplied.

I would wish to bring to your particular notice the services rendered by Mr. Ryan, Acting First Dragoman of His Majesty's Embassy. His ability, knowledge of Turkey, sound judgment and untiring industry, were of invaluable assistance to me, and are deserving of your special commendation.

I have, &c.

LOUIS MALLET.





No. 2.

*Sir Edward Grey to Sir L. Mallet.*

Sir,

*Foreign Office, December 4, 1914.*

I HAVE received your Excellency's despatch of the 20th ultimo, in which you summarise the events since your return to your post on the 16th August last until your departure on the 1st November.

I have read with great appreciation and pleasure of the invaluable assistance rendered to your Excellency in the difficult circumstances of your departure by the United States Ambassador and every member of the United States Embassy, and I have already requested the United States Government to convey to Mr. Morgenthau the most sincere thanks of His Majesty's Government for the valuable services rendered by his Excellency on that occasion, and subsequently in helping the British community to leave Constantinople.

I have also been much gratified to receive your Excellency's testimony of the cheerful courage of the British community in Turkey under exceptionally trying circumstances, and I have noted with great satisfaction your Excellency's appreciation of the valuable services of the embassy and consulate staff, and of the members of His Majesty's consular service throughout the Ottoman Empire.

I desire also to convey to your Excellency my high sense of the marked ability, patience, and discretion shown by your Excellency in carrying out, in the face of great difficulties, the policy of His Majesty's Government. War was eventually forced by wanton and unprovoked hostilities of the Turkish fleet under German inspiration and orders, but it was the desire of His Majesty's Government to avoid a rupture with Turkey; and your Excellency rightly directed all your efforts to encourage those influences at Constantinople that were moderate and reasonable. To your efforts it was at any rate in some degree due that the inevitable catastrophe did not occur sooner.

I am, &c  
E. GREY.

MISCELLANEOUS, No. 14 (1914).

Despatch from His Majesty's Ambassador at Constantinople summarising Events leading up to Rupture of Relations with Turkey, and Reply thereto.

[In continuation of "Miscellaneous, No. 13 (1914)": Cd. 7628.]

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