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ABSTRACT

During the First World War, the military and diplomatic efforts of individual Balkan states were directed toward the fulfillment of national goals that had remained essentially unchanged since their formulation in the 19th century. Pre-dating many of the Great Power rivalries that lay at the heart of the First World War, these aims contributed to the Balkan states’ perception of the conflict as yet another opportunity to attain the elusive goals of irredentism and "national unification," and endowed the war in South-Eastern Europe with the characteristics of a Third Balkan War – the last stage of the Balkan liberation struggles initiated in the early 1800s. These aspirations did not always coincide with the broad diplomatic and military objectives espoused by the respective alliance systems on whose side the nations of South-Eastern Europe fought in the course of the war. For these countries, the all-encompassing strategic priorities of the principal belligerents could rarely represent anything more than an abstraction. Consequently, Balkan statesmen considered such designs meaningful only if they offered the possibility of advancing their own national policy goals.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the influence of this perception of the nature of the conflict on Britain's Balkan strategy. An analysis of this kind will serve as the basis for the argument that conventional interpretations of the factors that shaped Britain's overall strategy in the First World War cannot, by themselves, account for the course and conduct of British strategy in South-Eastern Europe. Instead, they must be supplemented with considerations of the strategic priorities of Britain's Balkan allies and enemies, and their impact on the policies that guided British strategy in the region during the Great War.

This thesis is based on a synthesis of a variety of primary and secondary sources. The documentary foundations consist of materials contained in the British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. These are supplemented with a selection of unpublished documents, including the Conclusions and the Memoranda of the British War Cabinet for the time period between December 1916 and September 1918. Lastly, a broad range of secondary sources, including memoirs, published collections of private papers, and key monographs, has also been utilized.
DEDICATION

To my parents
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Easy ys myne booke to rede and telleth of moche fyte,
But then your easy rede is damned hard to wryte...."

– William Napier, History of the War in the Peninsula and in the South of France: From the Year 1807 to the Year 1814

The process of researching and writing this thesis has been, for the most part, a lonely task. Nevertheless, its completion would have been difficult, if not impossible, without the kind assistance of many individuals. In the first order, I would like to acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to my graduate supervisor, Professor Andre Gerolymatas. My guide and mentor for the past three years, he has been a source of unflagging encouragement and practical assistance far in excess of what a graduate student might customarily expect from a supervisor. To him, I will be always grateful. Next, I would like to thank Professor Martin Kitchen for reading my work and providing comments and suggestions for improvement. Likewise, I wish to offer thanks to Professor Lenard Cohen for his willingness to act as my external examiner. I am also grateful to the Department of History at Simon Fraser University for providing the financial support that has allowed me to finish this work. Many thanks, too, must go to the administrative staff of the Department, especially Mary Ann Pope and Susan MacIntosh, for patiently enduring the endless barrage of questions to which I subjected them. I am equally thankful for the moral support I received from fellow students and friends in the History graduate program. In particular, I would like to extend my most sincere gratitude to Christian Nielson and Stefani Marcian, whose friendship, kindness, and encouragement sustained me at all times, but especially in the "darkest hours."

Most importantly, however, I would like to thank my parents. It was they who, more than anybody else, had to bear the costs - both real and figurative - of my academic presumptions. They did so patiently, untiringly, and without complaint or reproach, all the while providing me with hope, encouragement and inspiration. It is only fitting, therefore, that this thesis should be dedicated to them.
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Introduction

BRITISH STRATEGY IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR: AN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Throughout the First World War, Great Britain maintained a substantial military presence in South-Eastern Europe. British and Imperial troops first arrived in the region in early 1915, when units of the hastily-organized Mediterranean Expeditionary Force landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula. At the time, a number of Britain’s leading military and political figures believed that the diversion of some of the Entente’s human and material resources from the Western Front to the Balkans might trigger a set of military and political developments that would bring the war to an early and successful conclusion for the Allies. The failure of the Gallipoli expedition, combined with the unsuccessful Franco-British attempt to render military assistance to Serbia in the fall and winter of 1915, discredited the notion that military operations in peripheral theaters such as the Balkans offered the best prospects for the defeat of the Central Powers. After the twin fiasco of the Dardanelles and Salonika, the strategic focus of most British leaders turned to other, seemingly more promising theaters of operations.

In conformity with their new strategic priorities, British leaders attempted to effect a complete, or at least a partial disengagement from the Balkans. Nevertheless, although the retention of a large military force in the Balkans had seemingly ceased to conform with Britain’s strategic interests, British units remained in South-Eastern Europe for the duration of the war. Altogether, the sheer number of troops that Britain and its allies maintained in the region until 1918, combined with the intensity of the inter-Allied disputes concerning the military and diplomatic conduct of the conflict in South-Eastern Europe, transformed the Balkans into one of the most important theaters of the Great War.

The corpus of historical literature pertaining to the higher direction of Britain’s war effort fully reflects the prominent role that the Balkans occupied in Britain’s strategic calculations during the war. While there is no single monograph devoted exclusively to Britain’s Balkan strategy, virtually all of the principal studies of Britain’s overall strategy between 1914 and 1918 accord a conspicuous place to the Balkans. In analyzing the forces that shaped Britain’s Balkan strategy, the majority of such studies present the war
in South-Eastern Europe as an extension of the conflict as a whole, subservient to Britain's wider strategy, war aims and post-war ambitions. As a result, British strategy in the Balkans during the First World War is generally viewed as having been influenced by the same considerations that also determined British strategy in other theaters of the war.

The most common historical interpretation of the forces that influenced British strategy is rooted in the memoirs that Winston Churchill, David Lloyd George, Maurice Hankey and William Robertson wrote after the war to justify the policies they had advocated, adopted or followed during the conflict itself. Their personal recollections have furnished the foundations for a school of thought that dominated the historiography of Britain's strategic conduct of the Great War for several decades.¹ According to this interpretation, the course of British strategy was influenced primarily by the dispute between Britain's political and military leaders concerning the conduct of the war; a civil-military conflict that involved a running strategic debate between the so-called "Easterner" and "Westerner" factions within Britain's supreme command establishment.

The issue at the heart of the dispute in question was the controversy surrounding the selection of the geographical focus of Britain's war effort. In this context, the "Easterners" – most frequently identified with Britain's senior political leaders such as Winston Churchill, David Lloyd George and Alfred Milner – are said to have favored operations in peripheral theaters such as the Balkans, Palestine and Mesopotamia. Such "sideshow" would fulfill two functions. First, they would ensure that a post-war settlement would take into account Britain's long-term imperial ambitions and interests, particularly in the Middle East. Second, they ostensibly offered an attractive alternative to the Entente's futile and costly efforts to smash through the German defenses in France and Flanders. Since decisive results could not be attained on the Western Front, the Easterners argued, the Central Powers would have to be defeated by means of an "indirect approach" that involved operations against Germany's alliance partners in South-Eastern Europe as a prelude to an attack against Germany's own vulnerable strategic rear.

By contrast, the "Westerners" — usually identified with Britain's senior military leaders such as William Robertson, Henry Wilson and Douglas Haig — claimed that the Entente could attain victory only by inflicting a crushing defeat upon the main body of Germany's field army. Since this objective could be attained only in France and Flanders, diversions of men and materiel away from the Western Front and into peripheral "sideshows" constituted a wasteful and counter-productive dispersal of scarce resources. These, the "Westerners" claimed, should instead be massed on the Western Front, and used to deliver a decisive blow against the land forces of the strongest of the Central Powers.\(^2\)

The perception of the "Easterner/Westerner" controversy as the paramount determinant of Britain's higher conduct of the Great War has been perpetuated by a number of works dealing with the subject of British strategy in the years 1914–1918. The majority of the best-known general histories and surveys of the war explain the process of formulation and implementation of Britain's strategic designs with reference to the dispute between the two rival factions.\(^3\) Key monographs dealing with specific aspects of Britain's military experience in the First World War place an equally heavy emphasis on the "Easterner/Westerner" debate. Foremost among them are David R. Woodward's studies of the strategic thought of David Lloyd George and William Robertson,\(^4\) and Paul Guinn's analysis of British strategy in the context of Britain's domestic politics, war aims and imperial ambitions.\(^5\) The tendency to view British strategy in the framework of the "Easterner/Westerner" split is also evident in the rather

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limited number of English-language works concerning specific campaigns in South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans.\(^6\)

The inclination to highlight the impact that the "Easterner/Westerner" dispute had on the formulation of Britain's military policies represents a valid interpretation of the dynamics behind the strategy-making process in Britain during the First World War. In the past two decades, however, a number of historians have pointed out that the debate between "Easterners" and "Westerners" cannot by any means be regarded as the only consideration that shaped British strategy between 1914 – 1918. Keith Nielson's analysis of Anglo-Russian relations during the war stands as one of the more prominent works arguing in favor of supplementing the "Easterner/Westerner" school of historical thought with examinations of other factors that may have influenced Britain's strategic policies.\(^7\) Neilson's main aim is to demonstrate the need for a new view of strategy that takes into account Britain's status as the member of an international coalition. The fact that Britain did not fight the war in a vacuum implied that in formulating their strategic designs, British leaders were compelled to take into account the interests of their allies. Consequently, Neilson argues, any examination of British strategy must include considerations of Britain's alliance partners and their impact on British strategic planning.

A similar rationale forms the basis of David Dutton's examination of Franco-British diplomacy and strategy on the Salonika Front between 1915 and 1918.\(^8\) Echoing Neilson's call for an alternative interpretation of British military policy, Dutton analyzes Britain's Balkan strategy through the prism of France's turbulent domestic politics and economic and political ambitions in the Near East. Specifically, Dutton argues that British leaders acquiesced in the maintenance of an Allied force at Macedonia only because of the concern that the termination of the Salonika enterprise would have had a destabilizing influence on France's domestic politics. In turn, this development might

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have led to a serious deterioration of Anglo-French relations and would have subjected the Entente to a potentially serious internal strain. Given these constraints, the British military commitment in the Balkans proved difficult to terminate and British troops remained in the region until the end of the war – long after their presence there had ceased to conform to Britain's own strategic priorities.

An even more radical challenge to the "Easterner/Westerner" school has been posited by David French in his two-volume study of British strategy and war aims during the Great War. According to French, the view that British strategy was influenced chiefly by the struggle between the "Easterner" and "Westerner" factions within the British high command establishment is at best a distortion, and at worst a caricature of the strategy-making process in Britain. Instead, French argues that the main driving force behind the formulation of British strategy was a dispute that focused on the constraints of time, rather than geography. In French's view, the controversy over where Britain's military resources should be deployed was much less important to British leaders than the problems associated with deciding at what point in the war Britain should endorse an all-out commitment of these resources in support of its continental allies. While some scholars have criticized French's interpretation of British strategy, it would probably be unwise to dismiss it out of hand.

Collectively, the "Easterner/Westerner" controversy, combined with considerations of Britain's status as a member of a multi-national alliance, and the debate concerning the timing of Britain's total commitment to the land war on the European continent may be said to be an accurate representation of the forces that shaped Britain's overall strategy during the First World War. At the same time, there can be little doubt that these general considerations were instrumental in the formulation of the strategic policies British leaders adopted specifically with regards to South-Eastern Europe.

However, in light of the unique political conditions that prevailed in the Balkans shortly before and during the First World War, no analysis of the factors that influenced British strategy in the region may be considered complete without an examination of the

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relationship between the war aims of individual Balkan states and British military policies in South-Eastern Europe. Such an examination has yet to be written. Admittedly, there is no shortage of works devoted to the manner in which the national policy goals of the Balkan states interacted with British diplomatic endeavors in the region. Most of these sources place a particularly heavy emphasis on the failure of the Entente's diplomatic efforts to construct a "Balkan bloc" in the early stages of the war, and on Britain's role in the creation of the new territorial order that emerged in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the war.

By contrast, not a single historical work exists that is devoted solely to assessing the influence of the national aspirations of Balkan countries on the formulation and implementation of the purely military aspects of British strategy in South-Eastern Europe. The want of such a study represents a potentially serious barrier to a comprehensive understanding of the forces that shaped Britain's Balkan strategy in the First World War.

The possibility that existing historiography might prove incapable of accounting for all the factors that influenced Britain's Balkan strategy is heightened by the degree to which the British decision-makers' perception of the First World War in South-Eastern Europe differed from that of their Balkan counterparts. To a Great Power like Britain, the First World War in the Balkans could be said to have represented merely an extension of the war as a whole, subservient to Britain's broader strategic goals. However, when the Balkan dimensions of the Great War are scrutinized from the perspective of the Balkans states themselves, the war assumes an entirely different character. Such an analysis

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11 Examples include Lynn Curtright, Muddle, Indecision, and Setback: British Policy and the Balkan States, August 1914 to the Inception of the Dardanelles Campaign (Thessaloniki, 1986); Christos Theodoulou, Greece and the Entente, August 1, 1914 – September 25, 1916 (Thessaloniki, 1971).

reveals that for the nations of South-Eastern Europe, the First World War was a distinct, self-contained conflict, and a struggle apart from the general European conflagration.

During the First World War, the military and diplomatic efforts of individual Balkan states were directed toward the fulfillment of national aspirations that had remained unchanged since their achievement of independence in the 19th century. Predating many of the Great Power rivalries that lay at the heart of the First World War, these aims contributed to the Balkan states' perception of the conflict as yet another opportunity to fulfill the goals of irredentism and "national unification." This dynamic endowed the war in South-Eastern Europe with the characteristics of a Third Balkan War and another phase of the Balkan liberation struggles initiated in the early 1800s.

These aspirations did not always coincide with the broad diplomatic and military objectives espoused by the respective alliance systems on whose side the nations of South-Eastern Europe fought in the course of the war. For these countries, the all-encompassing strategic priorities of the principal belligerents could never represent anything more than an abstraction. For Balkan statesmen, such designs could be meaningful only if they offered the possibility of advancing their own national policy aims.

In sum, the aim of this thesis is to analyze the influence of this perception of the nature of the conflict on Britain's Balkan strategy. An analysis of this kind will serve as the basis for the argument that conventional interpretations of the factors that shaped Britain's overall strategy in the First World War cannot, by themselves, rationalize the course and conduct of British strategy in South-Eastern Europe. Instead, they must be supplemented with considerations of the strategic priorities of Britain's Balkan allies and enemies, and their impact on the policies that guided British strategy in the region during the Great War.
Chapter One

FROM "CONTINENTAL COMMITMENT" TO A PERIPHERAL STRATEGY:
BRITAIN TURNS TO THE BALKANS, DECEMBER 1914/JANUARY 1915

The century that preceded the outbreak of the First World War witnessed several instances of British diplomatic intervention in the Balkans. Most notable examples included Britain's diplomatic role in the establishment of the modern Greek state (1821 – 1828), the settlement of the Great Eastern Crisis (1877 – 1878) and the resolution of the two Balkan Wars of 1912 – 1913. By contrast, direct and independent British military involvement in South-Eastern Europe prior to 1914 was limited. In 1854, Lord Raglan's expeditionary corps disembarked at Varna and spent several months there before continuing on its way to the Crimea.¹ During the Great Eastern Crisis of 1877 – 1878, with the Russian army encamped only a few miles from Istanbul, the British government dispatched a naval force first to Besika Bay, and then to the Sea of Marmara in order to make clear to St. Petersburg that Britain would not stand idly by if the Russians occupied Istanbul.² This naval demonstration, supplemented with diplomatic actions, represented the limits of British intervention in the Balkans in the 1870s. Nevertheless, before the crisis was settled by peaceful means at San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin, the British government devoted at least attention to the possibility of sending a military force to the region in the event that the tensions with Russia boiled over into open war.³

In the following decades, plans for military action against the Dardanelles would come to represent the principal focus of British designs for operations in the Balkans in the following decades. This policy intensified in the early 1880s, as Anglo-Ottoman


³ In October 1876, even before the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman War, two officers of the Royal Engineers were sent to the region to conduct an extensive examination of the westward approaches to Istanbul and ascertain the most advantageous position that could be taken up by a British expeditionary force for the purpose of defending the Ottoman capital. See PRO FO 424/38/169, Reports and Memoranda Relative to the Defense of Constantinople and Other Positions in Turkey, 1876 – 1877.
relations began to deteriorate considerably. The new strategic realities compelled British military planners to contemplate the possibility of a hypothetical Ottoman attack against Egypt and the Suez Canal, the twin nodal points of Britain's imperial communications since their occupation by British forces in 1882. British military authorities were convinced that if such a contingency did take place, then an undertaking against the Dardanelles would represent the most effective means of protecting Egypt. This rather limited outlook – one that viewed military or naval ventures in the Balkans merely as subordinate to the defense of Egypt – continued to characterize British strategic planning with regards to South-Eastern Europe until 1914.

British strategists' perception of the region's potential as a possible theater of military operations began to undergo significant changes in the months following the outbreak of the First World War. When British leaders decided in favor of intervening in the war in August 1914, they did so on the basis of two assumptions about the nature of the conflict that were also shared among the ruling circles of all other belligerent powers. First, Britain's leading political and military figures believed that the war would be of relatively short duration. A long war was assumed to be impossible because neither the civilian populations of the contending powers, nor their economic, political and social

4 Several factors were responsible for this development. In the first place, Britain's acquisition of Cyprus at the Congress of Berlin (1878) and the occupation of Egypt and the Suez Canal (1882) reduced significantly traditional British concerns with safeguarding Ottoman sovereignty against encroachments by other powers. The security of Britain's strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean was no longer dependent on the preservation of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the protection of the Straits against Russia. In addition, the memory of Ottoman atrocities in Bulgaria during the Great Eastern Crisis of 1876 – 1877 turned a large segment of liberal public opinion in Britain against the Ottomans. This trend was further perpetuated by the revulsion with which the British public reacted to the repressive policies adopted by Sultan Abdul Hamid II (r. 1878 – 1908) to deal with those whom he regarded as the enemies of his autocratic regime. In particular, it was the sultan's brutal treatment of his Armenian subjects that evoked disgust among the British public and political leaders. See Anderson, The Eastern Question, pp. 251 – 259; Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery, p. 359.

5 British military planners were concerned chiefly with the contingency of an attack against Egypt and the Suez Canal by Ottoman forces operating in conjunction with those of another Great Power, especially France or Russia. For an examination of the role of the Dardanelles in the context of British plans for the defense of Egypt see John Gooch, The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy, c.1900 – 1916 (London, 1974), pp. 238 – 265.

6 Even Winston Churchill's November 1914 proposal for an attack against Gallipoli and the Dardanelles was made with reference to the contribution that such an operation would make to the defense of Egypt. See PRO CAB 22/1, War Council Meeting, 25 November 1914, in Martin Gilbert, ed., Winston S. Churchill Companion Volume III, Part I: July 1914 – April 1915 (Boston, 1973), p. 278.
infrastructures could be counted upon to withstand for long the privations that would inevitably be caused by a prolonged and large-scale conflict. 7

The conviction that a protracted general war between the European powers was impossible found a practical manifestation in the nature of the strategic plans that the principal belligerents had been preparing for years prior to the conflict now confronting them. These plans anticipated that the outcome of the war would be settled within a few weeks, or at most months, through a series of major, decisive engagements that would be fought in France, Galicia and East Prussia. 8 Consequently, none of the strategic blueprints that were to guide the operations of the belligerent armies in the coming conflict made any provisions for military action in theaters other than Western Europe and Russian Poland. As far as Britain was concerned, its small regular army — the five infantry divisions and one cavalry division of the British Expeditionary Force — was to be deployed somewhere in France or Flanders in support of French forces. 9


The rigid nature of their war plans left the combatants completely unprepared for dealing with the conditions that had come to characterize the war by November 1914. On the Western Front, following the German retreat from the Marne in September, and the unsuccessful Allied efforts to dislodge the German forces from their new positions on the Aisne (14 – 18 Sept.), both sides engaged in successive attempts to envelop each other's open northern flank in the course of the so-called "Race to the Sea" (18 Sept. – 12 Oct.). These endeavors failed, and only resulted in the prolongation of the front until the fighting line in the West extended from the Swiss border to the Flemish coast. In a last-ditch attempt to seize the Channel ports, the OHL (Oberste Heeresleitung; the German Supreme Army Command) now initiated a series of costly and ultimately futile attacks against the thinly-held British sectors of the front in the vicinity of Ypres (12 – 20 Oct. and 29 Oct. – 11 Nov.). Similar attacks by Allied forces against German lines in Flanders (20 Oct. – 28 Oct.) and Champagne (mid-December) also failed. Neither side could make any considerable headway against entrenched opponents armed with machine guns, magazine-fed rifles and quick-firing artillery. The result was tactical deadlock that precluded strategically decisive results on the Western Front and put an end to the illusion of a short war.

In order to overcome the stalemate in the West, some Allied leaders began to weigh the advantages of activating new theaters of operations. In November 1914, Aristide Briand, the French Minister of Justice, suggested sending 400,000 Allied troops to the Balkans by way of Salonika in order to reinforce the Serbian army, induce Balkan neutrals to declare for the Entente and launch an offensive against Austria-Hungary. At approximately the same time, General François Franchet d'Esperey, commander of the

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11 Ibid., pp. 400 – 408.
French 5th Army, proposed to dispatch five army corps, or some 185,000 troops, to Serbia whence they were to march on Budapest in the spring of 1915. Though both plans stimulated considerable interests in France's military and political circles, they were turned down by General Joseph Joffre. The French commander-in-chief categorically opposed any diversion of troops to the Balkans on the grounds that the success of the offensives he intended to launch in Artois and Champagne in the spring necessitated that all French units remain concentrated on the Western Front.

Briand and Franchet d'Esperey were not alone in their conviction that military operations in peripheral theaters could contribute to overcoming the deadlock on the Western Front. On the other side of the English Channel, similar proposals were also being considered. In late December, acting without each other's knowledge, Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice Hankey, the Secretary of the War Council, Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, drafted a series of memoranda on the subject of the war's strategic conduct. All three documents were based on the premise that since a breakthrough on the Western Front was impossible, an alternative means of attaining strategically decisive results had to be sought. To this end, all three suggested undertaking major military operations in theaters other than France and Flanders.

For his part, Churchill favored an amphibious descent on Schleswig-Holstein. By contrast, Lloyd George and Hankey saw considerable potential in the prospect of

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16 Dutton, p. 23.

17 The War Council was a special Cabinet Committee established on 25 November 1914 by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith to direct Britain's war effort. Initially, the strategic direction of the war was handled by the Cabinet itself, but the large size of that body (twenty-two members), combined with the inexperience of most ministers in matters concerned with the direction of *la grande guerre*, led Asquith to transfer many of its war-related functions to the War Council, a much smaller organization made up only of some of the key ministers (including the service secretaries), and the service chiefs. See Hankey, *Supreme Command*, p. 237; Woodward, *Great Britain and the War*, pp. 48 – 49; Guinn, pp. 33 – 34; and George H. Cassar, *Asquith as War Leader* (London, 1994), pp. 54 – 55.

military and naval ventures in South-Eastern Europe. The Chancellor of the Exchequer suggested landing Britain's "New Armies," then still in the process of formation and training, at Salonika or on the Dalmatian coast. Lloyd George expected that such a massive military demonstration on the part of Britain would convince Greece and Romania to side with the Entente, and allow the British contingents to launch a massive offensive against Austria-Hungary in conjunction with Balkan armies. In Lloyd George's opinion, such an undertaking would offer two advantages. First, by securing a tangible military victory over the enemy, it would bolster public morale of the populations of the Allied countries, and encourage them to endure what would clearly be a long war "without grumbling or stint." Second, it might conceivably induce Italy to openly side with the Entente.19

Lloyd George's ambitious plan bore considerable semblance to the proposals tendered by Hankey. The Secretary of the War Council believed that British participation in a campaign in the Balkans would convince all Balkan states to join the Entente. Specifically, Hankey advocated sending three British corps to the Balkans, where they would combine with Greek and Bulgarian armies in an attack against Istanbul, knocking the Ottoman Empire out the war, opening the Dardanelles to Allied shipping and restoring communications with the Black Sea. At the same time, Russian, Serbian and Romanian armies would launch a joint offensive against Austria-Hungary.20

Although all three memoranda advocated the initiation of large-scale military and

19 David Lloyd George, Memorandum: Suggestions as to the Military Position, 31 December 1914, in Gilbert, ed., pp. 350 – 356; and Lloyd George, War Memoirs, pp. 219 – 226. Lloyd George's eagerness to enlist the aid of the Balkan states, particularly Greece, may have been motivated by more than simply strategic considerations. In particular, Lloyd George's design for an offensive in the Balkans might have been influenced by the counsels of Sir Basil Zaharoff, the notorious Anglo-Greek arms-merchant who supported the expansionist foreign policy objectives espoused by Eleftheros Venizelos, the prime minister of Greece. In the early stages of the war, Zaharoff repeatedly attempted to assist Venizelos in bringing Greece into the war on the side of the Allies. At the same time, Zaharoff encouraged Lloyd George to endorse Greek national aspirations and was instrumental in establishing unofficial communications between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Greek prime minister. See Gerolymatos, "Lloyd George and Venizelos, 1912 – 1917," Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora, Vol. 15, Nos. 3 – 4 (1988), p. 39; Donald McCormick, The Life of Sir Basil Zaharoff (London, 1965); and Guiles Davenport, Zaharoff: High Priest of War (Boston, 1934).

Naval undertakings in theaters other than France and Flanders, it is important to note that neither envisioned the transfer of the Entente’s main effort away from the Western Front. An analysis of the three documents reveals that their authors still believed that victory could be attained only in the West. However, in light of the fact that the conditions prevalent on the Western Front favored the defense, all three recognized the need to create strategic diversions in other theaters. Such diversions, it was hoped, would compel the Germans to denude their defenses on that vital front in order to counter the threat of Allied offensives elsewhere. Once diversions of this kind had siphoned off enough German troops from France and Flanders, the Allies conceivably would be able to attain the decisive breakthrough that had eluded them so far.

All three memoranda are very clear on this point. Thus, Churchill believed that if his scheme for an invasion of Schleswig-Holstein were to be carried out, it would force the enemy to "expend his strength simultaneously along the largest front." Writing to Prime Minister Herbert Asquith a few days earlier, Churchill noted that the execution of his proposed diversionary scheme would mean that the Germans, "...while being closely held on all existing lines, would be forced to face new attacks directed at vital points and exhaust [themselves] along a still larger perimeter." Lloyd George’s call for an offensive in the Balkans was also made chiefly with reference to the contribution that such an endeavor could make toward thinning out the German defenses in the West. Above all, the Chancellor of the Exchequer emphasized "the importance of attenuating the enemy’s line by forcing him largely to extend it," and expressed the conviction that "if the length of the German line is doubled, even at the present rate of attrition, it might become at an early date so thin as to be easily penetrable.” Similarly, Hankey believed that it was the want of a major diversion on other fronts that was largely responsible for the Allies’

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23 David Lloyd George, Memorandum: Suggestions as to the Military Position, 31 December 1914, in Gilbert, ed., p. 351.
inability to breach the German lines in the West. In sum, the three memoranda provide no evidence that either Churchill, Lloyd George, or Hankey were engaged in a search for the "soft underbelly" of the Central Powers. Instead, the principal purpose behind the activation of alternative theaters of operations was to attenuate the German line in France and Flanders as a means of creating conditions favorable to a decisive Allied offensive on the Western Front.

Lloyd George and Hankey's plans, in particular, offered another advantage aside from the possibility of inducing neutral Balkan countries to join the Entente, opening up the Dardanelles, and creating a strategic diversion that would force the German high command to weaken its defenses in the West. If these designs, or their variations, were to be adopted and implemented by the Allies, they would hold out the prospect of rendering tangible assistance to Serbia. Since the second week of August, that country had been waging an unassisted but successful struggle against numerically superior Austro-Hungarian forces. By early December, the Serbs had managed to repel three separate invasions of their territory, and had inflicted a series of stunning and humiliating defeats upon their opponents. However, the heavy manpower and equipment losses incurred by the Serbs meant that their victory would a Pyrrhic one. Altogether, in the course of the campaign of 1914, the Serbian army had lost 22,000 dead, 91,000 wounded and 19,000 captured and missing, and was losing more to typhus, dysentery and cholera that broke out late in the year. These losses, combined with critical ammunition shortages, implied that Serbia's prospects for survival would now depend heavily on assistance from its allies and co-belligerents.

The Ottoman Empire's decision to side with the Central Powers in November 1914 provided yet another argument in favor of Allied military involvement in South-

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Eastern Europe. The closure of the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles as a result of the Ottoman entry into the war severed a vital route of communications linking Russia with its western allies, thus restricting France's and Britain's ability to provide Russia with supplies of weapons and ammunition upon which its war effort depended to an extensive degree. In addition, the grain shipments whose export supplied Russia with the foreign credit that paid for French and British assistance were now trapped in the Black Sea. By implication, these developments put a premium on Allied military and naval operations in the vicinity of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus.

The proposals for a major Allied military effort in South-Eastern Europe were vulnerable to criticism on many grounds. Above all, they ignored the difficulties associated with the poor state of the transportation and communications infrastructure in the region, and took little account of the problems that a British expeditionary force operating in the Balkans would inevitably have to face due to the nature of local terrain. However, the most serious flaw inherent in proposals for a campaign in South-Eastern Europe was the extent to which the success of such designs was dependent on the willingness of the Balkan states to co-operate diplomatically and militarily not just with the Entente, but with each other.

In drafting their plans for an offensive against the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, the advocates of such ventures presupposed almost as a matter of course that the nations of South-Eastern Europe would willingly participate in a Balkan alliance directed toward a common endeavor. Such assumptions clearly demonstrated that most contemporary British leaders lacked an accurate understanding of the diplomatic and political realities prevalent in the region at the time. Since their attainment of independence from the Ottoman Empire at various times in the 19th century, the Balkan states had been engaged in the pursuit of irredentist ambitions and national aspirations whose conflicting nature had repeatedly led to regional conflict and instability. By 1914, the antagonisms and rivalries between individual Balkan countries had reached a point where any attempt to reconcile their conflicting territorial claims as a prelude to the establishment of a cohesive Balkan alliance was bound to encounter complications whose magnitude few British statesmen could initially comprehend.

[27 Aspinall-Oglander, Gallipoli, p. 58.]
Chapter Two

THE BALKANS AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The diplomatic stance adopted by individual Balkan states with regards to the First World War upon its eruption in the summer of 1914 was dictated by the outcome of the two Balkan Wars of 1912 – 1913. During the First Balkan War (Oct. 1912 – Apr. 1913), the armies of the Balkan League – Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro – combined to divest the Ottoman Empire of most of its remaining European possessions. However, the provisions of the Treaty of London that ended the war in May 1913 left Bulgaria dissatisfied with its territorial gains, and motivated that country to turn against its former allies only a few weeks after the conclusion of the First Balkan War.

At the heart of the dissensions that caused the disintegration of the Balkan League and led to the Second Balkan War was the issue of the disposal of Macedonia. Prior to the First Balkan War, when the Balkan League was still in the process of formation, Serbia and Bulgaria had made an attempt to reach an accommodation concerning the division of Macedonia should that region be wrested from Ottoman control. The basis for this understanding was the treaty of alliance signed by the two countries on 13 March 1912. The secret annex of that document stipulated that after the expulsion of the Ottomans from Macedonia, Serbia would be given territories located north of the Šar

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1 The impetus behind the creation of the Balkan League was originally provided by Russia. In the wake of the humiliating diplomatic defeat dealt to that country by Austria-Hungary during the Bosnian Crisis of 1908, St. Petersburg attempted to bind the Balkan states into a regional alliance whose intended purpose was to act a check on the Dual Monarchy’s ambitions in South-Eastern Europe. By 1912, Russian policy in South-Eastern Europe appeared to be bearing fruit as Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro found a temporary solution to their differences and concluded as series of bi-lateral treaties that effectively bound them to a common purpose. At this point, however, the Balkan League began to assume a life of its own as the four Balkan allies commenced preparations for a war against the Ottoman Empire. Now fully aware that the League had the potential to create a major international crisis, Russia attempted to dissuade the Balkan states from initiating a military conflict. Warnings from Russia and the other Great Powers to the effect that no territorial gains at the expense of the Ottoman Empire would be recognized had little influence on the four League members, and on 8 October 1912, the First Balkan War began. See Ernst Helmreich, The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars, 1912 – 1913 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1938).

Mountains, while Bulgaria would gain lands east of the Struma River. The issue of the disposal of the central part of Macedonia—the “Contested Zone”—was to be deferred until after the war. In the event that the Balkan allies would not be able to reach an agreement regarding the “Contested Zone,” its division was to be submitted to the arbitration of Czar Nicholas II of Russia. Nevertheless, the Serbian government indicated that its own claims would not extend south of the Kriva Palanka-Veleš-Ohrad line. This implied that the remaining portion of the “Contested Zone” could be divided between Bulgaria and Greece. However, the provisions of the Treaty of London led Serbia to break the terms of the agreement with Bulgaria. At London, Austria-Hungary and Italy—two states which sought to deprive Serbia from gaining access to the Adriatic—convinced the other Great Powers to sanction the creation of an independent Albanian state made up of territories the Serbian government had originally expected to obtain after the First Balkan War.

Its ambitions thwarted in Albania, the Serbs sought compensation by annexing those portions of Macedonia which had originally been allocated to Bulgaria. At the same time, Greece effectively frustrated the ambitions Bulgaria entertained with regards to Salonika, Macedonia’s largest city and seaport. Unable to convince its erstwhile allies to adhere to the original scheme for the partition of Macedonia, Bulgaria resorted to force of arms in an effort to reclaim what it considered as its share of the spoils of the First Balkan War. The resultant Second Balkan War (May–August 1913) witnessed the defeat of Bulgaria at the hands of Greece, Serbia, Romania and the Ottoman Empire, and furnished the basis for further tensions in the region.

The Second Balkan War came to an end with the conclusion of the Treaty of Bucharest (10 August 1913). The terms of the agreement ensured that all of its

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4 Ibid., p. 219.


6 Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, Balkan National States, p. 220.

signatories, even the defeated, would emerge from the war with at least some territorial gains. Nevertheless, the post-war peace settlement could not be considered fully satisfactory by any of the countries involved, especially Bulgaria. At best, the Balkan states regarded it as nothing more than an interlude of calm that could be used to prepare for a resumption of the endeavors for national unification. This state of affairs practically ensured that Balkan statesmen would regard the First World War as yet another opportunity for the completion of that part of their territorial aspirations that had been frustrated in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars.

This point was equally true for both the victors and the defeated. The Ottoman Empire, having lost all of its European possessions except Eastern Thrace, entertained ambitions of re-acquiring some of its former European provinces, including Western Thrace and the Aegean Islands. In addition, the Ottomans sought to exploit the political chaos that prevailed in Albania following the Balkan Wars in a far-fetched effort to re-establish their authority in that region.

In Bulgaria, the redistribution of the Ottoman Empire's European territories after the Balkan Wars was deemed completely unacceptable. During the First Balkan War, Bulgaria had made the largest military contribution to the struggle against the Ottomans, and incurred the greatest losses, but its territorial acquisitions were the most meager of all the members of the Balkan League. Admittedly, the Treaty of Bucharest did allow


9 These territories had been annexed by Bulgaria and Greece, respectively, after the Balkan Wars. See Palmer, The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire (London, 1992), p. 224; Ulrich Trumpener, Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914 – 1918 (Princeton, 1968), pp. 24 – 25.


11 During the First Balkan War, Bulgaria mobilized an army of nearly 600,000 men, as opposed to a force of 200,000 furnished by Serbia and 120,000 provided by Greece. Bulgaria's reward, however, was completely incommensurate with its military contribution. Whereas Serbia's national territory and population increased by 82% and 55%, respectively, and Greece's grew by 68% and 67%, Bulgaria's gains enlarged its territories by 29% and its population by a mere 3%. See Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars (Washington, D. C., 1914), p. 418; Leiften Stavrionos, The Balkans since 1453 (New York, 1958), p. 540; and Bela K. Kiraly and Dimitrije Djordjevic, eds., East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars (Boulder, Colorado, 1987), passim.
Bulgaria to gain access to the Aegean. However, this gain could in no way compensate for Bulgaria's inability to secure its share of Macedonia. Serbian and Greek unwillingness to observe pre-war agreements concerning the division of that region were resented by the Bulgarians all the more because of the fact that Macedonia had been at the heart of Bulgaria's territorial ambitions since the Congress of Berlin had ruled against its inclusion in the Bulgarian principality created after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 – 1877. Consequently, endeavors to acquire the area had formed a pivotal element of Bulgarian foreign policy ever since. However, Bulgarian grievances were by no means limited to the issue of Macedonia. In addition, the Treaty of Bucharest stipulated that Bulgaria cede the southern Dobruja – Bulgaria’s most productive agricultural region – to Romania.

Bulgaria’s neighbors, though victorious and intent on preventing any attempts to revise the Treaty of Bucharest to Bulgaria's advantage, also found it difficult to express unreserved contentment with the peace settlement. The territorial settlement that terminated the Second Balkan War left Greece in possession of Macedonia south of the

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12 The Congress of Berlin revised the Treaty of San Stefano (March 1878) that terminated the Russo-Ottoman War. Among the most important provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano was the creation of a large Bulgarian state that extended from the Danube in the north to the Aegean in the south, and from Thrace and the Black Sea in the east to Skopje and Lake Ohrid in the west. The territorial extent of this “Big Bulgaria” ensured that the new state would play a leading role in the Balkan Peninsula. Fearing that a large Bulgarian state would allow Russia to dominate the region, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary pressured St. Petersburg to agree to a modification of the San Stefano agreement. The resultant revisions, decided upon during a meeting of the representatives of the Great Powers at Berlin in June 1878 drastically reduced the territorial extent of Bulgaria to the area between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains (but including Sofia). Eastern Rumelia, the area south of the Balkan range, became a semi-autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire and was eventually annexed by Bulgaria in 1908. Most importantly, however, Bulgaria was deprived of Macedonia, which reverted to the Sublime Porte. As a result, Macedonia became the primary focus of Bulgarian foreign policy and irredentist aspirations after 1878. See Stavrianos, The Balkans, pp. 408 – 412. William N. Medlicott, The Congress of Berlin and After: A Diplomatic History of the Near Eastern Settlement, 1878 – 1880 (Hamden, Connecticut, 1963).


14 Romania became interested in the southern Dobruja during the First Balkan War when it demanded the region as compensation for Bulgaria’s territorial acquisitions elsewhere. As could be expected, the Bulgarians refused to consider the Romanian demand. In the latter stages of the Second Balkan War, Romania took advantage of the Bulgarian army’s preoccupation with Greek, Serbian and Ottoman forces to intervene in the latter stages of the Second Balkan War and simply took possession of the disputed territory by force. See R. W. Seton-Watson, A History of the Roumanians: From Roman Times to the Completion of Unity (Cambridge, 1934), pp. 457 – 458; Albertini, Vol. I, pp. 460 – 461; and Keith Hitchins, Rumania: 1866 – 1947 (Oxford, 1994), pp. 151 – 153.
line extending approximately from Lake Ohrid through Doiran, the Rupel Pass and then along the Nestos River to the Aegean. This territory included the cities of Salonika, Seres, Drama and Kavalla, and their hinterlands to a distance of up to 60 – 80 kilometers north of the coast. In addition, Greece gained the southern half of Epirus, and some of the Aegean Islands. On the surface, these acquisitions allowed Greece to make significant advances toward the realization of the “Great Idea” – the concept that had served as the ideological guiding post of Greek foreign policy since the 1840s. Nonetheless, the decision of the Great Powers to create an independent Albanian state, combined with Italy’s determination to maintain its hold over the Dodecanese Islands it had occupied during its own war with the Ottoman Empire in 1911 – 1912, deprived Greece of an even larger share of Ottoman territory. For the time being, the vision of a Greece stretching over “two continents and five seas” remained nothing more than an ideal. At the end of the Balkan Wars, five million Greeks were still living outside of the Kingdom in unredeemed territories such as Northern Epirus, Asia Minor, Cyprus and Thrace. The Great Powers’ resolve to minimize the damage inflicted by the Balkan Wars on Europe’s delicate diplomatic balance also frustrated the ambitions of Serbia. On the surface, that country’s leaders had few grounds for dissatisfaction with the division of the spoils in 1913. The Serbian state had, after all, nearly doubled in geographical size while

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16 The “Great Idea” was first articulated in 1844 by Ioannis Kolettis, one of the most distinguished Greek statesmen of the 19th century. The ideological underpinnings of the “Great Idea” emphasized the territorial expansion of the modern Greek state into regions historically associated with Hellenic civilization. In practical terms, this concept implied that the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Greece would revolve around attempts to acquire Thessaly, Macedonia, Epirus, Thrace, the Aegean Islands, Crete, Cyprus, the Ionian coast of Asia Minor, and the territory located between the Balkan and the Rhodope Mountains. The capital of this enlarged Greek state was to be located at Constantinople once it had been wrested back from the Ottomans. Greece never possessed the resources necessary for the realization of the “Great Idea,” but the concept itself – reflective of the classical as well as the Byzantine heritage of the Greek state – retained a powerful hold on the minds of Greek statesmen and intellectuals until the early 1920s when it was finally discredited after the disastrous conclusion of Greece’s Anatolian venture. See Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, pp. 77 – 78; and Richard Clogg, A Concise History of Greece (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 47 – 48.

its population grew from 2.9 million to 4.4 million. As already mentioned, however, the Balkan Wars did not satisfy Serbia’s territorial ambitions completely. Not only was Serbia unable to gain access to the Adriatic, but the settlement of 1913 fell short of the ambitions that Serbia’s ruling Radical Party entertained with regards to Habsburg territory and the Serbs living in it, particularly Bosnia-Hercegovina. These aspirations were only the latest manifestation of a program of territorial expansion whose ideological origins, like those of the “Great Idea,” were rooted in the 1840s. For the time being, however, the goal of unifying all Serbs under the scepter of the Karadjordjevic dynasty remained just as elusive as its Greek counterpart.

The wars of 1912 – 1913 did equally little to further the national aspirations of Romania, the third beneficiary of the Treaty of Bucharest. Romania did acquire the southern Dobruja at Bulgaria’s expense, but this prize could in no way reduce the designs that nationalist circles within Romania entertained toward Transylvania and Bessarabia; regions which formed integral parts of Austria-Hungary and Russia, respectively. The prospect of acquiring those territories, however, appeared remote in light of Romania’s practical inability to challenge effectively its Great Power neighbors. Particularly awkward was Romania’s relationship with the Dual Monarchy, to which Bucharest was

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20 The origins of Serbian irredentism are to be found in the *Načertanije*, a document drafted in 1844 by Ilija Garasanin, Serbia’s foreign minister at the time. Although its importance cannot be overestimated, the document provided a blueprint for the expansionist policies of subsequent Serbian governments. The *Načertanije* called for the unification of all the territories inhabited by Serbian and Orthodox populations into state whose extent would correspond roughly to that of the medieval Serbian empire of the Czar Dušan. The fulfillment of this aim required the acquisition of Bosnia-Hercegovina, Montenegro, the Banat, Srem, Bačka and northern Albania with an outlet to the Adriatic. Though it underwent a number of modifications, this blueprint for territorial expansion remained the core component of Serbian irredentism until the First World War, when the concept of a “Greater Serbia” began to merge with the notion of South Slav unity. Even then, however, Serbian leaders continued to envision Serbia as the dominant component in any South Slav state. See Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, p. 63; and David MacKenzie, “Serbia as Piedmont and the Yugoslav Idea, 1804 – 1914,” *East European Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 2 (June 1994), pp. 153 – 182.

bound by ties of a secret alliance and which made an aggressive stance on the Transylvanian issue virtually impossible.22

So long as the Great Powers remained at peace, any attempt by the Balkan states to unilaterally finalize their national aspirations was bound to fail. Attempts to attract the patronage of a Great Power in order to facilitate the attainment of the goal of national unity were not an appealing option, as “client states” were compelled to adjust their own aims to those of their “patron.” In the 19th century, the Great Powers’ constant concern with upholding the European balance of power led them to oppose Balkan irredentism on the grounds that the national ambitions of the Balkan states, if permitted to run their course, would precipitate the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and destabilize South-Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.23 By the late 19th century, however, the last vestiges of the “Concert of Europe” had vanished. It was this development that permitted Greece to acquire Thessaly and Crete from the Ottomans in the thirty-year period between 1881 and 1908.24

Nevertheless, the nature of the relationship between “client states” and “patron states” did not undergo significant changes. Those Balkan states that followed a Great

22 Ibid., p. 442. Romania’s irredentist aspirations with regards to Transylvania were made even more complicated by the family ties that bound the Romanian and German ruling houses. King Charles I of Romania was a member of the Siegmaringen branch of the Hohenzollern family, and felt an emotional attachment to the Central Powers and their cause. This state of affairs made it even less likely that Romania would be able to fulfill its territorial ambitions in any foreseeable future. See Glenn Torrey, “Irredentism and Diplomacy: The Central Powers and Romania, August – November 1914,” in Glenn Torrey, ed., Romania and World War I (Iași, 1998), 30 – 31.


24 Thessaly was awarded to Greece at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, although the final delineation of the new Greco-Ottoman frontier did not take place until 1882. The annexation of Thessaly was made possible in large measure by Britain’s desire to cultivate good relations with Greece in an effort to counterbalance the dissemination of Austro-Hungarian and Russian influence in the Balkans and the establishment of German influence in the Ottoman Empire. As far as Crete was concerned, its inhabitants had been agitating for an ensis (union) with Greece throughout the 19th century, with their demands occasionally flaring up into open revolt against the Ottoman administration. The Greek government’s support for one such revolt in May 1896 led to a war with the Ottoman Empire in which Greece suffered a humiliating defeat. Nevertheless, under the pressure of the Great Powers, the Ottomans agreed to grant to Crete the status of an autonomous province, with Prince George of Greece, the second son of King George I, as governor. Greece finally annexed Crete in 1912, according to the stipulations of the Treaty of London that ended the First Balkan War. See Couloumbis et al. Foreign Interference in Greek Politics, pp. 29 – 30; Theodore G. Tatsios, The Megali Idea and the Greek-Turkish War of 1897: The Impact of the Cretan Problem on Greek Irredentism, 1866-1897 (New York, 1984), passim.
Power patron not only had to make economic concessions and provide harbor facilities (as was characteristic of Greece’s relationship with Britain), but also were dependent on their patrons for military technology and training. Greece’s role in the Balkan Wars, for example, would have been impossible without the contribution that French military and British naval missions made to the training of the Greek armed forces prior to the conflict. Lastly, the Balkan states continued to conform to their Great Power patrons in the sphere of foreign policy, as was the case with the Greek decision to accept the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese Islands in order to accommodate British interests.

Another alternative open to Balkan statesmen seeking to realize their respective nations’ aspirations was regional co-operation. The viability of this particular option had been demonstrated in the course of the First Balkan War, when four Balkan countries, none of which was strong enough by itself to challenge the Ottoman Empire, combined their military resources toward a common goal. Unfortunately, the subsequent falling-out between the allies showed that the effectiveness of the concept of a Balkan League was conditional upon the existence of a temporary common interest or a common enemy, of a kind that had ceased to exist immediately after the Ottoman Empire had lost all but a tiny fraction of its European provinces in 1913. In effect, Balkan military alliances were "one issue/one war" alliances of convenience. The complex territorial expectations left little room for compromise. The only peacetime allies were Greece and Serbia, since they had no competing territorial interests.

The outbreak of the First World War opened up yet another avenue of approach Balkan statesmen could utilize to fulfill their national agendas. This method involved the exploitation of the belligerents' eagerness to secure the Balkan states' participation in the conflict. What made this method possible was the fact that with the exception of Serbia, no other Balkan state was immediately pulled into the war. In spite of the varying degrees of diplomatic and economic influence exercised by the Great Powers in most Balkan nations, the states of the region were able to remain outside of the alliance networks whose activation had transformed a limited conflict between Serbia and the Dual Monarchy into a general European war. This allowed the uncommitted Balkan states the

freedom to remain neutral and observe the course of the war until it had become clear which side would gain the upper hand. In turn, such a stance would theoretically permit for the extraction of maximum gains with the minimum of commitment to either side. The general attitude outlined above, as well as the degree to which the states of South-Eastern Europe were able to cling to non-alignment, is illustrated by the diplomatic positions adopted by the Balkan neutrals at the outbreak of the war.

In the initial stages of the war, it was the Central Powers that assumed the initiative in the struggle to secure the allegiance of the Balkan states. As early as 4 August 1914, Wilhelm II appealed to his brother-in-law, King Constantine I of Greece to range his country alongside Germany and Austria-Hungary "in the struggle against Slavism." Constantine, though personally sympathetic to Germany and willing to acknowledge the debt he owed to the Emperor in exchange for Germany's support of Greece at the Treaty of Bucharest, prudently declined Wilhelm's offer. He cited his country's vulnerability to British and French sea power as the main cause of his unwillingness to side himself with the Central Powers. Privately, Constantine was convinced that Greek participation in a war between the Great Powers could be justified only if the rewards for intervention were so great as to be impossible to refuse.

Given Greece's isolated geographic position, it is rather difficult to see how its intervention in the war on the side of the Central Powers would have enhanced its strategic situation. For this reason, it is probably safe to assume than neither Berlin nor Vienna were too concerned with Constantine's rebuff. However, the failure to secure Romania's adhesion to the Central Powers was, without a doubt, a serious setback to Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Officially, Romania was an ally of the Central Powers, bound to them by a treaty originally concluded in 1883 and repeatedly renewed since then. The country's strategic


27 Ibid., p. 639.


importance to the Central Powers was critical. In the eyes of German and Austro-Hungarian military planners, Romania's immediate entry into a hypothetical war with Russia was a crucial requisite for the success of the Central Powers' entire eastern strategy. If Romania were to fulfill its treaty obligations, the Central Powers' total military strength would be reinforced by five army corps deployed within striking distance of the Ukraine and Odessa. More importantly, these formations were expected to tie down as many as three Russian armies, thus diverting a significant proportion of the Russian army's combat power from more important fronts in Galicia, Russian Poland and East Prussia. Lastly, Romania's willingness to intervene in the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary would block direct Russian access to its Balkan ally, Serbia.

Conversely, if Romanian leaders adopted either a neutral or outwardly hostile stance toward the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary's strategic outlook in the East would worsen considerably. Thus, in a memorandum written in May 1914, General Helmuth von Moltke the Younger, the Chief of the German General Staff, plainly informed Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg that Romania's defection from the Central Powers' camp would complicate Austria-Hungary's strategic situation in the Balkans to such an extent that Germany would no longer be able to rely on its Habsburg ally to launch an offensive into Russia.

Moltke's views were shared, and to a large degree influenced by the opinions of his Austro-Hungarian counterpart, General Franz Conrad von Hötzenzendorf. The latter was particularly mistrustful of Romania, and suspicious of the support the Romanians gave to Serbia during the Second Balkan War. Conrad's assessment of the strategic problem

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31 Gordon A. Tunstall, Planning for War Against Russia and Serbia, passim., esp. ch. 4 and 5.
33 To distinguish him from his more famous, and altogether more competent uncle Helmuth von Moltke the Elder (1800 - 1891) who, as Chief of the Prussian (later German) General Staff between 1858 and 1888 laid the foundations for Prussia's victories over Denmark (1864), Austria (1866) and France (1870 – 1871).
posed by Romania was encapsulated in the memorandum he submitted to the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister in July 1914, shortly before the fateful 7 July meeting of the Dual Monarchy's joint cabinet.\textsuperscript{35} No evidence exists to suggest that Conrad's memorandum was discussed during the meeting, or that Conrad himself alluded to the Romanian problem.\textsuperscript{36} Nevertheless, the document itself is an effective summary of the complications that Romania's refusal to honor its treaty could cause for the Central Powers.

According to Conrad, Romanian neutrality in a war with Russia would reduce the Central Powers' order of battle by as many as twenty divisions, or 400,000 troops. Such a diminution of combat strength would have had the potential to completely undermine the fundamental assumptions upon which the Central Powers' eastern strategy was based. Since the war plans of the Central Powers emphasized the deployment of the majority of the German army's combat strength against France in the opening stages of the conflict, the burden of the struggle with Russia in the first few weeks of the war would inevitably have to be borne by Austro-Hungarian forces.\textsuperscript{37} In light of its numerical inferiority in comparison to its Russian counterpart, the Austro-Hungarian army would hardly be able to fulfill its role without Romanian military support.\textsuperscript{38}

As serious as such a contingency would have been, its repercussions would have paled in comparison with the consequences of Romania's outward defection of the Central Powers and its intervention on the side of the Entente. To begin with, such a contingency would effectively double the loss of manpower alluded to above.\textsuperscript{39} Even more critically, it would expose Hungary to invasion by way of the mountain passes that traversed the Carpathians and the Transylvanian Alps which ran along the Romanian-

\textsuperscript{35} It was in the course of this meeting that the Austro-Hungarian leadership approved the dispatch of a politically unacceptable ultimatum to Serbia in the wake of the Sarajevo assassination.

\textsuperscript{36} Ritter, \textit{The Sword and the Scepter}, Vol. III, p.239.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 238.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. p. 238 – 239.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 238.
Hungarian border.\textsuperscript{40} Although these passes afforded a convenient invasion route into Hungary via Romania, they had never been fortified on account of the Austro-Hungarian government's conviction that Romania could be regarded as a reliable ally.\textsuperscript{41}

The doubts expressed by senior German and Austro-Hungarian military leaders regarding Romania’s commitment to the Central Powers were reflective of sentiments harbored by their civilian counterparts as well. By 1914 both Vienna and Berlin were increasingly calling into question Romania's readiness to fulfill the stipulations of the treaty. Romania's only incentive for concluding the pact in the first place was its fear of Russia; a fear grounded in the events that following the Congress of Berlin when Russia “repaid” for Romania’s aid during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 – 1878 by annexing Romanian Bessarabia.\textsuperscript{42} With the passage of time, Romania's mistrust of Russia gradually abated, to be replaced by a corresponding increase in the tensions between Romania and the Dual Monarchy. At the heart of the growing estrangement between the allies was the status of Romanians in Transylvania. The intense policies of Magyarization to which the Hungarian government subjected its Romanian subjects were a constant source of friction between the two countries.\textsuperscript{43}

In addition, the Romanians resented what they regarded as Austria-Hungary's failure to render unqualified support to Romania's claims against Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars.\textsuperscript{44} Austria-Hungary's attempts to improve its relations with Bulgaria in an effort to create a Balkan counterweight to Serbia acted as yet another source of irritation to Romanian leaders. Having only recently annexed the southern Dobruja, the Romanians feared and mistrusted Bulgaria to the point of resisting all of the Dual Monarchy's attempts to reconcile the two Balkan neighbors or strengthen Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{40} Seton-Watson, \textit{A History}, p. 469.


\textsuperscript{42} Hitchins, \textit{Rumania}, pp. 53, 141 – 142.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 148.

\textsuperscript{44} Barclay to Grey, Annual Report on Roumania for the year 1913, 11 March 1914, Doc. 40, #10421(i), \textit{BDFA}, Part I, Series F, Vol. 16, p. 175.

Austro-Hungarian and German political and military leaders were well aware that Romania's growing disenchantment with its alliance partners was accompanied by a corresponding improvement in relations between Bucharest and the Entente, particularly Russia. By October 1913, Ottokar von Czernin, the special envoy dispatched to Romania by Leopold von Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister in an effort to patch the Dual Monarchy relations with its Balkan ally, concluded that things had deteriorated so badly that the alliance was now nothing more than a "worthless piece of paper." His views were corroborated less than a year later, when Nicholas II of Russia, accompanied by his foreign minister Sergei Sazonov, made a highly publicized and controversial visit to Romania in June 1914, thus demonstrating the new spirit of diplomatic reconciliation between the two countries.

Romania's attempts to distance itself from its former allies were not necessarily synonymous with the adoption of an exclusively pro-Entente stance. Admittedly, educated opinion in Romania favored the cause of the Entente, while the Francophile sentiment of Ion Brătianu the Romanian Prime Minister left little doubt as to where the preferences of his Liberal government lay. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that Bucharest was still distrustful of Russia, dismissive of the western powers as being too far off to be able to render any effective aid to Romania in the event of that country's intervention in the war, and fearful of the possibility of a Bulgarian attack.

Romania's estrangement from the Central Powers had progressed so far by the summer of 1914 that the country's automatic entry into the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary could by no means be assured. As late as 24 July, King Charles I of Romania informed Czernin that he would do everything he could to ensure that Romania would fulfill the stipulations of the treaty. However, the king's loyalty to the Central

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46 Ibid., p. 447.


48 Seton-Watson, A History, p. 474. The Romanians also feared that their entry into the war might provoke an attack by Bulgaria. See Barclay to Grey, telegram, 2 Oct. 1914, Doc. 219, # 10788/402, B DFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 1, p. 106.

49 Hitchins, p. 251.
Powers—based to a great extent on the monarch’s family ties to the German imperial house—was shared by few members of Romania’s ruling elite. During the meeting of the Romanian Crown Council on 3 August 1914, convinced that Germany and Austria-Hungary would win the war, Charles expressed himself in favor of honoring Romania’s alliance obligations and proposed an immediate intervention on the side of the Central Powers. Only the leader of the Romanian opposition backed the king. The remainder of the political notables who made up the council endorsed the policy proposed by Brătianu. The Prime Minister argued that since Austria-Hungary had not consulted Romania prior to dispatching its ultimatum to Serbia, the treaty had become void and had released Romania from its obligations. The best policy, Brătianu maintained, was the adoption of armed neutrality. Though embittered and disappointed, Charles promised to abide by the ultimate decision of the council to demonstrate his respect for Romania’s constitution.50

As had been the case with Greece, the political and military leaders of the Central Powers discovered that their ability to exercise any degree of influence within a Balkan state was not enough to guarantee its participation in the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary.51

The Central Powers’ attempts to attract Bulgaria to their side represented little more than a continuation of this pattern. From the perspective of Germany and Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria’s entry into the war would facilitate the defeat of Serbia and allow the Austro-Hungarian high command to mass its forces in Galicia. Though Moltke and Conrad were at odds regarding the relative importance of the Balkan theatre of operations, both agreed that Bulgaria’s participation in the war would be instrumental for the purpose of defeating Serbia. Writing to his Austrian counterpart on 5 August 1914,

50 Accounts of the meeting may be found in Seton-Watson, A History, pp. 476–477, and Albertini, Vol. III, pp. 572–575.

51 The Romanian government took another step away from its alliance with the Central Powers on 1 October 1914, when it signed a secret treaty with Russia. According to the provisions of the treaty, Russia recognized Romania’s territorial claims against Austria-Hungary, and promised that after the war, Romania would receive Transylvania and those parts of the Bukovina where Romanians made up a majority of the population. In return, Romania was to observe a “benevolent” neutrality toward Russia. In practical terms, this meant that the Romanians were to allow Russian supplies to cross Romanian territory to Serbia, while denying similar transit rights to the supplies the Germans were attempting to send to the Ottoman Empire. See Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, pp. 291–292.
Moltke counseled Conrad to “Concentrate your entire strength against Russia...Let the Bulgarians loose against Serbia and let the pack kill one another off. Now there can be but one objective: Russia!”

Conrad's reply implicitly challenged Möltke's insistence that the struggle against Russia should be accorded priority over operations in the Balkans. However, it also showed that the Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff shared his German colleague's views regarding the importance of securing Bulgarian military co-operation against Serbia:

...the situation calls for a successful stroke in the Balkans as soon as possible. Success there would be assured if Bulgaria would immediately take the field against Serbia. We are using all levers to induce Bulgaria to do so, but she hesitates...She quite overlooks the consideration that by immediate joint action with us she could rid herself of the Serbs for all time. 53

The last two sentences of Conrad's message to Moltke also afford a glimpse of the frustrations that Austro-Hungarian diplomats experienced in their endeavors assure that the Bulgarian army fulfilled the role that both Conrad and Moltke had envisioned for it. On the surface, there were few reasons why Bulgaria's adhesion to the Central Powers should present so many difficulties. In the wake of the Second Balkan War, Bulgaria had found itself diplomatically isolated after a series of blunders committed by the country's leaders cost Bulgaria the support of its traditional Great Powers protector: Russia. 54 To compensate for the loss of Russian patronage, Bulgarian leaders attempted to reorientate their foreign policy toward Austria-Hungary which shared Bulgaria's enmity for Serbia.

Domestically, this shift in diplomatic orientation was reflected in the replacement of Stoyan Danev's discredited Russophile cabinet by Vasil Radoslavov's ostensibly pro-Austrian government in late July 1913. 55 Moreover, in July 1914, Bulgaria had contracted a German loan in order to repay old loans, stabilize the country's economy following the


53 Ibid.


55 Macartney, p. 34.
Balkan wars and finance the integration of newly acquired territories into the Bulgarian economy. In accordance with the terms of the loan, Germany was granted control over some of the most important sectors of the Bulgarian economy. Given these burdensome economic stipulations, it would probably have been only natural to assume that Germany's newly established economic influence over Bulgaria would be sufficient to ensure the country's unquestioned, albeit unofficial, allegiance to the Central Powers in the event of a general European conflict. Nevertheless, neither the pro-Austrian leanings of the new Bulgarian government, nor Bulgaria's new economic relationship with Germany were sufficient to guarantee that Bulgaria would immediately respond to the Central Powers' calls for intervention once the war had begun. As far as the German loan was concerned, it carried no political terms at all. Hence, the increase in German economic interest in Bulgaria was not synonymous with a corresponding increase of German diplomatic influence.

The Central Powers found it equally difficult to convert the Russophobe stance of Prime Minister Vasil Radoslavov's cabinet into tangible diplomatic capital. In the months leading up to the war, the Radoslavov ministry had made two offers of alliance to Austria-Hungary. On both occasions, in July 1913 and February 1914, the Bulgarian alliance overtures were rebuffed. Several major obstacles barred the way to an Austro-Bulgarian understanding prior to 1914. The first of these was the opposition of Germany to any such scheme. The Emperor Wilhelm II believed that an alliance between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria would complicate his designs for reconciliation between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, and would alienate Romania, whose allegiance to the Central Powers was regarded as absolutely crucial by the ruling elites of Germany and the Dual Monarchy. Consequently, Austro-Hungarian and German statesmen made it clear to


57 Hall, p. 269.


59 Macartney, p. 37.

Bulgaria that an Austro-Bulgarian detente was conditional on a corresponding improvement of relations between Bulgaria and Romania.  

Unfortunately for Bulgaria, in 1913 and 1914, the possibility of reconciliation with its northern neighbor was slim at best. In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, the Romanians distrusted Bulgaria.  

For their own part, the Bulgarians had little inclination to resign themselves to the finality of the Treaty of Bucharest by reaching an understanding with a country which had "stabb[ed] them in the back" during the Second Balkan War.  

Overall, the Austrian insistence on a Bulgarian-Romanian rapprochement must only have increased the Bulgarians' opinion of the Habsburg monarchy as an unreliable ally - a sentiment created, in large part, by what the Bulgarians regarded as the Austro-Hungarian failure to obtain a revision of the Treaty of Bucharest in their favor.  

An equally significant reason for the Central Powers' inability to secure Bulgarian intervention at the start of the war was the personal animosity that existed between King Ferdinand of Bulgaria and the leading members of the Austro-Hungarian and German ruling houses. While the significance of this factor cannot be overestimated, Ferdinand's references to Francis Joseph as an "idiot" and an "old dotard," as well as the personal dislike he harbored toward Francis Ferdinand and Wilhelm II could hardly have improved the prospects for a successful reorientation of Bulgaria's foreign policy toward the Central Powers or its immediate entry into the conflict on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary.  

The antipathy toward the Central Powers was not confined to the Bulgarian court or government. Although the intensity pro-Russian feelings of Bulgaria's educated opinion had dampened after the Balkan Wars, it was still potent in the summer of 1914.  

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61 Constant, Foxy Ferdinand, pp. 290 – 291.  
63 Ibid.; Constant, p. 292.  
65 Constant, pp. 290, 292.  
66 See Crampton, pp. 435, 437.
Simultaneously, the Bulgarian public regarded the Central Powers with suspicion. Germany was still unpopular on account of the diplomatic support it offered to the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars. Germany was still unpopular on account of the diplomatic support it offered to the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars. Austria-Hungary was also mistrusted for reasons alluded to above. Radoslavov himself had few doubts as to where the sympathies of his constituents lay. "If we stand on the side of the Triple Alliance against Russia," he remarked to one of his ministers, "the people will stone us." On a more immediate level, the actual course of military events in the first few weeks of the war also favored Bulgarian neutrality. To Radoslavov, the overall strategic situation appeared uncertain. In the first month of the war, the Austro-Hungarian army suffered an unexpected defeat at the hands of the Serbs, while the Russians experienced the debacle at the Battle of Tannenberg. The best course Bulgaria could follow was to remain neutral and try to discern which of the two warring alliances could more effectively satisfy Bulgaria's main aim - the revision of the stipulations of the Treaty of Bucharest, especially as it applied to Macedonia - at least as neither side was able to obtain a clear advantage in the struggle.

Even the Ottoman Empire, the only Balkan neutral to join the Central Powers in 1914, did so only grudgingly. The extensive advantages which Ottoman participation in the war on the side of the Central Powers are summarized most effectively by Sazonov:

The possibility of Turkey siding with the Central Powers was particularly dangerous to Russia, for in that case the Black Sea would be open to the enemy's fleet, and a considerable part of our army needed on the [Eastern] front would have to be retained on the Turkish frontier [i.e. in the Caucasus - S. L], and, the Black Sea being closed, we should be cut off from direct communication with our allies and be paralyzed economically, having nothing but the distant and in every way inconvenient port of Archangel for an outlet.


68 As quoted in Hall, Bulgaria's Road, p. 292.

69 Ibid., p. 291.

70 Ibid.

The German-Ottoman treaty of alliance was signed on 2 August 1914, but its implementation was delayed by three months. The treaty was unpopular with many members of the Committee of Union and Progress that governed the Empire, who preferred an alliance with the Entente. Even those members of the Ottoman ruling elite who supported the alliance, including the Minister of War Enver Pasha, made their entry into the war conditional upon Germany's willingness and ability to pressure Bulgaria and Greece into conceding to the Ottoman Empire portions of Thrace and some of the Aegean Islands. It was not until late October that the Ottoman government became willing to openly side the Empire with the Central Powers.

In contrast to the Central Powers' diplomatic endeavors in South-Eastern Europe in the early stages of the war, the Entente's efforts were initially directed at securing the Balkan states' benevolent neutrality rather than belligerence. The Allies at first actually went as far as to chill the pro-Entente ardor of Eleftherios Venizelos, the Greek prime minister who, as early as 18 August 1914, informed Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary that Greece was ready enter the war on the side of the Entente. Nevertheless, Grey felt compelled to decline Venizelos' offer. In the eyes of the Foreign Secretary, Greece's intervention had the potential to provoke Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire to side immediately with the Central Powers. Moreover, Grey felt that whatever help the Greek army could have offered to the Entente would have been of negligible value so far from the principal fronts of the struggle. Most importantly, however, Grey feared that the acceptance of Venizelos' offer might cause offence to Russia.

72 Trumpener, Germany and the Ottoman Empire, pp. 19 – 20. For an account of the events leading up to the conclusion of the Ottoman-German alliance, see Albertini, Vol. III, pp. 605 – 617.

73 Palmer, Decline and Fall, p. 224.

74 An examination of the Ottoman Empire's entry into the war may be found in Trumpener, pp. 21 – 61.

75 Dakin, p. 203.

76 For this reason, Grey preferred to see all Balkan states to enter the war in unison, rather than separately. See Grey to Bax-Ironsde, telegram, 13 Aug. 1914, Doc. 47, #10670/476, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 1, pp. 21 – 22.

For the Entente as well as for the Central Powers, the strategic deadlock that settled over the war's principal fronts by late 1914 transformed the Balkans into the focal point of diplomatic activity. Both alliance systems had been making diplomatic overtures to states in the region since the beginning of the war. However, the conviction that the conflict would be of short duration, and that its ultimate outcome would be decided on battlefields in France and in Russia implied that endeavors to secure the sympathy of Balkan countries would enjoy only a limited priority in the minds of the political and military leaders of both warring alliances.

For the first few months of the conflict, such efforts were intended to fulfill relatively limited goals. For example, the notion of reviving the Balkan League, or creating a Balkan confederation as advocated by a number of British leaders including Foreign Secretary Edward Grey and Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George, was to facilitate the fulfillment of a small number of specific goals. These included preventing the diffusion of the war into South-Eastern Europe, discouraging the Ottoman Empire from intervening in the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and forestalling a Bulgarian intervention against Serbia. Similar efforts initiated by the Central Powers in an attempt to sway select Balkan states to their side also appear to have been motivated by strictly limited aims. The most important of these was Germany and Austria-Hungary's initially unsuccessful search for assistance against Serbia whose early defeat would allow the AOK (Armee Oberkommando; the Austro-Hungarian Army High Command) to focus its attention and resources on the more important Russian front.

The deadlock in the West, and the resultant proposals advanced by several members of the War Council for the activation of an alternative theatre of operations, heightened British interest in the Balkans. Although the proponents of a Balkan offensive recognized that the creation of a pro-Entente Balkan alliance would require the reconciliation of the conflicting territorial ambitions of the Balkan states, they completely underestimated the difficulties that the attainment of this goal would entail.

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In large measure, this state of affairs could be attributed to the general scarcity of sources British leaders could access to obtain reliable information pertaining to the Balkans. In 1914, in spite of the fact that South-Eastern Europe at had been repeatedly at the forefront of the international agenda since the 1870s, the number of British diplomatic posts in all of the Balkan states put together was smaller than those maintained by the Foreign Office in Chile alone. In these circumstances, British leaders proved responsive to the advice proffered by independent "experts" and special interest groups with no official standing in the hierarchy of the government.

In 1914, one of the most influential of such groups was the so-called "Balkan Committee." Originally formed in the early 1900s for the purpose of pressuring the British government to react to the Ottoman maladministration of Macedonia. In the wake of the Balkan Wars, the Committee assumed a decidedly pro-Bulgarian character, with the majority of its leading members strongly opposed to the territorial provisions of the Treaty of Bucharest. One of the most prominent members of the Balkan Committee was the Bulgarophile Noel Buxton, a Liberal member of Parliament who had traveled extensively in South-Eastern Europe since 1899. As early as August 1914, acting with the support of Lloyd George and Churchill, but without any official backing from the Foreign Office, Buxton left for the Balkans once again, hoping that his visit would sway Balkan leaders in favor of the Entente.

Buxton returned to London by January 1915. The results of his mission were highly encouraging to Lloyd George, who accepted Buxton's assertion that a Balkan

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80 David French, British Strategy and War Aims, p. 31.


83 Andre Gerolymatos, "Lloyd George and Eleftherios Venizelos, 1912 – 1917," Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora Vol. 15, No. 3 (1988), p. 37. Edward Grey, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, was reluctant to endorse Buxton's mission because he did not appreciate having an amateur interfere in matters that were the proper prerogative of the Foreign Office. Prime Minister Asquith, who also had reasons to be critical of Buxton's judgement. While visiting Sofia in 1912, the Bulgarophile M. P. took it upon himself to discuss with the German minister to Bulgaria a plan for the division of the Ottoman Empire, prompting Asquith to formulate the opinion that Buxton was "an amiable nincompoop." Lastly, both Grey and Asquith feared that Buxton's Bulgarophilia might seriously damage Britain's relationship with Greece and Serbia. See Robbins, "British Policy," p. 567.
alliance was feasible provided that Bulgaria's neighbors were willing to satisfy its unfulfilled territorial ambitions in exchange for compensation with Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian territory. Buxton's optimistic predictions that a lasting territorial settlement in the Balkans lay within the realm of possibility also made a positive impression on Asquith.

Buxton was not, by any means, the first to propose a formula for territorial redistribution in South-Eastern Europe with a view to constructing a Balkan alliance. Venizelos had advanced a similar proposal only a few days after the outbreak of the war. Since then, Entente diplomats had been making repeated attempts to the same effect. However, it is plausible to assume that his favorable reports concerning the diplomatic conditions in South-Eastern Europe made an important contribution toward convincing British leaders to persist in the belief that the rivalries of the Balkan states could be reconciled by means of territorial exchanges, in addition, it may have played a significant part in the War Council's eventual decision to endorse major military ventures in the region. For much of 1915, this conviction would remain at the center of Britain's diplomatic endeavors in South-Eastern, while its ultimate failure to pass the test of reality was bound to have dire consequences for Britain's Balkan strategy.

64 Gerolymatos, "Lloyd George and Venizelos," p. 42.


Chapter Three

THE DARDANELLES, GALLIPOLI, AND THE FALL OF SERBIA, 1915

In the course of several meetings held in early January 1915, the War Council deliberated the merits of the proposals submitted by Churchill, Lloyd George and Hankey. By now, Churchill had become enthused about the prospect of forcing the Dardanelles defenses by means of a naval assault that would open the way to Istanbul and precipitate the collapse of the Ottoman war effort. The First Lord's eloquent presentation of the advantages offered by this particular project were sufficiently impressive to convince the War Council on 13 January to sanction the preparations for a naval effort against the Straits. Churchill's Dardanelles plan not only promised to secure all the advantages offered by Lloyd George and Hankey's designs, but also appeared to provide the means by which Britain might respond to the appeal, made on 2 January by Grand Duke Nicholas, the Russian Commander-in-Chief, for a diversion that would ease Ottoman pressure on Russian forces in the Caucasus.¹

On 19 February, the Royal Navy's Aegean Squadron commenced the bombardment of the outer defenses of the Dardanelles. The initial results of the bombardment were encouraging, with the outer defenses of the Straits – the forts at Sedd-el-Bahr and Kum Kale – falling silent within a matter of days. Nevertheless, the question of supplementing the naval assault with an amphibious descent on the Gallipoli Peninsula increasingly began to preoccupy the War Council. By late March, an expeditionary force consisting of 75,000 British, Australian, New Zealand and French troops had been assembled on Mudros and in Alexandria.²

On 18 March, an initially successful attack was broken off when three Allied battleships sank and one was damaged after straying into an unswept minefield in Eren

¹ For the War Council meeting of 13 January 1915, see Cabinet Papers 22/1, in Gilbert, ed., pp. 407 – 411. The endorsement of this operation was not synonymous with a complete rejection of Lloyd George's schemes for military operations in the western Balkans, and the War Council resolved that if the deadlock on the Western Front did not disappear by spring British troops would be committed to an alternative theatre of operations. See Palmer, The Gardeners, 25; and David Fromkin, A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East: 1914 – 1922 (New York, 1989), pp. 125 – 136.

Keui Bay located well inside the Straits. Vice-Admiral J. M. De Roebeck, commanding the Aegean Squadron, now decided that a renewal of the naval attack could be successful only if combined with landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula. These took place just over a month later, on 25 April. After securing the beachheads, the attackers began to move inland, but their advance soon ground to a halt in face of unexpectedly determined Ottoman resistance. By 8 May, stalemate of the very kind that the operation was intended to circumvent had settled on the peninsula. The transformation of the Gallipoli expedition into a protracted campaign enhanced the importance of securing the military and diplomatic co-operation of the Balkan states as a means bringing it to a successful conclusion. Ironically, the operation that aimed, among other goals, to facilitate the intervention of the Balkan states into the war on the side of the Entente, now depended on the same countries' assistance for success.

British leaders attached a singular importance to the attitude that Bulgaria in particular was likely to adopt toward the projected military and naval initiatives in South-Eastern Europe. The conviction that Bulgaria's diplomatic position had the potential to considerably influence the Entente's fortunes in the Balkans was rooted in an interplay of two factors: an exaggerated estimate of the Bulgarian army's effectiveness, and an accurate recognition of the degree to which the country's geopolitical location endowed with a strategic importance that was out of all proportion to its size or military capabilities.

The Bulgarian army enjoyed the high regard of British military authorities since the early 20th century. However, it was the two Balkan Wars of 1912 – 1913 that contributed to a significant increase in British policy-makers' perceptions of Bulgarian military effectiveness. These assessments were influenced to a great extent by the

5 For the early phases of the Gallipoli Campaign see Aspinall-Oglander, pp. 162 – 365.
7 See for example FO 511/12/42842/12/44, Fitzmaurice, Memorandum, 26 November 1912, Doc. 287; and FO 611/125/13/44, Barclay to Grey, 3 January 1913, Doc. 441(i) in Gooch and Temperley, eds., Vol. IX, pp. 210, 339 – 341.
inaccurate and biased press reports filed by the pro-Bulgarian war correspondents of The Times of London, who accompanied the Bulgarian army in its campaign against the Ottomans in Thrace in the winter of 1912. The performance of Bulgarian troops in that campaign was more than adequate, but their commanders did not succeed in inflicting a decisive defeat upon the Ottomans. As a result, the Ottoman Eastern Army was able to carry out a relatively orderly retreat to the safety of the fortified Chatalja Lines west of Istanbul. At the same time, the Bulgarians' conduct of the campaign was plagued by a variety of problems which revealed that the Bulgarian high command still had quite a lot to learn about such basic rudiments of military operations as staff work, administration, logistics, and command and control.

The Bulgarian army's combat effectiveness was further reduced as a result of the human and material losses sustained in 1912 and 1913. At the beginning of the Great War, it was barely capable of clothing its soldiers, and suffered from shortages of such basic accoutrements of war as greatcoats, boots, rucksacks, water canteens, cartridge belts and blankets. The deficiencies in weaponry were equally serious. Only one-third of the Bulgarian army's 1,200 cannon and howitzers were modern, quick-firing artillery pieces, while the allotment of artillery ammunition was far below the planned 1,000 rounds per gun. Modern rifles were also in short supply. Out of a total of over 520,000 rifles available, only 373,000 were modern Männlicthers. This shortage forced the Bulgarian high command to supply its troops with obsolete or obsolescent weapons. Even more importantly, the losses incurred in the Balkan Wars included hundreds of irreplaceable officers who would be sorely missed in an army that had always been short on commissioned personnel. In spite of the problems outlined above, Britain's wartime

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leaders continued to hold the Bulgarian army in high esteem, and the three memoranda that collectively represented the conceptual foundation of Britain's strategy in the Balkans all made provisions for Bulgaria's active participation in the strategic designs advocated by the authors of the individual documents.  

Bulgaria's location at the heart of the Balkan Peninsula furnished British leaders with another incentive to seek the active co-operation of that state in their strategic designs. The central position Bulgaria occupied in the region endowed the country with a three-fold significance. To begin with, it meant that Bulgaria's diplomatic stance would directly influence the prospects of Greek and Romanian intervention on the side of the Entente. The architects of Britain's Balkan strategy viewed these countries' participation in the war as a vital ingredient of their strategic designs. At the beginning of 1915, the governments of these states were in the hands of leaders with strong pro-Allied leanings. However, it was highly unlikely that either would declare openly in favor of the Entente so long as the possibility existed that such a course of action would provoke a Bulgarian attack.

Second, the peculiarities of its geographical location established a direct link between Bulgaria's diplomatic attitude and the Serbia's continued ability to resist renewed assaults by the Austro-Hungarian army. So long as the Serbs had to contend only with an assault from the north and west, they could conceivably hold their own, as demonstrated in the course of the Austro-Hungarian invasions of Serbia in August and November-December 1914. The spectacular victories won by the Serbs over General Oskar Potiorek's Balkanstreitkräfte in the first weeks of the war were the product of a combination of factors, including the structural and doctrinal flaws prevalent in the Austro-Hungarian army, the high levels of professional competence among Serbia's military planners and leaders, and the dedication and courage of the Serb army's rank and file. It was clear, however, that the Bulgarian government's decision to remain neutral

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also played a significant role in facilitating the Serbs' success. Bulgarian neutrality permitted the Serbian high command to concentrate the majority of its forces in northern Serbia, and leave only small covering detachments to watch the Bulgarian border. In fact, the only tangible threat that confronted the Serbs from the direction of Bulgaria in the first four months of the war consisted of the activities of Bulgarian irregulars who, at the instigation of Radoslavov's government, made frequent forays into the Vardar valley in an attempt to sever the Salonika-Belgrade railway, Serbia's only link to its western allies.  

It was clear, however, that Serbia would probably collapse if an Austro-Hungarian offensive in the north were to be combined with a Bulgarian attack from the east. In order for Serbia to survive, the Allies had to secure Bulgaria's intervention on the side of the Entente, or at the very least, assure Bulgaria's friendly neutrality. The importance that individual members of the Entente accorded to Serbia's participation in the war underscored the urgency of reaching an accommodation with Bulgaria. As long as Serbia continued to fight, thereby tying down substantial numbers of Austro-Hungarian troops in the Balkans, the AOK would not be able to concentrate its forces against the Russians in Galicia. Serbia's continued survival was also a necessary requisite of the Entente's diplomatic efforts to secure the intervention of Romania and Bulgaria. As British leaders realized, allowing Serbia to be overrun by its enemies would impair seriously whatever hopes existed of winning the allegiance of the remaining Balkan neutrals.  

Lastly, Bulgaria's diplomatic orientation was a crucial factor in the context of the Entente's military and naval operations in the region of Istanbul and the Straits. Bulgaria's adoption of a favorable stance toward the Entente might enable the Allies to land troops at the Aegean ports of Dedeagatch and Porto Lagos as a prelude to an advance against the Ottoman capital. Likewise, the Russians might be able to utilize the harbor facilities of Burgos on the Black Sea as a staging base for the attack they proposed to carry out.

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against the defenses of the Bosphorus. Even more importantly, the vaunted Bulgarian army might actually assist the Allies’ efforts by advancing into Ottoman Thrace. In addition, persuading Bulgaria to adhere to the Entente would once and for all sever the transit route between Central Europe and the Ottoman Empire, and effectively prevent the latter from receiving German military supplies and technical personnel that helped to sustain its war effort. Because the Romanians had been adamantly refusing to allow the trans-shipment of German munitions through Romanian territory since the beginning of the war, Bulgaria’s intervention on the side of the Entente could have a potentially disastrous effect on the Ottoman war effort.

In addition to preventing substantial amounts of supplies from reaching Istanbul from Germany, Bulgaria’s adhesion to the Entente would produce an effect that would be particularly welcome to British strategists. The termination of communications between the Ottoman Empire and its allies would put an end to the possibility that Germany might exploit the Ottoman Empire’s status as the world’s leading Muslim state for the purpose of disseminating Pan-Islamic propaganda in Egypt and India in an effort to undermine Britain’s position in the Middle East and Asia. In addition, the physical isolation of the Porte from Germany could conceivably avert the specter of yet another contingency that British military and political leaders had feared for years prior to the war – the possibility that the Ottomans, acting at the instigation and with the assistance of Germany, might launch an attack against Egypt and the Suez Canal, the collective capstones of Britain’s

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18 Neilson, *Strategy and Supply*, p. 44. British fears with this regard were far from groundless. In light of the Ottoman army’s poor performance during the Balkan Wars, the Germans had very little faith in the Ottomans’ capacity to make a significant military contribution to the war against the Entente. Instead, the Germans encouraged the Ottoman government to focus its energies on the dissemination of Pan-Islamic sentiment among Britain’s Muslim subjects. See F. A. K. Yasamee, "Ottoman Empire," in Keith Wilson, ed. *Decisions for War, 1914* (New York, 1995), pp. 235, 245. For an examination of the role of Pan-Islamic ideology in the context of the German war effort in the Great War, see Ulrich Trumpener, "Suez, Baku and Gallipoli: The Military Dimensions of the German-Ottoman Coalition, 1914 – 1918," in Keith Neilson and R. A. Prete, eds., *Coalition Warfare: An Uneasy Accord* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1984), pp. 40 – 41. The most recent study of Germany’s attempts to use Pan-Islamic propaganda to undermine Britain’s imperial position in the Middle East and Asia is Donald M. McKale, *War by Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I* (London, 1998).
imperial strategy." Because this isolation could be enforced only if Bulgaria were to side with the Entente or adopt a benevolently neutral stance, that country's diplomatic allegiance had the potential to seriously influence the future of Britain's position in the Middle East.

The same reasons that made Bulgaria so important to the Allies made its attitude toward the conflict of equal importance to the Central Powers. Efforts designed to induce Bulgaria to intervene on their respective sides were initiated by the diplomats of the two rival alliances almost as soon as the First World War broke out in July 1914. The particular nature of Bulgaria's national policy goals meant Bulgaria would throw its support behind the alliance whose ability to satiate that country's maximum territorial ambition was most convincing. It also implied that Bulgaria's strategic aims could be satisfied only at the cost of inflicting territorial losses on Bulgaria's hostile neighbors – all of whom were either actively participating in the war on the side of the Entente (Serbia) or had pro-Allied leanings (Greece and Romania). In turn, the stipulations upon which Bulgaria's participation in the war were conditional ensured that the Entente would be unable to obtain Bulgaria's military participation. The Allies' inability to do so would have serious repercussions on the fate of their military and diplomatic initiatives in the Balkans. Because Bulgaria's co-operation was a crucial requisite for the success of the strategic designs that the British supreme command proposed to implement in the South-Eastern Europe in 1915, the Entente's failure to prevent Bulgaria from joining the Central Powers was an important contributing factor to the failure of the Allied effort in the Balkans.

For much of the First World War, the conduct and direction of Bulgarian foreign policy were in the hands of two individuals: King Ferdinand of Coburg, the German prince who had ruled Bulgaria since 1886, and Vasil Radoslavov, his German-educated, Austrophile Prime Minister. As King of Bulgaria, Ferdinand exercised extensive constitutional powers. In addition to being the supreme commander of the armed forces, the king had the right to appoint and dismiss cabinet ministers, convene or disband the Sobranje (Bulgaria's National Assembly), and conclude secret treaties and alliances.

19 Gooch, p. 255.
Ferdinand was aware that many other European monarchs did not regard him as their equal and, therefore, attempted to use his tight grip on the conduct of Bulgaria's foreign policy to advance the cause of territorial aggrandizement that would satisfy his desire for personal glory.²⁰

Ferdinand's aims of territorial expansion were fully in keeping with the national policy aims espoused by his first minister. A seasoned and skillful politician, Radoslavov had been involved in politics since 1884, frequently serving as a cabinet minister and eventually attaining the position of the chairman of the Sobranje.²¹ He came to power in July 1913, succeeding Stoyan Danev, whose misplaced reliance on Russian support during the Second Balkan War completely discredited his policies and forced his resignation.²² In formulating the strategic policy aims that would guide Bulgaria's diplomatic and military efforts during the Great War, Radoslavov emphasized the attainment of his country's maximum territorial aspirations. Specifically, these included the fulfillment of the elusive dream of "San Stefano Bulgaria," whose realization had dashed by the Treaty of Berlin of 1878.²³ In this context, Bulgarian national policy stressed the acquisition of the southern Dobruja, Eastern Thrace and Macedonia.²⁴ However, the latter was by far the most important of the Bulgarian irredentas, and the procurement of that region remained the principal focus of Bulgarian foreign policy throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁵

The fulfillment of Bulgaria's maximum territorial ambitions as the price for its involvement in the war represented the principal criterion on whose basis Radoslavov assessed the alliance offers repeatedly submitted to Bulgaria by the Entente and the


²¹ No English-language biography of Radoslavov exists. For a brief sketch of his personal and professional background, see Silberstein, The Troubled Alliance, pp. 131 - 132.

²² For circumstances surrounding Radoslavov's succession of Danev, see Hall, Bulgaria's Road, pp. 240 - 241; and Crampton, pp. 422 - 423.

²³ Hall, Bulgaria's Road, pp. 329 - 335.

²⁴ Crampton, p. 438.

²⁵ Hall, Bulgaria's Road, p. 291.
Central Powers throughout the protracted period of negotiations that lasted from August 1914 to September 1915. As early as 2 August 1914, Radoslavov made it clear to Count Adam Tarnowski, the Austro-Hungarian Minister to Bulgaria, that any alliance which Bulgaria might conclude with the Central Powers would have to be based on Germany and Austria-Hungary's willingness to assist Bulgaria in gaining all the territories to which that country had a "historic and ethnic right," particularly Serbian and Greek Macedonia.26 Radoslavov unambiguously reasserted the terms of Bulgaria's participation in the war in April 1915. "Bulgaria," he stated, "cannot be denied its historical and ethnic rights. It cannot exist without Macedonia, for which it has shed so much blood. Bulgaria wants all of Macedonia, Kavalla, Seres, Drama and also Enos-Midia.27

Radoslavov's decision to stay aloof from the war until September 1915, and ultimately to enter the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, was to a great extent a the result of his dissatisfaction with the inability of either alliance system to explicitly guarantee that Bulgarian intervention would be rewarded with the acquisition of all the territories to which it aspired. In general, Allied offers to Bulgaria fell far short of Radoslavov's expectations and made it clear to the Bulgarian government that the Entente could not be depended upon for assistance in fulfilling Bulgaria's national aspirations.

The Bulgarian government's reactions to some of the offers made by the Entente throughout the period of Bulgarian neutrality collectively represent a case in point. On 24 November 1914, the Entente submitted to Radoslavov a joint note promising Bulgaria "important territorial advantages" if it remained neutral and hinted that these awards might be increased if Bulgaria chose to actively assist the Entente in its fight against the Ottoman Empire or Austria-Hungary.28 Radoslavov's official response to the Allied offer was to reaffirm the policy of strict neutrality Bulgaria had been professing since the

26 Silberstein, p. 129; Hall, Bulgaria's Road, p. 287.
27 As quoted in Hall, Bulgaria's Road, p. 298.
beginning of the war. In reality, it was the imprecise nature of the Allied offer that convinced the Bulgarian Prime Minister to reject it. In a conversation with Gustav Michahelles, the German Minister to Bulgaria, Radoslavov stated that the territorial concessions offered by the Entente were so vague as to be worthless. Given Bulgaria's ambitions with respect to Macedonia, it was highly unlikely that anything short of a promise of an immediate possession of that region could persuade Radoslavov to agree to enter the war. Radoslavov's answer to the next Entente offer, that of 9 December 1914, was similar. This time, the Allies submitted offers of "an equitable readjustment of [Bulgaria's] Macedonian frontier," as well as Eastern Thrace up to the Enos-Midia line in exchange for an assurance that Bulgaria would remain neutral if Greece attempted to help Serbia repel another Austro-Hungarian invasion. From the perspective of Bulgaria, however, offers of Eastern Thrace could mean little unless accompanied by concrete and specific promises of territory in Macedonia. Not surprisingly, this offer was rejected on the grounds that it was not substantial enough.

The most important proposal made by the Entente to Bulgaria in 1915 suffered from the same limitations and shared the same fate as its predecessors of the previous year. On 29 May 1915, the Allied diplomatic representatives approached Radoslavov for the first time since the previous December. In exchange for a Bulgarian commitment to an attack against the Ottoman Empire, the Entente offered an immediate cession of Ottoman Thrace up to the Enos-Midia line, and post-war cession of the "Uncontested Zone" of Serbian Macedonia and parts of Greek Macedonia including the port of

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30 Silberstein, p. 139.

31 Hall, Bulgaria's Road, p. 294.


Bulgaria's acquisition of the Serb and Greek territories offered by the Allies was to take place only if Greece and Serbia were to receive compensation in Bosnia-Hercegovina and Asia Minor, respectively, after the conclusion of the war. Not surprisingly, the conditions and limitations with which the Allied offer was hedged reduced its appeal to Radoslavov. He responded only on 15 June, demanding clarifications with regards to the exact extent of the concessions the Entente was willing to offer to Bulgaria, as well as the specific nature of the territorial compensations envisioned for Greece and Serbia.

Ultimately, inter-allied frictions produced by disagreements over the wording and scope of a prospective reply to Radoslavov's request prevented the Entente foreign ministers from satisfying the Bulgarian demands for clarifications. At any rate, the Allies were already too late. The spectacular success of the Central Powers' offensive in Galicia and Russian Poland, combined with the evident failure of the Gallipoli campaign convinced Radoslavov and Ferdinand that Bulgaria could hope to satisfy its national aspirations only by taking the side of the Central Powers, rather than the Entente.

In late July, the Bulgarian Council of Ministers agreed to dispatch a "high ranking" military

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34 The "Uncontested Zone," was the portion of Macedonia south of the Kriva Palanka-Veleš-Ohrid line that the Serbian government claimed in 1912 as the maximum limit of its territorial ambitions in Macedonia.


38 Crampton, 441. At the same time, even pro-Entente Bulgarians began to have doubts about the prospects of an eventual Allied victory. See Bax-Ironsde to Grey, telegram, 16 June 1915, Doc. 649, #10944/386, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol.1, p. 363.
officer to Germany to examine the possibility of an alliance with the Central Powers.\textsuperscript{39} Arriving at the German Army Headquarters at Pless on 3 August, Lieutenant-Colonel Petar Gantshev initiated talks that eventually led to the conclusion of an alliance between the Central Powers and Bulgaria, and paved the way for Bulgaria's entry into the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary in October.\textsuperscript{40} In the meantime, the Entente submitted two further offers to Bulgaria on 3 August\textsuperscript{41} and 13 September,\textsuperscript{42} but their lack of substance, combined with the Bulgarian leaders' conviction that the Central Powers would emerge triumphant from the war rendered these last Allied approaches to Bulgaria futile.\textsuperscript{43}

The indefinite character of the Allied proposals to Bulgaria was a manifestation of an even greater problem that hampered the Entente's diplomatic efforts in the Balkans and ultimately contributed to the breakdown of Britain strategic designs in the region. The problem in question was a direct consequence of the geographical extent of Bulgaria's national aspirations. Their emphasis on Serbian Macedonia and parts of Greek Macedonia meant that the Entente could only satisfy the conditions for Bulgarian cooperation by compelling actual or potential allies in the region to sacrifice territories which collectively made up a crucial component of those countries' own national and historic lands.\textsuperscript{44}

Initially, the incompatibility of "San Stefano Bulgaria" with Greek and Serb


\textsuperscript{40} Silbersiein, pp. 167 – 174; Hall, Bulgaria's Road, pp. 304 – 308; Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, p. 160.

\textsuperscript{41} Grey to Bertie, telegram, 30 July 1915, Doc. 51, #11283/212; Buchanan to Grey, telegram, Doc. 64, #11283/253; O'Beirne to Grey, telegram, 4 Aug. 1915, Doc. 72, #11283/283, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 2, pp. 41 – 42, 52, 57.


\textsuperscript{43} Potts, pp. 228 – 229.

\textsuperscript{44} Howard, The Partition of Turkey, pp. 152 – 153.
territorial interests did not appear as an insurmountable obstacle. Entente statesmen were convinced that a territorial rearrangement of the political map of South-Eastern Europe along national lines would produce results that would reconcile the national interests of all Balkan states and facilitate the creation of a Balkan alliance that British leaders regarded as a vital requisite for the success of their strategic designs in the region. In exchange for ceding to Bulgaria the areas that lay at the heart of that country's national aspirations, the remaining Balkan states were to be rewarded with promises of post-war compensation with territories to be taken away from enemy states.

As far as the application of this formula to Serbia was concerned, the Entente sought to harness the cause of Yugoslav unification for the purpose of creating conditions favorable to the creation of a Balkan alliance. In the words of Winston Churchill,

It is only by reclaiming from Austria the territories which belong naturally to the Balkan races that the means can be provided to satisfy the legitimate needs and aspirations of all the Balkan States. Without taking Austrian territory, there is no way by which any Balkan State can expand except by internecine war. But the application of the principle of nationality to the Southern Provinces of Austria will produce results so advantageous to the Balkan States that the memory and the consequences of former quarrels could be assuaged for ever.

In order to ensure that the rosy picture painted by the First Lord of the Admiralty became a reality, the Entente followed a general policy of endeavoring to persuade Serbia to cede to Bulgaria the so-called "Uncontested Zone" of Macedonia as defined in the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty of alliance signed in July 1912. As compensation, Serbia would receive Bosnia-Hercegovina, sections of the Adriatic littoral, and portions of Croatia. The precise extent of the territories to be gained by both states varied in the context of individual proposals produced by the Allies in the first twelve months of the war. However, the fundamental premise upon which Entente diplomats based their efforts to

45 Calder, Britain and the Origins of the New Europe, p. 31.


47 Calder, p. 32.

48 Churchill Papers 26/1, Churchill to N. Buxton, 31 August 1914, as quoted in Gilbert, ed., p. 72.
reconcile Serbian and Bulgarian territorial aspirations remained constant throughout the period under examination. Allied diplomats were well aware that because Macedonia was an integral part of both Greater Bulgaria and Greater Serbia, the existence of the two was incompatible. At the same time, they mistakenly believed that "San Stefano Bulgaria" could conceivably co-exist with a Yugoslavia because the proponents of a South Slav state allegedly did not regard Macedonia as a vital component of such an entity. Given this state of affairs, Entente leaders sought to persuade the Serbian government to relinquish its emphasis on creating a Greater Serbia, and re-orient its policies toward the ideal of South Slav unity propounded by the so-called "Yugoslav Committee." 49

On the surface, the Allies' general plan for reconciling Serbia and Bulgaria by means of a territorial exchange appeared to have fair prospects of success. Serbia had always been desirous of obtaining the territories the Entente was offering as compensation for the cession of Macedonia to Bulgaria. The acquisition of Bosnia-Hercegovina was one of the most important aims of Serbian national aspirations, and one had to look no further than the crisis of 1908 for proof of that region's central place in the context of Serbian nationalism.50 Similarly, Entente leaders could hardly be blamed for believing that the Serbs could be willing to relinquish a part of Macedonia in exchange for the prospect of gaining sections of the Adriatic shoreline. After all, this component of the Allies' territorial compensation package was fully in keeping with Nikola Pašić's

49 Calder, p. 32. The First World War witnessed the struggle between two competing visions of the future of the South Slavs. One was represented by the so-called Yugoslav Committee, a non-governmental organization composed mainly of Croatian intellectuals who sought to create a federally-organized union of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Yugoslav Committee's aims stood in direct opposition to the exclusively Serbian national goals that formed the focal point of Serbia's foreign policy. Nevertheless, Serbian leaders could not ignore the Yugoslav Committee or its ideals completely, and were prepared to encourage its activities as long as these could be counted upon to facilitate the fulfillment of Serbia's own national goals. See Lenard J. Cohen, Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition (Boulder, Colorado, 1995); and Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, pp. 258 - 261.

50 At the Congress of Berlin, Austria-Hungary was permitted to occupy and administer Bosnia-Hercegovina, but the region remained a part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1908, the Dual Monarchy annexed Bosnia-Hercegovina. This action was resented by nationalist Serbs who regarded the region as an integral part of Greater Serbia. Expecting Russian support, the Serbs refused to reconcile themselves to the annexation for several months, and maintained a defiant attitude toward Austria-Hungary. In the end, however, the anticipated Russian support did not materialize. With the Russian army still in the process of recovering from the war with Japan, St. Petersburg proved unwilling to go to war with the Central Powers over the Bosnian issue, and the crisis ended when Russia accepted the annexation. See Bernadotte E. Schmitt, The Annexation of Bosnia, 1908 – 1909 (New York, 1970).
repeated attempts to obtain an outlet to the sea as a means of breaking his landlocked county's economic dependence on the Dual Monarchy.\footnote{Wolfram W. Gottlieb, Studies in Secret Diplomacy During the First World War (London, 1957), pp. 252 – 253.}

Even more importantly, Serbia's own official war aims appeared to mirror the Entente's scheme for the territorial redistribution in South-Eastern Europe. As early as 29 July 1914, only one day after Austria-Hungary's declaration of war against Serbia, Crown Prince Alexander issued a manifesto proclaiming that Serbia's principal war aim would be to solve once and for all Austria-Hungary's historically demonstrated inability to resolve the Yugoslav question.\footnote{Milorad Ekmecic, "Serbian War Aims," in Dimitrije Djordjevic, ed., The Creation of Yugoslavia, 1914 – 1918 (Santa Barbara, California, 1980), p. 20} In late August of the same year, Pašić traced the Klagenfurt-Maribor-Szeged line as the projected northern border of the post-war state.\footnote{Ibid., p. 20.} Just over a month later, the Serbian leader officially notified the Entente of Serbia's interest in Dalmatia.\footnote{Michael Boro Petrovich, "The Italo-Yugoslav Boundary Question, 1914 – 1915," in Alexander Dallin, ed., Russian Diplomacy and Eastern Europe, 1914 – 1917 (New York, 1963), p. 172.} The outward harmony between Serbian war aims and the Entente's offers received its final confirmation in the context of the so-called Niš Declaration of 7 December 1914, when the Serbian government formally defined its view of the war as "struggle for the liberation and unification of all our captive brethren Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes."

Unfortunately for the Allies, outward evidence of Serbia's seemingly favorable stance toward the prospect of territorial exchanges with Bulgaria proved to be deceptive. A combination of circumstances, however, ensured that the Entente's plan for reconciling the national aspirations of the two Balkan rivals would never bear fruit. To begin with, the Allies' scheme overlooked the intense emotional attachment that the Serbs felt toward territory already within the boundaries of their state. The failure to accurately assess the importance of national sentiment was a serious error on the part of the Entente.

While the prospects of acquiring access to the Adriatic was an attractive one, the
Serbs remained consistently opposed to successive Allied attempts to persuade them to the uncontested zone to Bulgaria. At best, as had been the case in October 1914 for example, Pašić was willing to relinquish only the east bank of the Vardar. Allied demands for the forfeiture of the entire uncontested zone repeatedly provoked a hostile response from the Serbs. The Entente’s joint demarche to Serbia in August 1915 moved Pašić to remark sourly to the French Minister to Serbia that “the Allies were disposing of the Serbs as though they were African tribes.” At the same time, Pašić made clear his preference for Macedonia to all the territories the Allies offered in compensation.

Earlier, in May 1915, when the Russian Minister to Belgrade confidentially informed Pašić of the Allies’ intention to intensify their pressure on Serbia in an effort to satisfy Bulgaria, the Serbian statesman announced that “[e]very Serb will prefer to be trampled under with Serbia, than make a concession to the Bulgarians.”

The Serbian Prime Minister’s determination to perish instead of reaching a territorial accommodation with Bulgaria was shared by his subordinates. In November 1914, Francis Elliot, the British Minister to Athens met with his Serbian counterpart. When Elliot told his colleague that Serbia should hand the “Uncontested Zone” over to Bulgaria, the Serbian diplomat answered that rather than cede Macedonia, his government would sooner transfer every soldier from the border with the Dual Monarchy and allow the Austro-Hungarian army to conquer the country while the Serbs dealt with the Bulgarians in the south.

One of Grey’s attempts to persuade the Serbian Minister to London of the necessity for a territorial settlement with Bulgaria elicited an equally dramatic response. Writing after the war, the Foreign Secretary recalled how “[t]he Serbian Minister closed one conversation with me that they would all rather die than let Bulgaria have Monastir. A preference for death put an end to all argument, and I became...

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57 Strandman (Russian Minister to Serbia) to Sazonov, 16 August 1915, as quoted in Macartney, p. 54.

58 C. J. Smith, p. 328.

59 Potts, p. 221.

60 Cutright, p. 51.
respectfully silent.\textsuperscript{61}

On certain occasions, Entente pressure, a deterioration of Serbia's military situation, or a combination of both would induce Pašić to grudgingly agree to the Allies' requirements for concessions to Bulgaria. But the Serbian Prime Minister's acceptance of the Entente's demands would be customarily hedged with so many limitations and conditions as to render it meaningless. In September 1914, Pašić indicated to the Russian Minister that Serbia might be willing to cede to Bulgaria unspecified territories in exchange for the Croatian littoral.\textsuperscript{62} At the same time, however, Pašić insistence that his offer be kept secret made it practically useless in the Entente's negotiations with Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{63} In addition, Pašić made it clear that any concessions would have to be approved by the Skupština (Serbian National Assembly), which undoubtedly would not be favorably inclined toward giving up territories whose conquest and defense during the two Balkan Wars had been so costly to Serbia.\textsuperscript{64} Exactly one year later, Pašić at last appeared to have yielded to Allied demands. Even then, however, he made acceptance conditional upon a redefinition of the uncontested zone's boundaries in a manner which significantly reduced its size.\textsuperscript{65} Moreover, Pašić insisted that Bulgaria take over the zone only after the war.\textsuperscript{66} These two stipulations made it unlikely that the offer would be accepted by Bulgaria.

In addition to underestimating the intensity of Serbian national feeling toward Macedonia, the Entente also misjudged the Serbian government's commitment to the notion of South Slav unification as espoused by the Yugoslav Committee. By the beginning of the First World War, the Serbian royal house had become the symbolic

\textsuperscript{61} Grey, \textit{Twenty-Five Years}, p. 203.

\textsuperscript{62} Curtright, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{63} Macartney, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{64} Potts, 208. For the text of the Serbian reply, see Des Graz to Grey, telegram, 1 Sept. 1914, Doc. 133, #10788/30, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 1, pp. 61 – 62.

\textsuperscript{65} Des Graz to Grey, telegram, 1 Sept. 1915, Doc. 131, #11283/540; Des Graz to Grey, telegram, 1 Sept. 1915, Doc. 132, #11283/541, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 2, pp. 102, 102 – 103.

\textsuperscript{66} Des Graz to Grey, telegram, 1 Sept. 1915, Doc. 133, #11283/542, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 2, pp. 103 – 104.
focal point of South Slav unity, but the majority of Serbian military and political leaders were always accorded more priority to creating a Greater Serbia than a "Yugoslavia." Pašić's own vision of a future South Slav state left little doubt that he regarded the process of its creation as a continuation of the process of Serbian territorial expansion that began early in previous century. While he was committed to the Yugoslav idea, Pašić saw Serbia as the dominant element in the South Slav state, and accordingly, he desired that the "liberation and unification" of the South Slavs take place under Serbia's aegis.

Perceiving the future Yugoslav state as a variation on the theme of Greater Serbia, and concerned with upholding Serbia's status as the leading light of South Slav unification, it was only natural that Pašić would prefer to keep Macedonia rather than trade it for uncertain promises of a South Slav state in which Serbian political supremacy might be challenged. This made it all the more unlikely that the Serbs would ever reconcile themselves to giving up Macedonia to Bulgaria.

The Allies' own diplomatic priorities in the first nine months of the war also contributed to dashing whatever hopes may have existed that Serbia might agree to territorial concessions to Bulgaria. As eager as the Allies were to construct a Balkan alliance, that aim never assumed a position of precedence over the goal of convincing Italy to join the Entente. However, the territorial guarantees which Italian leaders demanded from the Entente as a price for their entry into the war clashed directly with Serbia's own national aspirations. Initially, the Italian claims in the Adriatic and the Balkans were limited to and Trieste and the Albanian port of Valona. By March 1915, however, Sidney Sonnino, the new Italian Foreign Minister, had raised the price of Italian

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67 Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, p. 259.
69 Fest, Peace or Partition, p. 31; and Petrovich, A History, pp. 629 – 632.
70 Calder, p. 32.
intervention by advancing claims that included Istria and Dalmatia.\textsuperscript{72}

The Italian demands with regards to Istria were not particularly offensive to Pašić. That territory was inhabited by Croats and Slovenes, and the prospect of their inclusion within the borders of an Italian, rather than a Yugoslav state was certainly upsetting to the members of the predominantly Croat and Slovene Yugoslav Committee.\textsuperscript{73} Pašić on the other hand, more interested as he was in creating a Greater Serbia rather than a Yugoslavia, was not overly concerned with the prospect of an Italian annexation of Istria.\textsuperscript{74} But Italian demands for control of parts of the Dalmatian coastline were another matter altogether. As early as September 1914, in the same communication in which Pašić notified Sazonov of his assent to Italian ambitions in Istria, the Serbian statesman emphatically asserted that "Dalmatia desires to be united with Serbia."\textsuperscript{75} The following month, he warned that Italian intrusions into Dalmatia would be resisted by force and that the population of the region in question "...wishes to join Serbia...this is...the constant desire of the Serbo-Croat people."\textsuperscript{75}

Among the Allies, however, only Russia, fearful of Italian aggrandizement in the Balkans, displayed any willingness to uphold the Serbs' claims on the Adriatic. In September 1914, the Russian government provided a powerful endorsement of Serbian national aspirations when Sazonov, in a conversation with Michel Paleologue and Sir George Buchanan, the French and British ambassadors to Russia, respectively, outlined a thirteen-point program of Russian war aims. This agenda made specific provisions for the creation of a Greater Serbia that would include Bosnia-Hercegovina, Dalmatia and northern Albania.\textsuperscript{77} In November 1914, Sazonov attempted to take his endorsement of

\textsuperscript{72} W. A. Rienzi, "Italy's Neutrality and Entry into the Great War: A Re-examination," \textit{American Historical Review}, Vol. 73, No. 2 (1967 – 1968), pp. 1426 – 1430.


\textsuperscript{74} Petrovich, "The Italo-Yugoslav Boundary," p. 172.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Aide-Memoire, Serbian Legation, Petrograd, to Sazonov, 3 October 1914, as quoted in Gottlieb, \textit{Secret Diplomacy}, p. 332.

Serbian interests one step further by suggesting that the Allies specifically guarantee Serbia the territories with which it was to be compensated in exchange for ceding Macedonia to Bulgaria.78 Grey and Delcassé refused, reasoning that such an action might antagonize Italy and reduce the prospects of its intervention.79 For the same reason, the France and Britain did not officially endorse the Yugoslav program as spelled out in the Niš Declaration.80

From Grey's point of view, the diplomatic and military advantages that might accrue to the Entente as a result of Italy's entry into the war fully justified the prospect of alienating Serbia. Italian intervention, Grey reasoned, might provoke a diplomatic "chain reaction" in South-Eastern Europe and convince the Balkan neutrals to join the Entente. Naturally, the same results might be achieved by continued efforts to effect a territorial settlement between Bulgaria and Serbia, but given the state of Serbo-Bulgarian relations, the Italian option appeared much more attractive to Grey, even if it implied infringing on Serbia's claims in the Adriatic:

We must therefore decide either to admit the Italian claim or forgo the prospect of Italian co-operation. Italian co-operation will decide that of Romania and probably so other neutral states. It will be the turning point of the war and will very greatly hasten a successful conclusion.81

This policy received its final seal approval on 22 March 1915, when the Cabinet agreed that acceptance of Italy's territorial demands was justified given the importance of securing that country's intervention.82

Evidence that select members of the Entente were willing to override Serbia's national ambitions in favor of Italy's territorial aspirations made the possibility of a

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79 Ibid.; Potts, p. 218.


81 PRO FO 371/2375/25017, Grey to Buchanan, 22 March 1915, as quoted in Calder, p. 34.

82 Curtright, p. 181.
Serbo-Bulgarian territorial settlement even more remote. The negotiations between Italy and the Entente in the winter of 1914 and spring of 1915 were conducted in secret, but it was not long before rumors of the Allies' promises to Italy with regards to Dalmatia leaked out and reached the ears of the Serbs. When they did, they ensured that the Serbs would become all the more suspicious of the sincerity of their allies and by implication, even more reluctant to make territorial concessions to Bulgaria. The Serbs' opposition to the Entente's pressure for a territorial accommodation with Bulgaria solidified after the signing of the Treaty of London, signed on 26 April 1915. The treaty committed Italy to an intervention in the war on the side of the Allies in exchange for the Entente's agreement to most of Italy's territorial demands in the Adriatic.

The Pact of London made provisions for Serbia's interests in Dalmatia and stipulated that after the war, a significant part of the Adriatic littoral was to be awarded to Serbia. However, it was unlikely that these arrangements would assuage the Serbs' suspicions or make them more amenable to concessions to Bulgaria. To begin with, the Treaty stipulated that the sections of the Adriatic coast awarded to Serbia were to be neutralized. Second, the Entente never made the Serbs privy to the negotiations leading up to the agreement and did not inform them of the treaty's specific provisions. This state of affairs could hardly be counted upon to inspire the Serbs with trust in their Allies, and did little except produce damaging rumors concerning the terms offered by the Entente to Italy. These reportedly created so much resentment in Serbia as to make

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86 Lowe, "Italy and the Balkans," p. 421.

87 C. J. Smith, pp. 268 – 269.


elements of the Serbian army consider making peace overtures to the Central Powers.90 Two weeks after the treaty was signed, Grey sent Pašič an informal letter assuring him that the treaty would leave Serbia in possession of Bosnia-Hercegovina and a wide outlet to the Adriatic.91 However, at the insistence of Sidney Sonnino, the Italian Foreign Minister, the Entente never revealed the treaty's exact terms to the Serbs.92

Attempts to effect a territorial compromise between Serbia and Bulgaria represented only one facet of the Entente's scheme to reconstruct the Balkan alliance by means of a compensatory territorial settlement in the region. The Allies' endeavors to reconcile Bulgaria and Greece were another, equally important part of the same design. The Entente's ability to satisfy the territorial claims Bulgaria entertained with respect to its southern neighbor was expected to make a significant contribution toward convincing Bulgaria to side with the Allies. At the same time, however, a final territorial settlement between the two rivals would remove the last obstacle to Greece's adhesion to the Entente.

If relations between these two rival states could be stabilized, Greek fears of a Bulgarian attack would cease, and with Bulgaria now on the side of the Allies, the Greek armed forces would be able to render assistance to the Entente's war effort. The Greek army would be free to march north to assist the Serbs. Alternatively, it could be deployed to participate in operations in the region of the Dardanelles. In addition, the Greek navy, at the time the largest and most powerful in the Eastern Mediterranean, would be in a position to reinforce Allied naval units in the Aegean in their anticipated assault against the defenses guarding the entrance to the Straits. In order to ensure the realization of these prospects, the Entente sought to persuade Greece to relinquish the Kavalla, Seres and Drama districts of Greek Macedonia to Bulgaria. In exchange for these sacrifices, Greece was to be rewarded with territory in Northern Epirus and even more significantly, in Asia Minor. These proposals were best exemplified by the official appeal presented to Calder, p. 38.

Calder, p. 38. At the same time, Grey gave similar, unofficial assurances to the Serbian Minister in London. See Grey to Des Graz, despatch, 6 May 1915, Doc. 576, #10944/170, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 1, p. 318.

Venizelos on 24 January 1915 by Sir Francis Elliot, the British Minister to Greece.

As was the case with the Entente's endeavors to produce a Serbo-Bulgarian settlement, attempts to effect a similar Greco-Bulgarian reconciliation appeared full of promise. The vision of Greek national interests espoused by Eleftherios Venizelos, the pro-Entente prime minister of that country at the outbreak of the war, was fully in keeping with the Allies' proposals. The offer of Asia Minor in particular was in conformity with twin pillars of Venizelos' national policy objectives: Greek territorial expansion and the transformation of Greece into a major Mediterranean power in keeping with the spirit of the "Great Idea."93

In conformity with the leaders of other Balkan states, Venizelos believed that the First World War might be exploited for the purpose of completing the task of Greek national unification that had been initiated early in the 19th century.94 With all three of Greece's protective powers fighting against the Ottoman Empire, it appeared that Great Britain, France and Russia would no longer place any obstacles in the path of Greek territorial ambitions in Asia Minor.95 Determined to take advantage of this opportunity, Venizelos attempted to convince King Constantine of the advisability of accepting the Entente's offer. The Greek prime minister stated his position in the context of three policy memoranda submitted to Constantine between 24 January and 2 March. According to Venizelos, the acceptance of the Allied proposal and the cession of Kavalla and its hinterland to Bulgaria would imply the renunciation of some 2,000 square miles of territory inhabited by roughly 30,000 Greeks. As serious as such a sacrifice appeared, Venizelos believed that the compensation that Greece would gain on the eastern shores of the Aegean would more than make up for the loss of Kavalla. According to the Prime Minister's calculations, the areas Greece stood to gain in Asia Minor amounted to nearly 125,000 square miles of territory populated by 800,000 Greeks. The abandonment of neutrality and the cession of Kavalla to Bulgaria, Venizelos argued, were a reasonable


95 Couloumbis, et al., p. 40.
price to pay for the attainment of Greek national aspirations in Ionia.  

Venizelos' favorable attitude toward the Entente's plans for a Greco-Bulgarian territorial settlement disguised the difficulties that would lead to the demise of Allied proposals and contribute to the downfall of British strategy in the region in 1915. The chief obstacle barring the way to Greece's acceptance of the Entente's designs was rooted in the complexities of Greek domestic politics of the period. While Venizelos' approval of the Allied scheme of territorial redistribution in South-Eastern Europe was encouraging to the Entente, his dream of a Greater Greece on both sides of the Aegean was only one of two visions of national future prevalent in Greece during the First World War.

The rival vision was that was espoused by the loose group of politicians who centered around the royal court of Constantine, whose influence on the conduct of Greek foreign policy was considerable. In contrast to Venizelos, the prime minister's opponents generally placed emphasis not on Greek territorial expansion, but on the preservation of its territorial integrity and the protection of the gains Greece had acquired since the attainment of independence. This conviction was rooted in the "anti-Venizelists" perception of the course of the war as a whole. Believing that the Central Powers would emerge victorious in the end, Constantine and his supporters seriously doubted the Entente's ability to fulfill its promises. Given these circumstances, it was inadvisable to give up portions of Greek Macedonia in exchange for vague promises of territories that were to be acquired only after the conclusion of a war whose outcome was still in doubt. Considerations of national prestige reinforced this argument even further – the prospect of ceding to Bulgaria territories that the Greeks had only recently "redeemed" at great cost was bound to be unpopular.

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97 This conviction did not necessarily imply that Constantine was pro-German. Instead, as C. M. Woodhouse has asserted, the king "was rather pro-Greek than for or against any foreign power. He believed that neutrality would best serve his country's interests." See C. M. Woodhouse, A Short History of Modern Greece, (New York, 1968), p. 195.

98 Colombis et al., p. 40.

99 M. L. Smith, p. 45.
The anxieties entertained by many of Venizelos' opponents with regards to the regional balance of power in the Balkans provided yet another argument against ceding Kavalla in exchange for a promise of territory in Asia Minor. Constantine worried that any cession of territory to Bulgaria would contribute to the territorial aggrandizement of that country to the point where Bulgaria would be able to assume a position of political dominance in the region and threaten the territorial integrity of Greece. For the King, the retention of Greece's portion of Macedonia was an insurance against the specter of a long-term Bulgarian threat.100

The intensity of the opposition that Constantine and his supporters put up to Venizelos' vision of a Greater Greece ensured that the Entente's plan for territorial revisions between Greece and Bulgaria would be as unsuccessful as its proposals for the cession of Serbian territory. Venizelos' resignation from office on 6 March 1915 made it even less likely that the Greeks would accept the Allied plan. The prime minister had been compelled to step down after Constantine refused to sanction the dispatch of three Greek divisions to help the Allies seize the Gallipoli Peninsula.101 The cabinet which replaced Venizelos' government, while outwardly favorable to the Allies, made Greek intervention conditional on the Entente's willingness to guarantee Greek territorial integrity – a stipulation the Entente refused to grant, since its acceptance would have ruled out the possibility of Bulgaria's acquisition of Kavalla.102

Whether the Allies would have been able to induce Greece to hand over Kavalla to Bulgaria if Venizelos had been able to cling to power throughout the spring and summer of 1915 is also debatable. Closer scrutiny reveals that Venizelos' enthusiasm for the Entente's plans might not have been as pronounced as his memoranda to Constantine might initially indicate. Venizelos was as worried about the prospect of Bulgarian territorial aggrandizement as was Constantine, and his approbation for the Allied

100 Ibid., pp. 47 - 48.

101 Gerolymatos, pp. 44 - 45.

102 M. L. Smith, p. 55. What ended the possibility of Greek intervention for good was Bulgaria's decision in March 1915 to request and receive a loan of 150 million francs from Germany and Austria-Hungary. The loan, in the opinion of Greek leaders, practically guaranteed that Bulgaria would join the Central Powers. See Ioannis Metaxas, Personal Diary: The First World War, 1915 – 1920 (in Greek), p. 382.
proposals was always tempered by the fear that a redistribution of territory along the lines suggested by the Allies might strengthen Bulgaria to an extent that would be unacceptable to Greece. Moreover, the prime minister had been a late convert to the idea of handing Kavalla over to Bulgaria and had consistently opposed this course of action throughout 1914. While he favored the attempts to neutralize Bulgaria or bring it into the war on the side of the Allies, he would have preferred to have the Allies satiate Bulgaria's territorial appetite with Serbian, rather than Greek territory. His endorsement of the Allied proposal in early 1915 was a very guarded one, and he hedged his approval with the stipulation that Bulgaria was to take possession of Kavalla only after the war.

Bulgaria's entry into the war brought the conflict between Venizelos and his opponents at the royal court and the Greek General Staff to boiling point. Venizelos was re-elected in late August 1915; the following month he once again clashed with his sovereign over the interpretation of the Greco-Serb treaty of 1913. In the face of Bulgaria's mobilization against Serbia, the Prime Minister insisted that Greece fulfill its part of the treaty by assisting Serbia in repelling the attack of the combined German, Austro-Hungarian, and Bulgarian forces. Constantine argued that by the terms of the treaty, Greece was obliged to aid Serbia only in the event of an attack by Bulgaria alone, and not, as was now the case, by any of the Great Powers. Nevertheless, Constantine did reluctantly agree to Venizelos' decision to appeal to the Entente to send 150,000 men to Salonika as a means of helping the Serbs and allowing Greece to meet its obligations toward its ally. However, when Venizelos by-passed the king in convincing the Greek parliament to permit Greek forces to assist the Serbian army, Constantine demanded that the Prime Minister step down.

In spite of Venizelos' resignation, Allied landings at Salonika continued. A Franco-British force under General Maurice Sarrail, former commander of the French 3rd Army in the Verdun sector, began to disembark in Salonika harbor on 5 October. The small force commenced its advance into Serbia a few days later and engaged the Bulgarians in a series of sharp engagements in the Vardar valley, but was unable to

103 Petsalis-Diomidis, Greece at the Paris Peace Conference, p. 29.
104 Gerolymatos, p. 46.
establish contact with the main body of the Serb forces. In late November, Sarrail ordered a general withdrawal to Thessaloniki. 105

Sarrail's foray up the Vardar was the last major military effort undertaken by the Allies in the Balkans in 1915. Earlier, in August, the failure of the Suvla Bay landings at Gallipoli confirmed the Allies' inability to bring that campaign to a successful conclusion. 106 On 11 October, the question of evacuating the Mediterranean Expeditionary force from Gallipoli was raised for the first time. 107 Clearly, the campaign had failed. However, the landings at Thessaloniki could not be considered to have represented a viable alternative to the grand design of seizing the Dardanelles. Admittedly, the presence of Allied contingents at Thessaloniki appeared fully in keeping with the plans advocated to the same effect by David Lloyd George at the beginning of the year. Nevertheless, the purpose of the landings carried out in October was much different from that envisioned by Lloyd George. The Chancellor of the Exchequer advocated activating another front in the Balkans only after careful preparation and as a means of diverting German troops from the West. 108 The October 1915 landings, on the other hand, were carried out on short notice, with practically no preparations and in a haphazard manner so characteristic of the Entente's approach to operations in peripheral theatres of operations. The extemporaneous and improvised manner in which they were initiated bears testimony to the fact that they undertaken with the immediate and short-term objective of succoring the remnants of the Serbian army rather than with the aim of opening up another front designed to thin out the German lines in France and Flanders.

Ultimately, despite numerous attempts, the Entente proved unable to forge a regional alliance that British leaders regarded as a crucial determinant of the success or failure of their Balkan strategy for 1915. Such a coalition could come into being only if

106 L. Woodward, p. 86.
107 Ibid., 90.
108 Even though Lloyd George was a military amateur, he knew enough about the conduct of war to understand that "[e]xpeditions decided upon and organised with insufficient care and preparation generally end disastrously." See Lloyd George, Memorandum: Suggestions as to the Military Position, 31 December 1914, in Gilbert, ed., p. 226.
the Allies succeeded in reconciling the conflicting territorial aspirations of the Balkan states. However, the leaders of the Balkan states could see no advantage in a diplomatic project whose realization depended on their willingness to compromise on their respective countries' territorial ambitions. Their own national policy aims, grounded in the perception of the First World War as an opportunity to complete the task of national unification began in the 19th century, understandably enjoyed priority over whatever strategic designs Britain and the Entente adopted to follow in the Balkans for the purpose of defeating the Central Powers. By late 1915, the mirage of the Balkan alliance had faded, but considerations of the national interests of the Balkan states would to exert influence on British strategic designs in South-Eastern Europe.
Chapter Four

THE ROMANIAN INTERVENTION, 1916

The failure of the Entente to save Serbia from being overrun by German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian armies in the fall of 1915 marked the nadir of the Allies' Balkan strategy for that year. With the onset of the second winter of the war, the grandiose strategic designs formulated at the beginning of 1915 lay in tatters. For all intents and purposes, French and British influence in the Balkans on New Year's Day, 1916 extended no further than the pathetically small footholds to which their forces still clung in South-Eastern Europe. At Gallipoli, after the evacuation of the Suvla and ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) beachheads on the night of 19/20 December, 20,000 soldiers of the British 8th Corps remained at Cape Helles.¹ Three hundred kilometers to the west, three French and five British divisions – a total of 150,000 troops – were busily engaged in the construction of a fortified perimeter around Thessaloniki in the expectation of a Bulgarian onslaught that never materialized.² The Allies' fortifications not only transformed the Aegean port into the most heavily defended city in the Balkans but also provided German propagandists with a priceless opportunity to label the armed camp with an epithet that was destined to adhere to the Allies' Macedonian enterprise as a whole for the remainder of the war. Confined to their "bird cage" far from the main fronts of the conflict, the Allies, claimed German military commentators, had merely enclosed themselves in "the greatest internment camp in the world."³ More than anything else, the anti-climactic conclusion of the attempt to rescue Serbia stood as the most poignant symbol and reminder of the strategic errors committed by the Entente in the Balkans since the start of the war.

¹ The Cape Helles garrison was eventually evacuated on 9 January 1916. For the evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula, one of the most spectacularly successful operations of this type in all of military history, see Aspinall-Oglander, Vol. II, ch. 31 – 32; Corbett, Vol. III, pp. 230 – 258; Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (London, 1997), pp. 283 – 297; Robert R. James, Gallipoli (London, 1965), ch. 13; and Michael Hickey, Gallipoli (London, 1995), pp. 329 – 334.


The immediate reaction of the British leadership to the Balkan fiasco of 1915 was one of complete disillusionment with any further military or diplomatic ventures in South-Eastern Europe. Faced with what appeared to be a total collapse of their strategic designs in the region, the British were determined to effect a complete disengagement from the Balkans. On 23 December 1915, the War Committee concluded its meeting by resolving to recommend to the Cabinet that the time had come to evacuate the Cape Helles beachhead at Gallipoli. Earlier that month, even before the Anglo-French forces in Macedonia had retreated completely back across the Greek frontier after their unsuccessful bid to effect a junction with the Serbian army, the British began to pressure the French government to agree to a complete withdrawal from Thessaloniki. Fearing that "the retention of the present force of 150,000 at Salonika is...dangerous and likely to lead to a great disaster," the British made their case for the abandonment of Thessaloniki at the Calais Conference of 4 December 1915.

From a strictly military point of view, the British insistence on the immediate termination of the Allied military commitment in the Balkans made perfect sense. At the beginning of December, the Anglo-French expeditionary force in Macedonia was deficient in artillery and transport. A combined German-Bulgarian offensive against Thessaloniki was believed to be imminent, increasing the possibility that British contingents might be destroyed. Moreover, in spite of the assurances of the Greek government, the British were still not entirely certain whether Constantine would not

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4 The War Committee came into existence on 2 November 1915 when it replaced the Dardanelles Committee as the body responsible for the strategic direction of Britain's war effort. Its creation provides an interesting example of how developments in South-Eastern Europe could impact even the organization of the direction of the conflict. The reorganization of the British organs of supreme command in late 1915 is examined in Hankey, pp. 434, 440 - 446; Gooch, p. 320; and Guinn, pp. 109 - 110.

3 Hankey, p. 463; and Gooch, pp. 328 - 329.


7 Hankey, p. 452.

8 Grey to Bertie, despatch, 6 Dec. 1915, Doc. 248, #11582/411, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 2, p. 220. On 7 December, the 10th (Irish) Division, while covering the retreat of the rest of Sarrail's force, was, in fact, severely mauled by elements of the Bulgarian 2nd Army at the Battle of Kosturino, just north of Lake Doiran. See Falls, Vol. I. pp. 64 - 71.
order the Allied force to be disarmed and interned as soon as it crossed the frontier and re-entered the territory of neutral Greece.\(^9\) Most importantly, however, the Thessaloniki expedition appeared to have lost its original purpose. After all, contact with the retreating Serbian army had not been established, and the latter was now retreating westward to the Adriatic through Montenegro and Albania, rather than southward to the Aegean.\(^10\) In these circumstances, the British argued, the evacuation of Thessaloniki was the only viable alternative left to the Allies.\(^11\) Ultimately, the force of British arguments prevailed. Despite the initial refusal of French Prime Minister Aristide Briand, and his War Minister Joseph Gallieni, to endorse the evacuation, the British representatives ultimately left the conference with their French counterparts grudgingly accepting the demands for quitting the Balkans.\(^12\)

This triumph of British policy was destined to be short-lived, however. At the inter-Allied military conference held at Chantilly between 6 and 8 December, General Archibald Murray, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff found that the French, Russian, Italian and Serbian representatives all favored maintaining the Entente's military commitment at Thessaloniki.\(^13\) Stunned by the about-face executed by the French, the

\(^9\) Falls, Vol. I, pp. 46 – 48. In reality, it was highly unlikely that Constantine would ever dare to take such a drastic step.

\(^10\) The remnants of the Serbian army began their retreat in late November. The march to the Adriatic lasted three weeks, in the course of which the Serbs traversed some of the most forbidding and inhospitable terrain in the Balkans. Disease, hunger, severe weather conditions and constant attacks by hostile Albanian tribesmen resulted in the death of thousands along the way. Altogether, approximately 155,000 Serbs reached the coast. French and Italian warships then ferried them to Corfu. Over the next few months, the survivors of the march were re-equipped and reorganized with French help. By May 1916, the Serbian army, having fully recovered from the privations its troops had suffered during the retreat, numbered 120,000 troops in six divisions. The same month, the Serbs joined the Allied forces on the Salonika Front. Their military performance over the next two years was a crucial factor in the Allied victories at Monastir (November 1916), and the final Allied victory during the offensive of September 1918. See Charles Fryer, The Destruction of Serbia in 1915 (Boulder, Colorado, 1997) and Palmer, The Gardeners, pp. 41 – 42, 61 – 62.

\(^11\) Neilson, p. 121.


British ultimately caved in to their allies' views with regards to the Balkans. After dispatching Kitchener and Grey to Paris on 9 December to settle what was quickly becoming a serious inter-allied dispute, the British resigned themselves to a compromise. For the time being, the Entente forces in Macedonia would take up defensive positions around Thessaloniki, while the Allies would postpone making a final decision about the fate of their Balkan commitment until an undetermined point in the future.\(^\text{14}\)

The British government's willingness to back down from its insistence on disengaging from the Balkans was motivated primarily by the concern that the fallout from a possible refusal to agree with the French would have a potentially harmful effect on inter-allied relations. The decisions of the Calais Conference created a political crisis in France. The Socialist elements in Briand's *Union Sacrée* government threatened to abandon the coalition and bring about its fall if the Prime Minister agreed to the withdrawal from the Balkans.\(^\text{15}\) Convinced that the dissolution of the *Union Sacrée*, and an accompanying resumption of fractious domestic politics in France might gravely weaken the effectiveness of the Allied military effort as a whole, the British could do little else but agree to the accommodation outlined above.\(^\text{16}\)

The same considerations of domestic politics furnished the French leadership with the principal motive for insisting on the maintenance of an Allied military presence in the Balkans.\(^\text{17}\) However, the ostensible reasons behind such an insistence were couched

\(^{14}\) French, *British Strategy*, p. 151; Neilson, p. 124. Also see Lloyd George, pp. 315 – 316.


\(^{16}\) Dutton, *The Politics*, p. 73.

\(^{17}\) The French government's motives for maintaining the Balkan Front in existence were rooted in the complexities of domestic French politics. On 4 August 1914, French political parties agreed to suspend their partisan squabblings to facilitate the conduct of the war. The stability and effectiveness of the domestic political truce (*Union Sacrée*) depended on the co-operation of the Radical Socialist deputies in the National Assembly. This meant that France's successive wartime governments were often forced to permit political considerations to influence matters of strategy. The issue of the Entente forces in Macedonia was an example of this phenomenon. Sarraill, the commander of the Allied forces at Thessaloniki, was an ardent republican who enjoyed the support of the French political Left. His dismissal from the command of the French 3rd Army on 20 July 1915, in the course of the so-called *L'Affaire Sarraill*, had subjected the *Union Sacrée* to its first major crisis, which the government of René Viviani was able to diffuse only by appointing Sarraill to the command of the French forces in Macedonia. A similar situation took place in December 1915, when the question of the future of the Balkan Front was being discussed in Allied councils. Briand, who had succeeded Viviani as prime minister on 29 October, realized that his own political survival was dependent upon the Socialists' willingness to adhere to the *Union Sacrée*. The French
purely in the language of strategy and diplomacy. At Calais, for example, the French
delegates countered the British demands for the evacuation of Thessaloniki by
expounding upon the dire consequences that would arise if such a course of action were
to be adopted. Greece, the French argued, would declare for the Central Powers, while
Romania would be compelled to do the same. German and Austro-Hungarian submarines
would be able to use Thessaloniki as a base to strike at the Allies' shipping in the
Mediterranean. The Italians would lose the incentive for intervening in the Balkans by
way of Albania, while the Russians would become seriously demoralized. The Serbs,
feeling completely abandoned by the Allies, might choose to conclude a separate peace
with the Central Powers. At Chantilly, the French attempted to justify keeping the
Balkan front active by alluding to an issue to which the British were always sensitive –
the security of Britain's imperial possessions in the Middle East and Asia. Apparently, the
French claimed that an Entente force at Thessaloniki would act a menace to the strategic
flank of any German enterprise directed against the Middle East and indirectly assist in
the defense of Egypt. In addition, an Allied army in Macedonia could provide an
inducement for Romania to join the Entente.

The emphasis on the role of the Balkan front as a determinant of Romania's
attitude was merely a continuation of arguments that the French had been advancing for
weeks prior to the Calais and Chantilly Conferences in an endeavor to defend the

prime minister feared that a withdrawal from the Balkans – a theatre commanded by France's most
prominent left-wing general – would have been interpreted by the Left as a government conspiracy against
Sarrail. In turn, this would have resulted in the Radical Socialists' defection from the Union Sacrée and the
fall of Briand's government. It was the desire to avert such a contingency that motivated the French
representatives at Calais and Chantilly to argue so vehemently in support of maintaining the Allied military
presence in South-Eastern Europe. See Tanenbaum, General Maurice Sarrail, pp. 55 – 74; Palmer, The
Gardeners, pp. 29 – 30, 46 – 47; and George H. Cassar, The French and the Dardanelles: A Study in Failure in

Hankey, p. 453. The possibility that Serbia might conclude a separate peace with the Central
Powers appears to have been of particular concern to the Russian government which deemed it necessary to
assure the Serbs in December 1915 that Russia would fight on until Serbia was restored. See Buchanan to

Neilson, pp. 123 – 124. The official British account of the Chantilly Conference of December
1915 may be found in James E. Edmonds, History of the Great War: Military Operations, France and

Neilson, p. 124.
commitment and maintenance of Allied troops in the Balkans. Writing to Asquith in early November to appraise him of the results of a meeting with Briand and Gallieni, Kitchener reported that the French Prime Minister and War Minister both believed the intervention of Romania on the side of the Entente was one of the benefits that might accrue to the Allies if Anglo-French forces remained in the Balkans.21 Similarly, on 1 December, the French cabinet resolved not only to remain at Thessaloniki but also to ask Britain to send in reinforcements that would increase the expeditionary force in Macedonia to 300,000 troops. Once again, the possibility that such a military commitment might convince Romania to openly declare for the Entente figured as one of the major reasons for the French government's decision.22

In holding out the prospect of Romanian intervention as one of the benefits of remaining in the Balkans, the French cabinet found a responsive audience among the small minority of British leaders who did not favor a complete disengagement from Southeastern Europe. The most important among them was David Lloyd George, who also supported the retention of the position at Thessaloniki for reasons among which the possibility of Romanian intervention figured prominently.23

Lloyd George's favorable stance toward the prospect of Romania's entry into the war evoked the high regard with which many other British leaders viewed the possibility of Romanian intervention at a time when the disasters of 1915 were still in the future. At the beginning of the war, in August 1914, the British opposed Russian attempts to convince Romania to attack Austria-Hungary for the same reasons that compelled them to turn down Venizelos' offer of Greek intervention.24 However, beginning in late 1914, Romania began to figure prominently as a crucial component in the numerous designs advanced by British military and political leaders in favor of a "Balkan bloc" that was to be directed against either the Ottoman or the Austro-Hungarian Empires.


22 Ibid., p. 67.


24 French, British Strategy, p. 31 – 32.
The memoranda produced by key members of the War Cabinet in late December 1914 and early January 1915 all made allusions to Romania and the potentially significant contribution that its intervention might make to the fulfillment of the strategic opportunities that allegedly awaited the Entente in the Balkans. In his "Boxing Day Memorandum" of 28 December 1914, Maurice Hankey speculated that a joint attack by Russia, Serbia and Romania against Hungary might result in a complete collapse of the Dual Monarchy's war effort. Writing to Winston Churchill less than a week later, Admiral John Fisher, the First Sea Lord, envisioned the Romanian participation in a Russian and Serbian offensive against Austria-Hungary that was to be mounted to coincide with a combined operation aimed at seizing the Gallipoli Peninsula and forcing the Dardanelles. Similar recommendations for Romania's role in the war were advanced at the same time by Lloyd George who estimated that the Romanians could contribute 300,000, and perhaps as many as half a million troops to a massive Entente offensive against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Lastly, Winston Churchill conjectured that Romania's entry into the war, combined with the intervention of Italy, and the pressure of Allied military and naval operations on diverse fronts might significantly hasten the end of the war.

By late 1916, with the optimistic hopes of the previous year gone, and the concept of a strategic concentration of effort in the Balkans discredited by the events of 1915, many of Britain's leaders were skeptical about Romania's ability to make a positive contribution to the Entente's war effort. Doubts with this regard were especially pronounced in British military circles. Already at the Chantilly Conference of December 1915, Murray expressed the opinion that immobilizing 150,000 troops at Thessaloniki


27 David Lloyd George, Suggestions as to the Military Situation, 31 December 1914, as quoted in Gilbert, ed., pp. 350 – 356.

was an excessive price to pay in exchange for the possibility of Romanian intervention. General William Robertson, who succeeded Murray as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in late December 1915 shared this view. Believing firmly that the war could be only in France and Flanders, Robertson viewed the diversion of the Entente’s human and material resources to peripheral theaters such as the Balkans as a wasteful diversion of energy and effort that hindered the attempts to effect a maximum concentration of strength on the Western Front. He had little faith in the efficacy or wisdom of the Entente’s military commitment in the Balkans, and while reconciling himself to the retention of Thessaloniki as agreed to by the British in December 1915, he sought to reduce the British involvement in the region to a bare minimum. The self-imposed guidelines Robertson outlined in a letter written to a subordinate in March 1916 were indicative of the strategic policy Robertson would in fact follow until he stepped down as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in February 1918:

Briefly my policy is to get as many troops away from Salonika as possible and as soon as I can. Refuse to take offensive action in the Balkans until the situation changes very much. To keep Egypt reasonably secure. To keep a reserve in Egypt for India as long as it seems likely to be required. To get everybody else to France.

29 Neilson, p. 124. Murray was equally doubtful that the maintenance of a foothold in the Balkans would be sufficient to bring Romanian into the war in the first place. See Archibald Murray, Paper by the General Staff on the Future Conduct of the War: An Examination by the General Staff into the Factors Affecting the Choice of a Plan of Campaign, 16 Dec. 1915, in Edmonds, Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916. Appendices, p. 15.

30 In what was one of his first acts as C.I.G.S, Robertson officially endorsed Murray’s views concerning the strategic situation in the Balkans and recommended a complete withdrawal from Salonika. See William Robertson, Note for the War Committee, 23 Dec. 1915, in Edmonds, Military Operations, France and Belgium, Appendices, p. 28.

31 For Robertson’s views concerning the strategic conduct of the war see Sir William Robertson, Soldiers and Statesmen, 1914 – 1918 (London, 1926); David Woodward, ed., The Military Correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, December 1915 – February 1918 (London, 1989); L. Woodward, passim; Guinn, passim; French, British Strategy, passim; and French, The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, passim.


33 Robertson to Murray, 15 March 1916, as quoted in D. Woodward, ed., Military Correspondence, p. 43.
Lastly, realizing that the diplomatic efforts to sway Romania to the side of the Entente might produce calls for the reinforcement of the Allied garrison at Thessaloniki as a prelude for an offensive against Bulgaria, Robertson consistently opposed such a course of action and was generally unenthusiastic about the prospect of Romanian intervention.34

In practical terms, Robertson’s opposition to any schemes involving Romania was of a threefold nature. First, Robertson consistently expressed his lack of faith of Romania’s military effectiveness. The single most conspicuous example of this tendency was the memorandum Robertson presented at the meeting of the War Committee on 3 May 1916 in an attempt to thwart the designs for an offensive from Thessaloniki that the Romanians demanded as a condition for their intervention. While the allegedly doubtful military value of the Romanian army was only one of the points addressed by Robertson, it undoubtedly made a major contribution to the effectiveness of the argument as a whole – an argument so strong that even Lloyd George had to temporarily acknowledge its validity.35 In turn, Robertson’s lack of faith in Romania’s military effectiveness no doubt influenced his inclination to disapprove sending military supplies to Romania36 – the second element of his opposition to strategic designs based on the possibility of Romanian intervention.

Finally, Robertson exerted great efforts – to which an allusion has already been made – to counter any proposals for an Allied offensive from Thessaloniki to persuade Romania to join the Entente. Correctly believing that the repeated French calls for such an operation were in fact politically motivated, Robertson consistently made it clear throughout the first half of 1916 that in his view, a major military undertaking in Macedonia was neither possible nor desirable at the moment. As early as January 1916, Robertson ruled out the possibility of an offensive in the Balkans for the time being.37

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34 French, British Strategy, p. 206.


36 See for example Robertson to Lloyd George, 16 March 1916, as quoted in D. Woodward, ed., Military Correspondence, p. 43.

The following month, in the course of the Chantilly Conference of 14 February 1916, he categorically refused to listen to Joffre’s suggestion that the Allied contingent at Sarrail be reinforced by another 100,000 troops that would enable General Maurice Sarrail, the commander of the Franco-British force in Macedonia to launch a limited offensive which might convince Romania to join the Entente. For the remainder of 1916, as illustrated by even a selective examination of his correspondence for that year, Robertson on the whole remained firm in his opposition to a Balkan offensive in support of Romania right up to the time in late August when the War Committee reluctantly agreed to sanction British participation in an offensive designed to coincide with Romania’s entry into the war that month.

The doubts expressed by Robertson with regards to the effectiveness of Romania’s armed forces and that country’s possible entry into the war were shared by many of Russia’s senior political and military leaders. However, the Russians were not nearly as consistent as Robertson in claiming that the Entente would have little use for Romania’s participation. Sergei Sazonov, the Russian foreign minister, claimed after the war that his wartime policy toward Romania was merely a continuation of the diplomatic efforts he had initiated prior to the conflict. Throughout the war, Sazonov averred, he had preferred to focus his energies on widening the already yawning diplomatic breach between Romania and the Central Powers, rather than strive for that country’s active intervention. Romania’s active participation in the war on the side of the Entente, he argued, would merely impose on Russia military burdens of a kind that the Imperial Army would find difficult to fulfill. Given this state of affairs, Sazonov claimed that he chose to confine his activities to securing from Bucharest assurances of benevolent neutrality. In Sazonov’s opinion, such a course of action would effectively bar the Central Powers from access to Romania’s raw materials without requiring Russia’s already

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38 Neilson, p. 146. Also see Robertson to Haig, 17 February 1916; and Robertson to Murray, 15 March 1916, as quoted in D. Woodward, ed., Military Correspondence, pp. 36 – 37, 40 – 42.

39 See for example Robertson to Mahon, 6 March 1916; Robertson to Murray, 5 April 1916; Robertson to Milne, 8 May 1916; Robertson to Haig, 18 May 1916; Robertson to Murray, 10 July 1916; in D. Woodward, Military Correspondence, pp. 38, 45, 47 – 48, 49 – 50, 70 – 71.

40 Sazonov, Fateful Years, p. 265.
overburdened military establishment to commit itself to the potentially problematic assignment of assisting a weaker ally.\(^1\)

Sazonov's post-war claims provide only a fragmentary and simplistic depiction of Russia's diplomatic stance with regard to Romania in the first two years of the conflict. Contrary to the assertions summarized above, securing Romania's benevolent neutrality did not represent the sole focus of Sazonov's position with regards to Romania. Instead, Sazonov oscillated between attempts to assure Romanian neutrality and efforts to win Romania over as an active ally. From July 1914 onwards, Sazonov made a number of proposals to Bucharest aimed at attaining the latter goal. However, virtually all of these proposals were made at times when Russia needed Romania's intervention to counter the effects of a military misfortune, or prevent one from taking place. Sazonov's efforts to effect Romanian intervention in July and August 1914, for example, were most likely motivated by the desire to find a practical means of rendering direct Russian military assistance to Serbia.\(^2\) Similarly, in the summer of 1915, the Russians—with heavy pressure from their French and British allies—sought to induce Bucharest to join the Entente in the hopes that Romanian intervention would at least counterbalance the military disasters suffered by the Russian armies in the wake of the Central Powers' breakthrough at Gorlice in May.\(^3\) The last Russian appeal for Romanian intervention,

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 266.


made in the autumn of 1915, was equally a call of desperation, and represented a last-ditch attempt on the part of the Entente to save Serbia from total defeat.\textsuperscript{44}

The timing of all three appeals makes it possible to contend that Sazonov was always wary of the prospect of Romania's entry into the war and that he resorted to calls for that country's intervention only when unfavorable military situation and the pressure of the other Allies left him with no other recourse. If this is indeed the case, then Sazonov's memoirs may be seen as an accurate reflection of the Russian Foreign Minister's preferred policy toward Romania in the First World War.

The views expressed by the Russian military authorities with regards to the advisability of Romanian intervention were also far from consistent. On the whole, however, Russian generals were as dubious of the benefits of Romania's participation in the war as was Sazonov. The Russian military leaders' perception of Romania was nothing short of a paradox. Admittedly, the Russian General Staff was keenly aware of Romania's strategic position. As early as February 1914, General Zhilinski, the then Chief of the Russian General Staff, drew attention to the fact that Romanian neutrality in the event of a general European war would permit the Russians to reduce their forces along the Russo-Romanian frontier and delegate an army corps for amphibious operations around the Bosphorus.\textsuperscript{45} After the war had broken out, while the foreign minister was engaged in the first round of negotiations with Bucharest in late summer of 1914, he was informed that the Russian General Staff was strongly in favor of Romania's immediate entry into the conflict. Securing Romanian intervention in at that particular point in time held out the prospect of creating a continuous battle line running along the Danube and the Carpathians from Serbia to Galicia, thus significantly weakening the Austro-Hungarian army by forcing it to attenuate its front even further.\textsuperscript{46}

The importance of Bucharest's diplomatic stance to Russia's military planners was augmented by Romania's location astride the traditional, direct route of overland advance from Russia to Istanbul. With the arrival of the \textit{Goeben} and the \textit{Breslau} in Istanbul in

\textsuperscript{44} Rieber, pp. 264 – 266; Vinogradov, "Romania in the First World War," pp. 457 – 458.

\textsuperscript{45} Rieber, p. 235.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 252.
August 1914 and their subsequent incorporation into the Ottoman navy, the risks inherent in a Russian amphibious assault against the Bosphorus increased considerably. This development implied that any hypothetical venture the Russians might mount against the Straits would have to follow the overland route through Romania. In turn, this assumption made that country's willingness or unwillingness to co-operate in such an enterprise a chief element of its success or failure.  

Romania's strategic location in the Balkans appears to have been the single most important determinant of the Russian generals' periodic calls for Romanian intervention. They certainly were not based on the Russian assessments of Romanian military effectiveness. In general, Russian estimates of the capabilities of the Romanian army were as low as those voiced by Robertson. The Russians, though they respected the rank-and-file of the Romanian army, entertained a rather low opinion of the officer corps. General Polivanov, the Russian Minister of War, was so doubtful of Romanian military abilities that he recommended the Russians send 300,000 troops to aid the Romanians in the event of a Bulgarian attack from across the Danube. General Mikhail Alexeyev, the Chief of the Russian General Staff, also subscribed to the belief in the limited value of Romanian military establishment and resisted the diplomatic projects designed to facilitate Romania's intervention. In Alexeyev's opinion, Romania as an ally would prove to be more of a liability rather than an asset, if only because its entry into the war would imply the extension of the front by 300 kilometers, or 600 kilometers if Russia agreed to fulfill one of Romania's conditions of intervention and took up the responsibility of protecting Romania from Bulgaria. Furthermore, Alexeyev feared that

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48 Vinogradov, p. 454.
49 Rieber, pp. 256 – 257.
50 Stone, The Eastern Front, p. 273.
a hypothetical Romanian defeat would expose nearly 400 kilometers of Russia's southern flank, thus providing the Central Powers with a new avenue of attack against Russia.\(^52\)

Hard reality bore testimony to the Russians' pessimistic assessment of the Romanian army and the problems that Romania's intervention was likely to create for the Entente in general and Russia in particular. True, the Romanian army looked impressive on paper. Its commendable performance in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 – 1878 may have created unrealistically high expectations among those who did favor Romanian intervention in the First World War.\(^53\) Upon mobilization, its peacetime establishment of 460,000 men distributed among five army corps could expand to over 800,000.\(^54\) Including the reserves, Romania had the potential to mobilize 1,230,000 men capable of bearing arms – roughly 15% of the country's total population of 8 million, and 30% of its male population.\(^55\) These represented a potential infusion of manpower that the Entente would have been foolish to ignore. It is little wonder that when Romania ultimately joined the Allies in August 1916, the size of its army alone seemed enough of a reason to justify the belief that Romanian intervention would have a decisive effect on the course of the conflict.\(^56\)

The splendid facade of big battalions concealed some unpleasant truths. All the distinction that the Romanians army had won while storming the Grivitsa Redoubt at Plevna nearly forty years previously\(^57\) could not compensate for the fact that in 1916,

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\(^53\) Woods, *The Cradle of the War*, p. 120.


\(^55\) Ceausescu, "The Romanian Army in World War I," p. 514.


\(^57\) The Siege of Plevna (7 July – 29 November 1877) was the pivotal engagement of the Russo-Ottoman War. Commanded by Osman Pasha, Plevna's Ottoman garrison of 43,000 troops presented a threat to the communications of the Russian forces marching south toward Thrace and compelled the Russians to invest the town. The stubborn resistance put up by the defenders had serious military and diplomatic repercussions. First, it delayed the Russian march toward Istanbul for months and seriously weakened the Russian army's strength and combat effectiveness. Second, it swung public opinion in Britain in favor of the Ottomans, thus contributing to the British government's eventual decision to provide
Romanian officers and soldiers had virtually no practical knowledge of modern warfare. None of the enterprises carried out by the Romanian army subsequent to the Russo-Ottoman War contributed to broadening its combat experience. In 1907 it was called upon to crush a serious peasants' revolt — a task which it accomplished with a brutality and ruthlessness that were excessive even by the standards of the Balkans. Alone among the Balkan states, Romania did not participate in the First Balkan War, while its armed forces involvement in the Second Balkan War was amounted to a little more than an unopposed parade into Bulgarian territory.

The Romanians' deficiencies in weaponry and equipment were grave. Rifles for the infantry and carbines for the cavalry were in desperately short supply. It mattered little that Romania could mobilize over 1,000,000 men when there were only 440,000 rifles with which to arm them. From this number, only 330,000 were relatively modern, Austrian-made Miinnlichers. The rest were older Martini-Henry weapons captured from the Bulgarians in during the Second Balkan War. The artillery had about 1,300 pieces, but only 760 of these were modern, quick-firing guns. There were only 500 machine-guns, and their scarcity compelled the Romanians to allocate those weapons to first-line

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58 For the Great Peasants' Revolt of 1907, see Hitchins, pp. 176 – 178; and Seton-Watson, A History, pp. 385 – 388.


60 Charles Upson Clark, United Roumania (New York, 1932), p. 141.

61 Romania was particularly deficient in heavy artillery — see Charles Vopicka, The Secrets of the Balkans: Seven Years of a Diplomatist's Life in the Storm Centre of Europe (Chicago, 1921), p. 94. Even if the Romanian army had been adequately supplied with weapons, it is unlikely that Romanian industry would have been able to produce the required quantities of ammunition. In 1916, the Romanian munitions output was sufficient to provide only two shells for every gun and one cartridge (five rounds) for every rifle per day. See Hitchins, p. 262.
units only, with two machine-guns per battalion. There were no trench mortars, chemical weapons, gas masks, hand grenades, and only a few field telephones.

The quality of the human material that made up Romania's vaunted million-man army was uneven, and generally corresponded to the Russian military leaders' opinions regarding the attributes of Romanian officers and soldiers. The Romanian enlisted personnel were mainly peasant conscripts of little or no education but their bravery was unquestionable and with time would be acknowledged even by their opponents. By contrast, the quality of the officer corps was deplorable and few foreign observers, attached to the Romanian army, had anything kind to say about its commissioned personnel. The training and experience of most officers were deficient, while many divisional, corps, and army commanders were simply incompetent. Staff work was poor. There were a few highly capable senior officers but they were an exception to the prevalent rule.

Considerations of military doctrine also had the potential to seriously limit the effectiveness of hypothetical operations against the Central Powers. Prior to 1914, Romanian military planning was geared toward a possible war in which Romania would be fighting alongside, rather than against, the Central Powers. The most likely enemy was Russia, and if a confrontation with the former were to occur, it would most likely take

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62 Liddell-Hart, The Real War, p. 262; Clark, United Romania, p. 141.

63 Churchill, Vol. 3, p. 206; Vopicka, Secrets of the Balkans, p. 94; Clark, p. 141. The Germans were well aware of the Romanian army's lack of familiarity with chemical warfare, and ensured that Mackensen's army group in the Dobruja was plentifully supplied with gas shells. See Erich von Falkenhayn, p. 280.

64 Seton-Watson, A History, p. 502n.

65 Stone, p. 265.

66 The problems that plagued the Romanian officer corps were by no mean restricted to matters of professional competence, as may be deduced from a decree issued by the Romanian high command shortly after Romania's entry into the war. The order in question stipulated that only officers with the rank of lieutenant-colonel or above were entitled to wear makeup. However, the decree's effectiveness is open to question: according to Charles Cruttwell, "throughout the campaign crowds of officers were strolling about Bucharest with painted faces, soliciting prostitutes or one another." See Stone, pp. 264 – 265; and Cruttwell, p. 293.

place on the plains of Moldavia. Consequently, the Romanian army had never given much consideration to training or equipping its units for mountain warfare—even though a war with the Dual Monarchy would involve combat in the Transylvanian Alps and the Carpathians. As late as 1914, the only war plan at the disposal of the Romanian General Staff provided for an attack on Romania's northern neighbor. In January 1915, Prime Minister Brătianu finally ordered Romanian military planners to begin drafting plans against Austria-Hungary. However, it was unlikely that the Romanian army could effectively reverse the orientation of its training and doctrine overnight.

Nevertheless, whatever doubts may have been expressed by select British and Russian political leaders, the Entente could not afford to overlook the advantages that could be gained from Romania's intervention. These benefits were especially notable in the economic sphere. The transformation of the Great War into a protracted, industrial conflict endowed Romania with great importance for the Allies. The intervention of Romania on the side of the Entente would place that country's considerable economic assets at the disposal of the Allies, while at the same time completely depriving the Central Powers of access to the same resources. By any standards, Romania's economic potential was impressive. At the outbreak of the First World War, Romania's nine million hectares of cultivated arable land made it the second largest producer of agricultural staples, the second largest exporter of corn and the fifth largest exporter of wheat in the world. In addition, the country possessed considerable deposits of iron, copper, coal, and mercury, most of which had not yet been exploited. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly from the point of view of industrialized powers waging a war of economic attrition, Romania was the world's fourth largest producer of oil, with its oil fields turning out nearly 2,000,000 tons of oil a year by 1913.

Whether the Allies would be able to induce Romania to co-operate in the ambitious schemes formulated by British strategist, or allow its economic resources to

69 Torrey, "Rumania and the Belligerents," p. 177.
70 Ibid.
71 Silberstein, p. 31.
be harnessed to the Entente’s war effort was yet another matter altogether. Since the start of the war, Allied diplomats had launched numerous initiatives to induce Romania to enter the war. For a few months in 1915, the Entente’s endeavors to obtain Romania’s active participation in the war appeared to stand on the threshold of success. Between 26 February and 2 March, the Royal Navy’s Aegean Squadron under Vice Admiral Carden succeeded in destroying the outer defenses of the Dardanelles. This development had a galvanizing effect on the neutral states of the Balkans, including Romania. Eleftherios Venizelos, the Prime Minister of Greece, offered to land a Greek corps of three divisions on the Gallipoli Peninsula to help the Entente seize the Straits.72 At the same time, Bulgaria’s relations with the Central Powers cooled considerably, encouraging Grey to request the Bulgarian Minister to London to state the terms of his country’s co-operation with the Entente.73 Lastly, the British Cabinet received reports that Romania was leaning toward active intervention.74

Rumors concerning the possibility of Romanian intervention began to assume a more tangible form nearly two months later. On 26 April, Italy signed the Treaty of London, which paved the way for that country’s eventual entry into the war 24 May.75 Encouraged by the Entente’s military and diplomatic victories, Brătianu expressed his willingness to consider joining the Allies. Negotiations continued for several weeks, but by late July, Brătianu himself began to have doubts about the advisability of intervention. The Entente’s military fortunes were deteriorating rapidly. On the Eastern Front, the Central Powers’ breakthrough at Gorlice set in motion a general Russian retreat to the east, allowing German and Austro-Hungarian armies to recapture much of Galicia and conquer all of Russian Poland by the end of August. At Gallipoli, the failure of the Suvla Bay landings that same month confirmed the Allies’ inability break the deadlock at the

72 Theodoulou, Greece and the Entente, pp. 112 – 113.

73 Hankey, p. 285. For the impact of the Dardanelles/Gallipoli Campaign on Bulgarian policy, see Crampton, pp. 439 – 440; and Hall, Bulgaria’s Road, pp. 296 – 298.

74 Cassar, Asquith, p. 69.

Dardanelles. These developments chilled Brătianu's interventionist ardor and effectively dashed any hopes for Romania's entry into the war in 1915.  

The Entente's deteriorating military fortunes in the second year of the war undoubtedly played a major role in the Allies' failure to induce Romania to enter the war. Ultimately, however, it was the peculiar nature of Romania's national strategic policy objectives that lay at the heart of the Allies' inability to secure Romania's co-operation in 1915. Brătianu perceived the First World War as a war of national unification, which held out to Romania the prospect of realizing its irredentist aspirations. Consequently, Brătianu was willing to commit Romania to war alongside the Entente only if the members of the latter provided written assurances that after the war, they would satisfy Romania's maximum territorial demands. Specifically, these included those portions of the Romanian irredenta located within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: Transylvania, the Crișana, the Bukovina, and the Banat of Temesvár – territories collectively populated by nearly 3,000,000 ethnic Romanians. Romanian nationalist ambitions also extended to Russian Bessarabia. By 1914, however, the Romanians' anger over the Dual Monarchy's diplomatic support for Bulgaria during the Balkans Wars, combined with their resentment of the Hungarian government's treatment of the Romanian minority in Transylvania ensured that during the Great War, Romania's irredentist impulses would be directed chiefly against Austria-Hungary rather than Russia.

Brătianu's determination to ensure that Romania's national aspirations would be fulfilled were directly responsible for the Entente's inability to attain its goal of Romanian intervention in 1915. The formal offer of intervention submitted on 3 May to Sazonov by

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76 An examination of the Entente's negotiations with Romania in 1915 may be found in Torrey, "Rumania and the Belligerents," 182 – 184. For the effects of the Allied failure at Gallipoli on the attitudes of the Balkan neutrals, see Trumpener, Germany and the Ottoman Empire, p. 65.

77 Hitchins, pp. 260 – 261.


79 Ibid., p. 16.

80 Torrey, "Rumania and the Belligerents," pp. 171.
Constantin Diamandi, the Romanian ambassador to Petrograd, made Romania's entry into the war conditional on Russia's- and the Entente's- willingness to concede to Romania all of its ambitious territorial claims against Austria-Hungary. The Russian government's immediate response was one of shock and anger.

Since Transylvania and the southern portion of the Bukovina were recognized as ethnically Romanian, Brătianu's claim to those regions seemed reasonable. However, the Russians strongly objected to the other components of Brătianu's package of demands. Romanian aspirations in the northern half of the Bukovina, a region populated chiefly by Ukrainians, clashed with Russia's own ambitions in that area. As far as the predominantly Serb-populated Banat was concerned, Brătianu's desire to see that region incorporated into Romania conflicted with Serbian designs with respect to the same territory. The Serbs wanted the Banat for themselves to improve the strategic position of their capital city, so that Belgrade, located just across the Danube from Hungary, would no longer be so close to the territory of a foreign power.

Romania's ambitions in the Banat were particularly irritating to Britain. Desirous of effecting an overall Balkan settlement in the Balkans that would facilitate Bulgaria's adhesion to the Entente, Britain had been in the forefront of advocating a compromise based on the cession of Serbian Macedonia to Bulgaria and the compensation of Serbia with Bosnia-Hercegovina, sections of the Adriatic littoral, and parts of the Banat. Now, Initially, Brătianu wanted to negotiate with the Entente through London in the vain hope that Britain, because of its alleged disinterest in the Balkans, would be much more sympathetic to Romanian territorial claims than Russia. However, Sazonov was adamant that the Romanians must negotiate through him rather than through the British. See Rieber, p. 255; and Fest, p. 35.


Ibid., p. 183; Vinogradov, p. 455.

Vinogradov, pp. 455–456.


Calder, p. 39.

Fest, p. 35.
Brătianu's claim to the last the these was threatening to aggravate the Serbs and perhaps even derail Britain's efforts to work out a Serbo-Bulgarian territorial compromise. Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, played only a secondary role in the negotiations with Romania in 1915, allowing the Russians to take the lead and generally giving them a free hand in the conduct of the talks with Brătianu. But in the matter of the Banat, he took a firm stance against Romanian aspirations. Discussing the subject with the Romanian Minister to London, Grey made no secret of his belief in "the absolute necessity of securing some territory to the North of Belgrade to give Serbia a strategic frontier." Grey was equally critical of Brătianu's determination to claim a region the majority of whose inhabitants were not even Romanians and argued that he "could not urge that she [Serbia] should agree to the handing over to someone else of people of Serbian nationality who were living at the very doors of her capital." All in all, Grey thought, yielding to Romania's claims to the Banat was a course of action the Entente could not sanction:

I am of the opinion that Allies must adhere to their attitude about the Banat. Serbian feeling is very excited and resentful over offer of Macedonia to Bulgaria, and very suspicious of what has been arranged as regards Adriatic coast with Italy. I think that it would be neither fair nor prudent to sacrifice Serbian interests in the Banat.  

Both Russia and Britain also had little patience with the last of Brătianu's territorial claims – the Crișana region of Hungary. Specifically, Brătianu demanded that Romania's western frontier be pushed as far the line stretching from the city of Szeged to

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89 PRO FO 438/6, Gray to des Graz, 6 May 1915, as quoted in Fest, p. 35. Writing the following day to Sir George Barclay, the British Minister to Bucharest, Grey was even more forceful and stated that "unless Serbia has some portion of the Banat, Belgrade will be within cannon-shot of Roumanian territory. With every desire to facilitate Roumanian co-operation and to give sympathetic support to Roumanian claims, I cannot in reason and fairness urge that Serbia should consent to a settlement that would leave her capital exposed in this way." Grey to Barclay, telegram, 7 May 1915, Doc. 578, #10944/172, B DFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 1, p. 319.

90 PRO FO 371/2258/63946, Grey to Buchanan, 20 May 1915, as quoted in Calder, p. 39.

confluence of the Tisza and Szamos rivers. As most of the inhabitants of this area were Hungarian, Romania's claim to it could not be justified on the basis of ethnicity and Sazonov rejected this demand as vigorously as he had rejected the others. As far as Britain was concerned, the Romanian claim to the Crișana was a sensitive issue because its acceptance could conceivably lead to the dismemberment and destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a separate political entity—an outcome which Britain had not yet adopted as one of its war aims. For these reasons, Arthur Nicholson, the Permanent Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs urged extreme caution in any considerations dealing with Romania's claims to the Crișana:

We should be careful as to meeting these exorbitant demands. We cannot blot Austria and Hungary out of the map and convert them into larger Switzerland with no sea access. Promises hastily made now for an immediate object will be most embarrassing to realize when peace terms come to be discussed.

The spectacular success of the Central Powers' exploitation of the breakthrough at Gorlice compelled Sazonov and the other Allies to gradually soften their opposition to Brătianu's extreme demands. Pressured by Great Britain and France, whose leaders demanded that he do the utmost to compensate for Russia's recent military defeats by securing a diplomatic victory, Sazonov eventually caved in. On 21 July, he accepted all of Brătianu's claims. By now, however, in light of the deteriorating military situation facing the Entente in the East, Brătianu began to have doubts about the advisability of

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92 Barclay to Grey, telegram, 5 May 1915, Doc. 573, #10944/167; Barclay to Grey, telegram, 5 May 1915, Doc. 574, #10944/168, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 1, pp. 316, 317; Also see Rieber, p. 255.

93 Spector, p. 28; Vinogradov, p. 456.

94 PRO FO 371/2244, Nicholson minute, 24 April 1915, as quoted in Fest, p. 34.

95 Initially, it was the French government that took the lead in urging its allies to soften their critical views regarding Romania's territorial claims, with Britain and Russia relaxing their stand toward Brătianu's aspirations by July. See Grey to Bertie, despatch, 29 June 1915, Doc. 2, #10944/464; Buchanan to Grey, telegram, 7 June 1915, Doc. 7, #11283/5; Buchanan to Grey, telegram, 3 July 1915, Doc. 10, #11283/20; Crewe to Bertie, despatch, 7 July 1915, Doc. 13, #11283/37; Buchanan to Grey, telegram, 9 July 1915, Doc. 17, #11283/59, BDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 2, pp. 1, 6 – 7, 8, 10, 15.

96 Rieber, p. 257.

97 Vinogradov, p. 456.
intervention. In light of the recent Allied defeats in Poland and at Gallipoli, Brătianu retracted his offer of intervention.98 However, when examined in isolation, these defeats may hardly be regarded as the real reason for Romania's decision to abstain from the war for the time being. The underlying causes of this decision must instead be sought in the delays that accompanied the negotiations carried out between Romania and the Entente that summer concerning the extent of territorial compensation Romania was to receive as an inducement for its intervention.

The Entente's second failure to bring Romania into the war on their side in 1915 may also be best understood in the context of Romania's irredentist aspirations. In October, in a desperate bid to compensate for their own powerlessness to save Serbia from being crushed by the Central Powers, the Allies' attempted to persuade Romania (along with Greece) to come to the rescue of its neighbor. As an inducement, the British offered to commit 250,000 troops to the Balkans by 1 January 1916.99 Once again, the Allied efforts foundered. Brătianu made Romania's co-operation dependent on the Allies' willingness to provide a Russian army of 500,000 troops to protect Romania from Bulgaria – an extravagant demand the Entente could hardly fulfill.100

It is highly unlikely, however, that it was the Allies' inability to supply Romania with half a million Russian soldiers that convinced Brătianu to cling to neutrality. Instead, given the nature of Romania's war aims, it is plausible to speculate that Brătianu decided against intervention in October 1915 because entering the war to save Serbia would not have contributed to the fulfillment of Romania's national aspirations. After all, if Romania had intervened in the conflict solely for the purpose of succoring Serbia, the Allies would most likely have required the Romanian army to launch an offensive against Bulgaria, the bulk of whose armed forces was then deployed away from the Romanian border and along the Serbo-Bulgarian frontier. But Romania's irredentas were located across that its northern, rather than southern frontiers, and mounting an offensive against


99 Hankey, p. 429.

100 Vinogradov, pp. 457 – 458. It goes without saying that if the Allies had been capable of sending half a million men to the Balkans in autumn of 1915, they would not have asked for the services of the Romanian army in the first place.
Bulgaria would do little or nothing to put the Romanians in physical possession of their territorial claims. In the end, therefore, Brătianu may have made his decision to keep Romania neutral in October 1915 because he realized that intervention at that point in time, would not have allowed Romania to gain tangible control of the territories whose acquisition it sought.

The validity of this assumption is confirmed by the prominence which Romanian military planners accorded to their country's territorial ambitions. The war plans that the Romanian General Staff began to draft at Brătianu's behest in January 1915 to replace the outdated schemes for a war with Russia emphasized operations against Austria-Hungary in Transylvania. Transylvania's importance in the context of Romanian strategic planning suggests that in Brătianu's mind, a direct and strong co-relation may have existed between the actual occupation of a territory during a war and the likelihood of its permanent acquisition after a peace settlement.

At the very least, there can be little doubt that Brătianu was aware of the degree to which Bulgaria's experiences during the Balkan Wars of 1912 – 1913 demonstrated the importance of that relationship. During the First Balkan War, the main object of Bulgaria's strategic policy was the acquisition of Macedonia. However, considerations of military doctrine, combined with the specific nature of Bulgaria's actual strategic location dictated that the overwhelming majority of Bulgaria's military resources had to be concentrated in Eastern Thrace. Given this state of affairs, Bulgarian leaders were able to deploy only relatively small forces in the Macedonian theater of operations. As far as their claims to parts of Macedonia was concerned, the Bulgarians could do little aside from resigning themselves to trust that after the war their Greek and the Serb allies – who directed their main point of effort against Macedonia proper – would prove willing to accord to the Bulgarians the portions of Macedonia which they claimed.


In this, they were disappointed. Serbia, having been denied access to the Adriatic by the Great Powers' decision to create an independent Albanian state, sought compensation by retaining the portion of Macedonia that the Balkan allies originally agreed to allocate to Bulgaria. For reasons identical to those that left their territorial ambitions in Macedonia unfulfilled, the Bulgarians were unable to gain effective control of Thessaloniki, the other great prize they sought to procure as a result of the war. Leading elements of Crown Prince Constantine's Greek Army of Epirus entered Thessaloniki only hours before units of the Bulgarian 7th "Rila" Division reached the outskirts of the city. Although arrangements for joint administration of Thessaloniki were worked out, there could be little doubt that by occupying the city before the Bulgarians did, the Greeks effectively ensured that it would remain permanently in their hands.

These blows to Bulgaria's own territorial aspirations stood as a stern reminder of the steep price that had to be paid by states which failed to effectively co-ordinate their policy objectives with their military strategy. Whether Brătianu had the specific example of Bulgaria in the Balkan Wars in mind when he decided against intervention in October 1915 cannot be determined. However, it was an example with which he was certainly familiar, and which may have confirmed him in his decision not to commit his country to war except in circumstances that guaranteed the immediate gain of Romania's principal territorial demands.

The circumstances surrounding the events that led to Romania's intervention in the summer of 1916 may also be best understood with reference to Romania's irredentist objectives in Austria-Hungary. In the summer of 1916, Brătianu decided to re-open the negotiations with the Entente. The Romanian Prime Minister was aware that to abstain from the war any longer carried the risk of completely exhausting the patience of the Allied powers and putting at risk the realization of Romania's goal of national...
unification. Already, there were signs that the Entente was losing patience with Romania’s attitude in general and Brătianu’s diplomatic methods of hesitation and delay in particular. Throughout June 1916, Allied representatives at Bucharest had been exerting pressure upon Brătianu to induce him to intervene. These diplomatic initiatives were spearheaded by the French, for whom the losses sustained at Verdun made Romanian intervention seem a matter of particular urgency. Unable to make any significant headway, the Allies’ patience began to wear thin. Their warnings culminated on 1 July, General Alexeyev sent a telegram to Bucharest in which he stated that the time for Romania’s intervention was “now or never.” While not an ultimatum, the wording of Alexeyev’s message was an accurate reflection of the Entente’s exasperation with Brătianu.

The success of the Brusilov Offensive finally convinced Brătianu to inform the Allies once again of his readiness to commit Romania to their cause. On 4 July, he announced his willingness to conclude a military convention with the Entente. However, it would not be until 17 August that the final agreement would be signed between Romania and the Entente. As had been the case in the summer of the previous year, Brătianu’s insistence that the Allies agree to conditions necessary for the fulfillment of Romania’s irredentist ambitions prolonged the negotiations and delayed the attainment of a mutually acceptable accommodation. This time, however, the consequences of the delay would be disastrous for Romania.

To begin with, when Brătianu learned that Sazonov wanted Romania to intervene immediately or forfeit all the territorial guarantees made by the Entente since the start of the war, he temporarily hesitated, creating a delay of a few days. Further delays

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108 Vinogradov, p. 459.
110 Torrey, “Romania’s Decision to Intervene,” p. 205.
111 Reiber, p. 275.
112 Spector, p. 33.
occurred at the beginning of August, when Brătianu announced that Romania would not declare war on Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{113} His refusal to do so created new delays because the British, in turn, refused to sanction an offensive from Thessaloniki, which Brătianu demanded as one of the requisites for Romanian intervention, unless Romania attacked Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{114} Apparently, the Romanian Prime Minister wanted to intervene only in conjunction with a general Allied offensive, that would divert the Bulgarian army's attention while Romania mobilized and claimed that an Allied offensive from Thessaloniki would be most effective in attaining that objective.\textsuperscript{115}

On the surface, Brătianu's arguments were strategically sound. However, in light of Romania's national ambitions, it is possible to conjecture that purely strategic considerations played only a part in Brătianu's insistence that the Allies mount an offensive in Macedonia. Instead, it is plausible to assume that Brătianu's search for security against a Bulgarian attack was in reality motivated by a desire to create conditions that would permit Romania to pursue its irredentist ambitions by allowing its army to direct its main effort against Transylvania without the fear of a Bulgarian attack from the south.

The Romanian desire to keep Bulgaria neutral – an objective whose attainment was necessary to facilitate the fulfillment of Romanian irredentist ambitions – was also evident in the context of the diplomatic efforts undertaken by Brătianu shortly in an attempt to ensure Bulgarian neutrality. To achieve this aim, Brătianu offered Romanian support for Bulgarian claims to Serbian Macedonia after the war, and for the maintenance of Ferdinand's dynasty on the Bulgarian throne.\textsuperscript{116}

As subsequent events would show, Brătianu's belief that he could realistically ensure Bulgarian neutrality clearly ignored the realities of the current international situation and failed to take into account the escalating totality of warfare. For all the

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 34.

\textsuperscript{114} Neilson, pp. 153 – 154; French, \textit{British Strategy}, p. 209.

\textsuperscript{115} French, \textit{British Strategy}, p. 206.

\textsuperscript{116} M. S. Anderson, \textit{The Eastern Question}, p. 332n.
political and diplomatic shrewdness with which he has been often credited, the Romanian Prime Minister appeared ignorant of the fact that the tangle of international alliances that had contributed so much to transforming a limited, regional quarrel between Austria-Hungary and Serbia into a world war had also made the concept of limited wars an anachronism. Furthermore, he seemed to forget that Bulgaria still deeply resented Romania's annexation of 3,000 square miles of the Bulgarian Dobruja in 1913, and that Bulgarian public opinion was favorably inclined to a war with Romania.\textsuperscript{117} Bulgarians saw war with their northern neighbor as an opportunity to extract revenge from the "stab in the back" administered to Bulgaria by Romania during the Second Balkan War.\textsuperscript{118} Once Romania openly declared itself in favor of the Entente on 28 August, the Bulgarians did not hesitate for long and declared war on 1 September 1916.

None of the points of contention that arose in the course of the negotiations between Romania and the Allies in the summer of 1916 took more than a few days to iron out. Cumulatively, however, they delayed Romania's intervention by nearly six weeks. It was only on 17 August that Romania and the Entente signed the Treaty of Bucharest that committed Romania to an attack against Austria-Hungary by 28 August.\textsuperscript{119} By that time, however, the Brusilov Offensive had lost much of its momentum and decreased whatever chances existed for Romania's positive contribution to the Allied war effort.\textsuperscript{120} As had been the case the previous year, Brătianu's resolve to ensure that Romania entered the war only in conditions that guaranteed the fulfillment of its irredentist ambitions at their maximum extent contributed to protracting the negotiations between Romania and the Allies. This time, however, the delay was crucial, as it allowed the Central Powers' military planners a grace period in which to take measures designed to meet the contingency of Romanian intervention. In the last ten days of July and in the first week of August, for example, the Germans initiated the transfer of reinforcements

\textsuperscript{117} Vopicka, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{118} Constant, p. 206.

\textsuperscript{119} For the text of the Treaty of Bucharest, see Clark, pp. 134 – 140.

\textsuperscript{120} Torrey, "Rumania and the Belligerents," pp. 188 – 189.
from the West to Transylvania. In addition, construction of railroads in southern Hungary and northern Bulgaria also commenced in an effort to facilitate the deployment of forces which were to take part in the counterattack against Romania.

The desire to ensure the attainment of Romania's territorial aspirations was also evident in the context of the strategic plan implemented by the Romanian high command in the summer of 1916. At the time, Romania's military strategy was governed by a plan called "Hypothesis Z." In its final form, the plan was fully in keeping with Brătianu's determination to co-ordinate, as closely as possible, Romania's military strategy with the aims of its national policy. The plan provided for the concentration of three armies (the 1st, 2nd and 4th) for an offensive against Transylvania, and the deployment of one army (the 3rd) in a defensive posture along the Danube. In addition a strategic reserve of two divisions was to be stationed around Bucharest. The Romanians left only one division to protect the Dobruja. Instead, they chose to rely on the Russian 47th Corps to act as the mainstay of that region's defense.

"Hypothesis Z" was by no means unanimously accepted among Romania's senior military leaders. The most prominent dissenting voice raised in opposition to the plan was that of General Averescu, commander of the 2nd Army, who became the Chief of the Romanian General Staff later in the war. Averescu opposed the provisions of the plan, preferring to adopt a defensive posture along the Transylvanian Alps and the Carpathians, and advocated an attack against Bulgaria in an effort to effect a junction with the Allies from Thessaloniki. Averescu's proposal for a southward, rather than a northward

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121 Falkenhayn, p. 278.
122 Ibid., p. 279.
125 Clark, pp. 141 – 142.
advance was viewed with favor by the French high command. In Joffre’s view, a Romanian offensive against Bulgaria would make it possible for the Romanian to effect a junction with the Allied armies in Macedonia, and open an alternative line of communications and supply between the Western Allies on the one hand, and Romania and Russian on the other. After eliminating the Bulgarian threat to Romania’s rear, the united Allied forces would turn advance to the north against Austria-Hungary. This plan, however, was unacceptable to the Romanian government, and Joffre eventually had to agree to a Romanian offensive against Transylvania. 129

While it is debatable whether a Romanian offensive directed against Bulgaria would have been more successful than a thrust into Transylvania, there is little doubt that "Hypothesis Z" — a war plan based on the political requirements of Romanian irredentism — allowed the Central Powers to prepare for Romania’s entry into the war and facilitated their response to the invasion of Transylvania. The German high command was well aware that Transylvania was the focal point of Romania’s territorial ambitions. 130 By implication, therefore, it was only natural for the Central Powers’ strategists to assume that the Romanian army to deploy most of its forces in the north against Austria-Hungary, leaving the Danubian border with Bulgaria relatively weak. In turn, this assumption allowed the representatives of the Central Powers’ military high command establishments to hammer out the details of their response to Romania’s intervention at the Pless Conference of 28 July — a full month before Romania actually entered the war. 131

The Central Powers’ plan had three principal elements. In Transylvania, the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army was to delay the Romanian advance as long as possible, buying time for the arrival of German reinforcements from the West. 132 At the same time, a composite German-Bulgarian-Ottoman army group under the command of Field-Marshal August von Mackensen was to advance into the Dobruja, capture the fortresses


130 Falkenhayn, p. 279.


of Turtukaia and Silistria and march northward, halting its advance only after occupying the shortest line from the Danube to the Black Sea.\textsuperscript{133} Upon reaching that line, Mackensen was to leave enough troops to ensure the integrity of the new front and transfer the rest of his forces to the south for the purpose of crossing the Danube near Sviostov and marching onto Bucharest.\textsuperscript{134} Lastly, once the German 9th Army had assembled in southern Transylvania, it was to launch a counterattack aimed at breaking into the Wallachian Plain and join Mackensen in his drive toward Bucharest.\textsuperscript{135}

The Romanians would pay a heavy price for adopting a strategic plan that was based on considerations of national ambition rather than sound military principles. Advancing through the passes, the Romanians had to move in a number of widely separated columns, making mutual support and co-ordination of effort difficult, if not downright impossible.\textsuperscript{136} For lateral communications, they had to rely on rail lines located as much as 80 miles south of the passes. Once across the mountains, the situation of the Romanians should have improved, since the superior Austro-Hungarian railroads should have allowed them to close the yawning gaps existing between the three armies and their individual formations. Unfortunately for the Romanians, their ability to do so depended on their success in capturing some of the transportation centers located north of the Transylvanian Alps. This the Romanians failed to achieve, and their northward advance eventually stalled in September after making modest advances into Transylvania.\textsuperscript{137}

That, however, was only the beginning of the disaster. Initially, the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army delayed the Romanian advance northward, and bought sufficient time to enable the German 9th Army to concentrate in southern Transylvania. Once the Romanian offensive had been contained, the 9th Army launched a counterattack that

\textsuperscript{133} Falkenhayn, p. 280. Mackensen’s forces included one German, two Ottoman and four Bulgarian divisions.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., p. 281.


\textsuperscript{136} Liddell-Hart, p. 265.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
broke into the Wallachian plain in November. Simultaneously, the composite Bulgarian-German-Ottoman Army Group Mackensen entered the Dobruja from the south, captured the railway connecting central Romania with Constanza, and then moved westward across the Danube to assist in the operations of the 9th Army.

Having combined their forces and thwarted a Romanian counteroffensive at the Battle of the Arges in early December, both formations concluded the campaign by capturing Bucharest and driving the remnants of the Romanian army across the Sereth river into Moldavia, where the front stabilized and remained unchanged until the summer of 1917. Although it would remain an active participant in the war until the summer of 1918, Romania had ceased, for all intents and purposes, to be a factor in the conflict. While it would be simplistic to argue its leaders' insistence on the adoption of a strategy that gave priority to the fulfillment of national aspirations was the only cause of this development, there is little doubt that it contributed heavily to Romania's defeat. In the end, Romania's intervention did little to help the Entente, aside from diverting sizable Central Powers' forces from other theaters. Altogether, between August and December 1916, the Central Powers' deployed to Romania thirty-three infantry divisions (of which 17 were German) in addition to 8 cavalry divisions (of which 3.5 were German). Unfortunately, whatever advantages the Allies may have derived from this diversion of their enemies' forces to a subsidiary theater were outweighed by the sizable forces the Russian high command was compelled to divert to Romania to save its hapless ally. In addition to the 47th Corps, the Russians committed thirty-six infantry divisions and eleven cavalry divisions to Romania - or 23% of Russian infantry and 37% of cavalry serving on the Eastern Front from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

138 Cruttwell, p. 296.
139 Clark, pp. 143 – 152.
140 Ibid., pp. 153 – 156.
142 Torrey, "The Romanian Campaign," p. 36.
In retrospect, keeping Romania neutral would probably have been a much more effective means of depriving the Central Powers of the country's resources. In the long run, Romania's entry into the war proved a diplomatic and military blunder for the Allies. For Germany and Austria-Hungary, Bucharest's decision to throw its lot in with the Entente actually turned out to be a blessing in disguise. After defeating its army without too many complications, the Central Powers were able to exploit Romania's resources to a far greater degree than it would have been possible had the country's government decided to stay neutral. The retreating Romanians, had, it is true, tried to destroy some of their grain stores and blow up many of the oil wells. But the damage was superficial, and over a period of eighteen months between January 1917 and November 1918, Romania's natural wealth would provide 1,000,000 tons of oil, 2,000,000 tons of grain, 200,000 tons of timber, 100,000 head of cattle, and 200,000 goats and pigs to fuel the Central Powers' war machine. Thus, far from hastening the end of the war, Romania's decision to join the fray may actually have prolonged the conflict by enabling the Central Powers to obtain access to some of resources they needed to continue their struggle against the Entente.

While it is quite tempting to censure Brătianu for his tendency to subordinate military planning to nationalist and irredentist aims to the extent that he did, such criticisms are not entirely justified. In all fairness to Brătianu, he had little choice but to sanction an offensive into Transylvania given the specific circumstances and conditions he faced both domestically and in the sphere of foreign policy. The force of Romanian public opinion demanded the immediate liberation of that region. The majority of educated Romanians sympathized with the Entente, with support for the Allies being particularly pronounced among the officer corps of the Romanian army. However, that support was subordinated to the national aspiration of "liberating" Transylvania, which the force of public opinion vehemently demanded. Brătianu could hardly ignore such

143 Clark, p. 155.
144 Stone, p. 265.
145 Vopicka, p. 79; Weber, Eagles on the Crescent, pp. 52 – 53.
demands. A number of patriotic organizations devoted to the ideal of national unification, including those led by Také Ionescu and Nicolae Filipescu, two of Brătianu's political opponents, increased their pro-interventionist activities to fever pitch in June 1916, criticizing Brătianu for his hesitation and calling for his removal. Nationalist societies such as the "League for the Cultural Unity of all Romanians," "Unionist Federation," and "Patriotic Action," called for war specifically against Austria-Hungary. Although none of these organizations could threaten the government directly without gaining the active support of the police forces and the army, they were nevertheless capable of challenging Brătianu's power and would certainly have been very critical of the Prime Minister if Romania were to enter the war for reason other than the liberation of Transylvania.

Moreover, Brătianu's decision to order the Romanian army to adopt a war plan that aimed at an immediate occupation of Transylvania may have been influenced by a fear that the Allies were not entirely committed to the satisfying of Romanian claims. His fears were more than justified, as none of the Entente powers was particularly eager to fulfill the territorial promises made to Brătianu in exchange for Romania's intervention. Already in August, prior to the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest, Aristide Briand, in response to Boris Stürmer's inquiries as to how the extensive Romanian demands could be satisfied, stated that anything could be promised on paper but only the future would reveal what is possible. Briand then proposed a secret Franco-Russian treaty in which the signatories pledged themselves to re-examine Romanian claims after the war.


148 Oteea, The History of the Romanian People, pp. 440 - 441.


150 Boris Stürmer succeeded Sazonov as Russia's Foreign Minister on 23 July 1916. The latter was dismissed after Stürmer and Rasputin, both of whom opposed Sazonov's plans to grant autonomy to Poland, prevailed upon Empress Alexandra to convince Nicholas II to remove Sazonov from office. See C. J. Smith, pp. 400 - 406; and Alexander Dallin, "The Future of Poland," in Alexander Dallin, ed., Russian Diplomacy and Eastern Europe, 1914 - 1917 (New York, 1963), pp. 49 - 62.

151 Vinogradov, p. 461.

addition, Brătianu was susceptible to fears, especially pronounced in June 1916 at the height of Russian military victories over the armies of the Dual Monarchy, that the Russians might take Transylvania for themselves. Given all these factors, Brătianu's decision to direct the Romanian military effort to the north may well have been motivated by the belief that Romania's chances of retaining Transylvania after the war and fulfilling its irredentist ambitions would be greater if the region actually came into Romania's possession during the conflict itself.

Brătianu has also come under heavy fire from contemporaries and historians for the hesitations and delays that his insistence on the fulfillment of Romania's maximum territorial claims imposed upon that country's entry into the war. These hesitations had an unfortunate effect on the manner in which he was perceived by Entente diplomats and statesmen. In their eyes, the Romanian Prime Minister's tendency to make offers of intervention at times when the military situation favored the Entente, and then suddenly retract them when the war took a course unfavorable to the Allies, made Brătianu appear as an insincere, and perhaps even a hypocritical, leader. This judgment hints an opportunistic element in Brătianu's diplomacy, and implies that the Romanian leader's hesitations might have been rooted in an uncertainty regarding which of the two belligerent camps would ultimately win.

However, the inability to choose sides was hardly the reason for Brătianu's reluctance to enter the war. His sympathies — and those of the majority of politically articulate Romanians — lay firmly with the Entente. Brătianu was a Francophile to begin with, and it is likely that by the end of the First Battle of the Marne in September 1914, he had already made up his mind that it would be the Entente, rather than the Central Powers, that would emerge victorious. Ultimately, Brătianu's reluctance to commit Romania to the Allied cause in the first two years of the war had little to do with any doubts regarding the final outcome of the conflict. Instead, it was rooted in Brătianu's determination to ensure that when Romania finally did intervene in the conflict, it would

153 Spector, p. 32.
154 Vinogradov, p. 456.
155 Silberstein, p. 246.
do so in circumstances and on terms that offered the best possible prospects for the fulfillment of Romania's strategic policy goals at their maximum extent.

However, the Allies disapproved of many of the goals in question, and were unwilling, unable or reluctant to meet many of the conditions whose fulfillment Brătianu demanded as a requisite for his country's intervention. Eventually, Brătianu and the Entente were able to reach an acceptable accommodation, but only after overcoming difficulties that highlighted the fundamental contrasts between the strategic aims of the Allies and those of Romania. Brătianu regarded the Great War as a war of national unification. Consequently, the goal of creating a Greater Romania had unquestionable priority over Romania's obligations as a member of a coalition. By contrast, the Entente's sought Romanian intervention in order to facilitate the fulfillment of strategic designs of a completely different character. These could be meaningful to Brătianu only if they offered the prospect of contributing to the fulfillment of Romania's own national aspirations. Ultimately, the disparity between these two strategic visions created frictions that led to the disastrous demise of both.

156 French, British Strategy, p. 43.
Chapter Five
THE MACEDONIAN FRONT, 1917 – 1918

Romania's defeat at the hands of the Central Powers was a fitting finale to a year that had brought little but disappointment and frustration to the Entente in all of the war's principal theatres. When Romania intervened in the conflict in late August 1916, the overall strategic situation appeared to favor the Entente. In early June, the Russian 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th Armies of General Alexei Brusilov's South-Western Front tore into the positions held by Austro-Hungarian armies between the Pripet Marshes and the Dniester. The impact of the Brusilov Offensive ripped a gaping hole in the front line and shook the Austro-Hungarian war effort to its very foundations. On the Western Front, less than a month later, the British 4th Army began a series of attacks against the German 2nd Army, thus initiating what would eventually become known as the Battle of the Somme. The cumulative effect of all these operations subjected Germany and its allies to the worst military crisis they had yet had to face during the war, and seemingly allowed the Entente to firmly seize the strategic initiative for the first time since the beginning of the conflict. In late August, the British Foreign Office optimistically began to make preparations for peace negotiations, while Grey confidently predicted that the Germans would be suing for peace by October.

By the end of December, the overall strategic situation had undergone a reversal so drastic as to make Grey's earlier optimism appear farcical. While the military endeavors undertaken by the Entente during the summer placed a severe strain upon the human and material resources of the Central Powers, they proved incapable of bringing Germany and its allies to the negotiating table. The Brusilov Offensive, though spectacularly successful in its initial stages, soon lost its momentum as the Russian army's supply services failed to keep up with the advance and the OHL rushed reinforcements to stiffen the resistance of the retreating Habsburg forces. The Russian

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1 For the Brusilov Offensive see Brusilov, A Soldier's Notebook, pp. 235 – 275; Stone, pp. 232 – 263; and Liddell-Hart, pp. 262 – 264.


offensive sputtered on with ever diminishing intensity, until it finally came to a halt in late September – but not before Brusilov himself had incurred nearly 1,000,000 casualties.\(^4\) The outcome of the fighting on the Somme was equally depressing. Undeterred by the frightening casualties suffered by his troops on the first day of the fighting, General Sir Douglas Haig, the commander-in-chief of the British Expeditionary Force, continued to hammer away at the German defenses until 13 November when he finally suspended the attacks.\(^5\) In four and a half months of combat, Britain’s “New Armies” had advanced approximately 13 kilometers in exchange for a butcher's bill of 420,000 casualties.\(^6\)

The disastrous conclusion of the principal campaigns of 1916 prompted the Allies to set out once more on a search for a viable strategy for the following year. Initial steps in this direction were taken even before the full extent of Romania’s defeat could be comprehended. On 15 and 16 November, a conference of senior Entente military leaders convened at Chantilly, with Robertson, Haig and Joffre among the delegates. The Serbian, Romanian, Italian and Russian representatives urged their British and French counterparts to dispatch more troops to the Balkans, but these appeals had no tangible effect in the face of Joffre’s stiff opposition to any such suggestions.\(^7\) The meeting’s final resolutions emphatically and unmistakably designated the Western Front as the principal theatre of operations. The Allies were to complete preparations for another major push in France by mid-February 1917, at which time the precise date of the actual offensive was to be determined.\(^8\) As far as South-Eastern Europe was concerned, the conclusions of the military conference stipulated the desirability of knocking Bulgaria out of the war by

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\(^4\) Herwig, p. 209.


\(^6\) Edmonds, *A Short History of World War I*, p. 194.

\(^7\) Robert Blake, ed. *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914 – 1919* (London, 1952), p. 179. Joffre’s constant changes of mind regarding the desirability of an Allied offensive in the Balkans were the result of varying fortunes of war in other theatres. Thus, Joffre was generally favorable toward military operations in South-Eastern Europe only at times when the Allies were experiencing difficulties on the Western Front, and his ability to hold on to his position as French commander-in-chief appeared in doubt. See Palmer, *The Gardeners*, p. 46.

\(^8\) Guinn, p. 168.

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means of a massive offensive that would involve a Russo-Romanian drive from the north with an all-out advance by the Allied forces at Thessaloniki from the south. To enable Sarrail's command to carry out this task, the Allied expeditionary force in Macedonia was to be increased to a grand total of twenty-three divisions. In reality, the provision for a major offensive against Bulgaria was anything but a concession to the advocates of a Balkan-oriented strategy. In drafting it, Joffre was perfectly aware that the reinforcement of a kind specified in the resolution would not be feasible due to a shortage of resources and the poor state of Macedonia's transportation network.

The resolutions hammered out at Chantilly were presented to Allied political representatives, who had been meeting at Paris at the same time. Believing that the generals were responsible for the fiasco of the preceding months, the politicians had come to Paris intent on venting their frustration with the military chiefs' tight grip on the strategy-making process. Nevertheless, although Lloyd George easily grasped the hollow nature of the provision for a Balkan offensive, both Briand and Asquith eventually accepted the conclusions of the military conference without demur.

Less than a month after the Paris/Chantilly conferences, Mackensen's troops entered Bucharest. Even if Robertson and Joffre had been sincere in their endorsement of a combined Balkan offensive, the strategic situation was now hardly conducive to an enterprise of this type. The Romanian contingents that had managed to reach the line of the Sereth were utterly incapable of undertaking any offensive operations, much less of a grandiose endeavor sanctioned at Chantilly. More than three months of campaigning had reduced the Romanian army to less than 100,000 troops, with less than 30,000 in the front line. Some of the six divisions into which these pitiful remnants were organized had

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9 Specifically, the British contingent was to be raised to seven divisions, the French to six, and the Italian to three. See Lloyd George, p. 567.

10 Ibid., pp. 570 – 571.


12 Lloyd George, 569; Cassar, Asquith, p. 205.

been reduced to a strength of 2,000 rifles. Exhaustion and low morale were manifest. Subordinated to the headquarters of General Averescu's 2nd Army, the depleted Romanian units took over 35 kilometers of the front between the Russian 9th and 4th Armies. During the winter, 500 officers of General Henri Berthelot's French Military Mission, assisted by British and Russian advisors began the task of reorganizing the Romanian army, but it would be months before it became a battle-worthy formation again.

In Britain, the defeat of Romania furnished a stimulus for the resumption of the debate concerning the strategic utility of the Macedonian Front. For the second time in its short, but controversial history, the Entente's foothold in Macedonia appeared to have been completely deprived of its raison d'être, once again casting into doubt the wisdom of maintaining a large British contingent in the region. After all, in late 1915, the British government had agreed to retain a foothold in the Balkans only because of the French government's convictions that the presence of a large Allied force in the region would induce Romania to enter the war. By December, however, Romania had been beaten, and the remnants of its army were too weak to be counted upon to carry out the role assigned to them by the Chantilly plan.

Moreover, the Central Powers' triumph over Romania had substantially increased the dangers confronting the Allied contingents at Thessaloniki. Even prior to Romania's defeat, their position had been precarious enough. The Army of the Orient occupied a front approximately 150 miles in length and serviced by completely inadequate lateral communications. It drew the majority of its provisions from a single port whose processing capacity was barely sufficient to cope with the army's logistical requirements. Supplies destined for the Allied forces in Macedonia had to be transported nearly 2,000 miles from French and British ports over maritime routes infested with German and Austro-Hungarian submarines.

14 Torrey, "The Redemption," p. 271; Clark, p. 159.


Adding to the risks faced by the Allies forces on the Macedonian Front was the Entente's increasingly deteriorating diplomatic relations with Greece. The Allies' presence in Greece, a neutral state until July 1917, was based on a very liberal interpretation of the 1863 Treaty of London which accorded Britain, France, and Russia, in their capacity of Greece's "Protective Powers," the right to intervene in the country's domestic and foreign affairs, and charged them with safeguarding the sovereignty of the Kingdom. When the first Allied contingents set foot on the Thessaloniki waterfront in October 1915, they did so in the face of official protests from Constantine, who opposed Venizelos' decision to permit the Allies to disembark troops in Macedonia. For several months after the landings, the tensions and mistrust between Greece and the Entente steadily mounted, only awaiting a triggering incident to produce a crisis. Such an incident finally occurred on 26 May 1916, when the Greek commander of Fort Rupel, a defensive work blocking the most direct road from Bulgaria into eastern Macedonia, surrendered his post to the Bulgarian 7th Division.

The Allies regarded the surrender of the fort as incontrovertible evidence that Greece was actively collaborating with the Central Powers. In reality, the Greek government decided to hand the fort over to the Bulgarians not only because of the conviction that the fort could not be defended successfully, but also because of fears any opposition to a Bulgarian assault against the installation would compromise Greek neutrality. As far as the Allies were concerned, this was not a valid justification. The Entente's retaliatory measures were swift. Empowered to take whatever measures were

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17 From the point of view of international law, the Entente's actions toward Greece, a neutral state, were little different from those of Germany in Belgium in 1914. However, the Great War was by no means the first instance of foreign intervention in Greek domestic affairs. In 1850, in the course of the so-called "Don Pacifico Affair," a British naval squadron blockaded Piraeus in order to enforce property claims that several British subjects, including the historian George Finlay and the Gibraltar-born merchant David Pacifico were advancing against the Greek government. A financial settlement was eventually reached, but the episode actually proved advantageous to King Othon I of Greece, whose decision to confront a Great Power with calm and dignity increased the monarch's popularity among his subjects. Several years later, during the Crimean War, Britain and France imposed a naval blockade of Greek ports and landed troops in Piraeus in order to prevent Greece from taking advantage of the war to further its irredentist aspirations. See Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, A History of the Balkans, 1804-1945 (London, 1999), p. 63; and Couloumbis et al., pp. 25 - 26.


19 Mitrakos, p. 61.
necessary to ensure the safety and security of his forces, General Maurice Sarrail, the commander of the Army of the Orient, proclaimed a state of siege in Thessaloniki on 3 June 1915.20 French military authorities took over the administration of railway installations, and postal and telegraph services in the region. Tight censorship was imposed over local newspapers.21 At the same time, Allied naval units initiated a blockade of Greek ports. When Constantine agreed to replace the allegedly pro-German government of Stephanos Skoulodis with a more impartial cabinet and demobilize the Greek army, the Allies eventually lifted the blockade. However, they maintained a watch over the port of Kavalla, whose proximity to the Bulgarian border necessitated the maintenance of a naval force in the area.22

Ironically, Kavalla provided the setting for the next crisis between Greece and the Allies. In late August, the Bulgarian high command launched a major offensive against Allied positions in Macedonia in an effort to pre-empt the offensive Sarrail himself planned to undertake in conjunction with Romania's entry into the war. As part of their offensive, the Bulgarian 2nd Army advanced into eastern Macedonia, at the time unoccupied by the Allies, and captured Kavalla. At the time, the Greek army's demobilization was already well underway in accordance with the stipulations made by the Allies themselves in June.23 As a result, Kavalla's garrison – 8,000 men of the 4th Corps – could not offer any effective resistance, and surrendered without a fight, to be interned in Germany for the rest of the war.24 The Allies' reaction to the surrender of Kavalla closely resembled their response to the Fort Rupel incident. Interpreting the action of the Greek officers of the 4th Corps as evidence of treachery on the part of the Greeks, the Allies dispatched a naval squadron to Piraeus and seized the Greek fleet.25

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23 Mitrakos, p. 81.
Simultaneously, the Entente gave limited backing—though not official recognition—to a provisional government established which Venizelos established in Thessaloniki in September in opposition to the government in Athens.26

Allied warships remained at anchor off the Greek capital for several months. On 1 December 1916, amidst mounting tension, the French admiral commanding the Entente fleet ordered 3,000 British and French sailors and marines to seize a quantity of war material which the Allies demanded Greece forfeit as proof of its good will toward the Entente. Shortly after the landing force reached Athens, fighting broke out in the city between Constantine's supporters and the Franco-British contingent. Shortly after, the Vice-Admiral Dartige du Fournet, the French admiral commanding the Allied naval squadron off Athens ordered his ships to open fire on the Greek positions in the city. This action prompted Constantine to open negotiations with the French commander. The Greeks eventually agreed to surrender six batteries of artillery, and the landing parties re-embarked on their ships after sustaining over 200 casualties. Nevertheless, in spite of the Greek decision to bow down to the Allied demands, the so-called "Zappeion Incident" completely discredited Constantine in the eyes of even the few supporters he had left in Allied states and paved the way for the Entente's recognition of Venizelos' Thessaloniki regime as the legitimate government of Greece on 19 December.27

The fallout from the street battle in Athens, and the resultant deterioration of Greek-Allied relations, had a direct impact on the debates waged by Allied military leaders concerning the Entente's Balkan strategy and the advisability of maintaining a large expeditionary force in Macedonia. The perception of the Entente was that Greece was adopting an increasingly hostile attitude toward the Allies. Furthermore, the forces that the Central Powers had committed to the subjugation of Romania had accomplished their task, and were now free for deployment to other theatres. Robertson found this combination of circumstances deeply disturbing. He envisioned a scenario whose realization could prove fatal to the Army of the Orient. Writing to Joffre on 2 December,

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the C.I.G.S envisioned the possibility of a massive attack against Allied forces in Macedonia delivered from the north by thirty-five German, Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian and Ottoman divisions just released from the Romanian campaign, and from the south by Greek Royalist forces. In Robertson’s view, the only feasible countermeasure to this frightening contingency was the creation of a reserve behind the Allied front and the withdrawal of the Army of the Orient to a shorter line of defense.  

Joffre was as concerned as Robertson about a combined attack against Sarrail’s forces. However, Joffre proposed to remedy the dire situation faced by the Army of the Orient by sending even more troops to Greece to reinforce the Allied contingents already there. In his reply of 7 December, Joffre requested the British to dispatch two more divisions to the Macedonian Front, thus increasing their forces there to a grand total of nine divisions. At the same time, he proposed to ask the Italians to send four more divisions to the Balkans, and pledged that France would send two more. Altogether, these reinforcements would boost the strength of the Army of the Orient to twenty-three divisions.  

Joffre’s recommendations ran completely against the grain of Robertson’s fervent opposition to any increases in the size of the British Salonika Force. In October, he had resigned himself to the necessity of sending to Macedonia the 60th (London) Division, but only for the sake of maintaining cordial relations with France. Now, however, with the Macedonian Front threatened with a potentially overwhelming offensive from front and rear, Robertson adamantly refused to consider his French counterpart’s proposal. Throughout December, he continued to oppose outright Joffre’s request that two more British divisions be sent to Thessaloniki. Even if the two formations were dispatched to Greece, Robertson argued, the lengthy sea voyage they would have to make in order to reach Thessaloniki meant that they would arrive only sometime in late March – too late to affect the present military situation in the region.  

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29 Ibid., p. 253.

30 PRO CAB 23/1/20, War Cabinet, 27 December 1916.
Furthermore, in Robertson's view, the front line held by the Allies in Macedonia was so long that two additional divisions would not contribute substantially to strengthening the Allied line against the anticipated German attack. In light of the prevailing circumstances, the Allies would do best to contract their front by withdrawing to a shorter line that would facilitate defense against an offensive from the north, as well as provide security from a possible attack by Greek Royalist forces from the south. Ideally, Robertson would have liked to pull British troops out of Greece altogether — given Romania's defeat, the Chantilly scheme for a combined offensive against Bulgaria was no longer feasible. However, "political reasons" — the desire to maintain good relations with Britain's French and Serb allies — negated this course of action, and Robertson had to settle for the adoption of a purely defensive stance focused on covering Thessaloniki and protecting the vulnerable left flank of the Army of the Orient. The Allies should abandon Monastir and retire to a secondary position in the vicinity of Lake Ostrovo. While such a retrograde movement would open an avenue for a German advance into Greece, Robertson thought that ultimately it would prove to the Allies' advantage since no large German force would dare move south with twenty-three enemy divisions hovering off the flank of its advance. Overall, Robertson believed that the German and Greek Royalist threats faced by the Entente armies in Macedonia, combined with the strained shipping arrangements, meant that the Entente forces in Macedonia should adopt a purely defensive stance.

The possibility of a Central Powers' offensive on the Macedonian Front was progressively discounted by British military authorities beginning in late December and early January when it became clear that the Germans' were far more interested in dealing a coup de grace to the Romanians than they were in striking a blow against the Army of the Orient. By late January, concerns about an enemy offensive in Macedonia had

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31 PRO CAB 23/1/1, War Cabinet, 9 December 1916.
32 PRO CAB 23/1/18, War Cabinet, 26 December 1916.
33 PRO CAB 23/1/19, War Cabinet, 27 December 1916.
34 See for example PRO CAB 23/1/24, War Cabinet, 29 December 1917; PRO CAB 23/1/27, War Cabinet, 4 January 1917.
practically vanished. By contrast, Robertson’s objections to further British commitment in the Balkans, as well as the grounds upon which he based his arguments, did not recede into the background. On the contrary, they continued to form the core of his views regarding the Macedonian Front for the remainder of his tenure as Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Throughout 1917, Robertson’s views regarding the general conduct of British strategy in South-Eastern Europe received support from an unlikely source. After becoming Prime Minister in succession to Asquith in December 1916, Lloyd George began to gradually lose much of his earlier enthusiasm for major military ventures in the Balkans. Admittedly, his belief in the utility of military operations in peripheral theatres and his criticisms of Robertson’s insistence on concentrating Britain’s military resources continued unabated. Far from losing any of its intensity, the running quarrel which the new Lloyd George had been waging with the C.I.G.S over matters of strategy since late 1915 became even more fierce and eventually led to Robertson’s dismissal from his post in February 1918. Nevertheless, the new Prime Minister was skeptical about the possibility of attaining any positive military results in the Balkans. With Lloyd George’s cabinet dominated by “High Imperialists” like Milner and Curzon, considerations of Britain’s long-term imperial interests assumed a leading role in the formulation of Britain’s strategic conduct of the war. These considerations ensured that the new government and its leader would put a premium on military operations in theatres such as Palestine and Mesopotamia to the exclusion of other peripheral theatres, including South-Eastern Europe.

Lloyd George changing attitude toward British military presence in the Balkans first manifested itself at the inter-Allied conference in Rome on 5 – 7 January 1917. There, Lloyd George made it unmistakably clear to the French representatives that the already high demands placed on British shipping precluded the dispatch of more British

35 PRO CAB 23/1/40, War Cabinet, 22 January 1917.


divisions to the Balkans. More evidence of Lloyd George's growing impatience with the Entente's lack of progress in South-Eastern Europe came to light at the St. Jean-de-Maurienne conference (19 April 1917). At this meeting, the French delegates were informed that while the British government would agree to the new offensive that Sarrail intended to launch in Macedonia the end of April, the upcoming operation would be the "last chance" for the Army of the Orient to prove its worth. If the offensive did not achieve any tangible results, Sarrail's troops would have to withdraw to a shorter line of defense, while Britain would be compelled to pull its troops out of the Balkans to alleviate the shipping shortage.

When the Entente's senior political leaders met again in Paris on 4 - 5 May 1917, the main offensive had not even begun. Bad weather conditions had forced Sarrail to postpone it repeatedly, but the diversionary attacks that the British 12th Corps was to mount against the Bulgarian defenses between the Vardar and Lake Doiran went ahead on schedule. Delivered on 24 May, the attack made virtually no progress, and produced nothing but high casualties. It failure may well have been the factor that convinced Lloyd George not to wait for the results of the main offensive before carrying out the threat of pulling British troops out of Greece. When the War Council met on 1 May to discuss the upcoming inter-Allied meeting in Paris, Robertson recommended informing the French that one infantry division and two cavalry brigades be withdrawn from

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38 For the Rome Conference see PRO CAB 23/1/27, War Cabinet, 4 January 1917, Appendix I: Statement of the Prime Minister with reference to the Conference of the Allies held at the Consulta, Rome, on January 5, 6, and 7, 1917. Also see Lloyd George, pp. 838 - 839; Hankey, pp. 606 - 612; Sarrail, Mon Commandement, pp. 212 - 217; and Dutton, The Politics, p. 118.

39 PRO CAB 23/2/124, War Cabinet, 23 April 1917. Although the meeting at St. Jean-de-Maurienne ostensibly signaled the British government's intention to limit its military commitment in the Balkans, the conference also resulted in a secret diplomatic agreement that had serious repercussions for the Balkans. Specifically, the France and Britain recognized Italy's interests in an area of approximately 120,000 square miles in Asia Minor, including the district of Smyrna, with the stipulation that the city was to become a free port for French and British trade. This concession on the part of France and Britain was meant to ensure that the Italians would give backing to a separate peace with Austria-Hungary, and support the Entente's efforts to remove Constantine from the Greek throne as a means of facilitating Greece's entry into the war. See Petsalis-Diomidis, pp. 47 - 48. For the text of the St. Jean-de-Maurienne agreement, see Ernest L. Woodward, ed., Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919 - 1939, First Series, Volume IV (London, 1952), pp. 640 - 641.

40 During the First Battle of Doiran, the British 22nd, 26th and 60th (London) Divisions suffered over 3,100 casualties. Another attack, delivered on 8 May was equally futile and resulted in an additional 1,800 casualties for the 12th Corps. See Falls, Vol. II, pp. 302 - 334.
Thessaloniki as soon as possible, "to be followed by the whole or greater part of the remainder as soon as shipping could be made available." Robertson's suggestions were incorporated directly into the resolutions Lloyd George placed before the French government at the Paris Conference and reiterated at the London Conference. The British 60th (London) Division, together with the 7th and 8th Mounted Brigades would be withdrawn from Thessaloniki and transferred to Egypt, to strengthen Edmund Allenby's 8th Army, then preparing to launch an offensive into Palestine – an operation favored by both Lloyd George and Robertson on the grounds that its success would significantly advance Britain's imperial interests in the Middle East after the war. In time, the remainder of the Salonika Army would also be pulled out of Macedonia, while its place in the Allied front at Thessaloniki would be filled by Greek divisions.

British proposals for the abandonment of Monastir and the reduction of the forces at Thessaloniki were militarily sound, but their significance transcended the considerations of strategy. The issue of the proposed withdrawal was made complicated by the necessity to adjust Britain's own strategic and military priorities to those of the Britain's Balkan allies. With military operations in Macedonia effectively stalled after the failure of the spring offensive of 1917, the transfer of Britain's Salonika Army to Palestine would undoubtedly have been much more beneficial to Britain's own strategic and imperial interests than keeping that force in the Balkans. But Britain's wider strategic and policy concerns had little meaning to the governments of the Balkan states fighting the war on the side of the Entente. To them, the presence of British troops in the Balkans was a guarantee of Britain's commitment to fulfilling their own national aspirations and territorial ambitions. Consequently, British proposals for the reduction of

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41 PRO CAB 23/1/128, War Cabinet, 1 May 1917. Also see PRO CAB 23/13/128(a), War Cabinet, 1 May 1917.

42 PRO CAB 24/13/G.T 656, Anglo-French Conference, May 4 and 5, 1917, Resolutions proposed by the Prime Minister

43 Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 64 – 65.

44 PRO CAB 23/13/191(a), War Cabinet, 20 July 1917.

45 British forces in Macedonia were officially designated as an army after the Rome Conference. See Graham Nichol, Uncle George: Field Marshal Lord Milne of Salonika and Rubislaw (London, 1976).
its forces in Macedonia and for a contraction of the Allied front encountered vehement opposition not only from France, but also from the Serb, Romanian, and Venizelist Greek governments.\textsuperscript{46} The capture of Monastir in November 1916 after a grueling, two-and-a-half month-long offensive represented the first tangible success attained by the Thessaloniki expedition since its initiation more than a year previously.\textsuperscript{47} Sarrail even claimed that its conquest by his forces represented the Entente's first real victory of the entire war.\textsuperscript{48} For these reasons, the town had a substantial symbolic value. Abandoning it without a fight, after it had been won at such a high cost, would potentially lead to a loss of prestige. More importantly, however, it would have a potentially disastrous effect on the delicately balanced morale of the Serbian army whose exertions during the 1916 offensive contributed so much to the town's capture. On 23 December, General George Milne, commander of the British forces at Thessaloniki, informed Robertson that if an evacuation of Monastir were to be ordered, many Serbian troops might simply refuse to do so, while others might simply cross over to the Bulgarian lines and request that they be allowed to go back to their homes in Serbia.\textsuperscript{49}

As far as the withdrawal of British troops was concerned, the Serbs regarded any attempts to reduce the strength of the Army of the Orient as a betrayal. In May, when Sarrail announced his intention of detaching a force of approximately two divisions to monitor the withdrawal of Greek Royalist forces from Thessaly, the Serb High Command urged the British War Office to pressure the French into reversing Sarrail's decision.\textsuperscript{50} The British decision to transfer troops to Egypt drew even stronger protests. In late July 1917, the Foreign Office received a memorandum from the Serbian Government. The

\textsuperscript{46} PRO CAB 23/3/204, War Cabinet, 3 August 1917. The Allies recognized Venizelos' regime at Thessaloniki as the legitimate government of Greece on 19 December 1916. In June of the following year, the Allies succeeded in pressuring Constantine to leave Greece for Switzerland. He was succeeded by his second son, Alexander. Venizelos became Prime Minister of "unified" Greece on 27 June 1917, and Greece entered the war on the side of the Allies two days later. See Alastos, pp. 176 – 178; and Pestalis-Diomidis, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{47} For the Monastir offensive see Falls, Vol. I, pp. 234 – 241.

\textsuperscript{48} Palmer, The Gardeners, p. 91.


\textsuperscript{50} PRO CAB 23/2/149, War Cabinet, Appendix I: Note sent by the Serbian Military Attache in London to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 29 May 1917.
document, after asserting that a reinforcement of 100,000 troops would assure victory in Macedonia, went on to state menacingly that in any subtraction of force from the Army of the Orient would cause the Serbs to lose "[m]oral [sic] and trust in a sincere help of the Allies." A few days later, the Serbs repeated their demands for reinforcements, pointing out in emphatic terms the alleged numerical inferiority of Allied forces at Thessaloniki as compared to the enemy contingents facing them. Their allies' protests did little to encourage the British to reconsider their decision, and the withdrawal of the one division and two mounted brigades went ahead as planned.

However, the British did promise not to withdraw any further troops from the Balkans, except in the event of unexpected military contingency and to submit and such matters for discussion among the Allies. In addition, at least for the time being, the policy of abandoning Monastir and retreating to the "bird cage" was shelved. While these pledges might seem like only a small victory for the Serbs, it demonstrated the extent to which Britain's Balkan allies were capable of influencing major strategic and operational decisions. It would be unwise to suggest that the Serbian government's opposition to the withdrawal of British troops from Thessaloniki was the sole factor responsible for Britain's willingness to back down on the issue of pulling out even more troops and abandoning Monastir. Without doubt, the opposition from the French government received as much if not more consideration in Britain than the protests of a Balkan state. Moreover, the British government did not consider itself bound to any of the territorial promises made to Serbia in 1914 and 1915. British leaders were unwilling to give official sanction to Serbia's territorial ambitions at their widest extent because of the realization that the fulfillment of such ambitions would necessitate the

51 PRO CAB 23/3/205, War Cabinet, Appendix IV, 7 August 1917.

52 PRO CAB 24/23/G.T. 1727, Strength of Allied and Enemy Forces on the Salonika Front, Aide-Memoire by the Serbian Prime Minister, 13 August 1917.

53 PRO CAB 23/13/203(a), War Cabinet, 2 August 1917.


55 PRO CAB 23/13/191(a), War Cabinet, 20 July 1917.
dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a war-aim to which Great Britain was still not committed.\footnote{Rothwell, p. 120.}

Moreover, the endorsement of Serbia's national aspirations had the potential to jeopardize seriously British designs to conclude a separate peace with Bulgaria. To facilitate the conclusion of such a deal, Bulgaria was to be left in possession of all, or parts of Serbian Macedonia, the territory that stood at the heart of its irredentist ambitions, and this was unlikely to be favored by the Serbs.\footnote{See for example "The Balkans: Extracts from the War Aims Index of Statements by Allied, Enemy and Neutral Countries and Subject Nationalities, 1914 - 1918," n. d., Doc. 69, #11045, RDFA, Part II, Series H, Vol. 4, pp. 182 - 185.}

Nevertheless, throughout the course of the war, British leaders acknowledged repeatedly that Britain had a moral obligation toward the Serbs for the sacrifices they made during the conflict.\footnote{David MacKenzie, The "Black Hand" on Trial: Salonika, 1917 (Boulder, Colorado, 1995), p. 70.} For this reason, the British could not afford to alienate the Serbs completely. To do so, would entail running the risk of demoralizing the Serbian government and army to such an extent as to furnish them with reasons for concluding a separate peace with the Central Powers. Such a contingency was by no means impossible. With the prospects for an Entente victory in 1917 more distant than ever, the Serbian government in exile became receptive to the idea of arriving at an agreement with the Central Powers. To what extent the Corfu government was prepared to embark on such a course is not clear, circumstantial evidence suggests that the Serbs may have attempted to establish contact with Charles I of Austria-Hungary shortly after the latter became Emperor in November 1916.\footnote{Fest, passim.} Clearly, the warnings issued by the Serbs in August to the effect that further reductions of the Entente's forces in the Balkans would erode the Serbs' trust in the Allies were anything but empty rhetoric. On the contrary, in light of the extensive demoralization that had set in the ranks of the Serbian army after the conclusion of the Monastir offensive and continued to escalate throughout 1917, such admonitions had to be taken very seriously by British leaders.
Low morale began to affect the Serbs shortly after the end of the 1916 offensive in November. Although the capture of Monastir was a significant moral victory for the Serbs, the euphoria soon vanished. Most of Serbia was occupied by the Central Powers, and the Serbian high command found it virtually impossible to procure replacements for the heavy casualties sustained in during the offensive. So severe was the manpower shortage that in January, the entire Serb army was subjected to a drastic reorganization: the 3rd Army was disbanded, and its units incorporated into the 1st and 2nd Armies; at the same time, each Serbian division was reduced from twelve to nine battalions. None of these measures proved effective in alleviating the Serbs' manpower problems. In February 1917, the Serbian army contained only 23,000 effectives; a month later that figure had risen to barely 30,000. During the failed offensive of May 1917, the Serb high command deliberately refused to commit its 2nd Army to battle for fear that if Serbian troops were subjected once again to a prolonged period of intensive combat, the Serb army as a whole would cease to exist as an effective fighting formation. Even so, by August, none of the six Serb divisions could muster more than one-third of their paper strength. However, numbers and changing tables of organization did not tell the whole story, however. The most important consequence of the Serbs' lack of replacements and reserves implied that the Serbian high command could not afford to rotate units out the front line for rest and recuperation.

The impact on the morale of the Serbian troops was predictable. Lieutenant-Colonel E. A. Plunkett, reporting to the War Office in May 1917 on the results of one his
frequent fact-finding missions to Macedonia, described the condition of the Serbian army in bleak terms. Based on a conversation with General Bojević, the Serb Chief of Staff, Plunkett stated that the Serbian army might preserve its cohesion for three or four more months. After that, if it became clear to the Serbs that their prospects for liberating their homeland were slim, and that they would have to remain in their current positions for the rest of the war, they would defect to the enemy in the hope of being allowed to return to their homes and families. Already, Austrian peace propaganda was circulating among the Serb rank-and-file who were becoming increasingly disillusioned with their officers’ claims that the Allies would assist them in liberating their country. While Plunkett discounted the possibility that Serb officers would be willing to go over to the Austrians, he was convinced that the rank-and-file, many of whom had been on active service since the First Balkan War, would find it difficult to resist the temptation of crossing the lines and going home if permitted to do so by the enemy.66

When Plunkett visited the Macedonian Front two months later, the situation had improved, but only marginally. Serb commanders were now confident of being able to hold their army together until fall, but there was no telling what the onset of winter would bring. The line held by the Serbs ran along the peaks of the Moglena Mountains, and it was possible that the sufferings that the Serbs would have to endure due to the weather would seriously sap their morale again.67 General George Milne entertained similar views. Writing to Robertson in August, the commander of the British Salonika Army presented the Serbs as tired, demoralized and depressed by the British government’s decisions to withdraw a number of units from Macedonia. According to Crown Prince Alexander, Milne stated, the Serbs were barely prepared to withstand a major attack should the Central Powers decide to launch, especially if one were to be delivered in winter months.68 Plunkett’s and Milne’s views were corroborated by a memorandum submitted to the British Cabinet by Pašić in September 1917. The Serbian Prime Minister

66 PRO CAB 24/15/G.T. 924, Report of Lieut.-Colonel E. A. Plunkett, Liaison Officer, after third visit to Salonica, 23 – 22 April 1917.

67 PRO CAB 24/19/G.T. 1400, Military Situation at Salonika, July 1917, Lieut.-Col. E. A. Plunkett, Liaison Officer between the War Office and Salonica, 13 July 1917.

painted an alarming picture. The ranks of Serbian combat units was filled with men whose age normally should have disqualified them from active service but who continued to serve at the front due to a lack of replacements. Many Serb divisions, Pašić claimed, had been in the line since their arrival at the front in the spring of 1916, and had not had so much as a day's rest. The Serbs' physical condition and health were rapidly eroding their fitness; cases of heart disease and foot trouble, the scourge of infantrymen, were becoming more frequent. As a result, despairing of their chances to ever return home, or be relieved from the strain of continuous combat duty, some Serb soldiers were succumbing to demoralization and depression that all too often manifested itself in the tragic form of suicide.⁶⁹

Making matters worse were the difficulties inherent in finding the reinforcements upon whose procurement the morale of the Serbian army depended. Since replacements could not be levied in Serbia itself for obvious reasons, the Serbs had to look elsewhere. The most obvious source of replacement were the two divisions of the Serbian Volunteer Corps that fought alongside the Russian forces on the Eastern Front. This formation was composed of Serbs and other South Slavs who originally served in the Austro-Hungarian army, and after being taken prisoner, or deserting to the Russians, elected to fight against the Central Powers.⁷⁰ The corps had distinguished itself during the Romanian campaign, when it fought against Mackensen's forces in the Dobruja. In mid-1917, the Corfu regime began to express the desire to have the corps transferred to Macedonia, but the Russians proved reluctant to release the formation to duty on the Macedonian Front.⁷¹ The Serb Volunteer Corps was among the few units whose discipline and reliability proved strong enough to withstand the corroding effects of the political ferment into which Russia was sinking at the time.⁷² In September, the Russians' reluctance to part with this excellent

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⁷¹ See PRO CAB 23/3/180, War Cabinet, 10 July 1917; and PRO CAB 23/4/255, War Cabinet, 23 October 1917.

formation finally forced the British government to bring pressure to bear on the Russians in order to expedite the transfer of the corps to the Balkans.73

Even so, the transfer proceeded slowly, and the advance elements of the corps began disembarking in Thessaloniki only in January 1918.74 By March, nearly 8,000 men had arrived, providing much needed encouragement for the disheartened Serbs.75 Nevertheless, the Serbs recovered their spirits slowly. As late as May, General Guillamat, who succeeded Sarrail in command of the Allied Armies of the Orient in December 1917, informed the Supreme Allied War Council that the morale of the Serbs was so low and their loyalty so suspect as to create the danger that they would turn against the Allies and join the Central Powers, a contingency that held out the prospect of dire consequences for the security of Entente forces at Thessaloniki.76

Even more importantly, however, the elimination of the Serbian army from Allied order of battle would probably put an end to all hopes of inflicting a decisive military defeat on Bulgaria. During the 1916 offensive, Serb forces demonstrated considerable operational and tactical ability, and displayed an impressive aptitude for mountain warfare.77 As the one Allied army most adept at waging war in the difficult terrain of the Balkans, the Serbs represented were an irreplaceable asset for the Entente. British observers were convinced that Western European troops were naturally inferior in physical endurance and stamina to the peasant-soldiers of the Balkans, and that only the Serbian army could match the Bulgarians’ own proficiency at waging war in the difficult terrain of the Balkans.78 In short, neither the Entente in general not Britain in particular

73 PRO CAB 23/4/229, War Cabinet, 7 September 1917.
74 PRO CAB 23/5/329, War Cabinet, 23 January 1918.
75 PRO CAB 24/47/G.T. 4172, Eighth visit of Lieut.-Colonel E. A. Plunkett, General Staff, to Salonika Front, 9 February – 24 March 1918.
76 PRO CAB 23/6/404, War Cabinet, 3 May 1918.
77 For Serb participation in the 1916 offensive, see Falls, Vol. II, pp. 184 – 188, 235 – 241; and Palmer, The Gardeners, pp. 80 – 92. The Serbs’ military performance in 1916 made a particularly deep impression on Sarrail, who accorded them special praise in the congratulatory message issued to his forces after the fall of Monastir. See Sarrail, p. 182.
78 For British assessments of the Serbian army's military capabilities, see for example PRO CAB 24/9/G.T. 338, Report of Lieut.-Colonel Plunkett after his second visit to Salonica front, 1 – 14 March 1917; and PRO CAB 24/26/G.T. 2040, Milne to Robertson, 25 August 1917. Commenting on the
could afford to lose the support of the Serbs, even if the maintenance of that support necessitated the abandonment or modification of strategic designs that served Britain’s wider strategic and imperial interests.

The proposals for a gradual disengagement from the Balkans were only one element of the strategic policy adopted by British leaders toward South-Eastern Europe in 1917. Another, equally important element of the same policy involved the desire to conclude a separate peace with Bulgaria. This project had intrigued British leaders since Bulgaria’s entry into the war in October 1915 and became even more attractive in 1917, when the prospects of attaining a military victory over Germany appeared particularly bleak. Virtually all of the principal military initiatives undertaken by the Allies that year had ended in failure. In April, French forces attacked German positions in Champagne in accordance with the plan formulated by General Robert Nivelle, the officer who, in mid-December 1916, had succeeded Joffre in command of French armies on the Western Front. Nivelle was confident that the offensive that was to bear his name would break through the German front in a matter of days. The thirty divisions that participated in the attack captured 150 guns and took 20,000 prisoners, but the breakthrough predicted by Nivelle did not materialize. Instead, the French sustained another 118,000 casualties — a demoralizing loss that dealt a severe blow to French morale and contributed directly to the wave of mutinies that began to sweep through select units of the French army in May and continued until June. Haig’s Flanders offensive, launched on 31 July, fared no better. Although it continued until 6 November, the operation’s only tangible result amounted to the capture of a few square miles of water-logged ground east of Ypres, and the loss of almost 300,000 casualties.

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79 Leontaritis, Greece and the First World War, p. 252.
In these circumstances, the prospect of a separate peace with Germany's alliance partners appeared to offer an opportunity to weaken the leading of the Central Powers by the indirect expedient of detaching its allies. If successful, this policy would allow Britain and the Allies to terminate military operations in peripheral theatres of the war, and concentrate its military forces on the Western Front. It is only in this context that the clichéd classification of states like Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire as Germany's "props" makes sense. In material terms, all three were dependent upon Germany for credit, military supplies and reinforcements and technical expertise. In this circumstance, therefore, it was Germany that "propped" them up, not the other way around. However, it may be argued that in exchange, Germany's junior alliance partners provided a much less tangible, but equally valuable commodity. Specifically, their continued participation in the conflict provided Germany with a guarantee of security from the twin nightmares of German strategic thought since the early 1870s - the contingencies of a two-front war (Zweifrontenkrieg) and encirclement (Einkreisung). If this perception of security were to vanish - as it finally did in late 1918 - the potential effects on German morale could be grave. It was these calculations - the possibility that a maximum concentration of forces in France and Flanders could finally be effected, and that Germany might suffer a severe moral blow - that encouraged British leaders to pursue the policy of detaching Germany's allies. By this stage in the war, even the most ardent of the so-called "Eastemers" had come to the realization that a final military conflict with Germany could take place only on the Western Front, as illustrated by Lloyd George's support for the policy outlined above.

In addition to permitting the Entente to effect a military disengagement from the Balkans and inflicting a grave moral and psychological blow upon Germany, a separate

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83 Calder, p. 116.
84 Rothwell, pp. 50 - 51.
peace with Bulgaria was also expected to lead, almost be default, to the collapse of the Ottoman war effort. British attempts to negotiate a separate peace with the Ottomans had never made any progress due to the Ottomans' insistence on the retention of Istanbul which France and Britain promised to Russia in April 1915 in the context of the so-called Straits Agreement. A settlement with Bulgaria could lead to the collapse of the Ottoman war effort by default and would allow the Entente to circumvent that complication by creating conditions where the Allies could dictate what terms they saw fit to the Ottomans.

British leaders were able to even consider concluding a negotiated peace with Bulgaria on favorable terms. This was due to the continued prevalence in Britain of Bulgarophile sentiments that had been so pronounced among many influential segments of educated British opinion since the mid-1870s. Bulgaria's decision to side with Britain's enemies, while it undoubtedly discredited the British Bulgarophiles to some degree, was not sufficient to discredit completely its territorial ambitions. On the contrary, many Britons, including a number of leading political and military figures remained favorable toward Bulgaria's national aspirations. The few criticisms that were leveled at Bulgaria at all had more to do with the country's monarch, rather than with the extent of its territorial ambitions. Although a separate peace with Bulgaria could most likely be concluded only on terms detrimental to Britain's Balkan allies, including the cession of portions or all of Greek and Serbian Macedonia to Bulgaria, the pro-Bulgarian sympathies harbored by many Britons ensured that the possibility of such an arrangement

86 Rothwell, p. 123.
87 C. J. Smith, pp. 198 – 238.
88 Rothwell, pp. 123, 139.
89 "It is hardly an exaggeration to say that all those Englishmen who were interested in the Balkans were pro-Bulgarian and supported Bulgarian claims to Macedonia..." See Harry Hanak, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary During the First World War: A Study in the Formation of Public Opinion (London, 1962), p. 64.
90 Hanak, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, p. 93.
91 During a conversation with Prince Sixte de Bourbon in April 1917, Lloyd George stated that he professed "nothing but sympathy for Bulgaria but not for her king" and then proceeded to use "some forcible expressions about the King." to illustrate his point. See G. de Mantefer, ed., Austria's Peace Offer, 1916 – 1917 (London, 1921), p. 115.
could be contemplated at the highest levels without the fear of incurring any moral odium or attracting public censure.  

Among the first proposals for detaching for Bulgaria from the Central Powers by means of territorial concessions was that advanced by Robertson as early as February 1916. The C.I.G.S suggested that Bulgaria be bribed out of the war with offers of some of its' neighbors' territories, especially those of Greece which had not yet joined the Allies. 

Grey opposition to Robertson's scheme ensured that the proposal would not be taken seriously, but it did set the pattern for similar projects in the future. In August of the same year, Robertson and Lloyd George argued in favor of a negotiated settlement with Bulgaria. Once again, Grey's opposition thwarted the plan. But within a few months, Grey had left office, and the overall strategic situation had changed from the optimism of August 1916 to the gloom of early 1917. As a result, between February 1917 and September 1918, the British Foreign Office repeatedly gave consideration to various "peace feelers" extended by individuals with direct links to the Bulgarian government as well as by Bulgarian opposition groups. The repeated failure of such attempts did not substantially diminish the British leaders' desire to convince Bulgaria that its territorial aspirations would be fulfilled even if it finished the war on the losing side.

British enthusiasm and desire for a separate peace with Bulgaria was tempered by one major consideration: the anxiety that the achievement of that goal, or even the

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92 See Rothwell, pp. 120 – 121; and Leontaritis, p. 253.

93 Robertson also wanted Russia to abandon its claims to Istanbul so as to give the Ottoman Empire an incentive for concluding a separate peace. See Rothwell, p. 50.

94 Grey feared that if the proposal were to leak out, it might seriously jeopardize the negotiations which the Entente was at that time conducting with Romania with a view of securing that country's entry into the war. See Rothwell, p. 121.

95 See for example PRO CAB 23/1/124, War Cabinet, 23 April 1917; PRO CAB 23/13/200(a), War Cabinet, 31 July 1917; and PRO CAB 23/12/308(a), War Cabinet, 31 December 1917; and PRO CAB 23/14/429(a), War Cabinet, 11 June 1918. For an examination of the Entente's dealings with Bulgaria in this period see Rothwell, pp. 139 – 142, 215 – 221; Leontaritis, ch. 7 and 8; and Petko M. Petkov, The United States and Bulgaria in World War I (Boulder, Colorado, 1991), pp. 47 – 83; and Trumpener, Germany and the Ottoman Empire, pp. 153 – 156.

96 As late as 27 September 1918, only two days before Bulgaria capitulated to the Allies, Sir Eric Drummond stated that "[t]o insist on Bulgaria abandoning what may be termed her legitimate national aspirations would mean that Balkan unity could never be obtained." See Rothwell, p. 221.
endeavors to attain it, might alienate Britain's Balkan allies and complicate British plans for a disengagement from South-Eastern Europe. Although a separate peace with Bulgaria would have been fully in keeping with Britain's wider strategic interests, it was incompatible with the national and territorial aspirations of the Balkan states fighting on the side of the Entente. Because the success of British designs to detach Bulgaria from the Central Power was conditional on allowing that country portions of territories it had conquered from its neighbors in 1915–1916, attempts to conclude a separate peace with Bulgaria could not be expected to engender much enthusiasm from Britain's Balkan allies.

An examination of available evidence suggests that the negative effects such a deal would have had on Britain and the Entente's relations with their allies in South-Eastern Europe were an important consideration in the minds of British statesmen and diplomats. In July 1917 Noel Buxton, the best known of the British Bulgarophiles, submitted to the Cabinet yet another proposal for a territorial settlement in the Balkans. Buxton was a firm advocate of the plan to conclude a separate peace with Bulgaria on the basis of territorial concessions from Greece, Serbia, and Romania. In a devastating critique of Buxton's proposals prepared for the benefit of the War Cabinet, Leo Amery, one of the Assistant Secretaries of that body, stated that to the Serbs, Greeks and Romanians, a deal with Bulgaria along lines proposed by Buxton would be nothing short of a betrayal by the Entente and would probably lead them to side with the Central Powers.  

Amery's views were echoed by George Clerk, a senior clerk in the war department of the Foreign Office. Clerk acknowledged that "peace with Bulgaria means a very serious break with Greece and Serbia," but also pointed out that attempts to provide the latter with compensation would create other problems. Serbia, after all, would only be satisfied with the South Slav provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Any promises of these territories to Serbia would require the Allies to adopt the dismemberment of the Habsburg state as a war aim. To this goal, however, neither Britain nor the Entente was

97 PRO CAB 24/20/G.T.1482, The detachment of Germany's allies: Copy of letter from Mr. Noel Buxton, M. P., with notes by Captain L. S. Amery, July 1917. Amery also believed that a separate peace with Bulgaria would lead to the collapse of Russia, and would encourage Italy to demand Corsica and Tunisia from France.

98 PRO FO 371/2885/158411, Minute, George Clerk, 7 August 1917, as quoted in Leontaritis,
yet committed, given that attempts for a separate peace with Austria-Hungary were in progress simultaneously with efforts to detach Bulgaria from Germany.99

Amery and Clerk were not decision-makers, but sufficient evidence exists to suggest that their opinions were influential with British leaders. For example, in June 1918, the War Cabinet met to deliberate the merits of a plan whose author, an Austro-Polish aristocrat in the pay of the British secret service, proposed to hasten the end of the war by inciting a revolution in Galicia and Bohemia and at the same time detaching Bulgaria from the Central Powers.100 Curzon, who took the lead in criticizing the plan, asserted that its provision for a separate peace with Bulgaria would be "difficult to reconcile with the desiderata of our Allies."101

British leaders concerned with the possible fallout from a separate peace with Bulgaria is illustrated by the caution with which Arthur Balfour, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, approached the issue of a separate peace with Bulgaria. In September 1917 Lord Hardinge, the Permanent Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, informed Balfour of the plan worked out by the Bulgarian "Committee of National Defense – a Switzerland-based dissident group – for the conclusion of a separate peace between Bulgaria and the Entente. Though Hardinge was enthusiastic about the scheme, Balfour ordered him to suspend the talks with the Bulgarians and focus the energies of


100 The individual in question was Count Jan Horodyski, a Habsburg subject and a banker by trade with connections in Austria-Hungary and the United States. Recruited by the British secret service in early 1915, his activities during the war included attempts to influence American opinion in favor of the Entente, and gathering political intelligence on the Central Powers from his extensive contacts on both sides of the Atlantic. His plan to incite mass uprisings among the Slav populations of the Central Powers was among the few proposals of its kind to be given consideration by British leaders during the First World War. As such, it may be considered a forerunner of Churchill's determination to use indigenous resistance movements in Axis-occupied countries to "set Europe ablaze" during the Second. See Paul Latawski, "Count Horodyski's Plan 'To Set Europe Ablaze': June 1918," Slavic and Eastern European Review, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 1987), pp. 391–398.

101 PRO CAB 23/14/429(a), War Cabinet, 11 June 1918.
the Foreign Office on exploring the peace overtures which Baron Richard von Kühlmann, Germany's newly appointed Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, was advancing to Britain through the Spanish government.\textsuperscript{102}

In a memorandum written for Lloyd George's benefit, Balfour ostensibly justified his decision on the grounds that because the Committee of National Defense did not include any legitimate representatives of the Bulgarian government, its "peace feelers" could not be taken seriously.\textsuperscript{103} However, given the concerns Balfour was to express later, it is quite likely that his negative assessment of the peace proposals advanced by the Committee of National Defense were in fact motivated by an anxiety that the acceptance of such overtures would have a negative impact on the Entente's relations with the Balkan states. Until the end of the war, Balfour persisted in harboring serious reservations with regards to the advisability of concluding a separate peace with Bulgaria. In December 1917, he bluntly informed his cabinet colleagues that such a peace, requiring as it would the cession to Bulgaria of Greek, Serbian, and Romanian territories would be regarded by those three states as a betrayal. In Balfour's opinion:

Even the mere rumor that such questions were under discussion would send a tremor of fear and indignation from Jassy to Athens. Roumania, Serbia, and Greece know perfectly well that Bulgarian support can never be purchased except at their expense.\textsuperscript{104}

The Foreign Secretary was especially apprehensive about the effects that a Balkan territorial settlement along lines favorable to Bulgaria would have on Greece's allegiance to the cause of the Entente. Addressing the War Cabinet in August 1918, Balfour reminded his colleagues that the Allies were indebted to their Balkan friends, and warned that,

...if you suggest to Venizelos, for example, that some of the territory which the Bulgarians now occupy is really Bulgarian, and therefore in a settlement should be handed back to Bulgaria or left to Bulgaria, he would say to you: 'You

\textsuperscript{102} Rothwell, p. 141.

\textsuperscript{103} Balfour, Peace Negotiations, 19 September 1917, as quoted in Lloyd George, pp. 1237 - 1240.

absolutely ruin me, and you ruin my party, because the Emperor of Germany did promise King Constantine that the limits of Greece should, if Greece behaved well, be respected. Now you proposed that I should go out of the war after fighting, after all the cost in men and money, with smaller territory than Greece could have had without fighting. That, he would tell you, is absolute ruin to the cause of Venizelos, to the cause of Greek liberalism, and to the cause of Greece remaining on the side of the Allies.105

Balfour’s determination not to alienate Britain’s Balkan allies with talk of a separate peace with Bulgaria was also evident in the skeptical attitude he adopted toward the activities of Lord Northcliffe’s Crewe House Committee which proposed to implement a propaganda campaign with a view of inducing Bulgaria to leave the war. In May 1918, Northcliffe wrote to Balfour to advocate the adoption of a well-defined propaganda policy toward Bulgaria that would emphasize a territorial settlement based on the creation of a Greater Bulgaria and the compensation of Serbia with the South Slav provinces of the Habsburg Empire. Writing back, Balfour stated implicitly that instead of trying to lure Bulgaria out of the war with promises of territorial rewards, Northcliffe would do better to focus on frightening it with the prospects of the punishments that the Allies would inflict upon the country if it continued to fight against the Entente.106 Once again, the prospect of offending the Entente’s Balkan friends figured prominently in Balfour’s rejection of Northcliffe’s proposal.107

Balfour’s fears that any attempts to conclude a separate peace would provoke an adverse reaction among the Balkan states were fully justified. In mid-October 1917, after learning that the British Foreign Office was flirting with the Bulgarian Committee of National Defense, the Romanian government, supported by Russia, officially protested against Britain’s consideration of such overtures.108 A few weeks later, Greek, Serbian and Romanian ministers to London issued a joint protest to the same effect.109

105 PRO CAB 23/43/457, War Cabinet, 13 August 1918.


107 Rothwell, p.216.

108 Leontaritis, p. 268.
British assurances that the Balkan states would be consulted in any future decisions regarding a territorial settlement in the Balkans could do little to assuage their fears. If anything, the apprehensions of the Balkan states could only grow as the Entente moved ever closer to defining tangible war aims. Neither Lloyd George's Caxton speech on war aims, nor President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points made any positive references to the national aspirations of the Balkan allies.\textsuperscript{110} With the Entente persisting in its refusal to provide the Balkan states with binding guarantees of their territorial ambitions, the apprehensions of the governments of the Balkan states could only escalate. By June 1918, Venizelos was warning that if the Allies continued to agitate for a separate peace with Bulgaria, the Greeks would overthrow his government and invite Constantine to return.\textsuperscript{111} Shortly after, the Greek statesman appealed to Lloyd George to put an end to Bulgarophile propaganda in Britain.\textsuperscript{112}

Less than four months after Venizelos' complaint, the Allies finally succeeded in compelling Bulgaria to leave the war. However, the did so in a manner which ensured that no territorial awards would accrue to Germany's Balkan ally for making an early exit from the conflict. The Bulgarians did not quit the war by means of a negotiated peace. Instead, they capitulated as a result of the defeat inflicted upon their army by the "Gardeners of Salonika"\textsuperscript{113} who, in mid-September 1918 finally broke out of their Macedonian "internment camp" and put the Bulgarian forces opposing them to rout.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{109} Rothwell, p. 142.

\textsuperscript{110} Leontaritis, pp. 277 – 279. On the contrary, at Caxton Lloyd George went as far as to state that he supported the maintenance of Ottoman sovereignty in Thrace and Asia Minor. See Leontaritis, pp. 277 – 279.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 301.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 304.

\textsuperscript{113} The Allied forces in Macedonia were branded with this epithet in June 1916, when Georges Clemenceau, an opponent of the Balkan venture, poured scorn on the alleged inactivity of Sarrail's troops by pointing out that while German armies were only a few hours' distance from Paris, thousands of Allied soldiers were locked up in a distant theatre, supposedly doing nothing more productive than digging trenches. See Palmer, The Gardeners, p. 71; and Paul Coblenz, The Silence of Sarrail (London, 1930), pp. 108 – 116.

On 27 September, only two weeks after the commencement of the offensive, the Bulgarians asked for armistice terms. Expecting that the Entente would simply allow their country to revert to neutral status, the Bulgarian representatives were shocked to find out that Franchet d'Esperey, who took charge of the negotiations on behalf of the French government, refused to show any clemency. Bulgaria was to be treated for what it was — a vanquished enemy.115

For Britain, Bulgaria's surrender was a welcome, if unexpected development. Nevertheless, the satisfaction that British leaders felt with regards to d'Esperey's victory was tempered by the fact that the Allied success in the Balkans had come too late to allow Britain to fulfill its broader strategic aim of disengaging from South-Eastern Europe and focusing its military resources in other theatres of operations.116 Britain's ability to attain this goal was conditional upon the withdrawal of the British component of the Army of the Orient, and the conclusion of a separate peace with Bulgaria. These goals, however, were incompatible with the national policy aims of Britain's Balkan allies. Their objections to select elements of British strategy made a significant contribution to the hesitation and caution with which the British government approached even the promising of the Bulgarian peace overtures. In addition, they ensured that the issue of withdrawing British troops from the Balkans could never be contemplated in isolation from the potentially drastic political implications that such an action might entail. As had been the case on several previous occasions during the war, the relatively limited strategic priorities of the Balkan states proved capable of playing an important contributory role in thwarting Britain's wider strategic designs.


116 On the surface, Bulgaria's defeat finally furnished British strategists with the opportunity to transfer their Salonika Army to the West. But by late September, that was hardly necessary because Allied and American forces in France and Flanders proved perfectly capable of defeating the German army without reinforcements from other theatres. When the Bulgarian armistice went into effect at noon on 30 September, the German army in the West had been in retreat since 8 August, and was being pummeled by a series of concentric offensives unleashed by the Allies under the direction of Marshal Ferdinand Foch between 26 and 29 September along the entire front from Flanders to the Meuse-Argonne sector. Though the Allied advance lost some of its momentum in October, the German retreat continued until the hostilities ceased on 11 November. See John Terraine, To Win a War: 1918, The Year of Victory (London, 1978).
Conclusion

A WAR WITHIN A WAR

The outbreak of the First World War found the nations of the Balkan Peninsula in the process of recovering from yet another round of military conflicts that had been waged for the purpose of completing the national unification programs espoused by all states of the region. Formulated as far back as the first half of the 19th century, these irredentist aspirations were the foci of the foreign policy agendas of the Balkan states by 1914. By the time of the Sarajevo assassination, the nations of the region had made great advances toward the fulfillment of the aims in question. The Balkan Wars of 1912 – 1913 resulted in the near-complete expulsion of the last vestiges of Ottoman authority from Europe, and allowed all Balkan states to make significant territorial acquisitions.

Nevertheless, the full realization of the irredentist ambitions espoused by nations of the Balkans remained an elusive goal. No Balkan state possessed the resources sufficient to attain its aims unilaterally. Likewise, the fragmentation of the Balkan League following the First Balkan War assured that regional co-operation for the purpose of attaining these aims was no longer an option. At the same time, the opposition of the Great Powers placed yet another obstacle in the path of Balkan territorial expansion. This state of affairs ensured that when the First World War erupted in August 1914, Balkan statesmen would see the conflict primarily in the context of its potential to advance their respective countries’ national agendas of irredentism and national unification. For the nations of the Balkans, therefore, the Great War was to be the Third Balkan War – a conflict that would furnish an opportunity to facilitate the completion of the programs of national expansion and territorial aggrandizement.

This peculiar perception of the nature of the First World War is instrumental to the understanding of the course and conduct of British strategy in the Balkans between 1914 – 1918. For Britain, as well as for the other Great Powers, South-Eastern Europe was only one of several theatres of operations, and the military and diplomatic endeavors undertaken in the region were subordinated to the wider strategic aims of the war as a whole. British leaders’ view of the war Balkans as an integral part of a greater conflict set their strategic priorities at odds with those professed by their Balkan counterparts. For the
latter, the attainment of the irredentist aspirations that stood at the forefront of their foreign policy agendas enjoyed overwhelming priority over the advancement of the strategic designs that British military planners proposed to carry out in South-Eastern Europe for the purpose of achieving Britain’s wider strategic aims. As a result, Balkan statesmen were prepared to assist Britain in fulfilling its own strategic goals in the region only if such co-operation held out the prospect of enhancing the national policy aims of their respective countries. Ultimately, Balkan leaders could be said to have viewed the First World War in the Balkans almost as a self-contained conflict, or a “war within a war” that was unconnected to the wider struggle which encompassed Europe.

The tendency of Balkan leaders to view the Great War in such terms was an important influence on the fate of the strategic designs formulated by British leaders with regards to South-Eastern Europe throughout the conflict. In spite of this fact, however, the influence of the national policy aims of the Balkan states on the course and conduct of Britain’s Balkan strategy during the First World War has been hitherto neglected by existing historical literature. In general, conventional interpretations of factors that shaped British strategy in South-Eastern Europe during the Great War emphasize the same considerations that influenced formulation of Britain’s overall strategy of the war. These considerations are for the most part applicable to the specific case of Britain’s military involvement in the Balkans between 1914 and 1915. Nevertheless, the wide disparity between the strategic priorities of Great Britain on the one hand and its Balkan allies on the other means that standard explanations of the forces that shaped Britain’s Balkan strategy must be also be supplemented with an examination of the manner in which the national policy aims of the Balkan states influenced the strategic initiatives which Britain sought to implement in the region.

The disharmony between the strategic priorities of Great Britain and the Balkan states first became evident in the early stages of the war, when British leaders sought to convince the nations of South-Eastern Europe to unite in a regional alliance directed against the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary. The creation of such an alliance was fully in keeping with the strategic designs British leaders intended to carry out in the region at the time. A Balkan alliance was expected to assist Great Britain and the Entente in re-opening the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, activating an alternative theatre of
operations that would force Germany to weaken its defenses on the Western Front, and protecting Serbia from annihilation.

The formation of this regional coalition depended on the Entente’s ability to satisfy the irredentist ambitions of Bulgaria. These, in turn, could be fulfilled only by means of a territorial settlement that jeopardized the fulfillment of the irredentist agendas espoused by Greece and Serbia. As a consequence, Balkan leaders approached Allied proposals for a Balkan alliance with suspicion at best, and hostility at worst. A successful revival of the Balkan League was in Britain’s best strategic interest and could have had a significant impact on the course of the war as a whole. Nevertheless, it was not in conformity with the national policy goals of the Balkan states, which for this reason proved extremely reluctant to co-operate in Allied efforts designed to facilitate its realization. It is difficult to speculate whether Britain’s Balkan strategy in 1915 would have been crowned with success if a Balkan alliance had come into being at that time. However, there can be little doubt that the failure to create such a coalition was an important contributory factor in the demise of British strategic initiatives in South-Eastern Europe that year.

The Allies’ attempts to convince Romania to enter the conflict were susceptible to similar frustrations. Ion Brătianu, Romania’s leader, was prepared to join the Entente only in circumstances that guaranteed the fulfillment of his country’s maximum irredentist aspirations. His insistence on this point repeatedly hindered the Entente’s efforts to compel Romania to intervene in 1915 at times when its entry into the war may have had beneficial results for the Allied – and British – strategic designs in the region. Brătianu’s desire to obtain guarantees of Romania’s territorial ambitions before entering the war delayed Romanian intervention until August 1916. When Romania did intervene, its armed forces’ contribution to the Entente’s war effort consisted of an offensive that had, as its main aim, the realization of Romania’s territorial ambitions, rather than the advancement of the Allies’ broader strategic goals.

Romania’s defeat contributed to the growing disenchantment that British strategists had been feeling toward their military commitment in the Balkans since the failure of the Gallipoli campaign and the fiasco of the attempt to rescue Serbia. By 1917, calls for the reduction, or even the complete termination of the British military
commitment in South-Eastern Europe were being made with ever-increasing frequency not only by those British leaders who had been consistently opposed to any Balkan ventures, but also by individuals such as David Lloyd George who, earlier in the war, had been among the most enthusiastic advocates of British military intervention in the region. Disengagement from South-Eastern Europe was fully in keeping with Britain’s overall strategic priorities, but not with the national policy aims of the Balkan states fighting on the side of the Entente. A complete British withdrawal from the Balkans could have been accomplished only on the basis of a separate peace with Bulgaria that, in turn, would have necessitated Greece and Serbia to reconcile themselves to the loss of portions of territories they had won at a great cost in 1912 – 1913. Moreover, the withdrawal of British troops from Macedonia, where they had been present since late 1915, could conceivably diminish the Balkan states’ chances of realizing their national ambitions after the war. Britain’s Balkan allies could not be expected to respond enthusiastically to proposals of this kind.

Available evidence indicates that the opposition that Balkan statesmen expressed to plans for the withdrawal British troops from the region or for a separate understanding with Bulgaria was a significant factor in dissuading British leaders from pursuing their new Balkan strategy with vigor and determination. To have done so would have entailed antagonizing the Balkan allies to an extent that might have had potentially calamitous repercussions for the security of the Allied military position on the Macedonian Front. When Bulgaria finally surrendered in September 1918, over 100,000 British troops were still present in the Balkans – evidence of the degree to which the national aspirations of a handful of small states were capable of affecting the sweeping strategic designs of the foremost of the Great Powers.

Britain’s military and diplomatic experiences in South-Eastern Europe during the First World War left a deep imprint on that country’s policy toward the Balkans in the 1920s and 1930s. The anti-climactic confrontation with Mustafa Kemal’s Nationalist Turkish forces in the course of the Chanak Crisis of 1922 was Britain’s last direct intervention in the region during the turbulent period that followed the end of the war. For the next decade and a half, Britain’s interest in South-Eastern Europe was minimal, focusing chiefly on the status of the Straits. This particular focus was indicative of an
even wider trend that characterized European diplomacy in the inter-war period — the Great Powers' temporary loss of interest in the Balkan affairs. With Germany defeated, Austria-Hungary no longer extant, and Russia recovering from the effects of war and revolution, South-Eastern Europe had ceased to be the focal point of Great Power rivalry for the first time in a century. Only two states retained a preoccupation with South-Eastern Europe. Italy, its hopes of obtaining territory on the eastern shores of the Adriatic unfulfilled, continued to regard the region as an important arena of diplomatic endeavor. France also looked to South-Eastern Europe, seeking to enlist the support of its wartime allies for the so-called Little Entente. This diplomatic arrangement bound Romania, Czechoslovakia and the newly-created Yugoslav state into a political partnership that aimed at preserving the new, post-war international order in the Danubian basin and stood at the heart of France's Eastern European alliance system in the 1920s.

French and Italian ambitions with regards to the Balkans were facilitated by the specific character of the territorial settlement imposed on the region by the provisions of the treaties of Neuilly, St.Germain, and Lausanne. These treaties reinforced the tendency, prevalent since the conclusion of the wars of 1912 – 1913, to categorize Balkan countries either as satisfied or revisionist states. The former included Romania and Serbia/Yugoslavia, both of which emerged from the First World War with significant territorial increases that, for the most part, encompassed most of their irredentist ambitions. Anxious to protect their gains, both states proved willing to co-operate in French-sponsored diplomatic initiatives such as the Little Entente, and later, in the 1930s, in the so-called Balkan Entente — a regional security pact whose creation was the result of the initiative of the Balkan states themselves.

While the Little Entente sought to contain Hungarian revisionism, the Balkan Entente was directed primarily against Bulgaria, a state whose territorial losses after the First World War exacerbated the revisionist tendencies that had been at the forefront of its foreign policy agenda since the Treaty of Bucharest of 1913. The same revisionist inclinations made Bulgaria susceptible first to Italian, and then, in the 1930s, to German diplomatic influence and determined Bulgaria's loyalties during the Second World War.

Greece represented a special case. Although it had fought in the First World War on the side of the Entente, its internal affairs and international standing in the post-war
period were not entirely consistent with its ostensible status as a junior partner of a victorious alliance. The disastrous Anatolian venture discredited the ambitious scope of the “Great Idea” as a realistic aim of Greek foreign policy and introduced a new element of strife and dissention in Greek domestic politics. The meager gain of Western Thrace up to the valley of the Evros could hardly compensate Greece for the loss of national dignity incurred as a consequence of the campaign in Asia Minor. Nonetheless, in the diplomatic disputes that arose in the region in the next two decades, Greece always sided firmly with the status quo powers of Romania and Yugoslavia against Bulgarian revisionism.

The Anatolian venture had an additional significance that transcended the considerations of Greek foreign policy. Greece’s incursion into Asia Minor following the First World War was carried out with the acquiescence of Great Britain, which looked favorably on Greek ambitions in the region as a means of countering the aspirations that Italy, dissatisfied with its share in the post-war settlement, entertained toward Asia Minor. Britain’s attitude toward Greek expansionism in Asia Minor did not meet with French approval. This disagreement reflected gradual breakdown of the Entente following the Great War – a process that first manifested itself during the war itself in the context of Franco-British disagreements concerning the conduct of the Allies’ Balkan strategy and the extent to which Britain was prepared to provide diplomatic and military support for the irredentist ambitions of its Balkan allies.

Britain’s involvement in South-Eastern Europe during the First World War remains a contentious issue for historians of the conflict. Nevertheless, although there exists an extensive body of scholarly literature that seeks to analyze the feasibility and wisdom of a “Balkan” strategy, the subject in question continues to furnish the researcher with opportunities for further inquiry. Among these, the final Balkan offensive of September 1918 awaits a definitive account and examination in the wider context of the Great War as a whole. Only when the precise extent of the offensive’s contribution to the final Allied victory is determined will it become possible to pronounce whether the military and diplomatic efforts carried out by Britain and the Entente in South-Eastern Europe between 1914 and 1918 had served a useful strategic purpose.
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