



War Decision and Neoclassical Realism: The Entry of the Ottoman Empire into the First World War

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Abstract

Why did the fracturing Ottoman Empire enter the Great War? Why did the Ottomans drag their feet for a period of three months although the alliance treaty stipulated that the Ottomans should enter the war against Russia if the latter fought with Germany? This article sets forth a neoclassical realist analysis of the war decision by the members of Ottoman foreign policy executive as the outcome of dynamic interactions between the systemic stimuli/structural modifiers and unit-level variables that occurred in a limited time frame (August to November 1914) and sequentially influenced the strategic calculus of the actors involved. It demonstrates that a changing amalgamation of systemic and unit-level factors were instrumental in the Ottoman decision to enter the Great War, the most prominent of which was the divided foreign policy executive.

Keywords

First World War, Ottoman war decision, Ottoman–German Alliance, Divided Foreign Policy Executive, neo-classical realism

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Introduction

The Ottoman Empire's decision to enter the First World War on the side of Central Powers proved to be one of the most significant developments in the diplomatic history of modern Europe due to momentous social and political consequences. The latter included the dramatic collapse of the polyglot Ottoman Empire and emergence of new national statehoods in the Middle East. The entry into the Great War of the Ottoman Empire – then ruled by the Unionist party state controlled by Committee of the Union and Progress – not only prolonged the War for two years, it also forced the Entente Powers to squander lives and resources that could have otherwise been deployed in the European war theatre. It contributed to the collapse in 1917 of the Tsarist Empire. Significantly, the latter's lifeline from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean was slashed by the Ottoman Empire's closing the straits to the Entente powers. Despite its significance for international politics, the Ottoman war decision has remained theoretically underexplored and therefore unknown to students of international relations theory and security studies.

The Ottoman war decision and alliance strategies provoke a number of important questions. Why did a fracturing Empire enter the Great War? How did the grave war decision take shape? More intriguingly, why did the Ottoman Empire declare a policy of armed neutrality one day after it signed an alliance treaty with Germany on 2 August 1914? Why did the Ottomans drag their feet for a period of three months although the alliance treaty stipulated that the Ottomans should enter the war against Russia if the latter fought with Germany? Despite the fact that the Ottoman armed neutrality paid off during these foot-dragging months, why did the Ottoman war cabinet stop exploiting its armed neutrality on 29 October 1914, when eventually they let two German warships destroy the Russian targets at the Black Sea? Was the acquisition of these two warships, other war materials, and economic aid from Germany good enough a reason to break the otherwise effective armed neutrality?

This article sets forth a neoclassical realist analysis of the war decision by the members of the Ottoman foreign policy executive as the outcome of *dynamic* interactions between the systemic stimuli/structural modifiers and unit-level variables that occurred in a limited time frame (August to November 1914) and sequentially influenced the strategic calculus of the actors involved. It argues that the systemic variables (e.g., the offence–defence balance of naval military technology between Ottomans and Russians in the Straits, German 'foreign penetration', economic aids, catastrophic defeat of the Austrian army by Russia) and unit-level variables (e.g., the divided nature of the Ottoman foreign policy executive, the Young Turks' strategic culture) set the broad parameters of the Ottoman war strategy and its bargaining options with the Great Powers.

One Decision, Many Interpretations

The existing literature provides almost no theoretical or systematic explanation for the Ottoman Empire's entry into the Great War on the side of Germany and the Central Powers. Nonetheless, a wide range of arguments and debates abound. The first line of argument develops along an actor-based explanation, according to which the war

decision was made by a group of strong, idiosyncratic personalities from within the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).¹ While some point to War Minister Enver as the only responsible actor behind the war decision, others accuse the CUP triumvirate (Enver Pasha, Minister of Navy Cemal Pasha, and Interior Minister Talat Pasha) of dragging the Empire into an adventurous road leading to nowhere but to a tortuous end. The second line focuses mostly on the state level, with some historians putting the onus on either the Ottoman state or Germany. They hold that the weak Ottoman state and its hapless pro-German ruling elite were usurped and ‘chain ganged’ into war as a fait accompli by the German state. For instance, the Porte’s surprise attack (‘the Black Sea Raid’) on the Russian targets in the Black Sea was launched entirely without the knowledge and consent of the Ottoman war cabinet, a fateful decision that led to the Ottoman entry into the War and its subsequent annihilation.²

The third and much-preferred line of explanation for the entry decision is heavily based on the system structure and constraints (i.e., the European balance of power at the time). Facing the impending German threat in Europe, Russia, Britain, and France had reached an agreement and temporarily united against the common enemy, Germany. In particular, the reorientation of the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907, their policies regarding Italy’s attack on Tripoli, and also their general diplomacy after the Balkan Wars deeply shook the confidence of the Ottoman Empire in dealing with Britain and France.³ In particular, the prevailing understanding amongst the Young Turks was such that Britain and Russia had formed a new anti-Ottoman scheme during the Reval meeting. The latter led British officials in the Foreign Office to seek a regrouping of Powers as the breakdown of the Concert was becoming a fact. Competition as well as jealousy was particularly visible as in the impasse over the Baghdad Railway. These balance-of-power reconfigurations helped the anti-Ottoman tendency in the Foreign Office.⁴ A well-known version of this mode of thought posits that Ottoman war decision was the result of France and Britain’s reluctance to assuage Ottoman fears of partition by giving security guaranties.⁵ Overall, the existing studies either tend to overemphasize the role of international systemic factors⁶ or reduce the main dynamics to ‘the nationalist aspiration of the Unionists which Enver Pasha came to personify’.⁷ While the first and second lines of argument suffer from voluntarism, rendering the war decision as a drift, accident, or

1 Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılap Tarihi*, vol. 2/3: *Paylaşmalar* (Ankara, 1951), p. 2.

2 Ahmed Emin Yalman, *Turkey in the World War* (New Haven, CT, 1930), p. 75; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848–1918* (Oxford, 1957), p. 534.

3 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude towards Peace, Cabinet Papers 1915-1988 - The National Archives (CAB) 24/39, January 16, 1918.

4 Joseph Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire 1908–1914* (London, 2015), p. 6.

5 Yuluğ Tekin Kurat, ‘How Turkey Drifted into World War I’, in Kenneth Bourne and Donald Cameron Watt (eds), *Studies in International History* (London, 1967), pp. 291–315; Timothy W. Crawford, ‘The Alliance Politics of Concerted Accommodation: Entente Bargaining and Italian and Ottoman Interventions in the First World War’, *Security Studies* 23:1 (2014), pp. 113–47.

6 See, for example, Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008).

7 See, for example, Feroz Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic: Essays on the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (İstanbul, 2008), p. 148.

folly, the third is overly deterministic, leaving little room for agency, as in the following bold claim: ‘every rational actor assessing the existing situation objectively would have made the same decision’.⁸ The heavy reliance on the systemic constraints falls short in explaining not only why there had been a critical three-month period of foot-dragging by the Ottomans but also the persistence of a cabinet majority in opposition to the entry and intervention at the moment of decision. Therefore, a better starting point, we argue, is to study the *making* of the decision itself, that is, how the planning, communication, and even implementation of the war decision took place in an unofficial *process* of decision-making by a *divided* executive.

A Neoclassical Realist Explanation

The collapse of the Soviet Union exposed the limits of neorealism’s basic assumption that states respond mechanically to the distribution of material capabilities in an international system. A new group of realist scholars recaptured realism ‘from those who look only at politics between societies, ignoring what goes on within societies’.⁹ Neoclassical realism, a theory that combines states’ relative material power capabilities in an international system and domestic political constraints, looks at ‘how systemic pressures are translated through unit level intervening variables such as decision-makers’ perceptions and domestic state structure’.¹⁰ Systemic imperatives do not necessarily produce specific foreign policy outcomes; rather they are filtered through how top officials assess likely threats/opportunities, and identify viable strategies in response to those threats.¹¹ Since neorealism makes no assertions about how domestic variables influence the way states assess and adapt to threats/opportunities in their environment, neoclassical realism conveniently utilizes *Innenpolitik* dynamics in order to explain specific foreign policy decisions.¹²

The present article sets forth a neoclassical realist analysis of the Ottoman war decision by the CUP’s foreign policy executive that took shape in a specific time frame in August–November 1914 as the main foundation for its entry into the Great War, which led to the dramatic collapse of the Ottoman Empire. It explains the dynamics of the

8 Gün Kut, ‘The Black Sea Raid of October 29, 1914, as a Foreign Policy Decision: Collusion or Necessity?’ in H. Yavuz and F. Ahmad (eds), *War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State* (Salt Lake City, 2016), p. 118.

9 Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), p. 19.

10 Gideon Rose, ‘Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy’, *World Politics* 51:1 (1998), p. 152.

11 Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin Ripsman, ‘Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy’, in Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (eds), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 3–4.

12 Randall L. Schweller, ‘The Progressive Power of Neoclassical Realism’, in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds), *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 319–20.

Ottoman war decision through the systemic factors from European Powers and unit-level factors pertaining to the Ottoman Foreign Policy Executive, leadership, and strategic culture. More specifically, in order to explain Ottoman entry into the War, it identifies six systemic stimuli and structural modifiers as (I) Ottoman alliance strategy operating within the balance of power; (II) the lack of physical distance from, and topographical barriers against great powers; (III) the offence–defence balance of naval military technology between Ottomans and Russians in the Straits region; (IV) regional constraints such as the uncertainty about Bulgaria’s course of action; (V) the clarity of threats and opportunities emanating from the war theatre; and (VI) the magnitude of first-move advantage of the Ottoman Black Sea Raid against Russia on 29 October 1914. As for the unit-level variables, it identifies (VII) the leadership image of the CUP’s Executive and (VIII) the Unionists’ strategic culture. System-structural and unit-level variables together shape in a dynamic fashion the broad parameters of the Ottoman war strategy and its bargaining options with the European Powers.

Although we employ the analytical framework of neoclassical realist theory,¹³ a close re-examination of the Ottoman war decision necessitates certain elaborations in some of the assumptions of the theory. First, the theory identifies key decision makers at the domestic level as the Foreign Policy Executive (FPE). Therefore characterizing the FPE of states is the first step in conducting empirical research from a neoclassical realist perspective.¹⁴ This is so because the members of FPE make foreign policy decisions and their assessment of threats/opportunities matters most. The second key step is to determine what kind of hierarchy exists among members of the FPE and which member(s) have disproportionate influence over decisions.¹⁵ However, the role of ‘disproportionate share of influence’ within the ‘circle of senior players’ in foreign policy decisions¹⁶ is understudied from the perspective of neoclassical realism.¹⁷ This article, therefore, aims

13 Steven E. Lobell, ‘Threat Assessment, the State, and Foreign Policy: A Neoclassical Realist Model’, in Steven E. Lobell, Norin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (eds), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, 2009); Norin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (Oxford, 2016).

14 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, p. 123.

15 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, pp. 126–7.

16 Graham Allison and Morton H. Halperin, ‘Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications’, *World Politics* 24:S1 (1972), p. 47.

17 Some neoclassical realist scholars take the FPE as ‘a unified central-decision maker’ because they assume that the members of the FPE are ‘primarily committed to advancing the security or power of the entire nation’; Lobell, *Threat Assessment the State, and Foreign Policy*, p. 56. This theoretical assertion might be limiting in certain non-western contexts, where a ‘united FPE’ is a misnomer and risks misunderstanding the inner workings of FPE. Although it still does not take into account the ‘divided’ nature of a FPE, the newer scholarship on neoclassical realism seems cognizant of this fact in its claim: ‘the researcher should determine what hierarchy, if any, exists among decision makers’; Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, p. 126. One of the very few treatments in neoclassical realist theory of the relationship between decision making in FPE and balancing behaviour is Randall Schweller’s discussion of ‘elite consensus/disagreement’. He argues that ‘elite

to tackle a case in which the FPE members openly deliberate and yet still disagree on the best responses to threats or optimal strategies, a division with potentially grave consequences for the polity and society. As we demonstrate throughout the study, it is vital to underline (IX) the context and structure of decisions in a *divided* executive. The article therefore argues that rather than building the explanation on individual, domestic, or international levels, one of the ways to solve the puzzle of the Ottoman war decision is to study the *divided* character of its FPE and to track how divisions sequentially lead to decisions particularly in the period between 2 August and 29 October 1914. So construed, the near hegemonic third view simply becomes unsustainable because (a) the Ottoman FPE *was* divided over key decisions leading to the War such as the bombing of the Russian Black Sea coasts with two German warships in October 1914; and (b) the Ottoman war entry should be taken as a foreign policy action emanating incrementally from a *process* of decision-making that should be analysed in chronological order, rather than taken as an end point. Hence, we argue that far from a (rational) necessity, the decision to ally with Germany and enter the War was a gamble.

Second, because neoclassical realism takes domestic alignment with certain societal leaders (through state–society relations) in a permissive strategic environment as the only exceptional violation of the FPE’s key role in decisions,¹⁸ unsuitably it does not take into account back-door deals with foreign missions and more importantly (X) perilous ‘foreign penetration’ into the FPE. To be sure, neoclassical realism accepts that the FPE’s priority to advance the state’s security may well be disrupted by societal elites who may push them ‘beyond what is in the nation’s grand strategic interest’,¹⁹ or alternatively, that their decision ‘is more likely to conform to state preferences and the demands of the external environments’ when foreign policymakers are insulated from key societal interests.²⁰ However, these postulates can hardly accommodate *direct* foreign penetration, an often overlooked yet potentially significant intervening variable in explaining crisis decisions. The concept of foreign penetration features in the work of Walt,²¹ who notably gives credit to foreign penetration in explaining alliance formations; however, he limits the analytical purchase of the variable to ‘economic-military aids, propaganda, and lobbies’.²² In a ‘crisis decision-making process’ further constrained by a restrictive strategic

consensus is the most necessary of necessary causes of balancing’ and that if there is no elite consensus there will be ‘either underbalancing or some other non-balancing policy option’. While Schweller aptly dissects the decision elites and their relationship to balancing behaviour, our research does not support his evaluation. Our investigation regarding the Ottoman case of the divided FPE shows that in fact overbalancing was the preferred policy option although there was no ‘elite consensus’ whatsoever. Randall L. Schweller, ‘Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing’, *International Security* 29:2 (2004), p. 171.

18 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, pp. 52–6; Lobel, *Threat Assessment, the State, and Foreign Policy*, p. 62.

19 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, p. 61.

20 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobel, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, p. 71.

21 Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY, 1987).

22 Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, pp. 46–9.

environment, the FPE of a regional power, as the present case demonstrates, may neither be unified nor free from extremely direct and risky foreign penetrations. As explained below in detail (see the section ‘A Divided Foreign Policy Executive’), the German ‘foreign penetration’ in the Ottoman war decision clearly went beyond Walt’s framework of aids, propaganda, or lobbying so as to include certain German military personalities and agendas/missions which *literally* penetrated in the Ottoman FPE and affected the course of its decision-making process rather than just impacting or constraining it. That is, the newfound German imperialist and war agenda was implemented by top German officers in Istanbul, who had maintained close and personal relations with some prominent members of the Ottoman FPE. Particularly after the 2 August Alliance Treaty, these elite officers were able to plainly infiltrate into the making of the security policy and decision-making process. Undeniably, that does not suggest they always dictated the preferred outcome, but it does mean they led some influential figureheads within the Ottoman FPE to take particular courses of action instead of others.

Third, this article seeks to go beyond the dualism of system and agency as both equally affecting decision-making under uncertainty.²³ Meaningfully combining a vast range of variables in a coherent and consistent way is admittedly a challenging task. However, neoclassical realism offers little for such an undertaking or on how to stitch systemic and unit-level variables. The theory is also largely silent on determining the degree of influence of variables.²⁴ It simply proposes that in the short term, crisis decision-making ‘leadership images’ would have a greater say while unit-level ‘process variables’ would have ‘more influence’ in the medium-to-long terms.²⁵ Rather than working singularly, systemic factors can enable actors to take actions they would not consider before. Particularly in crisis decision making – as in the case of the Ottoman war decision – it may be necessary to take into account sequential–temporal interactions between systemic and unit-level variables in producing foreign policy outcomes.

Consequently, the present investigation into the Ottoman war decision and alliance patterns take *time* as an actual variable in order to better stitch the systemic and unit-level variables for a more meaningful and complete explanation. In particular, it employs a ‘morphogenetic’ approach in order to present a detailed study of the foreign policy decision-making *process* of the Ottoman war entry between August and October 1914. The morphogenetic approach to foreign policy²⁶ is applied here heuristically to introduce (XI) the time dimension in order to sort both the relative weight of system-structural and unit-level agential factors and the dynamic and reciprocal interplay between them.²⁷ In particular, it reconstructs the war decision of the Ottoman FPE as in part resulting from the dynamic interplay between systemic and unit-level variables that *sequentially* conditioned

23 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, p. 51.

24 For example, Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 211.

25 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, pp. 60–1.

26 Walter Carlsnaes, ‘The Agent-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis’, *International Studies Quarterly* 36:3 (1992), pp. 245–70.

27 See Margaret Archer, ‘Morphogenesis versus Structuration: On Combining Structure and Action’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 33:4 (1982), pp. 455–83, especially 467–71.

Table 1. A tree level explanation for the Ottoman Empire's entry into the First World War.

Systemic stimuli	I	Ottoman alliance strategy within the European balance of power
	V	Clarity of threats and opportunities vis-à-vis Russia
Structural modifiers	II	Lack of physical distance from and topographical barriers against Great Powers
	III	Offence–defence balance of naval military technology between Ottomans and Russians
	IV	Regional constraints (e. g., the uncertainty over Bulgaria's course of action)
	VI	First-move advantage of the Ottoman Black Sea Raid against Russia
	XI	Time dimension
	XI	Leadership image of the CUP's Executive
Unit-level variables	VIII	Unionists' strategic culture
	IX	Context and structure of decisions in the <i>divided</i> Ottoman Executive
	X	German 'foreign penetration' into the Ottoman FPE

each other between August and October 1914. By introducing the time dimension, the study shows (see below the section 'Three Options for the Ottomans in a Multi-polar Europe') how the interplay between the systemic stimuli and the unit/intervening variables in the three months' time period sequentially shaped the Ottoman FPE's war decision. The FPE's menu for action was conditioned by the systemic constraints prior to action (such as the Ottoman alliance strategies with Great Powers and German 'foreign penetration') and systemic factors also *enabled* the actors to change the course of their action producing subsequent systemic inputs (such as the offence–defence balance in the Straits and Black Sea Region). Overall, the aim here is to explain the foreign policy actions (i.e., the Ottoman war decision as well as its alliance strategies vis-à-vis the Great Powers) through the reciprocal and dynamic interplay between systemic forces such as the European balance of powers and the unit level factors such as the leadership image and strategic culture of the Ottoman foreign policy executive. Methodologically informed by the morphogenetic approach, the article breaks the decision cycles into time-intervals (a three-month investigation) in order to penetrate the said interplay between structural factors and actors as well as assessing their relative weight (see Table 1).

Ottoman War Decision Explained

Our re-examination of the vast literature shows that the existing explanations for the Ottoman entry are untenable for three reasons. First, many scholars present Enver and other elites in the CUP triumvirate as the people who already made up their minds about entering into the Great War on the side of Germany. This is empirically wrong because the Ottoman FPE overturned the war decision on many occasions. Also, it is erroneous to reduce the whole gamut of the war decision (with its interplay over time and complex

logic interconnected with systemic factors and domestic politics) to certain individual traits no matter how influential they were. A more comprehensive explanation should be able to account for and combine other relevant variables and allow them to interact in a meaningful way in a given time frame. In the present model, then, when we employ XI (i.e., the morphogenetic conception of sequential interplay to explain the context and conduct of Ottoman foreign policy and its war plans for the period between the 2 August Treaty and 29 October 1914's decision to bomb the Russian targets in the Black Sea), V and VI take the stage in the explanation of the war decision. As shown below, the specific interaction between the systemic stimuli (e.g., German economic aids, catastrophic defeat of the Austrian army against Russia) and the individual members of the FPE (i.e., Enver, Talat, and Cemal) acting within a limited time frame influenced sequentially the strategic calculus of the Ottoman Empire in its war decision and alliance politics. When it comes to explaining why some in the FPE stood against intervention (Said Halim and Cavid) and some were at best half-hearted about it (Talat and Halil) at the time of the war decision, then, VII, IX, and X complete the explanatory framework.

Second, the bedrock assumption of the hegemonic systemic approaches – that the wartime FPE was a unified entity, united in the face of international pressures – is simply incorrect. The implications of the divided nature of the Unionist wartime government's FPE are demonstrated below, particularly in the light of its war entry decision. Although the majority of the existing historical studies unequivocally accept that the Ottoman war cabinet was divided,²⁸ the analytical and theoretical implications of this recognition are mostly ignored. The wartime Unionist government's back-door deals with foreign missions, the existence of unofficial foreign policy line and staff, constant bickering, shifting coalitions, and its ham-fisted approach to alliance formation all turned the Ottoman FPE into a divided organization which acted within the broad parameters of procedural rationality. Hence rather than merely acting out of political concerns, we show that VII and X can better explain why disagreements reigned over the FPE during this period.

Third, the existing approaches mostly take the Ottoman war decision as an end point in itself, hence, they largely ignore the peculiarities of the decision-making *process* involving the wartime Unionist government members acting within a limited time frame and under systemic constraints. For instance, these explanations simply gloss over or decline to take into account the counter-factual point that even after securing a formal alliance with Germany on 2 August 1914, the Ottoman Porte long pursued a strategy of buck-passing aiming to postpone any military engagement in the War despite Berlin's protests, pressures, and even threats.²⁹ To solve this puzzle, we argue below that the war decision was not an accident, drift, or folly; instead, it was I, II, III, and IV that present a

28 See for example, Feroz Ahmad, 'Unionist Failure to Stay Out of the War in October–November 1914', *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 20:2/3 (2015), p. 23; Ulrich Trumpener, 'Turkey's War', in Hew Strachan (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford, 2014), p. 80.

29 Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 161.

better explanatory framework for understanding why the Ottomans followed a buck-passing strategy for almost three months. Lastly, V and VI take the stage in explaining why the Ottomans preferred balancing to buck-passing in October 1914.

Three Options for the Ottomans in a Multi-Polar Europe

What were the strategic options for the Ottoman Empire at the emergent war theatre in Europe on the eve of the Great War? To answer, we should first put the options into the context of the European balance of power and polarity. To begin with, Britain, Germany, France, and Russia were the top naval powers in Europe³⁰ whose strategies and interests in the context of the Eastern Question and the imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire thereof clashed with each other. The Porte had long coastlines, its economy was highly dependent on sea transport, and importantly its capital Istanbul was a much-coveted military target. However, the Ottoman Empire lacked any significant naval power; it was lagging behind the Powers having only one dreadnought, two light cruisers, and eight destroyers. A comparison with the fourth top naval power of Europe, Russia (having four dreadnoughts, seven pre-dreadnoughts, 106 destroyers, and 36 submarines), makes the following assertion obvious: the Ottoman Empire was a regional power in a multi-polar system. Already devastated by consecutive defeats following the Napoleonic Wars and the Balkan Wars, the Sublime Porte was not ready demographically and economically for yet another war. It was able to mobilize only 2.8 million men for its army throughout the War and as such it grew pale compared to the massive war mobilizations of its rivals: Russia managed to recruit between 14 and 15.5 million men, Germany 13.2 million men, France 8.4 million men, and Britain 5.4 million men.³¹ Considering the war expenditures throughout the War, the standing of the Ottoman Empire (less than 0.1 billion dollars) was beyond any comparison with Germany (19.9 billion dollars) and Britain (23 billion dollars).³² As a result, the Ottoman Empire was to be a regional power, if not small, in a multi-polar European balance of power (I and III). The Ottoman state could have ensured constant resupply of Russia by Britain and France through the Black Sea, yet, for the Entente such a country had no other important war-tipping potential.³³

Significantly, however, what made the Ottoman Empire different, for example from Brazil, on the eve of the War was its geographical location, a 'structural modifier'.³⁴ On the one hand, Istanbul the capital lacked much-needed physical distance from and topographical barriers against the Entente powers (II). Under imminent threats, particularly from Russia, the aim was to manage this geographical threat environment that even pushed the Porte into an alliance strategy of bandwagoning leading to negotiations with

30 Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *The Routledge Companion to European History since 1763* (New York, 2005), p. 167.

31 Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (London, 2015), pp. 56–7.

32 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London, 1988), p. 274.

33 Crawford, 'The Alliance Politics of Concerted Accommodation', p. 121.

34 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, pp. 41–2.

Russia and Britain both before and during the Great War. On the other, being located in close proximity to the British colonies such as Egypt and being affected by the Russian general strategic planning increased the war-tipping potential of the Ottoman Empire for the German war aims. This pushed Ottoman decision makers towards two different options: balancing with Germany against a common threat and enemy, namely Russia, and exploiting the needs of Germany. In line with 'defensive expansionism',³⁵ the Porte was able to change its weak position in offence–defence balance against Russia in the Straits by exploiting Germany's hope to drag its ally into the War.³⁶ In doing so, the Porte saw itself as free from risking its survival against Germany because the latter, as Enver explained to Leont'ev, Russian military attaché in Istanbul during alliance negotiations in mid-August,³⁷ did not have land access to the Ottoman Empire (II). As a result, systemic imperatives (European balance of power and lack of British or Russian security guarantees) and the structural modifier (of geography) imposed three broad options for the Ottomans on the eve of the Great War: bandwagoning with the Entente Powers, balancing against the Powers with Germany, or buck-passing the responsibility to Germany.

As storm clouds gathered over Europe, the Ottoman decision makers first went for the bandwagoning option. In March 1914, they perilously approached a state that had the age-old dream of conquering the Straits and Istanbul, namely Russia, the Porte's arch-enemy with whom it had fought 10 wars in the last 200 years. The Porte and the Tsarist Russia established a Russo–Turkish Friendship Committee on the instruction of Interior Minister Talat. In May 1914, Talat met with Russian Foreign Minister Sazanov and Tsar Nicholas himself at the tsar's summer palace in the Crimea and offered a Russo–Turkish alliance. Although the Russians did not reject the offer, nothing further developed. Just three days after the alliance treaty with Germany, on 5 August, the Ottomans approached Russia once again with a secret treaty proposal. Headed by Enver, the leading figures of the cabinet such as Grand Vizier Said Halim and Talat held negotiations with the Russian ambassador to the Porte about the possibility of a Russian guarantee for the Ottoman territorial integrity. This would be in return for full military support of the Ottoman Empire to the Entente Powers and dismissal of all German military officers from office, a shocking proposal given the alliance agreement with Germany days ago.³⁸ Similarly, the Ottoman policymakers negotiated with Britain and France for an alliance, with no concrete result. The fear of an Ottoman ruling elite was such that the Great Powers had reached an agreement to dismember the Empire after the June 1908 meeting between the United Kingdom, traditional protector of the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. The prospect for the agreement was consolidated at a time when the Porte's alliance offers to Britain, France, and Russia were rejected. Hence, the traditional Ottoman policy of using the clash of great power interests in Europe was coming to an end.

35 Stephen Van Evera, 'Offense, Defence, and the Causes of War', *International Security* 22:4 (1998), pp. 5–43.

36 Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918* (Princeton, 1968), p. 21.

37 Ronald Bobroff, *Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits* (London, 2006), p. 101.

38 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 127. See also, Ali Haydar Mithat, *Hâtıralarım 1872–1946* (İstanbul, 1946), pp. 270–1.

The lack of systemic incentives left the Porte with two options: either balancing against the Great Powers with Germany or buck-passing the responsibility to Germany by keeping the Porte out of the War. To use a metaphor of an office to illustrate the Ottomans' dilemma, international structure and systemic modifiers put the Ottoman Empire in an office with three doors, one of them, namely bandwagoning, being locked from the outside. Sequentially, these structural predicaments came first to explain why the Ottoman FPE differed inside as to whether and when the Ottoman Empire should become a belligerent despite the consensus about an alliance with Germany.³⁹ After the secret 2 August Alliance Treaty was signed with Germany, the Porte soon declared its armed neutrality⁴⁰ (buck-passing) as its main war strategy by putting three different reasons against balancing with Germany: the war mobilization and deployment of the Ottoman army was far from complete, the defences of the Straits and Istanbul were extremely weak, and the uncertainty about Bulgaria's course of action in the War was lingering.⁴¹ The misgiving was not only about Bulgarian uncertainty, but Sofia's historical foreign policy objective of unifying all ethnic Bulgarians in the region including those of eastern Thrace (Edirne/Adrianople), another terrifying prospect for the Ottomans.⁴² The bitter memories of the small Balkan states coming so close to the capital in the First Balkan War cautioned the Ottomans about a potential Bulgarian attack.⁴³ The Balkan Wars also impacted other states' estimates of Ottoman strength and capacity. Another historical concern of the Ottoman Empire was to manage the Russian threat.⁴⁴ Fully aware of the age-old aspirations and calculations of Tsarist Russia for the Bosphorus and Istanbul,⁴⁵ the CUP was always apprehensive of and in constant vigilance against Russia.⁴⁶ Of particular concern for the CUP was Russia's traditional foreign policy in the Balkan Wars, calls for the Armenian reforms, intervention in the Kurdish issue,⁴⁷ and its approach to the Porte's operations near Iran. To recap with our explanatory model: while the first two reasons were about an offence–defence balance between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in the north and Britain in the south (III), the last was about regional

39 Feroz Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic: Essays on the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (İstanbul, 2008), p. 65.

40 BOA DH.ŞFR (The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – Cipher [Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Dahiliye Şifre]), 44/29, from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 17 August 1914.

41 ATASE (Archives of the Turkish General Staff [Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı], BDH (Birinci Dünya Harbi [First World War]), F.K1 (Klasör [Folder]): 243, Dos (Dosya [File]): 1009, Fh (Fihrist [Index]): 7/4–5.

42 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 122.

43 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 121.

44 Alfred Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 551.

45 For a detailed study on Russia and the Straits see; Sergey Goryanof, *Rus Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Boğazlar ve Şark Meselesi* [The Straits and the Oriental Issue according to Russian Archive Documents] (İstanbul, 2006).

46 Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 43–5.

47 Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, pp. 61–70.

constraints (IV). The lack of systemic stimuli by Britain, France, and Russia had to become obvious which sequentially enabled the pro-balancing camp within the Ottoman FPE to sharpen its pro-German position.

The Porte soon after started to exploit its position of armed neutrality to increase gains from Germany. During the preparation meetings at the German Embassy even before the 2 August Treaty, all the participants (Enver, Liman, and Wangenheim) agreed to strengthen Ottoman naval power in the Black Sea. As part of the agreement, the flagship of Germany's mighty Mediterranean Squadron, *Goeben*, together with a light cruiser, *Breslau*, set off towards the Dardanelles to escape from being sunk by the British fleet. In order to keep the Empire's neutral position, the Porte purchased these two German warships, critically consolidating Ottoman naval power and tipping the balance against Russia in the Black Sea. The arrival of the two German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* likely delayed the onset of hostilities between Turkey and Russia for months because Russia's Black Sea fleet had lost its offensive supremacy in troops transports and warships vis-à-vis the Ottoman fleet in terms of maintaining a strike-force on the Black Sea.⁴⁸ Although Russia still floated more warships overall on the Black Sea than did the Ottoman Empire, she had none in the *Goeben*'s class in terms of either speed or firing range.⁴⁹ In short, the acquisition of two German warships heavily affected the offence–defence balance of naval military technology between the Ottomans and Russians (III). The Ottoman experience of acquisition and later use of German warships against Russia seem to confirm the theoretical postulate that a 'state with purely defensive ambitions may rationally initiate war if it perceives that through a pre-emptive strike it can minimize its losses against an assumed aggressor'.⁵⁰ This was at least the reasoning of some members of the FPE. Not surprisingly in the aftermath, the assumed aggressor Russia took 'the greatest initiative from the side of the Entente' in order to neutralize the Ottomans in exchange for some compromises such as the guarantee for the Ottoman territorial integrity during the second half of August 1914.⁵¹

The political developments unfolding in consecutive months after the signing of the Turkish–German military alliance seemed to prove the 'peaceniks' in Ottoman FPE right who were against immediate intervention in their expectation that the Empire 'had the most favourable opportunity to regain her sovereignty and independence without having to resort to arms'.⁵² For instance, the most risky step, the abolition of Capitulations, the most important privileges of European powers in the Empire in the previous two

48 Alan Bodger, 'Russia and the End of the Ottoman Empire' in *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1995), p. 75.

49 Hedley Paul Willmott, *The Last Century of Sea Power, Volume 1: From Port Arthur to Chanak 1894–1922* (Bloomington, 2009), p. 302.

50 Jack S. Levy, 'The Offensive/Defensive Balance of Military Technology: A Theoretical and Historical Analysis', *International Studies Quarterly* 28:2 (1984), p. 229.

51 Allan Cunningham, 'The Wrong Horse? Anglo–Ottoman Relations before the First World War', in E. Ingram (ed.), *Eastern Questions in the Nineteenth Century: Collected Essays, vol. 2* (London, 1993), p. 244; Bobroff, *Roads to Glory*, p. 106.

52 Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic*, p. 130.

centuries, received a mild protest from the Entente Powers. Put differently, buck-passing had gained strength against the balancing option with the passage of time after the 2 August Treaty with the Germans. Therefore, whenever Enver, the only major figure promoting immediate entry into the War on the side of Germany (IX), took the risk of joining the War during August–September 1914, he faced the ‘unanimous opposition of his colleagues’.⁵³ Developing systemic factors further empowered the political position of the peaceniks within the FPE. Indeed, the Central Powers were losing ground when the German offensive in France had been halted at the Marne, and the Austro-Hungarian army had been defeated in Galicia by the Russian forces in mid-September. Hence, the Central Powers were not in a position to force the Porte to join the War on their side.⁵⁴ Consequently, breaking the armed neutrality was now riskier for the Ottomans when the hopes for a decisive victory of the German army against the Entente Powers swiftly disappeared (I).

Even regional constraints were rendering the buck-passing strategy a more optimal choice for the Porte (IV). The FPE *including* Enver agreed that the Ottoman state should not act before Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania had made their position and attitude clear.⁵⁵ Therefore, Talat and Halil went to Bulgaria and Romania in late August 1914 to discuss their attitudes towards the ongoing war. As Aksakal meticulously documents, the Ottoman policymakers (including Enver) were eager to keep Bulgaria out of the War in order to legitimize their neutral position against the intensifying German pressures for immediate intervention. Accordingly, Cemal and Talat suggested to Andrei Toshev, the Bulgarian representative at İstanbul, that the two sides should preserve the armed neutrality until the outcome of the War became more predictable.⁵⁶ So long as Bulgaria kept its neutrality, the Ottoman policymakers could exploit the situation for more military aid from Germany. Not surprisingly, Enver rushed to use this opportunity to request armaments from the German manufacturer Krupp at the same day he explained to Wangenheim the uncertainty about Bulgaria’s course of action as the main reason for the delay of Ottoman entry to the War.⁵⁷ In short, the Balkan countries’ policy of staying out of the War not only consolidated the Ottoman’s preferred strategy of buck-passing; it also provided a legitimate excuse for more German aid. Hence, even the most radical and pro-German member of the FPE, namely War Minister Enver, was able to change strategy because the systemic factors importantly worked on a different time interval than the unit-level elements *enabling* the actors to take action they were otherwise unable to.

Due to new developments, the buck-passing strategy started to lose appeal and ground to the balancing option after early October with Germany entering the decision-making

53 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, pp. 39–40.

54 Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic*, p. 135.

55 BOA HR.SYS (The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – Political [Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Dahiliye Siyasi]), 2094/2-5_3-2, from Sofia Ambassador to Foreign Ministry, 2 August 1914, Feroz Ahmad, ‘The Dilemmas of Young Turk Policy, 1914–1918’, in H. Yavuz and F. Ahmad (eds), *War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State* (Salt Lake City, 2016), p. 67.

56 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 120.

57 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 123.

stage once again. How did this become possible? In order to explain the change of mind, other intervening variables need to be included. That is, given the fact that the international system had earlier imposed buck-passing and balancing as the two most convenient responses, explaining why balancing was still preferred – instead of buck-passing – needs a closer examination of the Unionist’s strategic culture and the leadership images of the leading figures in the foreign policy decision-making inner circle. Two conclusions followed. First, although the FPE preferred and was at times able to entertain ranked preferences, these were subject to changes within the systemic environment and second, the decision-making process was epitomized as a *divided* executive.

Strategic Culture and Leadership: A Pragmatist Revisionism

Organized both in exile and in Balkan territories of the Ottoman Empire, the CUP overthrew Sultan Abdulhamid, who exerted effective control over the fracturing Empire for 32 years. After the Young Turk revolution of 1908, in theory the Empire became a constitutional monarchy where the Sultan and elected parliament shared power. Although the CUP dominated the elected parliament, it was not until the military coup on 23 January 1913 that the Unionist executive became hegemonic in state affairs and suppressed all the organized oppositions, putting all CUP members in key governmental positions and giving absolute authority to the Unionists in government. Thus on the eve of the Great War, the ultimate authority in shaping the Ottoman decision-making and politics writ large laid with ‘an inner circle of some half-dozen Unionist bosses’.⁵⁸ All of the latter wielded significant veto power and influence within the CUP not least because they held key positions in the Ottoman cabinet. Said Halim was the Grand Vizier (prime minister), Halil Bey the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Talat Bey the Interior Minister, Cavid Bey the Finance Minister, Enver Pasha the Minister of War, and Cemal Pasha the Minister of the Navy. In the highly personified and one-party regime, Ottoman state–society relations and domestic institutions weigh in secondary in shaping decisions, hence, a point of agreement between our study and the neoclassical realist theory.⁵⁹ Given that the war decision was taken in a highly restrictive European strategic environment, which diminishes the effect of state–society relations and domestic institutions, investigating the strategic culture of these six men and their leadership images is necessary and explanatory.

An investigation into the CUP’s strategic culture (VIII) shows that the FPE exhibited a relatively consistent parabellum strategic culture, a hard realpolitik approach to domestic and international affairs.⁶⁰ Realpolitik decision axioms were prevalent in the

58 Feroz Abdullah Khan Yasamee, ‘Ottoman Empire’, in Keith Wilson (ed.), *Decisions for War 1914* (New York, 1995), p. 231.

59 Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, pp. 127–8.

60 See Tuncay Kardaş, Yıldırım Turan, and İsmail Ediz, ‘Neoclassical Realism and the Strategic Culture of the Late Ottoman Empire: The Pragmatist Revisionism of the CUP’s Triumvirate’, *Insight Turkey* (forthcoming).

cognitive maps of key members of the FPE whenever they debated how to best deal with threats and opportunities. The FPE's conception of a window of opportunity and threat management were significantly shaped by the recent experiences around the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Italian War for Libya/Tripolitania, the Armenian Reform Program, the Balkan Wars, and the military recapture of Edirne.⁶¹ Such events helped to shape the parabellum strategic culture and foreign policy mindset of the CUP. Nothing exemplifies the FPE's hard realpolitik approach better than the experience of the successful recovery of Edirne/Adrianople in July 1913 by Enver's leadership. The recovery of Edirne *by military means* not only disrupted the diplomatic calculations of the Great Powers, it also endorsed the belief amongst the Ottoman ruling elites that 'through steadfast commitment and fierce action, the Ottoman Empire could perhaps be saved'.⁶² What made it pragmatist at the same time, however, was the fact that the Porte's FPE could exhibit a ranked set of strategic preferences vis-à-vis Germany and the Entente Powers depending on differing sensitivities to their relative capabilities. This also meant that they were divided in what to choose from the menu of choice as the best policy response to address the specific threats and opportunities on the eve of the Great War.

In line with its internal divisions, the members of the Ottoman FPE opted for different strategies, for different reasons, at different time intervals. For instance, Said Halim and Cavid Bey opted mostly for static defence and even adopted 'accommodationist' strategies of peace/alliance with the Entente and Central Powers, exploiting the strategy of armed neutrality to guarantee security and territorial integrity of the Porte. While Cavid was 'resolute for neutrality', Enver, Cemal, and Talat, on the other hand, mostly preferred offensive strategies such as an 'early intervention'.⁶³ They held views of external threat environment as dangerous, saw adversaries as threatening the Porte, and conceptualized the War in zero-sum terms. It is important to note that a unifying feat of the FPE members was that as a whole their strategic culture valued *flexibility* and held a conscious sensitivity to the changing relative capacities in the European balance of power, adjusting their (alliance) preferences accordingly. Hence, rather than an outright revisionism they opted for offensive strategies whenever the balance favoured the Porte (as was the case in the ownership of two German dreadnoughts by the FPE to be finally used in the Black Sea Raid) or turned to defensive strategies to buy time for armament and war mobilization, as was generally the case between August and October 1914.

Educated by the ideas of elitism-social Darwinism and social engineering during their elite military training in the Ottoman war college, the military figures of the FPE, Enver and Cemal, had a strong proclivity towards the potential of war for nation-building.⁶⁴ For instance, well-known strategist Major von der Goltz's magnum opus (and his ode to violence), *The Nation in Arms*, proved so influential a book that it not only became a

61 See Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, 'Atrocity Propaganda and the Nationalization of the Masses in the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars (1912–13)', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46:4 (2014), pp. 759–78.

62 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 23.

63 Yasamee, 'Ottoman Empire', p. 248.

64 Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York, 1995), p. 211; Handan N. Akmeşe, *The Ottoman Military and the March to World War* (London, 2005), p. 22.

bedtime read but also a military textbook in the Ottoman war college. For them, wars served not only defence but also national rejuvenation, ‘purifying’ the nation from laziness and misery. As an answer to the animating axiom of the late Ottoman ruling elites, that is, ‘how to save the [Ottoman] state’, Enver took the lead in systematically inflicting militarism, sacrifice, and dedication on the Ottoman youth population through scouting and the formation of young paramilitary groups with a view to creating ‘a nation in arms’ (*millet-i müselleha*) and manipulating the population for the looming Great War with the help of the Belgian and German military mission.⁶⁵ In addition to realpolitik, flexibility, and militarism, obtaining economic freedom (the abrogation of capitulations) and security guarantees against the ‘nightmare’ of Russian invasion of the straits and Istanbul were the main foreign policy objectives. For instance, in line with pragmatist revisionism, Enver, an Ottoman-firster, played into the Muslim sense of vulnerability and revenge following the devastating Balkan Wars. It was Enver in particular within the FPE for whom the loss of territories left an indelible mark. He had this to say: ‘My heart is bleeding ... The misery created by this last Crusade [the Balkan Wars] are visible everywhere. If you knew all the atrocities which the enemy has inflicted right here at the gates of Istanbul, you would understand the sufferings of the poor Muslims. But our hatred is intensifying: revenge, revenge, revenge, there is no other word!’⁶⁶

As for the leadership images (VII), six men of the FPE had different cognitive constraints such as values and personalities. Serving as finance minister since 1909, Francophile Cavid Bey pursued a strong belief in liberal capitalist values despite his post in an increasingly protectionist and nationalist regime.⁶⁷ This core value of Cavid Bey kept him determined in his objection to the German alliance even when all others in the FPE defended the 2 August Treaty. Educated in the field of politics, Said Halim was the FPE’s wise man with strong anti-imperialist thoughts. However, he ‘lacked a personal following and in Unionist terms was something of a light-weight’.⁶⁸ Halil Bey had law education and built up a reputation for political sagacity and moderation during his post in the parliament.⁶⁹ Serving as a postman between 1898 and 1908, Talat Bey, like all other civilians in the FPE, tended to act more strategically and cautiously. The common denominator of these four leaders was that all of them were civilians and experienced either in state bureaucracy or in private business. As for their modes of conduct, Şerif Mardin develops two different concepts when it comes to the behavioural patterns of the late Ottoman decision makers. While civilian bureaucrats (the above four figures in the FPE) tended to be more cautious about key decisions, military figures approached

65 Zafer Toprak, *İttihatve Terakki'nin Paramiliter Gençlik Örgütleri* (B.Ü. Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi 7 (1979), p. 96.

66 Quoted in Şükrü Hanioglu, *Kendi Mektuplarında Enver Paşa* [Enver Pasha in his Letters] (İstanbul, 1989), p. 242.

67 Deniz T. Kilinçoglu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (London, 2015), pp. 68–9.

68 Yasamee, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 232.

69 Syed Tanvir Wasti, ‘Halil Mentese: The Quadrumvir’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 32:3 (1996), p. 94.

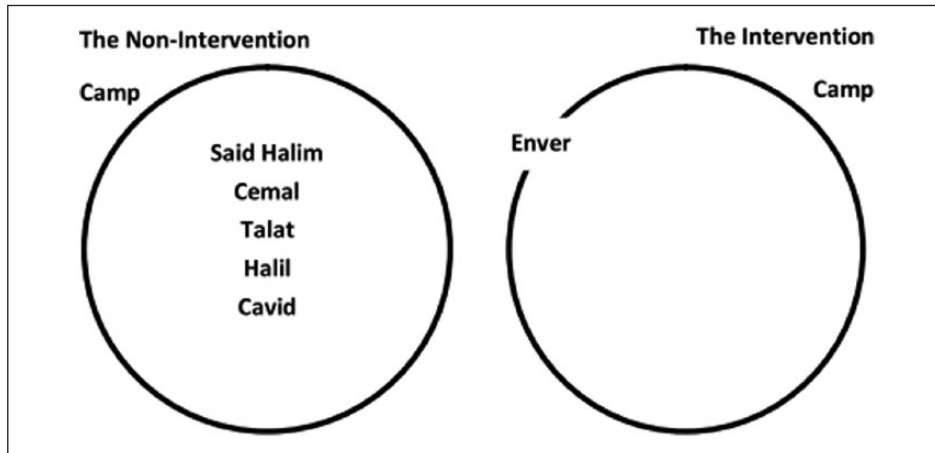


Figure 1. The Ottoman FPE throughout August after 2 August Treaty.

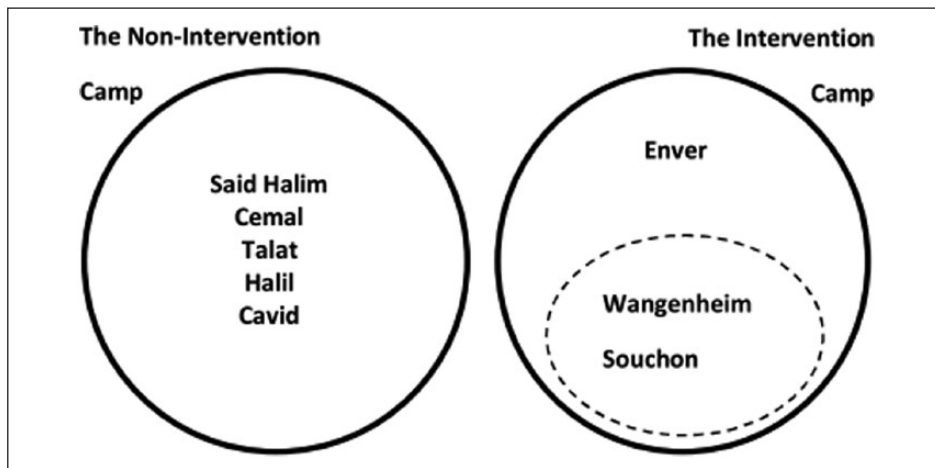


Figure 2. The Ottoman FPE in mid-September.

politics mostly with the feeling of patriotism and preferred ‘direct movement’ rather than ‘time-consuming’ decision-making process.⁷⁰

Cemal graduated from military schools and served in troubled regions such as post-revolution Istanbul, post-conflict Adana, and a Baghdad torn by British influence. He was known as a disciplinarian, reformer, anti-imperialist, and order-builder.⁷¹ Because of

70 Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri 1895–1908* [Political Ideas of Jön Turks 1895–1908] (İstanbul, 2006), p. 310.

71 M. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria: Cemal Pasha’s Governorate during World War I, 1914–17* (London, 2014), p. 11.

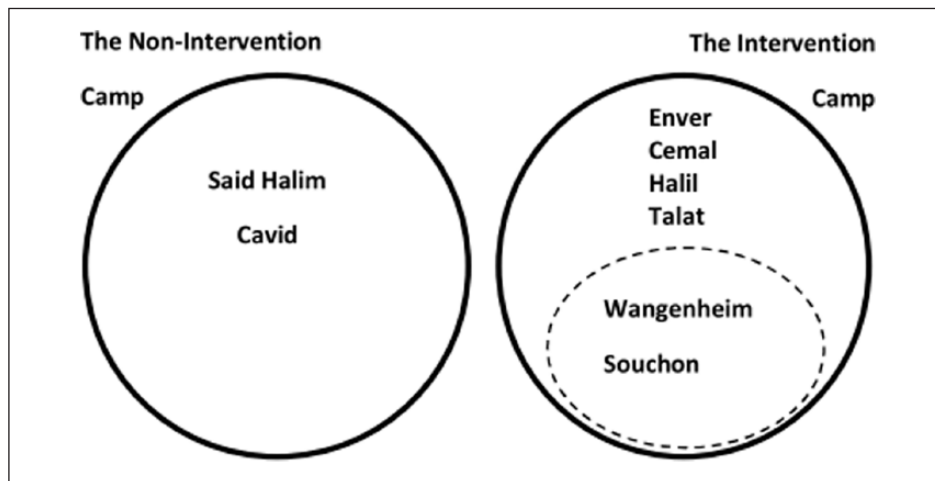


Figure 3. The Ottoman FPE in mid-October.

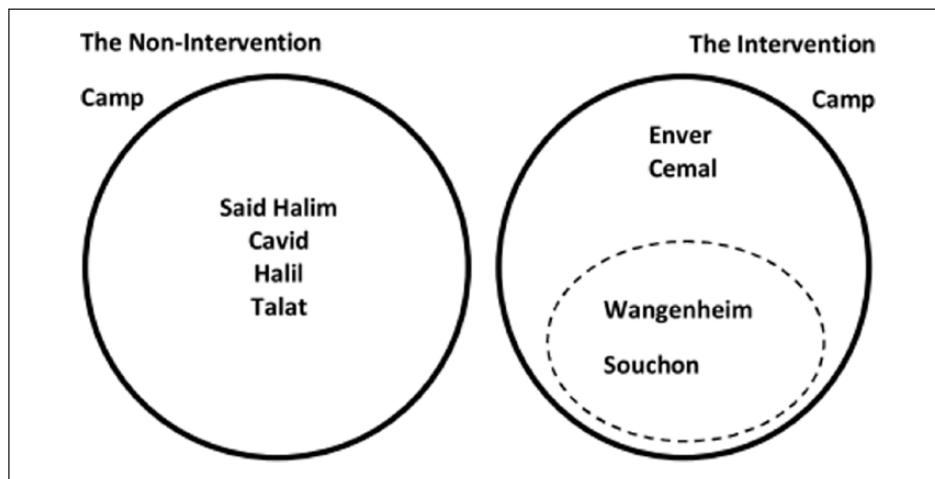


Figure 4. The Ottoman FPE at the time of decision for the Black Sea Raid.

his strong character, his slide into the intervention camp in early October is surprising for many historians.⁷² However, British war moves in Egypt and the Persian Gulf might have sharpened his anti-imperialist thoughts in that he stood firm when he joined the interventionist camp. Enver, the youngest within the FPE, had the most determined and ambitious personality traits compared with the rest. With his strict sense of duty forged in the Balkans, his remarkably abrupt courage, singleness of purpose as a guerrilla fighter

⁷² Yasamee, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 255.

against the domestic and external powers, Enver emerged as a hero of the Young Turk revolution in 1908, and later was hailed as ‘the hero of freedom’ and saviour of Edirne, former capital of the Ottoman Empire lost to Bulgaria during the Balkan War. Proud to be called a ‘Turkish Napoleon’,⁷³ Enver was so determined to save Edirne despite hesitations among the members of the government that he once wrote, ‘if those officially charged with governing lack the courage to order the army into battle ... I will make it march without orders’.⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, then, Enver would take the lead with extremely risky steps to jump to the war theatre after the 2 August Turco–German Alliance Treaty even when other members of the FPE were unanimously opposed to the intervention.

A Divided Foreign Policy Executive

When the War started, Enver, despite his uncompromising pro-German war-hawk position, often walked with the neutralist camp on the grounds that there was uncertainty about the Bulgarian course of action and that the Ottoman Empire was not militarily ready for the War on the side of Germany and the Central Powers. Four days after the secret 2 August Alliance Treaty with Germany, he not only invited two German warships to Istanbul but also notified Wangenheim that ‘the Ottoman armed forces needed almost half a million artillery shells, two hundred thousand rifles, as well as other supplies’.⁷⁵ However, the entry of Britain into the War on 4 August changed Enver’s calculus about the naval balance in the Black Sea. The latter now needed to be consolidated by fortifications at the Dardanelles against the British forces after the acquisition of two German warships. Extremely apprehensive about the security of Istanbul and the straits, Enver held that the Dardanelles would grow vulnerable to British attack in case of an Ottoman offensive against Russia on the Black Sea by the two German warships.⁷⁶ On 16 August he urged the immediate delivery of about two hundred mines to bolster defences at the Straits.⁷⁷ However, Romania’s neutral position prevented German war materials from reaching the Ottoman Empire throughout August.⁷⁸ Not surprisingly, when Liman von Sanders increased the pressure for the Porte’s immediate action in late August, it was Enver who went far enough to risk the Treaty of Alliance. If Berlin did not appreciate the profits of the alliance (Russia and Britain had been compelled to leave behind troops in the Caucasus and Egypt, respectively), the German military mission could then be sent back and the Ottoman army demobilized.⁷⁹ Hence despite his pro-intervention stance, Enver easily walked back with the neutralist camp. It is important to note that rather than

73 Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Makedonya’dan Orta Asya’ya Enver Paşa, Cilt 1, 1960–1908* [Enver Pasha from Macedonia to Central Asia Vol 1, 1960–1908] (İstanbul, 1993), p. 464.

74 Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, p. 23.

75 Ulrich Trumpener, ‘German Military Aid to Turkey in 1914: An Historical Re-evaluation’, *The Journal of Modern History* 32:2 (1960), p. 146.

76 BOA HR.SYS, 2095/5_26,33, from Enver Pasha to Foreign Ministry, 22 October 1914.

77 Trumpener, ‘German Military Aid to Turkey in 1914’, p. 146.

78 BOA HR.SYS, 2318/5-36, from War Ministry to Foreign Ministry, 16 August 1914.

79 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 119.

being obstinate, the time-sensitive changes in the military balance of power forced the Ottoman FPE members to hedge their bets and act accordingly (Figure 1).

Enver, however, was not *primus inter pares* within the FPE. For instance, the Grand Vizier Said Halim played the leading role in handling the extremely delicate issue of the arrival of two German warships in the Marmara Sea. When the German admiralty instructed Souchon to proceed to the Dardanelles on 3 August, Enver was reckoning that if naval supremacy was achieved in the Black Sea, any campaign against Russia would have a chance of success.⁸⁰ Therefore, he ordered to admit the German cruisers into the Straits immediately. However, Said Halim believed that such a move would break Ottoman neutrality and stop his efforts to exploit the July Crisis for maximum strategic gains. He therefore intervened and overruled Enver during the negotiation process with the German officers. Said Halim not only prevented Ottoman entry into the War, he also used this opportunity to improve the Porte's diplomatic position against Germany, revising the 2 August Treaty in favour of the Ottoman Empire.⁸¹ Despite his central role in this process, Said Halim also enjoyed the support of the whole cabinet including two other members of the Unionist triumvirate, Cemal and Talat. For example, Cavid, in his diary entry of 14 August, said, 'The Germans are inciting and encouraging us to enter the War immediately. Enver is prepared to jump into the fire; I believed that he is the only one amongst us who is faithful to this policy.'⁸² At the end of the day, however, the end result was what Enver had wished for: the Ottoman navy to be fortified against the Russian navy on the Black Sea and the German support to become concrete.

The Central Power's offensive position against Russia and France throughout August 1914 provided a systemic 'clarity of signals' enabling the 'clarity of options'⁸³ for the Porte such that the Ottoman FPE assumed as long as Germany took the initiative, the Russian threat would be averted. In line with the predictions of neoclassical realist theory,⁸⁴ this would also mean a permissive strategic environment for the Ottoman FPE. In other words, the optimal policy option namely buck-passing the responsibility to Germany without risking survival against any other Great Powers, became clearer. However, when the Central Powers lost their offensive capability during the first half of September (particularly after the Russians inflicted a crushing defeat on the Austrians in Galicia), the 'optimal clarity' disappeared and the 'what if Germany loses' option loomed large and made the optimal policy against the Russian threat unclear. Our findings here support the theoretical axiom of neoclassical realism in that when there was less clarity about *how to deal with the Russian threat*, there was greater room for the Ottomans to change their established preferences and be open to influences of other actors within the decision-making circle. Although the Central Power's losses in Marne and Galicia made

80 Yasamee, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 239.

81 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, p. 112; Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, pp. 44–5.

82 Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic*, p. 136.

83 Norin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Stephen E. Lobell, 'Conclusion: The State of Neoclassical Realism', in Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro (eds), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, p. 283.

84 Lobell, Ripsman, Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism*, p. 52.

the entry of the Ottomans into the War riskier and consolidated the strategy of armed neutrality, a sharp decrease in systemic clarity complicated positions of certain political leaders in the FPE. Hence, Enver quickly left his compromising position favouring the buck-passing strategy and took the initiative to pressure his wavering colleagues such as Talat and Cemal. Furthermore, because Enver was primarily concerned with exploiting the Porte's war entry decision in the near future for securing extra military supplies from Germany, the 10 September decision of General Falkenhayn, the German war minister, to stop all further requests for officers, artillery, and ammunition until the Ottoman Empire was at war⁸⁵ destroyed the ability of Enver to employ the buck-passing strategy.

Falkenhayn's threat worked also because Germany temporarily disentangled the Rumanian obstacle. Enver's request for a team of naval technicians for the Dardanelles fortifications against an attack from the sea was met in early September with the arrival of around 500 German sailors led by Admiral Guido von Usedom (helping to increase the 'clear opportunity' of a surprise attack on the Russian naval forces). As British Admiral Sir Arthur Limpus, the head of the British naval mission in the Ottoman Empire, warned Churchill on 30 August, 'By themselves, even with the Goeben and Breslau, the Turks would be beaten at sea. With Germans manning their own ships, and German officers and Gun-layers etc. in the Turkish ships, the result would be different.'⁸⁶ The steady flow of war materials to the Ottoman Empire from 29 August to 16 September⁸⁷ hence solved Enver's problem of securing the defence of the Straits during the naval attack at the Russian targets. As a result, Enver left his compromising position in buck-passing strategy in mid-September and significantly the Ottoman FPE turned into a *divided* one. This can be clearly seen in Enver's *individual* decision to authorize Souchon for the Black Sea Raid on 14 September.

The evidence of the Porte's improving balance of capabilities vis-à-vis Russia (i.e., an increase in 'opportunity clarity' of attacking the Russians on the Black Sea), however, was not enough for all the members of FPE and the outright opponents of intervention continued to prevail in the Ottoman war cabinet. For instance, on 8 September, Wangenheim advised Berlin that Enver's hands were tied by the unwillingness of colleagues and technical problems.⁸⁸ When Kaiser Wilhelm II sent a direct order to Wangenheim and Souchon to take 'energetic action in the Black Sea as soon as you feel strong enough and the defensive capacities of the Dardanelles' on 14 September,⁸⁹ they were confident that Enver would assist them and that his colleagues would eventually bow to a *fait accompli* (X).⁹⁰ Enver had already solved his defence puzzle because the Usedom mission had completed its job of fortifying the Dardanelles sufficiently to

85 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 149.

86 CHAR (Churchill College, Cambridge, Chartwell Papers), 13/45/144–5.

87 Trumpener, 'German Military Aid to Turkey in 1914', p. 148.

88 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 36.

89 Gerard E. Silberstein, *The Troubled Alliance: German–Austrian Relations, 1914–1917* (Lexington, KY, 1970), p. 89; BA-MA (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv [German Federal Military Archives]), Ser. I, Reel 13, No. 43.

90 Yasamee, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 251.

prevent any possible British naval attack.⁹¹ Therefore, he took the risk of war with Russia by giving Souchon the key authorization for entering the Black Sea and opening fire on any Russian vessels on the same day. Although there was a ‘clear opportunity’ for Enver of a surprise attack, for others there was not. For other members of the FPE securing the British guarantee of Ottoman territorial integrity was more valuable than jumping into the war theatre without solving the long-list of military and economic problems. For instance, Talat had a firm belief that the Empire could not intervene without Bulgaria (IV) and promised Enver that no minister would oppose such a Black Sea attack once Bulgaria had decided on action.⁹² Therefore, before Souchon could act, the Grand Vizier Said Halim was able once again to rescind Enver’s orders (IX).

When Souchon refused to recognize the cabinet’s decision and sent *Breslau* into the Black Sea without any permission from the Ottoman authorities, the cabinet again met on 20 September. Said Halim, Cemal, and Talat stood firm in procrastinating over the Porte’s entry into the War because they knew such an act would be taken by the Entente as the end of Ottoman armed neutrality. The cabinet decided to offer a shrewd compromise, conceding Souchon the right to carry out orders *from* Berlin, even if these orders collided with Ottoman interests.⁹³ By way of this compromise, the Ottoman FPE not only salvaged its alliance with Germany but also averted the risk of breaking its neutrality. Although the cabinet could still not prevent Souchon from sailing the two German warships into the Black Sea, it *was* able to continue the Porte’s armed neutrality by simply stating that Souchon’s planned *fait accompli* occurred against the wishes of the Ottoman cabinet. To put it differently, the cabinet’s 20 September decision rendered Souchon’s single-handed moves useless in dragging the Ottomans into war. Even at that time, the buck-passing strategy was both sustainable and less risky because, as Wangenheim reported to his German imperial headquarters in Berlin, ‘benevolent Turkish neutrality’ was much more valuable than abandoning the German influence in Istanbul.⁹⁴ The lesson to be drawn for Enver and German officers in Istanbul from the unfaltering position of armed neutrality of the non-interventionist camp was clearly the following: more members of the FPE had to be won over (IX), unless there was a *coup d’état* against it or kidnapping of some anti-intervention figures in the cabinet (Figure 2).⁹⁵

As of late September, Enver was left alone in his efforts to create a cause of war with Russia. However, unfolding developments in the subsequent days dramatically tipped the balance within the FPE in favour of Enver: Churchill authorized the British navy to anchor at the gate of the Dardanelles on 25 September and the British fleet had established a total blockade of the Dardanelles by the end of September (II). Furthermore, the commander of the British warships outside the Dardanelles announced that they would treat any Ottoman

91 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 39; Yasamee, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 251.

92 Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I, Volume I* (Ankara, 2006), p. 680.

93 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 41; Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 159.

94 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 43.

95 For such scenarios, see Ernst Jackh, *The Rising Crescent* (New York, 2007), pp. 114–15.

warship venturing outside the Straits as hostile.⁹⁶ The failure of Said Halim's efforts to convince the British to at least pull their ships back in early October significantly weakened the hand of the non-interventionist camp.⁹⁷ According to Feroz Ahmad, the Ottoman Empire and the Entente were already in a state of 'cold war' by the beginning of October as a result of the blockade that increased the economic hardship the Ottomans had long experienced.⁹⁸ In addition, the 'cold war' was exacerbated by the decision of the Russian war committee to undertake a detailed study of resources in realizing the 'Constantinople operation' on 14 September, and the arrival of large number of troops in Egypt from the British dominions in early October.⁹⁹ After the 14 September decision, the Russian press began an active anti-Ottoman campaign and the Russian army dramatically increased its military manoeuvres in the Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia.

Hence the increasing clarity about the threat environment coincided with a greater increase in opportunity clarity (due to the changes in the offence–defence balance with Russia in the Black Sea after *Goeben* and *Breslau*). From 27 to 30 September additional antisubmarine nets and mine fields were laid at the Dardanelles and, as Mallet reported to London, 540 cases of *Mauser* rifles and 13 trucks of war material arrived from Germany in early September.¹⁰⁰ Another burning problem for the Ottoman decision makers was an empty treasure. The fact that continued war mobilization became unsustainable in mid-September imposed two options over the FPE: either the army had to be demobilized (the Finance Minister Cavid's position) or the state would go bankrupt.¹⁰¹ Bandwagoning would be an answer if the Entente had paid a good price for the Ottoman armed neutrality during negotiations in August–September 1914.¹⁰² They did not, and the Ottomans went for the strategy of buck-passing. On 27 September, the central foreign policy decision-making inner circle met at the grand vizier's villa with the aim of asking the Germans for money.¹⁰³ This meeting was also important in that it constituted the last time the members of Ottoman FPE were able to block Enver unanimously about allowing Souchon to take the fleet into the Black Sea.¹⁰⁴ The other decision bore fruit, and Germany, in early October, agreed to provide a loan of five million liras in gold, solving the urgent problem of the Ottoman war mobilization (hence, increase in 'opportunity clarity').

It was the changing effects of systemic stimuli that helped Enver to strengthen his hand against his wavering FPE colleagues when the threats and opportunities became clearer in early October (V). Talat and Halil finally slid into the intervention camp when they met with Enver on 6 October and decided further delay in entering the War would endanger the Porte's alliance with Germany at a moment when the Empire needed

96 Yasamee, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 253.

97 Bobroff, *Roads to Glory*, p. 110.

98 Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic*, p. 142.

99 Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, pp. 687–90.

100 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 47.

101 Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic*, p. 143.

102 See, Crawford, 'The Alliance Politics of Concerted Accommodation'.

103 Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic*, p. 143.

104 Yasamee, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 253.

German support the most against British and Russian threats (IX). As Enver explained to Wangenheim after the 8 October meeting with Halil and Talat, the first task of the intervention camp would then be obtaining Said Halim and Cemal's unconditional support.¹⁰⁵ On 9 October, Enver notified Wangenheim that he, Talat, and Halil together would force Cemal into line the next day.¹⁰⁶ The British war moves in Egypt in early September and the German loan seem to have changed Cemal's mind as he joined the meeting organized by Wangenheim together with Enver, Talat, and Halil on 11 October.¹⁰⁷ In this meeting it was concluded that Souchon would be authorized to attack the Russians as soon as the German government delivered two million liras in gold, leaving the remaining three million after the declaration of war.¹⁰⁸ It is vital to note that a *unified* front of foreign executive by the leading CUP members emerged with a strong German *foreign penetration* in mid-October. That is, Souchon and Wangenheim became perpetual participants in the FPE meetings to such an extent that they helped to bring pro-intervention executives together until the *coup de grace* and that they played a significant role in keeping the process on track (X) (Figure 3).

It was the divided nature of the Ottoman FPE that made direct foreign penetration possible in the first place and effective since two prominent German officers in Istanbul, Wangenheim and Souchon, did take part in the decision-making process of the Ottoman war entry. The safe arrival of two million gold liras on 16 and 21 October removed the last obstacle before the implementation of the 11 October plan for the pro-intervention executives. However, not everything proceeded smoothly. Talat and Halil were still not very certain about the aptness of an immediate intervention (IX), as Enver informed the Germans on 23 October.¹⁰⁹ As part of a last-ditch effort for postponement, Talat and Halil tried to exploit Vienna's anxieties by conjuring the spectre of an Italian attack, according to which the Ottoman intervention could provoke Italy to join the Entente and to launch an attack on Austria-Hungary.¹¹⁰ They also thought Romania would not permit the transit of war material from Germany to the Ottoman Empire, vital for the Suez and Caucasus campaigns of the Ottoman army (IV). Additionally, helpfully a military report was presented to the cabinet on 21 October revealing that the Empire was inefficiently equipped militarily.¹¹¹ Therefore, Talat proposed to the cabinet to send Halil, eager to present his objection to the immediate entry of the Ottoman Empire into the War in person, and Hafız Hakkı Pasha to Germany. In all, referring to German foreign penetration, Talat claimed in his memoir about the game-changing Black Sea Raid that 'None of us knew about this fact but like everybody else I believed that Enver was informed.'¹¹²

105 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 171.

106 Yasamee, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 255.

107 BA-MA (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv) [German Federal Military Archives]. Ser. I, Reel 13, No. 1022.

108 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 49.

109 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 53.

110 Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, p. 174.

111 Kurat, 'How Turkey Drifted into World War I', p. 311.

112 Talat Paşa, *Talat Paşa'nın Anıları* [Talat Pasha's Memoirs], trans. A. Kabacalı (İstanbul, 2007), p. 30.

Despite all these last-minute efforts of the non-intervention camp and defection of Halil and Talat into wavering positions, Enver assured Wangenheim that as long as he could still count on Cemal's position, things were going to be all right.¹¹³ On 24 October, Cemal signed the secret orders instructing the Ottoman sailors to follow any order issued by the German commanders and handed them over to Lieutenant Commander Hans Humann.¹¹⁴ Wangenheim demanded a clear and written order from Enver to Souchon lest Russia treated the attack as a purely German operation. The next day, 25 October, Enver transmitted that fateful order calling an attack on the Russian fleet to Souchon.¹¹⁵ Although Enver told Humann that Talat had now swung back to the side of the intervention camp,¹¹⁶ it seems certain that two Ottoman executives, Cemal and Enver, and two foreign penetrators, Wangenheim, and Souchon, made the final decision. Hence the Ottoman fleet, including two German warships, the Ottoman cruiser *Hamidiye*, and several Ottoman destroyers under the command of Souchon, steamed out of Istanbul to the Black Sea on 27 October. When news of the ships shelling Russian coasts and destroying a number of Russian vessels on 29 October reached Istanbul, the grand vizier and Cavid ordered an immediate cessation of the operation. The resignation of five cabinet members including Said Halim and Cavid, and the dispatch of excusatory notes to Russia and the other Entente Powers, did not reverse the process and the Empire entered the War on the German side (Figure 4).

Conclusion

Despite its immense and continuing significance, the Ottoman Empire's decision to enter the First World War has been a theoretically underexplored case and remains an unknown enterprise for many students of international relations theory. The existing literature provides almost no theoretically meaningful explanation for the Ottoman entry into the Great War on the side of Germany and the Central Powers. Oscillating between the big causes (system structure) and particularism (unit-level), the Ottoman decision of war entry is often explained away either as a result of the pressures of the European Great Powers or the expansionist dreams of idiosyncratic personalities such as the War Minister Enver Pasha.

Challenging this false dichotomy, the present study has put forth a neoclassical realist analysis of the war decision by demonstrating that a *changing* amalgamation of systemic and unit-level factors in a given time frame were instrumental in the Ottoman decision to

113 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 53; Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, p. 721.

114 ATASE (Archives of the Turkish General Staff [Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı], BDH (Birinci Dünya Harbi [First World War]F), K1 (Klasör [Folder]): 87, Dos (Dosya [File]): 449, Fh (Fihrist [Index]): 1–5.

115 ATASE (Archives of the Turkish General Staff [Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı], BDH (Birinci Dünya Harbi [First World War]F), K1 (Klasör [Folder]): 1646, Dos (Dosya [File]): 30, Fh (Fihrist [Index]): 11.

116 Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918*, p. 54.

enter the Great War, the most prominent of which was the *divided* FPE. The article has explained the Ottoman war decision by recourse to the systemic factors such as the alliance strategies, European Great Power politics, and unit-level factors such as the Ottoman FPE, leadership, and strategic culture.

Practically, the present investigation offers five principal conclusions. First, the entry into the Great War resulted from decisions taken by a coterie of influential individuals associated with the Unionists fraction of the Young Turk movement. This group of individuals was a divided FPE formed by six prominent members of the CUP, that were united *only* in their motivation to save the Ottoman Empire from partition by the Great Powers. Second, we showed that this FPE was dramatically penetrated by the German top brass who played critical roles in the Ottoman war decision and alliance politics. Third, a sound explanation of the Ottoman Empire's entry into the Great War must therefore centre on the diverging calculations and considerations of these six men and the 'foreign penetration' by the top German officers. Fourth, the final Ottoman war decision and its alliance preferences were the result of procedural decision-making taking shape in a *process* sensitive to the changing domestic and systemic-international pressures in a particular time frame. Five, the Ottoman entry into the Great War was, hence, a contingent decision, a gamble par excellence.

Theoretically, this study offers three elaborations to the neoclassical realist research programme. First, it provided an empirical investigation into the theory's understudied puzzle: what is the role of disproportionate share of influence among the FPE members in foreign policy decisions? As the present study demonstrated, looking at the divided character of the FPE has an important merit in explaining foreign policy decisions. Accepting the latter can increase the explanatory power of the theory not least because it allows a process-oriented analysis sensitive to temporal pressures rather than a strict rationalist approach to decision-making. Looking from within the fragments or cracks of the FPE, the role of relevant systemic and unit-level variables such as the leadership image or strategic culture of parochial actors becomes more apparent, and meaningful. Second, using the morphogenetic approach to foreign policymaking can help to better *link* the differential unit-level factors with the changing systemic stimuli and structural modifiers. The morphogenetic approach introduces time as a variable to sort both the relative weight of structural and agential factors and the dynamic sequential interplay between them. Third, our investigation helps to increase the explanatory power and scope of neoclassical realist theory by offering a historically significant and geographically broad case study from a non-western context, namely the Ottoman Empire's decision to enter the First World War.

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