

Turkey and Britain 1914–1952: From Enemies to Allies

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The British Institute at Ankara research project ‘Turkey and Britain 1914–1952: From Enemies to Allies’ held its inaugural workshop, investigating Anglo-Turkish engagement during the First World War, on 1–2 April 2016 at the Uluslararası Stratejik Araştırmalar Kurumu in Ankara. One of the objectives of the workshops was to bring policy makers and historians together, and, accordingly, the audience included diplomats from South Sudan, Somalia, Thailand, Peru, Japan, the United Kingdom and Turkey, military officers and numerous academics among more than 70 listeners. The conference was opened by the former Turkish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Özdem Sanberk, who made reference to the twists and turns of Anglo-Turkish relations while emphasising their continued importance and expressing his continued optimism about the at times challenged relationship between the two countries.

The first panel dealt with aspects of Anglo-Ottoman relations on the outbreak of the war. Camille Cole, from Yale University, presented part of her doctoral research on transport and infrastructure on the Tigris, where British and British-Indian companies and engineers played an ambiguous role as both agents of Ottoman modernisation and British imperial aspirations. Piro Rexhepi, an incoming fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, examined how pan-Islamists connected British India and Ottoman Albania, where a war-time pro-Ottoman uprising frustrated Allied plans for the new state. Ambassador Altay Cengizer, the Director-General of policy planning at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a published historian, argued that the Ottoman Empire had no choice but to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers: an issue that would be debated throughout the conference. Cengizer made his case on the basis of readings of diplomatic exchanges with Britain, Russia and Germany in the summer of 1914, and concurred with the Committee of Union and Progress assessment that the Entente offer of territorial integrity could not be trusted given British and French promises to reward Russia and potential Balkan allies. Richard Moore, the current British Ambassador to Turkey, made a short speech recounting his meeting with some of the last surviving veterans of the Gallipoli campaign and elucidated some of the complexities of empire and resistance through reference to his family’s history of both anti-imperialist activism and services to the state.

The evening keynote lecture was delivered by Eugene Rogan, whose *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Middle East During the First World War, 1914–1920* is perhaps the most comprehensive regional study of the war. Rogan elucidated the similarity of experiences in the Ottoman and British trenches, drawing on the diaries and letters of the soldiers of both empires fighting in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia.



The second day of the conference moved forward chronologically to deal with the war and its immediate aftermath. Sevtap Demirci of Boğaziçi university provided a useful overview of the Ottoman road to war and the formative clash between the British and Ottoman Empires at Gallipoli, echoing Altay Cengizer’s emphasis on the inevitability of Ottoman participation in the conflict. Turning to Syria and Egypt, M. Talha Çiçek, Newton Fellow of the British Academy at SOAS and assistant professor at Istanbul Medeniyet University, elaborated on how the call to jihad was used to motivate Ottoman Muslim soldiers in Syria in preparation for an attack across the Suez Canal, which Çiçek claimed to have been a genuine plan for invasion, rather than the ‘exploratory offensive’ that it was defended as after its failure. Çiçek’s research shows how Ottoman religious propaganda became an important means to counteract the dread that many in the province felt at the outset of the conflict, a point raised in Eugene Rogan’s previous lecture, and reveals Ottoman commitment to the concept of jihad that others have dismissed as a German imposition. Ayhan Aktar, a professor at Istanbul Bilgi University, showed how a British official history that sought to downplay Ottoman successes in the Dardanelles succeeded in shaping Turkish accounts of the sinking of the battleship *Bouvet* in subsequent decades, until underwater investigations of the wreck and his own research revealed the true cause of its sinking. Warren Dockter, a research fellow at the University of Cambridge, demonstrated the durability and depth of Winston Churchill’s relationship with Ottoman and Turkish elites and his affection for the country, revealing a more complex and nuanced understanding of Churchill’s views of the Ottoman Empire.

Charles Laderman from the University of Cambridge examined the decision by the United States not to declare war on the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, exploring the extent to which President Woodrow Wilson’s suspicions of Allied, particularly British, motives in the Near East coloured his diplomacy and how the US government, supported by the American missionary lobby, withstood pressure from its domestic critics, led by Theodore

Roosevelt, for an American–Ottoman war. Selçuk Esenbel, professor emeritus at Boğaziçi University, then illustrated the important role played by Japanese representatives, another British ally that nonetheless remained neutral towards the Ottoman Empire, in mediating relations with the defeated Ottoman government and providing a channel through which to enter discussions with the resurgent Turkish national movement in Anatolia.

David S. Katz, a professor at Tel Aviv University, spoke about Arnold J. Toynbee, whose relief work saved many lives and whose newspaper articles helped push public opinion in favour of Turkey. It was on his way home, travelling on the Orient Express, that Toynbee had the idea of how to organise what would become his famous *A Study of History*, the dozen volumes which made him a household name throughout the English-speaking world, put him on the cover of *Time* magazine and ultimately led to him being crowned by the popular press as the greatest historian of his day. Matthew Ghazarian, a doctoral student at Columbia University, and Ozan Arslan, a professor at Izmir University of Economics, both presented on the Caucasus, one of the most complex theatres of the latter part of the war, where Bolshevik, White Russian, Ottoman, British, Armenian and Georgian forces variously held and lost ground. Arslan provided a detailed account of Ottoman expansion into the space ceded by post-revolutionary Russia and how ambitions in Central Asia, like those in Egypt discussed by Çiçek, were supported through sectarian propagandising. Ghazarian showed how control of the region's important oil resources drove events, if in a rather unexpected way, with the obstruction of exports rather than the extraction of resources seeming to motivate imperial policies.

Rethinking 'radicalisation' in regional and global politics

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At the 2014 UK Political Studies Association conference in Manchester we co-organised a panel series titled 'Radicalization and transformation in southeastern Europe'. Our experience there encouraged us to expand this research theme into a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* in May 2016 (issue 24.2). During a period when the brunt of political science scholarship seemingly focuses on radicalisation only as a security threat or as a process inescapably intertwined with Islamic fundamentalism, we chose to explore its neglected aspects. To do this we adopted Christian de Vito's definition that sees radicalisation as 'a shift in the contents and/or forms of contention that, in relation to previous contents and/or forms of contention, is perceived as an escalation by (some) historical agents and/or by external observers' (De Vito 2014: 72).

We invited colleagues working on southeastern Europe (Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Albania) to expand on their panel presentations and reflect more deeply on the type of 'radicalisation' their case studies reflected. The cases included the intervention of the 'anti-capitalist Muslims' group during the Gezi Park protests, the anti-austerity movement in Greece, the anti-corruption rallies in Bulgaria, the absence of radical politics in today's Albania and a comparison of the Turkish and Greek state responses to eruptions of civil discontent and protests between 2008 and 2013. Through these cases we show that radicalisation in politics can be seen as a process of intensification of existing forms of political engagement within liberal democracies by both society and state actors. This intensification can have negative (the shrinking of democratic rule and the rise of state violence) as well as positive (the creativity involved in forms of social disobedience and the reversal of political apathy) effects. Hence, we argue that what determines whether radicalisation is progressive or conservative, productive or disastrous for democratic politics is the specific character and content of such an intensification. This stands in sharp contrast to the dominant approach that sees radicalisation as a mainly 'external' threat to liberal democracy or a kind of cancerous cell within it.

Our suggestion of treating radicalisation as a 'form' instead of connecting it a priori with a negative or positive content can be helpful as a means of examining contemporary developments within the region and beyond. For instance, this approach can be used for the examination of contradictions of liberal democracy at the inter- or supra-state level, moving away from the focus on the nation-state by pointing to the illiberal intensification of governance orders emanating from transnational institutions like the EU, NATO, the IMF or the World Bank. The growing legitimacy crisis of the EU can be examined as a crisis involving the radicalisation of a neo-nationalist logic affecting its core mechanisms and pushing the union to act increasingly as a cloak for the vested interests of primarily Germany and the EU-north, particularly in response to the 2008 global financial crisis. This logic is now seemingly expanding to many Baltic member-states, which



Holding a half-hour sit in every Saturday on Istanbul's Istiklal Street for more than 20 years now, the 'Saturday Mothers' protest against the disappearance of loved ones during the 1980s and 1990s in Turkey (photo by leon_eye)