

Serpil Atamaz 

## From Enemies to Friends with No Benefits: The Failed Attempt at an Ottoman–Iranian Alliance in the Aftermath of the 1908 Revolution

*This paper examines the historical developments and the debates revolving around the formation of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance in the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the 1908 Revolution. It argues that although neither the idea of an alliance between the two states nor the attempt to establish it was new, the way it was discussed, justified, and promoted in this period was different. The previous attempts by the Ottomans were led by the state as part of a broader pan-Islamist project (ittihad-ı İslam) that adopted a heavily religious tone. On the other hand, the main proponents of the alliance during the constitutional period were mostly transnational/international figures and religious scholars, who framed the issue within the context of Ottoman–Iranian relations, focusing on immediate pragmatic, strategic, and ideological concerns, such as protecting the sovereignty and security of the two countries against European imperialism through constitutionalism. Rather than focusing on reconciling the disputes between the Sunnis and Shi'is, and presenting this alliance as the first step towards the formation of a broader Islamic union as Abdülhamid II did in the nineteenth century, these people emphasized brotherhood and solidarity between the two constitutional governments, and tried to establish a strategic partnership based on shared borders, experiences, ideals, and enemies.*

**Keywords:** Ottoman–Iranian Alliance; Ottoman–Iranian Relations; Revolution of 1908; Iranian Constitutional Revolution; Pan-Islamism; Committee of Union and Progress

On 23 October 1910, Ömer Naci, a prominent member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), took the podium to a storm of applause at the Odeon Theatre

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Serpil Atamaz is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at California State University, Sacramento. Her research interests lie in early twentieth century Turkey and Iran, with particular emphasis on women, nation-building, press, modernity, and Turkish–Iranian interactions.

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in Istanbul, and addressed the hundreds of people who had gathered there to protest against the recent British ultimatum to Iran:<sup>1</sup>

A nation is sinking. ... Our neighbor is stricken with grief and facing a calamity. We gathered here upon the news ... regarding the invasion of Iran by the British, who pretend to be lovers of civilization, humanity, and freedom ... in order to understand what our Iranian brothers are thinking, and to formulate an opinion about this. It may seem like this matter only concerns Iran and there is no need for Ottomans to get involved, but the time to be occupied with appearances is over and things are not as they seem. It is time to bring the two souls together!<sup>2</sup>

Referring to his involvement in the Iranian constitutional revolution (1906–11), he added: “I was with them during their catastrophic times and found happiness in sharing their sorrows. We Ottomans are protesting this attack not because such and such is Muslim, but they are enslaved and miserable.”<sup>3</sup>

Among those applauding these words were Turks, Iranians, Arabs, Armenians, Kurds, and Russian Muslims, who wanted to take an action against the British ultimatum, which they regarded as a violation of Iran’s sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> Believing that it also constituted a significant threat to the Ottoman Empire, they issued calls to the Ottoman government to intervene and even decided to send a telegram to the German emperor to ask for his help in preventing a British onslaught in Iran.<sup>5</sup> Proposed by Ubeydullah Bey, a deputy of the Ottoman parliament, the idea received support from the members of the audience, who started cheering “Long Live Germans! Long Live the Great Emperor of the Glorious Germany.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Britain gave an ultimatum to Tehran in October 1910, demanding the constitutional government establish security in southern Iran. In the event of Iran’s failure to meet this demand, Britain would maintain its own force in the region. Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 226–7. The meeting, organized by *Anjuman-e Sa’adat-e İrānian* (Society of the Welfare of Iranians) in Istanbul, was a response to this ultimatum. For information about the Iranian community in Istanbul and their activities, see Zarcone and Zarinebaf-Shahr, *Les Iraniens d’Istanbul*; Minucheher, “Homeland from Afar”; and *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Anjoman-e Sa’adat” and s.v. Fariba Zarinebaf, “Diaspora.”

<sup>2</sup>“Ömer Naci Beyefendi’nin Nutku,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 5, no. 112 (October 1910): 144.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.* Ömer Naci was among the emissaries sent to Azerbaijan to establish links with Iranian constitutionalists. For more information on his activities in Iran and his role in the Iranian constitutional revolution, see Vejdani, “Crafting Constitutional Narratives.” For more information on Ömer Naci, see Tevetoğlu, *Ömer Naci*.

<sup>4</sup>YY, “İngilizlerin Ültimatomu,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 5, no. 112 (October 1910). Among the speakers were Hüseyin Dâniş, Muhammed Tefvik, Kürdistan-ı İrani Şeyhülislam-ı Sabıkı Hasan Efendi, Ahmed Agayef, Ubeydullah Efendi, Alimcan Efendi, Abdürreşid İbrahim, and Kara Bey.

<sup>5</sup>“Almanya İmparatoruna Çekilen Telgraf,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 5, no. 112 (October 1910): 145. This decision was based on the German emperor’s promise to defend Muslims’ rights during his visit to the tomb of Selahaddin Eyyubî in Damascus, and his previous interventions in Macedonia and Morocco.

<sup>6</sup>“Aydın Mebusu Ubeydullah Efendi’nin Nutku,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 5, no. 112 (October 1910): 140–41. During World War I the CUP assigned Ubeydullah Efendi to Iran and Afghanistan to gather support for the Ottoman war effort. However, the mission failed as the British arrested him in

Although there were protests all over the Islamic world against the British ultimatum, the meeting in Istanbul attracted special attention in Britain, as it brought together a large number of people from different ethnic and religious groups in support of Iran in the capital of the most powerful Muslim state, and had the potential to spark a movement that could lead to unity in the Islamic world. Reporting on the meeting, the *Manchester Guardian* interpreted Turks' decision to seek help from the Kaiser as foolish but alarming, and gave the following warning: "There were many Turks present at the meeting in Constantinople ... which denounced England ... Constantinople is the political as Persia is the intellectual capital of Islam. We cannot make enemies of Persia without deeply offending Turkey."<sup>7</sup> According to the newspaper, the meeting demonstrated how British policy towards Iran was causing Britain to fall from grace while it was creating sympathy for Germany among Muslims, including the Ottomans. Meanwhile, in his letter to Seyyid Hasan Taqizadeh, a well-known Iranian constitutionalist, Edward Browne wrote that the meeting in Istanbul caused concern among the British policymakers, "who had never believed in this degree of unity between Muslims, and especially between the Shi'is and the Sunnis."<sup>8</sup>

As acknowledged by the British press and Browne, this meeting was not just an ordinary protest. In fact, as this paper will demonstrate, it was an indication of the growing demand in the Ottoman Empire for an Ottoman–Iranian alliance, possibly backed by Germany, against British imperialism. Even though there was neither government nor public support for the idea at the time, there were many influential politicians, journalists, and religious scholars in the empire, who used the British ultimatum to Iran to promote the establishment of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance (*Osmanlı–İran ittifakı*) or union (*ittihad*). Employing the press to explain why the establishment of this alliance was both necessary and urgent, these political and intellectual figures tried not only to put pressure on the government but also to garner support from the public for this project.

Based mostly on Ottoman-Turkish newspapers published in Istanbul and the proceedings of the Ottoman parliament, this paper examines the historical developments and the debates revolving around the formation of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance in the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the 1908 Revolution. It argues that although neither the idea of an alliance between the two states nor the attempt to establish it was new, the way it was discussed, justified, and promoted during this period was different. The previous attempts by the Ottomans were led by the state as part of a broader pan-Islamist project (*ittihad-ı İslam*) that adopted a heavily religious tone. On the other hand, the main proponents of the alliance during the constitutional period were mostly intellectuals and religious scholars with transnational and international connections, who framed the issue within the context of

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Tehran. For more on Ubeydullah Efendi, see Özalp, *Ulemadan Bir Jöntürk*; Özalp, *Mehmed Ubeydullah Efendi'nin*; Alkan, *Ubeydullah Efendi'nin Amerika*.

<sup>7</sup>Bonakdarian, "Edward G. Browne and the Iranian Constitutional Struggle," 24.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

Ottoman–Iranian relations, focusing on immediate pragmatic, strategic, and ideological concerns, such as protecting the sovereignty and security of the two countries against European imperialism through constitutionalism. Instead of focusing on reconciling the disputes between the Sunnis and Shi‘is or presenting this alliance as the first step towards the formation of a broader Islamic union as Abdülhamid II did in the nineteenth century, they emphasized brotherhood, cooperation, and solidarity between the “Ottomans” and “Iranians”, based on common problems, interests, ideals, experiences, and enemies more than common religion.

This paper aims to show the significant place Iran occupied in the Ottoman public and political discourse in the constitutional period, a topic that has yet to be explored. Even though references to the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic, whether as a role model, a rival, a potential ally, and/or a looming threat constitute an integral part of modern Iranian historiography, the scholarship on the late Ottoman Empire hardly involves any discussion on Iran outside the context of border disputes and diplomacy, let alone on the efforts to build an Ottoman–Iranian alliance. In other words, while the impact of the increasing political, intellectual, and cultural exchanges between the two countries on Iranian modernity and nationalism has been explored by a number of scholars,<sup>9</sup> its effects on Ottoman and Republican Turkey remain unknown. That is why this paper focuses on the Ottomans’ perspectives on the establishment of an alliance with Iran and studies how the attempt to build this alliance helped shape the political and public discourse of the time.

The first part provides a brief overview of the history of Ottoman–Iranian relations from the early eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. It discusses the context in which the idea of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance emerged, and ultimately became a state policy during Abdülhamid II’s rule. The second part explains how the almost simultaneous revolutions in the two countries and the British ultimatum changed the parameters and the framework of the discussion on an Ottoman–Iranian alliance. Examining the debates among intellectuals and politicians in the Ottoman Empire between 1908 and 1914, it analyzes the reasons behind different groups’ support or opposition to joining forces with Iran. Finally, the third part discusses how the demands for cooperation with Iran were reframed during World War I, as the Ottomans continued, against all odds, to regard Iran as a potential ally in their struggle against the Entente powers.

### *The Early Attempts to Form an Ottoman–Iranian Alliance*

Even though they had been rivals and fought many wars over the centuries, there were times the Ottoman Empire and Iran considered forming an alliance or entering

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<sup>9</sup>Amanat, *Pivot of the*; Keddie, *Modern Iran*; Ringer, *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform*; Marashi, “Performing the Nation”; Perry, “Language Reform in Turkey and Iran”; Chehabi, “Staging the Emperor’s New Clothes”; Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*; Vejdani, *Making History in Iran*.

into a union, although it was never clear what this would actually entail.<sup>10</sup> Nader Shah (r. 1736–47) of Iran was apparently the first to propose such a union. In his letters to Sultan Mahmud I (1730–54), he expressed his desire to establish peaceful relations between the two states by ending the ongoing disputes between Sunni and Shi‘i Muslims. He suggested that the two states exchange ambassador representatives “so that the signs of togetherness and unity would be apparent.”<sup>11</sup> Employing Quranic verses and hadith, he also called for “an Islamic merger, in which the Ottomans would recognise Ja‘fari Shi‘ism as a fifth school of jurisprudence and Iran would become a ‘branch’ (*şube*) of the Ottoman Empire analogous to the Tatar khanate of the Crimea.”<sup>12</sup> Findley notes that Ottomans were not interested in this proposal, since they were suspicious of Nader Shah’s motives and did not want to upset the status quo in the Islamic world.<sup>13</sup> However, Tucker claims that these negotiations constituted a turning point in Ottoman–Iranian relations as they “provided a unique basis for peace with Iran” by harmonizing “the ideal of a unitary *umma* with the reality of autonomous Muslim powers while remaining faithful ... to the Ottoman dynastic tradition.”<sup>14</sup>

The next opportunity for an alliance presented itself in the early nineteenth century as Russia became a significant threat for both Iran and the Ottoman Empire, and the representatives of the two states started negotiations in order to end the ongoing hostilities between them. According to Masters, what marked a clear break with the past were the treaties of Erzurum in 1823 and 1848, which, for the first time, “treated the shah and sultan as equal and sovereign Muslim leaders” and declared Iran to be “a friendly nation.”<sup>15</sup> Iran even proposed the establishment of a defensive alliance against Russia, but the Ottomans turned it down.<sup>16</sup> Lord Strangford, the British consul in Istanbul, reported that the Ottomans rejected the proposal, because Russia would perceive it as a sign of hostility, Great Britain expressed serious concerns, and “an alliance with a heretical country, such as Iran, with the exception of the case of general danger, would absolutely contradict

<sup>10</sup>There is a rich literature on the history of Turkish–Iranian relations. For an overview, see Çetin-saya, “Essential Friends and Natural Enemies.” For Ottoman–Qajar relations in the nineteenth century, see Göyünç, “XIX. Yüzyılda Tahran’daki Temsilcilerimiz”; Shaw, ‘Iranian Relations with the Ottoman Empire’; Masters, “The Treaties of Erzurum”; Shahvar, “Iron Poles, Wooden Poles”; Williamson, “The Turco-Persian War of 1821–1823”; Ateş, “Bones of Contention”; Gozalova, “Relations Between Qajar Iran and Ottoman Turkey”; Nasiri, *Nasireddin Şah Zamanında*. For border disputes between the two states, see Kunalalp, “The Ottoman Drang Nach Osten”; Schofie, “Narrowing the Frontier”; Kurt, “Contesting Foreign Policy”; Ateş, *The Ottoman–Iranian Borderlands*. For Turkish–Iranian relations in the early twentieth century, see Göyünç, “Displays of Friendship”; Marashi, “Performing the Nation.”

<sup>11</sup>Tucker, “Letters from Nader Shah,” 393–4.

<sup>12</sup>Findley, “Political Culture and the Great Households,” 68.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 68. Findley states that Ottomans “compared their hold on the caliphate and their 450 years as a *ghazi* state with Iran’s lack of *ghazi* tradition and dynastic instability, calling Iran the ‘faithless woman of the world who, marrying first one and then another, passes from hand to hand like a handkerchief.’”

<sup>14</sup>Tucker, “The Peace Negotiations of 1736,” 17.

<sup>15</sup>Masters, “The Treaties of Erzurum,” 11.

<sup>16</sup>Gozalova, “Relations Between Qajar Iran,” 87.

Muhammad's law."<sup>17</sup> In the end, while the tensions between the two states eased, the attempt to create a united front against Russia failed. Despite facing a common enemy, Ottomans and Iranians came only as far as avoiding war with each other, except occasional skirmishes at the border.<sup>18</sup>

The issue came up again in 1873 at a meeting between Nasir al-Din Shah and Abdülaziz during the former's visit to Istanbul, where they discussed the possibility of forming a spiritual union among Islamic states.<sup>19</sup> The meetings between Qajar shahs and Ottoman statesmen became a common occurrence in the last decades of the nineteenth century as Nasir al-Din Shah and Muzaffar al-Din Shah made many official visits to the Ottoman court on their way to or from Europe.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, there were regular discussions between the representatives of two states as well as in the Ottoman press about the necessity of union, alliance, and concord between Iran and the Ottoman Empire due to their shared borders, constant contact, and common religion.<sup>21</sup>

Even though the Ottoman–Iranian alliance did not materialize, the interactions between the two nations intensified throughout the nineteenth century. As Zarinebaf demonstrates, the opening of both the Tabriz–Trabzon–Istanbul route and the Iranian consulates in different parts of the empire played an important role in increasing the intellectual, diplomatic, and commercial exchanges between the Ottomans and Iranians.<sup>22</sup> As the size of Iranian community in the Ottoman Empire grew, so did the Ottoman influence on Iranian bureaucrats, intellectuals, and religious scholars who witnessed and were inspired by the modernization efforts of the Ottoman state. Establishing relations with Ottoman intellectuals and officials, and participating in political debates of the time through their publications, these Iranians later played a significant role in the pan-Islamist project sponsored by Abdülhamid II.<sup>23</sup>

Ottomans actively sought out a union or at least an alliance with Iran for the first time during the reign of Abdülhamid II as part of the sultan's attempt to achieve Islamic unity, which meant creating a united Muslim front against imperialism.<sup>24</sup> In order to gain an advantage against western powers by maintaining the loyalty and support of the Muslims living under European rule as well as the multi-ethnic Muslim population of the empire, he used his position as the caliph to present

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>18</sup> Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Metin, *Emperyalist Çağda Modernleşme*, 125.

<sup>20</sup> Marashi, "Performing the Nation," 104.

<sup>21</sup> Göyünç, "Displays of Friendship," 57; Nasiri, *Nasreddim Şah Zamanında*, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Zarinebaf, "From Istanbul to Tabriz," 169.

<sup>23</sup> Kia, "Iranian Muslim Revolutionary Thought."

<sup>24</sup> For more on Pan-Islamism, see Keddie, "Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism"; Keddie, "The Pan-Islamic Appeal"; Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism"; Kia, "Iranian Muslim Revolutionary Thought"; Deringil, "The Struggle Against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq"; Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam*; Kia, "Pan-Islamism in Late Nineteenth-Century Iran"; Özcan, *Pan-Islamism*; Cole, "Shaikh al-Ra'is and Sultan Abdülhamid II"; Çetinsaya, "The Ottoman View of British Presence"; Çetinsaya, "The Caliph and Mujtahids."

himself as the leader of the Islamic world. The participation of Iran in the pan-Islamist project was crucial for its success. Iran bordered the Ottoman Empire and Russia, and was also on the pathway to India and Central Asia, home to millions of Muslims. In addition to needing Iran to secure their borders and to reach out to various parts of the Muslim world, Ottomans wanted to make sure of the loyalty of the growing Shi‘i population within its borders, particularly in Ottoman Iraq, which had historical and religious connections to Iran. Aware of the potential strength of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance against imperialist powers and considering sectarian division a big obstacle to achieving Islamic unity, Abdülhamid II began contemplating Sunni–Shi‘i rapprochement in the mid-1880s.<sup>25</sup> However, instead of negotiating the terms of a union between the two states with Nasir al-Din Shah, Abdülhamid II decided to contact the Shi‘i ulama and win them over so that he could benefit from their influence on Iranians to further his pan-Islamist goals.<sup>26</sup>

The Qajars, on the other hand, did not consider pan-Islamism a useful ideology because “its Muslim population was not as diverse and its foreign policy was quite as ambitious” as that of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>27</sup> In fact, they had more reasons to oppose pan-Islamism than to support it. For the Qajars, advocating the idea would mean shooting themselves in the foot, since it entailed the recognition of the authority of the Ottoman sultan over the Muslim world, including Iran. Kia argues that this would diminish the status of the Qajar shah and would be a humiliating blow “for a monarchy that already felt deeply insecure and lacked ... religious legitimacy.”<sup>28</sup> Also, if they set the sectarian differences aside, the Iranian state and religious hierarchy would lose both their principal enemy and an ideological weapon that had helped them “to preserve their separate and distinct identity.”<sup>29</sup> In addition to constituting a threat to the power and legitimacy of the Qajar dynasty and Shi‘i clergy, pan-Islamism went against the Shi‘i beliefs, because it required the acknowledgment of and loyalty to a Sunni caliph. As Keddie states, “for someone to be a Pan-Islamist and especially a supporter of the Ottoman sultan-caliph in Iran, he had to break significantly with his own religious traditions,” unlike a Sunni Muslim.<sup>30</sup>

Despite these factors, there were Iranian intellectuals and religious scholars who supported pan-Islamism through their writings and activities. Working within the pan-Islamist circle founded by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in Istanbul, they helped Abdülhamid II gain the support of the Shi‘i ulama in southern Iraq for his leadership of the Islamic world.<sup>31</sup> Among them were Mirza Malkam Khan, Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, Shaykh Ahmad Ruhi, Mirza Hassan Khan Khabir al-Molk, and Shaykh al-Ra‘is, who were known for their reformist and nationalist ideas rather than their reli-

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<sup>25</sup>Çetinsaya, “The Caliph and Mujtahids,” 562. See also Çetinsaya, “Essential Friends and Natural Enemies,” and Çetinsaya, “The Ottoman View of British Presence.”

<sup>26</sup>Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 563.

<sup>27</sup>Vejdani, “Contesting Nations and Canons,” 51.

<sup>28</sup>Kia, “Pan-Islamism,” 48.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>30</sup>Keddie, “Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism,” 26.

<sup>31</sup>Kia, “Pan-Islamism,” 38.

gious sentiments. The fact that most of them were Azali-Babis is a clear indication that they had different motives for supporting Abdülhamid II's pan-Islamist policy, the most obvious of which was the fear of European domination of the Islamic world. Kia argues that for some, it was about finding a foreign ally to preserve Iranian independence, while for others, it was about "challenging the power and undermining the legitimacy of the shah's government rather than religious sentiments, concern for the plight of the Muslims of the world, or even an anti-imperialist belief."<sup>32</sup> Likewise, Keddie states that these men's main concern was to "get rid of the Qajars and end Western domination in Iran."<sup>33</sup> What this means is that the pan-Islamist project for most of its Iranian supporters did not have anything to do with religion. Shaykh al-Ra'is, a Bahai, was an exception; he was genuinely interested in pan-Islamism. Preparing a detailed proposal, he urged Ottomans and Iranians to establish an alliance "based on deep convictions and common religious and spiritual objectives" rather than "expediency, convenience, and political manoeuvring."<sup>34</sup>

If he really wanted to build an alliance with Iran, Abdülhamid II definitely went about it the wrong way, since he tried to do it by establishing links with the critics of the shah and undermining his authority. Another problem with the whole project was the promotion of pan-Islamic ideals by progressive intellectuals, who were critical of autocracy and worked with Abdülhamid II solely for pragmatic purposes. Ottoman authorities actually ended up arresting or exiling members of the pan-Islamist circle and closing *Akhtar*, the reformist Persian newspaper published in Istanbul, because of the increasing pressure from the Qajar government, which was concerned about the activities of Iranian pan-Islamists who were openly critical of the shah.<sup>35</sup> The Iranian government's threat about letting the Armenian revolutionaries inside Iran and on the border roam free was particularly influential in Abdülhamid's decision to downplay the Iranian dimension of his project after 1896.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, as Cole states, the project of pan-Islam "was in fact heavily imbricated in Sunni triumphalism and Sunni missionizing so that it was bound to raise alarm among the Shiites" and that "genuine pan-Islam would have required the sultan to put away Sunni prejudices."<sup>37</sup> Yet we know that while Abdülhamid II was seeking rapprochement between Sunnis and Shi'is, he was resorting to different methods to combat Shi'ism, especially in Ottoman Iraq.<sup>38</sup> Even though Abdülhamid II made another

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>33</sup>Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion," 289–90.

<sup>34</sup>Details of the proposal of Shaykh al-Ra'is can be found in Kia, "Pan-Islamism," 41. For more information on Shaykh al-Ra'is, see Cole, "The Provincial Politics of Heresy and Reform"; Cole, "Autobiography and Silence"; and Cole, "Shaikh al-Ra'is and Sultan Abdülhamid II."

<sup>35</sup>Abdülhamid II had previously supported the newspaper due to its promotion of pan-Islamism. For more information on this newspaper, see Pistor-Hatam, "The Persian Newspaper Akhtar"; and Lawrance, *Akhtar*.

<sup>36</sup>Çetinsaya, "The Caliph and Mujtahids," 568–9.

<sup>37</sup>Cole, "Shaikh al-Ra'is and Sultan Abdülhamid II," 182–3.

<sup>38</sup>For more on the policies against Shiism in Iraq, see Çetinsaya, "The Caliph and Mujtahids"; and Deringil, "The Struggle against Shiism."



attempt in 1896 by sending, this time, an official mission to Nasir al-Din Shah, the assassination of the latter by a disciple of al-Afghani interrupted his plans.<sup>39</sup>

Even though there were clear signs of friendship between the former enemies in the late nineteenth century, they were not able to take the necessary steps to establish a cooperative relationship against European imperialism. Framed in terms of pan-Islamism and sponsored by an Ottoman sultan, who proudly used his title of “Caliph,” the idea of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance not only failed to appeal to the Qajars, but also could not eliminate the biases and tensions caused by years of political, military, and sectarian conflict between the Ottoman and Iranian governments. However, as the internal and external dynamics changed in the early twentieth century, Iran and the Ottoman Empire came very close to forming an alliance. The constitutional revolutions in both countries provided a new opportunity in this regard.<sup>40</sup>

### *The Ottoman Revolution of 1908 and Its Aftermath*

Emboldened by the accomplishment of their Iranian counterparts in establishing a constitutional regime in 1906, Ottoman constitutionalists, known as Young Turks, used the opportunity to promote and implement solidarity and fraternity between the two countries. Expressing both their support for the new regime and their disapproval of Ottoman incursions into Iranian territory in their publications as well as in the letters and telegrams they sent to Iranian diplomats, politicians, and organizations, the Young Turks tried to lay the groundwork for future collaboration with the constitutionalists in Iran.<sup>41</sup> In their letter to the Iranian *majles* in December 1907, they stated: “after the establishment of a Constitutional administration in the Ottoman government, the two neighbouring countries can strengthen their friendship and render service to Eastern civilization.”<sup>42</sup> Considering Iran a potential base for their activities in Eastern Anatolia, the Young Turks also dispatched emissaries to the region to forge links with Iranian constitutionalists, to deliver a declaration to *Anjoman-e Melli*, and to secure Armenians’ support against Abdülhamid II.<sup>43</sup> Some of these emissaries, such as Ömer Naci, even fought against the shah’s forces in Iran. Meanwhile there were discussions between prominent Ottoman and Iranian dissidents, such as Ahmed Rıza and Taqizadeh, in Europe, particularly in Paris and London, about the ways in which they could work together. Some of these meetings were arranged by British dissidents, such as Edward Browne, who

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<sup>39</sup>Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam*, 44.

<sup>40</sup>For a comparative study of constitutionalism and the constitutional revolutions in the Ottoman and Qajar empires, see Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism*; Sohrabi, “Global Waves, Local Actors”; Sohrabi, “Historicizing Revolutions”; Zarinebaf, “Alternatif Moderniteler”; and Zarinebaf, “From Istanbul to Tabriz.”

<sup>41</sup>Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 205.

<sup>42</sup>Vejdani, “Crafting Constitutional Narratives,” 322.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 322.

supported the formation of a political pact between Ottoman and Iranian constitutionalists.<sup>44</sup>

The interaction and cooperation between Iranian and Ottoman constitutionalists intensified after July 1908, as the Young Turks came to power in the Ottoman Empire and Muhammad Ali Shah ended constitutional rule in Iran by bombarding the *majles*, which led the Iranian constitutionalists to seek help from the Ottoman government by writing petitions and sending telegrams.<sup>45</sup> Some of them even took refuge in the Ottoman consulates in Tehran and Tabriz. Although these *basts* were seen as proof of Ottoman support for the Iranian constitutionalists, Vejdani demonstrates that there was in fact “a difference of approach between Ottoman officials serving on the ground in Iran ... sympathetic with the constitutionalist cause, and career diplomats and civil servants ... who saw support for the constitutionalists as a liability in light of overwhelming Russian and British diplomatic pressure.”<sup>46</sup> While Istanbul had attracted Iranians escaping persecution on the eve of the revolution, it became a haven for activists and refugees after the Iranian constitution was suspended.<sup>47</sup> Among them were prominent constitutionalist figures like Dikhkhuda and Salmasi, who took advantage of the atmosphere of freedom in the Ottoman Empire to support the constitutional movement in Iran.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, the Turkish press based in Istanbul closely followed the developments in Iran and reported favorably on the constitutional movement. There were even newspapers and periodicals that collected contributions to help the Iranian constitutionalists during the siege of Tabriz between June 1908 and July 1909.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, there were many reports and commentaries on Iran in the press, which not only served to inform the Ottoman public about the current events next door, but also aimed to emphasize the similarities between Ottomans and Iranians by focusing on common problems such as despotism and imperialism as well as on shared ideals such as constitutionalism.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Bonakdarian, “Iranian Constitutional Exiles,” 183–4. According to Bonakdarian, Edward Browne was critical of the Anglo-Russian Entente (1907) and believed that as the president of *La Fraternité Musulmane*, the Young Turk leader Ahmet Rıza could help with the “general mobilization of Muslim opinion in support of the Iranian constitutionalists,” leading to a change in British foreign policy in favor of Iran. That is why he introduced him to Taqizadeh. Taqizadeh, who was familiar with the political and intellectual developments in the Ottoman Empire, later lived in Istanbul with Mehmed Emin Resulzade for several months, helped set up a society of Iranian immigrants, and even attended a session of the Ottoman parliament. Zarinebaf, “From Tabriz to Istanbul,” 166.

<sup>45</sup>Zarinebaf, “From Tabriz to Istanbul,” 166. While pro-constitutional Persians in Istanbul established the Iranian Union and Progress Committee, “Iranian expatriates in Switzerland adopted the regulations of the CUP, as a guideline for their secret organization.” Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 498.

<sup>46</sup>Vejdani, “Crafting Constitutional Narratives,” 334–5.

<sup>47</sup>*Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Zarinebaf, “Diaspora.”

<sup>48</sup>Dikhkhuda established the Persian newspaper *Sorush* in Istanbul in 1909, the official organ of Anjuman-i Sa‘adat. Zarinebaf, “From Tabriz to Istanbul,” 166. Salmasi traveled to Istanbul with Ömer Naci through Eastern Anatolia. On his way, he met with other revolutionaries and spoke at conferences organized by the CUP and the Iranian diaspora. Vejdani, “Crafting Constitutional Narratives.”

<sup>49</sup>Zarinebaf, “From Tabriz to Istanbul,” 166.

<sup>50</sup>Atamaz, “Constitutionalism as a Solution.”

Shortly after it came to power, the Young Turk government announced its plans to withdraw the troops in northwestern Iran, previously sent by Abdülhamid II. If they had actually followed through with it, this would have constituted a major shift in Ottoman policy towards Iran. However, the occupation continued. As Vejdani suggests, this was not necessarily considered a problem at the time since the shah was back in power and the Ottoman troops could provide the Iranian constitutionalists with much-needed assistance against the shah's forces.<sup>51</sup>

When Iranian revolutionaries won the struggle and opened the *majles* for the second time in November 1909, it looked like the establishment of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance would soon be a reality. Both states had constitutional governments and were run by people who seemed to share the same ideals and enemies. Yet there was no attempt on the part of the CUP to build such an alliance, despite its previous rhetoric and actions. The international ramifications of such an action, the influential role the ulama played in Iranian politics that contradicted Young Turks' secularism, Ottoman territorial ambitions, and the political instability in both Iran and the Ottoman Empire all played a role, to different degrees, in CUP's reluctance to join forces with Iran. The political turmoil in Iran resulted from the ideological divisions among revolutionaries, the power struggle between the revolutionaries and the shah, and the British and Russian involvement.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the CUP was trying to secure its hold on power as it faced opposition both from the remnants and supporters of the old regime, as exemplified by the counterrevolutionary attempt of 1909, and the newly emerging political parties established by its former members.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Vejdani, "Crafting Constitutional Narratives," 327.

<sup>52</sup>Iranian revolutionaries consisted of various social, ethnic, and religious groups with different interests and priorities, which later led to inner conflicts and power struggles once the parliament opened. For more on these groups and the political scene in Iran, see Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*.

<sup>53</sup>Although the CUP originally consisted of different groups, ranging from extreme westernists to Islamists and non-Muslims to conservative nationalists, it gained a centralist, westernist, and nationalist character after it came to power under the leadership of revolutionary figures like Talat Bey, Enver Bey, Cemal Bey, Dr. Nazım, Hüseyin Cahit, and Ziya Gökalp. Having achieved their goal under the umbrella of the CUP by establishing a constitutional regime, other groups that were dissatisfied with the policies of the Unionists started to leave the party and formed their own political organizations. For more on the political scene in post-revolutionary Ottoman Empire, see Kansu, *Politics in Post-revolutionary Turkey*. The rhetoric and policies of the CUP were so complex and variable that scholars have long debated the true nature of this organization and the real intentions of its members. While some scholars like Ramsaur and Akşin have argued that the CUP was originally Turkish nationalist, others like Georgeon and Kayalı have claimed that the CUP favored Ottomanism, but had to follow Turkist policies due to the circumstances caused by the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913. On the other hand, without denying the Turkist tendencies among the CUP members, scholars like Ahmad and Hanioglu have asserted that the Unionists regarded Turkism, just like Ottomanism, as an instrument that could save the empire, since they were pragmatists who were little concerned with ideology. Meanwhile, Atabaki states that the CUP was spreading pan-Turkist propaganda in Iran and the Caucasus as early as 1908. Atabaki, "Pan-Turkism and Iranian Nationalism," 125. For a detailed study of the CUP and its policies, see Ramsaur, *The Young*; Ahmad, *The Young Turks*; Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor*; Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*; Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*; Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*; and Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*.

Even though the Ottoman government did not seem interested, an Ottoman–Iranian alliance continued to find support in the press, gaining more urgency and popularity with Britain’s ultimatum to Iran in October 1910. Among those who used the press to promote this alliance were Russian emigres such as Mehmed Resulzade, Ahmed Agayef, Abdürreşid İbrahim, and Alimcan Efendi, who had connections to the Turkic-Muslim populations in Central Asia; members of the ulama, such as Mehmed Ragıb, Ubeydullah Efendi, and Aksekili Ahmed Efendi; and intellectuals with ties to the Arab world and India, such as Abdullah Cevdet and S. M. Tevfik. Although they came from different backgrounds and subscribed to various ideologies, such as pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism, pan-Asianism, and westernism, these people were all pro-constitutionalists who framed their discussion on Iran around themes of brotherhood, cooperation, and solidarity, and argued that an alliance between the two powers was necessary to protect the sovereignty and security of the Ottoman Empire and Iran.<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that although Istanbul housed many Iranian constitutionalists who promoted Ottoman–Iranian solidarity at one point or another, such as Taqizadeh, Kazemzadeh, and Dawlatabadi, their names and views did not appear in the Ottoman–Turkish press until World War I.

The meeting held at the Odeon Theatre in October 1910 brought together most of these figures, who openly called on the Ottoman government to take a stand against the occupation of Iran. Ubeydullah Efendi, a deputy of the parliament, regarded an intervention by the Ottomans as necessary for two reasons. First, the empire was responsible for the protection of other Muslim states as the seat of the caliphate. Second, if Europeans, who feared the possibility of a Turkish–Iranian union, were to invade Iran, the Ottoman Empire would become an easy target.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Ahmed Agayef (later known as Ahmed Ağaoğlu), a prominent intellectual of Azeri origin, said:<sup>56</sup>

Today, the office of the great caliphate has many duties and responsibilities. There is a lot of hope set upon it. One of these [duties] is to think about Iran. Ottomans thinking about Iran is the same thing as Ottomans thinking about themselves. If we render their lives safe, we will have rendered our lives safe as well. Iranians have a right to set their hope upon us because it is what brotherhood is for, because it is

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<sup>54</sup>As Shissler points out, the time period in which these people were shaped was a fluid one as borders changed, populations and ideas moved, and terms of identity shifted quite often. She states, “their world was quite cosmopolitan, their political and intellectual consciousness spreading out in ways that did not respect imperial frontiers or narrow communal cultural or linguistic boundaries,” leading them to adopt overlapping or competing identities. Shissler, *Between Two Empires*, 4. Agayef, for example, could interchangeably identify himself as Persian, a Turk, and a Russian or Turkish Muslim, and play an important role in the pan-Turkist movement in the Ottoman Empire along with other emigres of Azeri background such as Ali Hüseyinzade and Mehmed Emin Resulzade, who served as the editor of *Iran-i Naw*, a socialist newspaper in Iran. Vejdani, “Contesting Nations,” 61–2.

<sup>55</sup>“Aydın Mebusu Ubeydullah Efendi’nin Nutku,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 5, no. 112 (October 1910): 140–41.

<sup>56</sup>For an intellectual biography of Ahmet Ağaoğlu, see Shissler, *Between Two Empires*.

the duty of the caliphate. ... Regarding the life of Iran as our own, we should take care of our own affairs in a devoted manner.<sup>57</sup>

Fearful about the invasion of Iran by the Russians from the north and by the British from the south, Agayef added that this would leave Anatolia, Arabian Iraq, Baghdad, Mosul, Basra, and the Arabian Peninsula vulnerable to foreign occupation. Since Ottomans had neither the military force nor the financial power to protect their borders, they had no choice but to resist the partition of Iran.<sup>58</sup>

While Alimcan Efendi, a Russian Muslim, warned the Ottomans not to remain indifferent to this “unjustified” and “cruel” treatment by reminding them what Britain had done in Egypt twenty-seven years before,<sup>59</sup> another speaker depicted the ultimatum as Britain’s attempt to prevent a possible union between Ottomans and Iranians since it could threaten Europe.<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile, at a similar meeting in Iran held in November 1910, Iranian protesters warned Britain that the more they tried to weaken the Islamic governments the stronger they would become, and that their insults and attacks against the Iranian nation would lead to an alliance that they would have to worry about.<sup>61</sup>

Although the British ultimatum alarmed many people in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, and led them to emphasize the urgency of forming an alliance between the two nations, the government showed no interest in it. In fact, at the parliamentary session on 3 December 1910, İbrahim Hakkı Paşa, the head of the cabinet, argued that people misinterpreted Britain’s act and reacted unnecessarily negatively:

The explanation given by Britain on this matter is very persuasive and satisfactory for us. The British government has no intentions over Iran ... This is what Britain guaranteed to all the states ... As a result of this [the ultimatum], the Iranian government will be able to nicely maintain order over there.<sup>62</sup>

Another criticism the government received was about the continuation of the Ottoman invasion even after the restoration of the constitution in Iran. In fact, Ottomans had made further inroads into Iranian territory.<sup>63</sup> In his response to the

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<sup>57</sup>“Ahmed Bey Agayef Efendi’nin Nutku,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 5, no. 112 (October 1910): 126–7.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>“Alimcan Efendi’nin Nutku,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 5, no. 112 (October 1910): 134–5.

<sup>60</sup>“Şeyh Esedullah Efendi’nin Nutku,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, 5, no. 112 (November 1910): 132–3.

<sup>61</sup>“İran’da Bir Miting ve Mukarreratı,” *Servet-i Fünun* 40, no. 1020 (December 1910): 142.

<sup>62</sup>*Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: İctima 3 Cilt 1*, 284–5. For British–Ottoman relations during the constitutional period, see Ahmad. “Great Britain’s Relations with the Young Turks”. Ünal, “Britain and Ottoman Domestic Politics”; Ünal, “Young Turk Assessments of International Politics.”

<sup>63</sup>Berberian, “The Dashnaksutiun and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution,” 30. Among them were Hnchakists, who believed that the Young Turk government had “adopted the way of Abdülhamid,” meaning that they wanted to expand their rule into Iran. Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 70. For the role Armenians played in the constitutional revolutions in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, see Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries*.

criticisms, the prime minister stated that the turmoil in Iran necessitated the protection of the borders and the Ottoman consuls, and that they did not intend to establish a permanent presence in Iran. İbrahim Hakkı Paşa finished his speech by expressing his desire to see Iran as an independent and powerful state under constitutional rule, which would eliminate the need to maintain a strong military force there.<sup>64</sup>

Naturally, this explanation did not satisfy some of the deputies. Among them was İsmail Hakkı Paşa, who addressed the parliament two days later to share his concerns:

We have a great and important relationship with Iran. Iran and the Ottoman Empire cannot be separated from each other. They are brother states. The life of one is connected to that of other ... It is common knowledge that Britain and Russia had a pact a few years ago to realize their plans about Iran. This agreement continues. It reached such a point that a disaster awaits Iran. And our cabinet tells us that that is not the case.<sup>65</sup>

Six months later, Rifat Paşa made a speech at the parliament about the same issue, and reiterated that the government had no ambitions for territorial expansion and did not desire anything except the improvement of the situation in Iran.<sup>66</sup> To disprove the claims that this was all talk, he revealed that the Ottoman government proposed the establishment of a committee to solve the border disputes between the two states, which was “necessary to build a sincere and friendly relationship” and “to draw the two countries closer.”<sup>67</sup> Pleased with this declaration, İsmail Hakkı Paşa suggested that the two governments solve this issue without wasting time, since there were ill-intentioned people who were trying to take advantage of this conflict; and his Iranian friends, like many others, were concerned about Ottomans’ true intentions.<sup>68</sup>

Prominent British dissidents who supported the formation of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance, such as Edward G. Browne, Major Stokes, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and H. N. Brailsford Browne shared the same concern.<sup>69</sup> Bonakdarian argues that even though their disappointment and concern about the British ultimatum to

<sup>64</sup>*Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: İçtima 3 Cilt 1*, 284–5.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>66</sup>Rifat Paşa was a controversial figure, because he was married to a Russian woman and wanted to expel the Iranian constitutionalists who took refuge at the Ottoman consulates a few years earlier. Vejdani, “Crafting Constitutional Narratives,” 332.

<sup>67</sup>*Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: İçtima 3 Cilt 5* (TBMM Basımevi: Ankara, 1990), 441–2.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 553. Among those who were skeptical about Ottomans’ intentions in Iran were Hnchakists, who believed that the Young Turk government had “adopted the way of Abdülhamid,” meaning that they wanted to expand their rule into Iran. Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 70. For the role Armenians played in the constitutional revolutions in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, see Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries*.

<sup>69</sup>Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian*, 228. Stokes was the British military attaché in Tehran and an ardent supporter of the Iranian constitutionalist cause.

Iran led them “to hope that Persia will be saved by Turkey backed by Germany,”<sup>70</sup> they believed that Young Turks were not interested in assisting their Iranian counterparts due to their “aggressive, chauvinistic, Turkifying tendency” and “territorial ambitions in north-western Iran.”<sup>71</sup> However, Browne was still hopeful mainly due to the “increasing public sympathy for the Iranian constitutionalists in the Ottoman Empire by 1911.”<sup>72</sup>

Despite the attempts of prominent intellectual and political figures both inside and outside the empire, the CUP neither attempted to form an official alliance with nor extended its full support to Iran once the struggle between the Iranian constitutionalists and the shah transformed into a conflict between the Iranian government and foreign powers. Criticizing the government officials for shutting their ears to pleas for intervention, Abdullah Cevdet stated that Ottomans had no other option, since Iran’s independence was much more important than Crete and even Turkish Europe:

The fate of Iran is so connected to the fate of Turkey that being indifferent to Iran’s fate, for us, is being indifferent to our own. ... Iran is our neighbor. Our houses are attached to each other and the walls that separate our houses are common. ... Iran is our life, soul, and breath. If we want to live, then we need to be ready to die for Iran.<sup>73</sup>

However, unlike those who thought that gaining the support of Germany was essential to save Iran, Abdullah Cevdet was against seeking Germany’s protection and assistance. Drawing attention to Germany’s refusal to interfere unless its trade was interrupted and its recognition of the rights of Russians and the British as Iran’s neighbors, Abdullah Cevdet said, as an “empire of factories,” Germany was in need of ignorant nations that were not industrialized to which it could sell its products. The reason it seemed to be protecting Muslims was “because Muslims had an aptitude to be milked and clipped.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, Iranians needed to appeal, first, to themselves, and second, to the citizens of the Turkish Empire instead of Germany.

The issue of a possible Ottoman intervention in Iran came up again in the parliament as Russia issued its own ultimatum to Iran in November 1911 and Iranians requested support from the Ottoman government.<sup>75</sup> In response to the telegrams sent by the Iranian *majles* as well as by Iranians from Calcutta, Bombay, and Tabriz, the parliament asked Asım Bey, the minister of foreign affairs, to explain the government’s stance on the matter in December 1911. The way he discussed

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>72</sup>Bonakdarian, “Edward G. Browne and the Iranian,” 27.

<sup>73</sup>Abdullah Cevdet, “İran Viran,” *İctihad* 1, no. 28 (August 1911): 792–4.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Vejdani, *Making History in Iran*, 130. While the Iranian *majles* sought the assistance of the Ottomans upon the Russian ultimatum, there were those who were distrustful and critical of foreign interference in general because Iran had suffered more than enough at the hands of foreigners.

the Russian ultimatum was very similar to the way the prime minister had discussed the British ultimatum nearly a year before, revealing how far the government was from working with Iran. In a diplomatic manner, he stated that it was impossible not to be upset about the latest developments in Iran, and that they were encouraging the Iranians and Russians to find a way to resolve the matter.<sup>76</sup> Failing to address Russian imperialism and to acknowledge how dire the situation was, he expressed hope that the two states would solve their problems quickly and peacefully, recognize each other's rights, and re-establish their friendly relations. He even claimed that the Russian government was not happy about giving Iran an ultimatum either, but had to take this action to protect its rights. Following this speech, the parliament decided to respond to the Iranians' telegrams by repeating the foreign minister's explanations.<sup>77</sup>

The declarations made by the government officials in the aftermath of both the British and the Russian ultimatums clearly demonstrate that the Ottoman government tried to avoid conflict with Britain and Russia and wanted to persuade the deputies that there was no reason to get involved in Iran. They knew that assisting Iranian constitutionalists as well as establishing closer ties with Germany, as some demanded, would cause a fallout with the Britain and Russia, so they chose to ignore the imperialist ambitions of these powers, and downplayed the threat they posed to the sovereignty of Iran. It should be remembered that Ottomans themselves had been occupying Iranian territory. In fact, the way they tried to justify their occupation of Iran closely resembled the British and Russian rhetoric since they claimed that the Ottoman troops were there to maintain security and stability.<sup>78</sup> While the government portrayed the Ottoman occupation as a pragmatic necessity, many Iranians and the opponents of the CUP regarded it as a sign of their expansionist policy and an obstacle to the establishment of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance.

Despite the government's unwillingness to take action, it is clear from the discussions in the parliament that some deputies supported ending the Ottoman occupation as well as interfering on Iranians' behalf. The calls for the establishment of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance continued to appear in the press as well. S. M. Tevfik, who wrote several articles on this issue between 1912 and 1915, argued that the Ottoman government was making a mistake by not entering into a formal alliance with Iran.<sup>79</sup> He wrote:

<sup>76</sup>*Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: İctima 4 Cilt 2* (TBMM Basımevi: Ankara, 1991), 186.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>It is worth mentioning that the coverage of the latest developments in Iran in the publications associated with the government, such as *Tanin* and *Sabah*, was in line with government policy, despite the fact that both newspapers supported the constitutionalists in Iran in the early days of the Ottoman revolution. While *Tanin* was silent about the meeting at the Odeon Theatre and published an article that tried to explain the presence of Ottoman troops in Iran with the power vacuum there, *Sabah* made the point that the salvation of Iran was in the hands of Iranians, and not Germany. "İran'ın Taksimine Dair," *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 5, no. 113 (November 1910): 144.

<sup>79</sup>S. M. Tevfik, "Ruslar İraniler Meşhur Bombardımanı," *Sebilürreşad* 8, no. 193 (May 1912): 203–5; "Osmanlı–İran İttifakı," *Sebilürreşad* 8, no. 198 (May 1912): 305–7; "Osmanlı–İran Hududu," *Sebilürreşad* 8, no.186 (March 1912); "İslam Düşmanları Ne Yüzle Müslümanlardan Sadakat Bekliyorlar?"



Alas! It's a shame! ... When will we, Muslims, change our ways and start thinking sensibly? One day we will regret it, but will it be of any use? Let us wake up from this deep sleep, let us wake up forever ... Enough is enough.<sup>80</sup>

S. M. Tevfik declared that following the constitutional revolutions, the two nations finally set aside their centuries-long ignorance, left their conflicts in the past, and realized they had mutual political interests. Therefore, with a little help and sacrifice, they could easily unite. According to Tevfik, it was neither necessary nor important to form a religious union between the two states; what Ottomans and Iranians needed to do was to form a strong union based on politics and interests, which would gain the support of intellectuals and religious scholars on both sides, who cared about the future of their countries. Discussing how Europeans could react to this union, he complained that whenever there was a sign of awakening among Muslims, Europeans attributed it to Pan-Islamism, which they considered a bad thing, even though France, Britain, and Russia on the one hand and Germany, Austria, and Italy on the other, had their own alliances with other Christian states.<sup>81</sup>

Mehmed Emin Resulzade also emphasized the commonalities and declared that the Ottoman Empire and Iran had to act together because their destinies were intertwined with each other in the face of European imperialism.<sup>82</sup> In addition to being connected through religion, language, race, traditions, interests, and enemies, they shared a long border, which caused the political fate of one to affect that of the other, making their cooperation essential for survival.<sup>83</sup> The biggest threat for both was the alliance of Russia and Britain, which Resulzade respectively called “*tehlike-i berriye*” (land threat/danger) and “*dehşet-i bahriye*” (naval terror). While Russia had ambitions on Islamic lands, declared war on Iran and the Ottoman Empire every few years, captured their territories, and even attacked their capitals, Britain was pretending to be a friend of the Islamic world, but forcing both Ottomans and Iranians to pay for their support and friendship.

Apart from explaining in detail why it was essential for the two states to work with each other, some intellectuals and politicians in the Ottoman Empire made a habit of glorifying Iran in their writings in the press, especially after the British ultimatum to Iran. Making constant references to Iran's pre-Islamic and Islamic past, its impact on civilization, its perseverance under continuous foreign threats, and the positive qualities of Iranians as a nation,<sup>84</sup> they wanted to demonstrate that Iran was a respectable member of the civilized world as well as to prove Iran's worthiness to continue its

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*Sebilürreşad* 13, no. 318 (December 1914): 43–5; “İran Hala mı Bitaraf Duracak,” *Sebilürreşad* 13 (February 1915): 125.

<sup>80</sup>S. M. Tevfik, “Osmanlı–İran İttifakı” *Sebilürreşad* 8, no. 198 (May 1912): 305–7.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Mehmed Emin Resulzade, “İran Tarihçe-i İnkılabı,” *Sebilürreşad* 9, no. 215 (October 1912): 129–31.

<sup>83</sup>Mehmed Emin Resulzade, “Hükümet-i Osmaniyye ile İran Beyninde Maddî ve Manevî Rabitalar,” *Sebilürreşad* 9, no. 213 (October 1912): 92–4.

<sup>84</sup>Mehmed Ragıb, “Zavallı İran,” *Sırat-ı Müstakim* 6, no. 132 (March 1910): 26–9.

existence as an independent nation among others. Through glorification of Iran, they also aimed to gain support from the Ottoman public for an alliance with Iran by changing the possible negative opinions Ottomans held about their neighbors due to sectarian biases and previous conflicts. What was missing in these discussions about Iran was any reference to Shi'ism.

The first thing the proponents of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance drew attention to was Iran's long history, even though they could not agree on how far it went back—the estimations varied from 3,000 years to 8,000 years—Agayef stated that historians could not find a time when Iran did not exist, meaning it was born with humanity.<sup>85</sup> As one of the oldest nations in the world, Iranians were able to establish an independent national administration even before the Romans and the Greeks.<sup>86</sup> Second, throughout all this time Iran occupied more or less the same area and maintained its sovereignty, which was a major accomplishment. Likewise, Resulzade wrote that although Iran lost many battles against its enemies, it had always reobtained its independence due to its cultural and spiritual victory or superiority.<sup>87</sup> Third, Iran was praised for its contribution to Islamic and world civilization, especially in areas of science, philosophy, and literature.<sup>88</sup> Resulzade argued that Iran was to the Islamic eastern world what Greece was to Christian Europe. In order to illustrate Iran's "glorious and dignified" status both among Muslims and within humanity, he gave examples of world-renowned Iranian scientists, poets, and philosophers, such as Firdawsî, Rumi, Sâdi, Hafez, Beydavi, Firuzabadi, İbn-i Sina, and Gazali, whom he described as "genius." In addition to praising these men for their achievements and elevating the status of Persian in the East to that of French in Europe, he quoted an Iranian writer, who once said: "Arabs are the conceivers, Iranians are the educators, and Turks are the defenders of Islam."<sup>89</sup> Likewise, Abdullah Cevdet stated that compared to the Ottomans, Iranians had a lot to be proud of in their history, such as producing great poets and *Shahnama* (Book of the Kings), one of the masterpieces of the world.<sup>90</sup> Finally, Iranians were praised for their patriotism, industriousness, and economic and commercial abilities.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup>"Ahmed Bey Agayef Efendi'nin Nutku."

<sup>86</sup>Agayef, "İran'ın Mazi ve Haline Bir Nazar-1," *Sebilürreşad* 4, no. 103 (August 1910): 426–7.

<sup>87</sup>Mehmed Emin Resulzade, "Hayat-ı Akvam-ı İslamiyye (İran Nedir)," *Sebilürreşad* 9, no. 212 (September 1912): 41–2. While Resulzade explained Iran's endurance with its cultural and spiritual superiority, Agayef gave most of the credit for Iran's resurrection to Turks, who, to the detriment of their own identity, had a tendency to adopt and improve the religion and culture of the places and peoples that came under their rule instead of trying to Turkify them. Ahmed Agayef, "İran'ın Mazi ve Haline Bir Nazar-2," *Sebilürreşad* 4, no. 104 (September 1910). Atabaki states that having become disillusioned with the constitutional movements in Iran and Russia, both Azerbaijani figures were drawn to the CUP's "call for unity among Turkic peoples," and became "the pioneers of pan-Turkism in Caucasia and Azerbaijan." Atabaki, "Pan-Turkism and Iranian Nationalism," 126–7.

<sup>88</sup>Agayef, "İran'ın Mazi ve Haline Bir Nazar-2."

<sup>89</sup>Resulzade, "Hayat-ı Akvam-ı İslamiyye": "Arablar İslamiyetin müvellidi, İraniler mürebbisi, Türkler de müdafidir."

<sup>90</sup>Abdullah Cevdet, "Kuvadis İran?," *İctihad* 5, no. 106 (May 1914): 105–8.

As seen, those who pushed for Ottoman–Iranian cooperation during the constitutional period, whether in the form of a union or alliance, based their demands on strategic and ideological rather than religious grounds. Even though they sometimes referred to Islam, the caliphate, and the Muslim world in their writings and speeches, they justified their demand by demonstrating how the two nations were closely connected to each other, undergoing parallel processes, facing common enemies, having mutual interests, and sharing common ideals such as constitutionalism and anti-imperialism. These people believed that the Ottoman Empire and Iran wasted a lot of time with religious and sectarian bigotry, and that they would not have been in this situation if they had found a way to unite earlier. That is why they tried to change the negative perceptions about Iran and portrayed it in a positive light by highlighting its similarities and connections with the Ottoman Empire.

Although the government seemed to be passively watching the developments next door, it was actually quite active behind the scenes, spreading both pan-Islamist and pan-Turkist propaganda in areas inhabited by Muslims, including Iran, through emissaries, agents, organizations, and publications in order to counterbalance the influence of Russians and the British.<sup>92</sup> Their activities intensified with the beginning of World War I and the Ottoman Empire's entry into the war on the side of Germany.<sup>93</sup>

### *The War Years (1914–18)*

World War I posed both opportunities and challenges for Ottoman–Iranian solidarity. While the war created additional obstacles to the establishment of an alliance between the two countries, it also demonstrated these countries' inability to preserve their sovereignty and security on their own as well as the leverage they could gain against the European powers by cooperating with each other. That was why some people still had hope for the Ottoman and Iranian governments to work together as late as 1918. However, there was more emphasis on religion and a return to the age-old references to Sunnism and Shi'ism in the discussions on Ottoman–Iranian alliance during wartime. This mainly resulted from Ottomans' declaration of a jihad upon their entry into the war, their desire to appeal to Iranians' religious sentiments, and their efforts to secure the support of the Shi'i ulama.

When the Ottoman government issued a call for jihad, there was expectation among some people in the empire that Iran would soon join them in their fight against the Entente powers, since Iranians had suffered a lot at the hands of the British and the Russians.<sup>94</sup> However, Iran soon declared its neutrality as it was

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<sup>91</sup>E.V., "İran, Acaba Yeni Bir Lehistan Mı Olacaktır?," *Mecmua-yı Ebuziyya* 31, no. 126 (November 1912): 296–300.

<sup>92</sup>Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, 46–50; Landau, *Politics of Pan-Islamism*, 90–91.

<sup>93</sup>See Reynolds, "Buffers, Not Brethren."

<sup>94</sup>Britain gave an ultimatum to Tehran Aksekili Ahmed Hamdi, "Resm-i İran Hâlâ mı Sükût Edecek?," *Sebilürreşad* 13, no. 327 (February 1915): 121–2.

under British and Russian occupation, lacked a firmly established government, and there were Iranian statesmen who thought that joining the Ottomans was a risky move, which turned out to be a well-founded concern. Expressing his frustration about this decision, Aksekili Ahmed Hamdi, a prominent member of the Ottoman ulama, stated that Iran's neutrality as a Muslim country was not acceptable at a time when Ottomans were fighting to defend Muslims' rights. Claiming that it was in Iranians' best interest to participate in the war on the Ottomans' side, he warned that if the other side won, Islam would be destroyed and there would no longer be either Iran or Turan.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the government's decision not to enter the war, there were Iranians who issued calls for solidarity with the Ottoman Empire. Abdullah Efendi, who spent some time in Iran during World War I as the head of the Special Afghan Committee, said that even though the Iranian government declared neutrality because of fear of the Russians, Iranians wanted to enter the war on the Ottomans' side.<sup>96</sup> While there were some members of the ulama and newspapers in Iran that expressed this desire, it is difficult to argue that this was a popular sentiment.<sup>97</sup> In fact, Atabaki states that the Ottoman propaganda campaign in Iran, which was first pan-Islamic and then pan-Turkic, failed to gain support due to Iranians' "national mistrust of the Ottomans," Ottomans' "refusals to honor their border treaties," and the "ever changing and outspoken expansionist rhetoric of some Ottoman leaders."<sup>98</sup> Cronin even argues that despite its potential propaganda impact, Ottomans' entry into the war complicated the Iranian nationalist-German attempts at cooperation due to Iranians' awareness of Turks' territorial ambitions, their fear of pan-Turkism, and their resentment at the behavior of the Ottoman armies.<sup>99</sup>

The occupation of Azerbaijan by Ottoman forces and the activities of *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* in Iran complicated the relations between the two countries even more.<sup>100</sup> While the occupation seemed to prove Iranians' fears about Ottomans' true intentions, it also caused disagreements among Iranian politicians, intellectuals, and ulama, as some of them wanted to "benefit from the Turks while the war lasted."<sup>101</sup> There were also those who seemed too eager to work with the Ottomans.

<sup>95</sup>Aksekili Ahmed Hamdi, "Resm-i İran Hâlâ mı" *Sebilürreşad* 13, no. 327 (February 1915): 121–2.

<sup>96</sup>Arıkan, "Harb-i Umûmî'de," 7.

<sup>97</sup>Landau, *Politics of Pan-Islamism*, 135.

<sup>98</sup>Atabaki, "Going East," 42.

<sup>99</sup>Cronin, "Iranian Nationalism and the Government Gendarmerie," 50.

<sup>100</sup>For more information on *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, see Yiğit, "The *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* and World War I"; and Safi, "The Ottoman Special Organization *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*." For a discussion of their activities in Iran during the war, see Arıkan, "Harb-i Umûmî'de Osmanlı"; Sarısan, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Osmanlı"; Sarısan, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında İran"; and Atabaki, "Going East." Atabaki argues that occupation was motivated by pan-Turkish and pan-Turanian sentiment, and aimed "to penetrate Central Asia and Afghanistan not only as a threat to British India but also to extend the Ottoman Empire to what were referred to as its natural boundaries." Atabaki, "Pan-Turkism and Iranian Nationalism," 124.

<sup>101</sup>Ettehadiyyeh, "The Iranian Provisional Government," 22. Among those who were open to working with Turks were Kasravi, Dawlatabadi, and some members of the provisional government.

For instance, breaking with the Democrats in Tabriz who opposed the Ottoman presence, Taqi Rifat published a newspaper in Ottoman Turkish and recited a Turkish poem at the welcoming party for the commander in chief of the Ottoman army in Azerbaijan and Caucasus.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, there were groups such as the Mujahidin in Tabriz which received support from the Ottoman forces due to their pro-Turkish stance.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to the divisions among and the tensions between the Ottomans and the Iranians, there were other obstacles to the establishment of an alliance between the two countries during World War I, such as the tribes on the border, the conflict of interest between Germans and Ottomans, and the political instability in Iran. While Germany seemed to support Ottomans' attempt to mobilize the Muslims living under the British, French, and Russian rule by using the institution of the caliphate, there was German propaganda aimed at Iranians during wartime, which promoted the idea that if the Ottomans were to replace the British and the Russians they would annex and ruin Iran, achieving their goal of defeating Shi'ism.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, the Iranian government was under so much pressure from Russia that it decided to move the capital from Tehran to Isfahan, beyond the reach of Russian forces, but failed to do so. Instead, a group of politicians that mostly consisted of pro-German Democrats ended up establishing a provisional government in Kermanshah in 1915, which the Ottomans and the Germans hoped would block the Russian advancement. However, the provisional government did not last long and it lost the control of Kermanshah to the Russians in 1916. It is worth mentioning that many Iranian gendarme officers went to Istanbul following the fall of the provisional government and entered the Ottoman army, at least temporarily.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to the occupying powers, the Iranian government had to deal with regional revolts and protest movements in different parts of the country throughout the war. Among them were the Jangali movement in Gilan and the Khiabani movement in Azerbaijan, both of which were led by reformist and revolutionary individuals.<sup>106</sup> While the former received assistance from the Ottomans in the form of weapons and military personnel, and had ties to a pan-Islamist organization called the Union of Islam, inspired by the Union and Progress,<sup>107</sup> the latter regarded the Union of Islam as a pan-Turanian ploy and was against the Ottoman annexation of Azerbaijan.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Katouzian, "Ahmad Kasravi and the Revolt," 101.

<sup>103</sup>Katouzian, "The Revolt of Shaykh Muhammad Khiyabani," 160.

<sup>104</sup>Arıkan, "Harb-i Umûmî'de," 13.

<sup>105</sup>Cronin, "Iranian Nationalism and the Government Gendarmarie," 58.

<sup>106</sup>For more information about the Jangali movement, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Pezhmann Dailami, "Jangali Movement"; and Afary, "The Contentious Historiography of the Gilan." For the Khiabani Revolt, see Katouzian, "The Revolt of Shaykh Muhammad Khiyabani"; and Katouzian, "Ahmad Kasravi and the Revolt."

<sup>107</sup>Afary, "The Contentious Historiography," 11.

<sup>108</sup>Katouzian, "Ahmad Kasravi," 165.

Even though the number of people in the Ottoman Empire and Iran publicly calling for cooperation between the two countries dwindled during the course of the war, the issue kept appearing in the Ottoman press, which started to publish the views of Iranian intellectuals and officials who were supportive of the idea. In an interview in 1915, Shaykh al-Ra'is, who regarded Shi'i–Sunni division as one of the reasons for Islam's decline, said that the war “presented a momentous opportunity for the unification of the world of Islam particularly because there was an added incentive to protect the Caliphate.”<sup>109</sup> Similarly, in 1916, one of the most prominent Iranian constitutionalists, Yahya Dawlatabadi, wrote an article in which he argued that “The independence and national survival [of Iran and the Ottoman Empire] depends on friendship” and that “the most important cause of unity is religion because it brings the spirit of these two nations close to one another.”<sup>110</sup>

Even towards the end of the war, prominent Iranian figures were making statements in favor of Ottoman–Iranian solidarity. Among them was Hacı Mirza Ali Muhammed Dawlatabadî, a member of the ulama and a politician, who was interviewed in Istanbul. Attributing the historical animosity between the two states to their rulers' attempt to portray political conflicts as sectarian conflicts, he argued that the discord that had existed for five centuries and penetrated all areas of life could be eliminated only through *ittihad-ı İslam*. He added that he did not understand how two Muslim nations that shared a long past acted with indifference to one another, while nations which had no connection in terms of religion, language, nation, race, climate, and neighbourhood were trying so hard to establish alliances with each other.<sup>111</sup>

His compatriot Mirza Süleyman Han, the minister of internal affairs, also admitted that the emphasis on sectarian differences created hostility between the two nations, fueled by Sunni and Shi'i ulama on both sides. He believed that the situation had to change since it harmed both Ottomans and Iranians, while benefiting Europeans and the enemies of Islam. The minister declared that Iranians wanted Ottomans to come out of the war as an honorable and independent nation, but was critical of Ottomans' decision to send troops to Azerbaijan and felt the need to emphasize that the ties between Azerbaijan and Iran were stronger than ever. He stated that if they wanted to be independent and sovereign, the two states should forget about the past differences, conflicts, and hostilities, and start working together, focusing on their shared interests.<sup>112</sup> As evidenced by these declarations as well as the attention they received in the Turkish press, the attempts to establish an Ottoman–Iranian alliance continued during the war, but were not in the end successful.

<sup>109</sup>Vejdani, “Contesting Nations,” 54.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>111</sup>“Osmanlı–İran Münasebat-ı Hazıra ve Atiyeleri,” *Sebilürreşad* 15, no. 368 (September 1918): 71–2.

<sup>112</sup>“Osmanlı ve İran İttihadi Hakkında İran Dahiliye Nazırının Beyanatu,” *Sebilürreşad* 15, no. 369 (September 1918): 94–5.

To conclude, although the idea of an Ottoman–Iranian alliance emerged in the eighteenth century, it became a state policy during the rule of Abdülhamid II, who regarded this alliance as the first step towards the formation of a broader Islamic union against European powers under his leadership as caliph. Framed in terms of pan-Islamism, this policy aimed for cooperation between two Muslim empires by reconciling the disputes between the Sunnis and Shi'is. Following the almost simultaneous constitutional revolutions in the Ottoman and Qajar empires, the Ottoman–Iranian alliance came to signify a strategic partnership between two constitutional governments based on shared borders, experiences, ideals, and enemies. Despite the lack of government and public support, it was promoted by prominent intellectual and political figures in the Ottoman Empire as a solution to the immediate threat posed by Russians and the British to the sovereignty and security of the two states. During World War I, the Ottomans focused on securing Iran's support in their struggle against the Entente powers. While the government was busy spreading propaganda in Iran in order to counterbalance the influence of Russians and the British,<sup>113</sup> the press was publishing favorable statements about Ottoman–Iranian solidarity by people from both sides. However, the emphasis shifted back to common religion, unity between the Sunnis and Shi'is, and protection of the Islamic world. In spite of the efforts of different groups over the years, and the various ways in which they promoted and tried to achieve an Ottoman–Iranian alliance, this alliance never materialized. Although the hostility between the Ottoman and Qajar empires eventually gave way to friendly relations and exchanges, these two states failed to build an alliance that could benefit both parties due to domestic problems, such as political instability and power struggles between different ideological groups, pressure from European powers, Ottoman territorial ambitions, issues on the border, and a mutual lack of trust. Ironically, the secular nation-states that replaced these empires in Turkey and Iran following the war came much closer to building a cooperative relationship in the early 1930s than their predecessors ever had before.

## ORCID

Serpil Atamaz  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6136-0793>

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<sup>113</sup>Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, 46–50; Landau, *Politics of Pan-Islamism*, 90–91.

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