

David Urquhart's Ottoman legions

by Joseph Brewda

After fomenting the Caucasian Mountain Peoples' uprising, David Urquhart returned to England in the 1830s, intent on rallying public feeling for a war with Russia. His "Foreign Affairs Committees," and their organ *Portfolio*, were dedicated to raising public awareness of the "Eastern Question." Urquhart's answer to this question was to take the Ottoman Empire under London's protection, and arrange the collision, and mutual destruction, of the Ottoman and Russian empires.

Hurling Turkey at Russia required urgent reform of the Ottoman State bureaucracy and modernization of its army. It also required the creation of a new imperial, anti-Russian ideology. Lord Palmerston himself supervised the reforms of the Ottoman Empire in the 1840s, and the expansion of a civil service bureaucracy educated and indoctrinated in Paris and London. In 1864, Giuseppe Mazzini, one of Palmerston's agents, provided the cadre for the new ideology by forming the Young Ottomans in Paris, largely administered by his Young Poland organization, and dedicated to forming a Turkish-Eastern European-Transcaucasian alliance against Russia.

Urquhart was the chief British case officer of the Young Ottoman movement, having from the 1830s worked for Turkish-Polish collaboration against Russia. Until 1876, when the Young Ottomans succeeded in seizing power in Istanbul for one year, Urquhart served as their adviser. Among other duties, he was paymaster for Young Ottoman leader Ali Suavi, a dominant figure in their Paris-based exile publication, *Hurriyet*.

Orchestrating a showdown

There were two ideological movements the British created in the mid-nineteenth century to motivate Ottoman imperial wars with Russia. One was the Pan-Islamic movement. The other was the Pan-Turkic movement. The Young Ottomans proselytized both.

Pan-Turkism, the mission to unite all Turkic peoples based on their common ethnic origin, and antipathy to Russia, was concocted by Urquhart's crony Arminius Vambery, a Hungarian Jewish emigré also in the pay of Lord Palmerston.

Disguised as a Turkish dervish, Vambery traveled

throughout Central Asia in the 1860s to investigate possibilities for creating a Pan-Turkic, anti-Russian, identity, unified around the sultan of the Ottoman Empire. His conclusion was optimistic, even though Central Asia had never been under Ottoman rule.

Vambery's Ottoman imperial vision was proclaimed in his 1865 *Travels in Central Asia*: "In its character of Turkish dynasty, the house of Osman might, out of the different kindred elements with which it is connected by the bond of a common language, religion, and history, have founded an empire extending from the shore of the Adriatic far into China, an empire mightier than that which the great Romanoff was obliged to employ not only force, but cunning, to put together, out of the most discordant and heterogeneous materials. Anatolians, Azerbaydjanes, Turkomans, Özbegs, Kirghis, and Tartars are the respective members, out of which a mighty Turkish Colossus might have arisen, certainly better capable of measuring itself with its great northern competitor than Turkey such as we see it in the present day."

In its more extravagant form, Vambery's doctrine was known as "Pan-Turanism," and sought to ally the Turkic peoples with the Hungarians, Finns, and Mongols.

The man who emerged as the leader of the Pan-Turkic movement was Urquhart's protégé Ali Suavi, who had traveled to Britain under Urquhart's sponsorship. In his writings in *Hurriyet* and other locations, Suavi argued that the movement was necessary to mobilize the Ottomans in defense of the Central Asian Khans, then under military threat by the expanding Russian Empire. Suavi was the first to use the term "Turk" to describe the "Ottomans," which in previous usage had been an Ottoman pejorative term for their backward Central Asian cousins. Suavi was killed in an aborted effort to depose the sultan in 1876, sponsored by British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli.

Pan-Islamism, which advanced the idea that Istanbul was the natural center of the entire Islamic world, and not just the Turkic peoples, was a brother-doctrine of the same British mother. It, too, sought to turn the Ottoman sultan into the rallying point for a struggle against Russia, this time robed in religious garb. The British myth-spinners of pan-Islamism were the family of cult novelist Edmund Bulwer-Lytton, and Wilfred Scawen Blunt, the 1870s founder of the British Arab Bureau.

The birth announcement of the pan-Islamic movement appeared first in 1869, in the pages of the Young Ottomans' Paris-based *Hurriyet*. It castigated the Ottoman Empire for its non-committal attitude toward the Central Asian Khanates under Russian attack. But rather than appealing to ethnic solidarity, it avowed that the sultan, as caliph—the defender of the faith—was responsible for defending Central Asia. The pan-Islamic proselytizer for the Young Ottomans was Tahsin Efendi, who, after studying in Paris in the 1850s, returned to form the Sufi "Society for the Study of Geography in Islamic Lands," a geographical pan-Islamic organizing society.

The Young Ottomans' revival

For one brief year, 1876, the Young Ottomans ruled in Istanbul, with their leader, Midhat Pasha, replacing the grand vizier. But in 1877, they were ousted, driven underground, and forced into exile. With succor offered by London, however, the movement did not die. By 1896, the Young Ottomans were resuscitated as the "Young Turks," who seized power over the Ottoman Empire in a British-sponsored coup in 1908. Evidently lacking self-confidence, the Young Turks appointed a British general as chief of staff of the Turkish Army.

The Young Turks' ideology, Pan-Turkism, put Turkey on a collision course with its Slavic neighbors. By 1912, the Young Turks had instigated the first Balkan war, unleashing the events that led to World War I.

The mastermind of the Young Turk regime was Emmanuel Carasso, an Italian Jew and grand master of the "Macedonia Resurrected" freemasonic Lodge of Salonika, which had plotted the 1908 coup. Carasso had supervised the procurement of Turkey's food supplies, in league with the international arms trafficker, grain speculator, Bolshevik financial patron, and British super-agent, Alexander Helphand Parvus.

Just as Urquhart had been the mentor for Karl Marx's crusade against Russia, so Parvus had spent a lifetime logistically facilitating the Marxist movement that would ultimately bring down the Russian Empire. Taking advantage of the shattering effects of the 1902 Russo-Japanese War, Parvus funded and oversaw the 1905 Russian Revolution. His agent had been Leon Trotsky, whom he had drilled in the doctrine of "permanent revolution," leading to Trotsky's book on the theme.

From Russia, Parvus arrived in Turkey soon after the 1908 Young Turk revolution. To grease the wheels of his various political operations, he joined with Carasso to become the top grain speculator in Turkey. He also became financial editor of the Young Turk newspaper, *Türk Yurdu*.

Later, Parvus took some of the money he had acquired in Turkey, and gold from the German General Staff, to finance the 1917 Russian Revolution and arrange for Vladimir Lenin's triumphant return to Russia.

Another foreign mentor of the Young Turk regime was the Polish Jew Vladimir Jabotinsky, who became editor of the newspaper, *Young Turk*. Jabotinsky would later become the founder of the branch of the Zionist movement that spawned the Likud Party of Israel and its offshoots, those Zionists attempting to block the Middle East peace process today.

The Young Turk regime did not last. The tables were turned with the rise of Turkish nationalist leader Mustapha Kemal Ataturk and the founding of the Turkish Republic, in the aftermath of World War I. The Young Turk leadership fled Turkey again, this time to Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Today, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has been called into action—again.