



VMUN 2026

Historical Crisis Committee

BACKGROUND GUIDE





Vancouver Model United Nations

The Twenty-Fifth Annual Session | January 23rd-25th, 2026

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Ryan Wu, and it is my honour to serve as your Director for the Historical Crisis Committee (HCC) at VMUN 2026. Alongside your Chair Brandon Xu and your Assistant Director Jasmine Zhang, I am excited to join you on a weekend of fervent debate and fierce discourse.

My journey in Model United Nations has been as chaotic as it has been challenging and fun. I am sure almost all of you resonate with the utter fear and sense of thrill that comes with delegating your first few times. As a small Grade 8 stepping into the vast world of MUN, equipped with nothing but a blazer and some peer pressure, I knew nothing of what lay ahead of me. Nevertheless, after being thrust into FCC roleplaying *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, my MUN adventures have taken many unexpected twists and turns ultimately leading me back to crisis simulations. As a history lover, I hope HCC will offer a paramount experience to confront a conflict with interest and passion alongside forming meaningful bonds with fellow delegates.

In this year's HCC, we will dive into the barren battlefields of the First Balkan War, the precursor to the First World War and the turning point responsible for the geographic layout of modern Europe. Over the sessions, you will explore stratagem against the nefarious Ottoman Empire, fight off imposing foreign forces, and deal with constantly shifting interests, backstabbing, and unprecedented chaos. Your decisions as leaders of the Balkan League nations will determine the fate of not just your states and people but also the region's foreseeable future.

On behalf of the dais team, I wish you the best of luck at the Historical Crisis Committee and hope we can make HCC the best it has ever been. I look forward to meeting you all at VMUN 2026! Should there be any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at hcc@vmun.com.

Until the Last Shot Echoes,

Ryan Wu

HCC Director

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For HCC, position papers, although strongly recommended, are not required. However, delegates who wish to be considered for an award must submit position papers.

Formatting

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, his/her country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)

Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by **January 12, 2026, at 23:59 PT**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email. Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Position Paper award. The email address for this committee is hcc@vmun.com.

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The First Balkan War

Overview

In the capture of Constantinople (then Byzantium) in 1453, the Ottoman Empire, then a regional predominantly Islamic power and successor to the Caliphates, obtained the entirety of the Asia Minor from the devolving Byzantine Empire, replacing Orthodox rule on the peninsula with Sunni Islam. Afterwards, they embarked on a policy of expansion into Eastern Europe, forcing conversions and subduing ethnic minorities. This expansion reached its zenith on September 12th, 1683; having encircled and laid siege to the Austrian capital of Vienna, a surprise assault from the surrounding Kahlenberg hills by a European coalition in the form of the Holy League repelled the Ottomans.¹ This was the last that its dwindling armies could handle, having held through a two-month siege of the city. Lacking in numbers, supplies, and morale, the Ottoman forces suffered a sound defeat that not only stopped in its tracks their advancement, but completely removed its political and military influence from most of Eastern Europe.²

This battle and Ottoman defeat marked a major turning point in European history. Up to that point, Muslim influence on the Turkish peninsula and Slavic territories had been immense, with Ottoman vassals as east as Crimea and as north as modern Hungary.³ Within decades the empire had seized much of Greece, including Macedonian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Albanian regions, establishing a cultural-assimilationist state and scoring more military successes until they dominated the entire Balkan district with seemingly unstoppable force. However, following the establishment of the Holy League—consisting of Western, Habsburg, and Catholic-dominant states—and its successes, such as at Vienna, Ottoman influence slowly began to recede.⁴ Throughout the 17th to 19th centuries, this decline became increasingly evident as minority ethnic uprisings started gaining momentum; evidenced by the Serbian Uprisings in 1804 and the Greek War of Independence in 1821, the incapability and weakened state of the Ottoman government and Sultan were increasingly apparent. Around this time, major European powers and historical enemies of the Ottomans began coining the empire as the sick man of Europe.⁵

Despite the regression of its oppressors, the Balkan ethnic vie for independence and autonomy remained a slow grind. While the Ottomans lost momentum in their conquest of the entirety of Eastern Europe, the traditional military power of South-Eastern Europe retained control over vital territories such as most of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro, as well as a complete annexation of Albania.⁶ Larger quantities in artillery, arms, and naval dominance over key waterways from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara to the Bosphorus Strait still kept

¹ John Stoye, *The Siege of Vienna: The Last Great Trial Between Cross and Crescent* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000).

² Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Enemy at the Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans, and the Battle for Europe* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008).

³ Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts On File, 2009).

⁴ David Parrott, "The Limits of Military Power: The Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire in the Seventeenth Century," *European History Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1985).

⁵ Stoye, *The Siege of Vienna*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

the Ottomans as a regional force to be reckoned with.⁷ By the turn of the 20th century, Ottoman influence in the region still held relatively firm and remained a primary threat to the Balkan peoples.⁸

Furthermore, the Ottoman threat is only one of many that keep the Balkan nations divided and unsovereign. In fact, diplomacy between influential and competing European states has been as large if not a larger threat to the region. For one, the Russian Empire, with its massive land army and its historical anti-Ottoman sentiments due clashes over regional resources and territory, constantly uses the Balkans as an excuse to wage war, causing millions of civilian casualties in the process.⁹ France, as a prominent Catholic nation, devotes themselves to the prevention of Ottoman domination in the region and frequently engages in regional conflicts, often exacerbating crises and depriving the population of necessities to survive. Moreover, states such as Britain get involved to curtail the influence of other nations while Austria-Hungary approaches with more caution due to internal instability. Such tensions culminated to a breaking point in the 1910s, laying the foundation for a major war to begin.¹⁰

After the Albanian Revolt of 1912, Russia believed that it was now free to exert its control over the Balkan peninsula, as the weakening of the Ottoman Empire looked to reach its tipping point. In the spring of 1912, following an unfruitful series of diplomatic negotiations between the Ottomans and Russia over control over the Macedonian region, the Balkan League, consisting of four Balkan states, Montenegro, Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria, was officially formed.¹¹ The League's goal was to repel further Ottoman aggression and prevent a resurgence of expansion like Vienna, as well as liberate ethnic populations under Ottoman control and restore Orthodoxy. Under the auspices of Russia, the League's first treaties were ratified in March, and on October 8th, 1912, the League declared war on the Ottoman Empire, kicking off the First Balkan War. The League managed to amass around 750,000 armed forces.¹² In this moment of historical importance, where the fate of the Slavic peoples was at stake and the world watched with anxious anticipation, the Balkan League must work to defend their homeland through flawless strategy, diplomacy, and execution. Trapped between European giants with subpar resources and largely untrained soldiers, the actions of those at the top will decide the outcome of the war, and thus decide the future of Eastern Europe.

Timeline

September 12, 1683 — Ottoman forces under Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha maintain the Second Siege of Vienna for two months but are defeated by a Holy League coalition led by King Jan III Sobieski of Poland.¹³ The defeat halts Ottoman expansion into Central Europe and marks the beginning of its significant territorial decline.

⁷ Gábor Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and the Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁸ Salih Özbaran, "The Ottoman Navy and European Powers in the 16th and 17th Centuries," in *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 40–42; Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 71–76.

¹¹ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Volume 2, Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹² Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹³ Kenneth M Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1991).

January 26, 1699 — The Treaty of Karlowitz, signed at a loss of the Great Turkish War, forces the Ottoman Empire to cede Central European territory to Austria, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Venice, leading to loss of administrative control over large portions of land and resources.¹⁴

February 15, 1804 — Led by Karađorđe Petrović and revolutionaries, the First Serbian Uprising challenges centuries of Ottoman rule, establishing a short-lived autonomous principality before Ottoman reoccupation. The uprising inspires future Balkan nationalist movements.¹⁵

April 23, 1815 — Under Miloš Obrenović, Serbia launches a second more successful revolt, resulting in de facto autonomy. By 1830, Serbia achieves full autonomy under Ottoman suzerainty, laying the groundwork for eventual independence.¹⁶

March 25, 1821 — Spurred by rising nationalism and supported by Britain, France, and Russia, Greek revolutionaries rise against the Ottoman Empire. After years of warfare and foreign intervention, southern Greece achieved full independence in 1832.¹⁷

October 4, 1853 — The Crimean War erupts as a conflict between Russia and an alliance of the Ottoman Empire, Britain, and France.¹⁸ Though the Ottomans survive, the war exposes the empire's growing military weakness and dependency on European powers.

February 27, 1870 — Recognized by the Ottomans after pressure from Russia and Bulgarian nationalists, the Exarchate becomes a symbol of Bulgarian cultural and religious autonomy.¹⁹ It intensifies Bulgarian-Serbian and Bulgarian-Greek rivalry in Macedonia.

1875 - 1878 — Widespread uprisings across the Balkans—including in Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and Serbia—escalate into the Russo-Turkish War. The Treaty of Berlin grants independence or autonomy to Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria, further reducing Ottoman influence.²⁰

July 24, 1908 — The Committee of Union and Progress forces Sultan Abdulhamid II to restore the constitution and reconvene parliament. Though initially promoting reform, the revolution gives way to heightened Turkish nationalism and centralized control.²¹ The Ottomans subsequently reinforce their presence in the Balkans.

¹⁴ Derek McKay and H.M. Scott, *The Rise of the Great Powers 1648–1815* (London: Longman, 1983).

¹⁵ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle for Independence, 1821–1833* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

¹⁸ Figes, *The Crimean War*.

¹⁹ R.J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁰ M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1966).

²¹ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

October 6, 1908 — Exploiting Ottoman instability, Austria-Hungary formally annexes Bosnia and Herzegovina, which it had administered since 1878.²² The move outrages Serbia and pan-Slavic nationalists, heightening regional tensions. Austria-Hungary tightens its pact with its Ottoman ally, posing an increasing threat to the Balkans.

September 29, 1911 — Italy invades Ottoman-held Libya and the Dodecanese Islands, initiating the Italo-Turkish War dealing another blow to Ottoman prestige and military capability.²³ The war exposes the empire's vulnerability, encouraging Balkan states to consider military action.

January 1912 — Albanian deputies rebels rise against Ottoman rule in parliament, demanding autonomy and the implementation of constitutional reforms. Although concessions are granted, the revolt undermines Ottoman control and encourages neighboring Balkan states to strike. The result of the revolt directly inspire the formation of the Balkan League as it demonstrates the vulnerability of the Ottoman shell.²⁴

March - May, 1912 — Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro establish a military alliance through the Balkan League aimed at expelling the Ottomans from Europe. Mutual suspicion is set aside temporarily in the name of shared territorial ambitions.²⁵

October 8, 1912 (Crisis Initiation) — Montenegro declares war on the Ottoman Empire, soon joined by the rest of the Balkan League.²⁶ The conflict rapidly spreads across the Balkans as the Ottomans face simultaneous offensives in Thrace, Macedonia, and Epirus.²⁷

Historical Analysis

Ottoman Dominance in Eastern Europe

The year is 1683. The Ottoman Empire is at its historic peak, dominating the Islamic world and prospering off its control over natural resource reserves and trade routes. Just two centuries earlier, the Ottomans had taken Constantinople, the then-Byzantine capital.²⁸ This historic city, bolstered by its extreme fortifications under a millennium of Roman rule and its importance as a crossroad for both pan-Eurasian trade and military activity, served as a rich base of operations for the increasingly aggressive Islamic empire. By the early 1600s, the Ottomans had conquered not just old Byzantine lands, but had also extended its reign down the Arabian peninsula, subjugating Persians, Jews, and other minorities. Finding lucrative success in its conquests, it turned its target towards the fertile lands of Eastern Europe and began driving towards Christian capitals through the Balkans.

²² R.J.W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Central Europe c.1683–1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²³ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (New York: Random House, 1992).

²⁴ Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening: 1878–1912* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

²⁵ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913*.

²⁶ Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912–1913* (Westport: Praeger, 2003).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*.

The Ottoman Empire's spread to Eastern Europe was not a sudden conquest but the product of well over a century of consistent campaigning on the battlefield and careful strategic alliances with nearby states. Advances from infantry to cavalry and artillery to naval gave the Ottomans an edge over most of their opponents.²⁹ As a “gunpowder empire,” and with control over the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire grew to an extent where it easily rivaled Russia on its home turf and worried large “traditional powerhouses” such as Britain, France, Austria, and Denmark. With the victory in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, the Ottomans gained control of Serbia and advanced inexorably into the Bulgars in 1396 and campaigned through Wallachia and Moldavia in the 15th century.³⁰ The taking of Constantinople in 1453 brought an end to the Byzantines but also put the Ottomans firmly in the position of unopposed dominance in southeast Europe. By the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent in the 16th century, the Ottomans dominated vast tracts of territory between Hungary and Greece, extending into Transylvania and even threatening Vienna.³¹ It was not only a vast territory but also teeming with strategic and economic resources: fertile plains, Europe-Asia trade routes, and metal-producing territories like Bosnia and Serbia.³² The Ottomans employed the *timar* system of rewarding fidelity in the form of land, integrating the conquered peoples into the bureaucracy.³³

Religiously, the Ottomans were Sunni Muslims who ruled over an ethnically diverse Christian, Orthodox and Catholic, and Jewish population. Their *millet* system provided religious minorities with self-rule in internal lives, which, while convenient, cemented communal boundaries.³⁴ Muslims were favored, however, and conversion, voluntary or not, would often lead to social advancement.³⁵ The *devshirme* system, whereby Christian boys were recruited into the Janissary corps and imperial service, tended both to represent the empire's policies of integration and coercion.³⁶ Such instances included but were not limited to the conversion of Buda in Hungary into a continental capital following the 1526 Battle of Mohács; each event implemented more cultural appropriation and firmer political authority over ethnic territories.³⁷ These instances demonstrate how the Ottomans inserted themselves throughout Eastern Europe, establishing rule by military power and religious policy.³⁸

At the turn of the 1680s, the Ottoman Empire seemed unbreakable. They had conquered the entirety of the Balkans, not only silencing ethnic populations but also depriving them of future growth by confiscating harvests and taking over mines.³⁹ In July of 1683, Ottoman Commander-in-chief Grand Vizier Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha decided the time was right to march on Vienna, the Holy Roman Empire's capital and the guardian of the Christian faith. Within days, the Ottoman armies surrounded the city and brutally assaulted its defenses, putting the city at an extreme risk of falling.⁴⁰ This was the breaking point of centuries of tension and back and forth struggle between the two fronts. At this time, the Ottoman extent is shown as per the following figure:

²⁹ Murphey, Ottoman Warfare.

³⁰ Barbara Jelavich, History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

³¹ Halil İnalcık, The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300–1600 (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973).

³² Rhoads Murphey, Ottoman Warfare, 1500–1700 (London: UCL Press, 1999).

³³ İnalcık, The Ottoman Empire.

³⁴ Karen Barkey, Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Heath W. Lowry, The Nature of the Early Ottoman State (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).

³⁷ Finkel, Caroline, Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

³⁸ Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire (New York: Facts On File, 2009).

³⁹ İnalcık, The Ottoman Empire.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

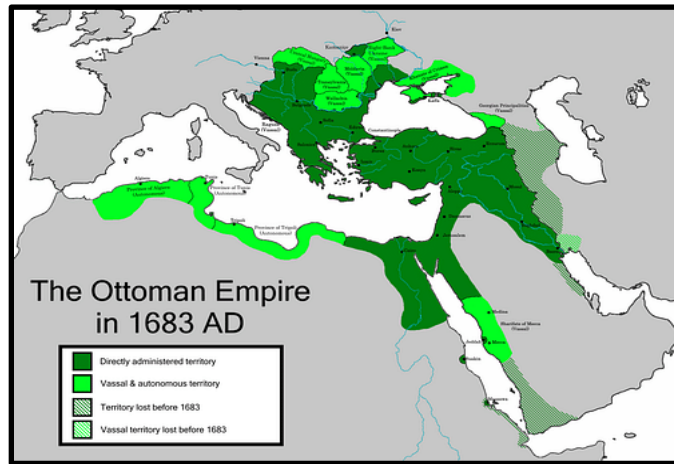


Figure 1: The Ottoman Empire at its Peak, circa 1683.⁴¹

Second Siege of Vienna

The Ottoman-European tension ultimately culminated to a breaking point, where, in the Second Siege of Vienna, the two powers clashed in a decisive moment. For the Ottomans, victory would mean control over not just the Balkans but all of Eastern Europe, subjugating Russia under its wing while placing Western Europe and the future of Christianity at critical stake; for the Holy League (the Christian countries), victory would show the weakness of Ottoman over-extension and result in the rebalancing of power dynamics in the Asia Minor. Yet as its first major defeat after the Long Turkish War (1593–1606), the Ottomans would prove to have reached its zenith, and this originally designed “knockout blow” to bring Habsburg Austria into Ottoman vassalage would end up as the start of a long period of imperial retreat.⁴²

The campaign for the fateful summer of 1683 began when Kara Mustafa moved an army of around 150,000 to 170,000 men through Hungary with logistical support from Transylvanian, Tatar, and Moldavian allies.⁴³ Vienna’s garrison of 15,000 men was commanded by Count Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg, who fortified the city and constructed inner fortifications in anticipation, knowing that they could only bear the heavy Ottoman weight for so long.⁴⁴ The Ottomans encircled the city entirely in mid-July and began excavation work in tunnels to install mines beneath its walls.⁴⁵ Kara Mustafa’s intent was to starve out the city and ultimately force its surrender.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, the siege’s lengthiness gave time for the Holy League to marshal a relief force, partly organized through Papal diplomacy under Pope Innocent XI.⁴⁷ On 12th of September, a coalition of around 80,000 men in an alliance of Austrians, Bavarians, Saxons, and a large contingent of Polish soldiers under King Jan III Sobieski

⁴¹ World History Encyclopedia: The Ottoman Empire.

⁴² Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Picador, 1998).

⁴³ Gábor Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and the Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Enemy at the Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans and the Battle for Europe* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ R. J. W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

attacked with their advance from the Kahlenberg heights.⁴⁸ Sobieski's cavalry assault in the ensuing battle, sometimes referred to as the "greatest cavalry charge in history," succeeded in wiping out the bulk of the strongest Ottoman armies with his legendary Polish Winged Hussars, shattering Ottoman ranks and sending them into disorderly flight.⁴⁹ The fight only took less than a day but shattered Kara Mustafa's siege and morale.

The consequence was catastrophic for the Ottomans. Kara Mustafa, culpable for the defeat and retreat, was executed on imperial orders in Belgrade later in the year.⁵⁰ Failure of the siege caused the Holy League to unleash a series of counterattacks in Hungary and the Balkans that began the Great Turkish War (1683–1699).⁵¹ On a military level, it revealed stagnation of Ottoman siege warfare and logistics to those of increasingly modern Western armies. On a strategic level, it marked an end to Ottoman expansion in Europe.⁵²

Culturally, the siege became a mythic victory for Christian Europe. There arose myths about it—such as that croissants were invented to celebrate the defeat of the Ottomans.⁵³ In fact, apart from myth, the siege symbolized shifting East-West distributions of power. Vienna resisted not only through its will alone but because an alliance of several countries coordinated their efforts for once, foreshadowing a new age of collaboration among European powers of resistance to the "Eastern menace." Austria-Hungary would later surge as a result of this victory and redefine borders in the region. Never again would the Ottomans accumulate enough strength to reattempt an invasion, and such weakness would not escape the watchful eyes of the Balkan peoples, all desperate for an opening at claiming independence after centuries of oppression.

Treaty of Karlowitz

The Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 officially ended the Great Turkish War (1683–1699) and marked a turning point in the Ottoman Empire's geopolitics.⁵⁴ Defeated at the Second Siege of Vienna and successive series of defeats in war—most notably at Battle of Zenta in 1697—the Ottomans, once masters of the continent, found themselves now obligated to cede countless territories and give up valuable resources.⁵⁵ In addition to losing vast swathes of territory, the treaty shattered the illusion of Ottoman invincibility in Europe.⁵⁶

The treaty was negotiated in the Sremski Karlovci region (modern Serbia) between the Ottomans and the Holy League members: Austria, Poland-Lithuania, Venice, and Russia.⁵⁷ As a result of the peace terms, the Ottoman Empire ceded Hungary and Transylvania to the Habsburgs, Podolia to Poland, and Peloponnese and Dalmatian territory to Venice.⁵⁸ These were not symbolic tracts of land; Hungary and Transylvania, in particular, had been

⁴⁸ Wheatcroft, *The Enemy at the Gate*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Finkel, *Osman's Dream*.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Ágoston and Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

⁵⁵ R. J. W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

⁵⁶ Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts On File, 2009).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

disputed and economically valuable territories.⁵⁹ The loss of these lands significantly decreased the empire's source of tax revenues, military manpower pool, and strategic buffer zones.⁶⁰

Even more humiliating than loss of territory, Karlowitz formalized Ottoman decline in that it recognized that the empire would now be forced into diplomatic negotiations with Christian powers on an equal footing—a new experience for the erstwhile expansionist sultans.⁶¹ The Ottomans had mediation, and in important ways humiliation, imposed on them by the impartial Dutch and English onlookers who brokered the negotiations.⁶² The treaty also cemented Austria's rise to be the premier power of Central Europe by displacing the Ottomans from their accustomed position of ascendancy.⁶³

For the Balkans, the consequences were multiple. With Austrian expansion in the south, Catholicism returned in some lands to face Orthodox and Muslim people.⁶⁴ Alongside this, Ottoman retreat emboldened native peoples, especially in Serbia and Bulgaria, as the empire's capacity for asserting taxation and jurisprudential regimes was visibly shaken.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Muslim people grew isolated in territories of a receding empire, such as Bosnia; resentment and paranoia fueled by fear of the growing number of Christians set in and planted news seeds of ethnic strife.⁶⁶

Although the Ottomans retained great holdings, Karlowitz signified an age of reform and retrenchment.⁶⁷ The sultans and viziers struggled with military weakness, and piecemeal efforts at modernization began.⁶⁸ The psychological impact of the treaty persisted longer than its terms, proclaiming to foe and friend alike that an Ottoman age of conquest was irretrievably lost.⁶⁹ Put in historical context, the Balkan peoples now knew that defiance of Ottoman rule, which previously seemed absolute, was possible, and in the next two centuries, uprisings, demonstrations, and revolts surged more than ever, further rocking the already wavering empire.

Ottoman Decline and Ethnic Uprisings

The next period of Balkan history can only be rightfully described as tumultuous. Seeing the Ottoman Empire's fall from grace, dissent began to surge. One by one, previously silenced nations, peoples, and groups gained confidence in their resolve. The Treaty of Karlowitz not only ended Ottoman expansion but also paved the way for increasing instability within and directly adjacent to its jurisdiction. As more and more revolts found success, each had a domino effect—directly inspiring the subsequent one, and so on.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300–1600* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), 189.

⁶¹ Finkel, *Osman's Dream*.

⁶² Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

One of the earliest serious signs of imperial weakness was the First Serbian Uprising of 1804, a rebellion caused by local grievances and evolving geopolitics.⁷⁰ In reaction to the cruelty of Janissary-dominated Dahije who had assumed tyrannical rule over the Sanjak of Smederevo, Serbian chiefs led by Karadorđe Petrović rose in revolt.⁷¹ Originally planned to reassert direct Ottoman rule, it later developed into a nationalist struggle for self-governance.⁷² Belgrade was recaptured by the Ottoman forces in 1813, but its uprising legacy persisted and took a massive toll on Ottoman armies who often had to tend to many areas around the empire simultaneously to put down rebellion after rebellion.⁷³

It was only two years later, in Miloš Obrenović's Second Serbian Uprising (1815), that there emerged tactically innovative and politically astute leadership—a painful opposition to Ottoman bureaucracy. Obrenović fought bounded by local, guerilla tactics that involved ambushes and exhausted Ottoman resources rather than traditional pitched battles; this ultimately compelled Sublime Porte (the central association of Ottoman government agencies) to bestow de facto autonomy.⁷⁴ Serbia was made an autonomous principality in Ottoman suzerainty before 1830—a model which stimulated even more subsequent nationalist movements.⁷⁵

In the south, the Greek War of Independence (1821–1830) further dispelled the fantasy that Ottoman Christian populations would be quiescent. Led by the Philike Hetairia (Society of Friends), an undercover nationalist movement, revolt began in Peloponnese and swept across the Aegean.⁷⁶ Ottoman response was ferocious suppression, including hanging of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, but doing so only succeeded in galvanizing resistance.⁷⁷ Sympathy for Greece in Europe, especially in Britain and Russia, translated into direct intervention.⁷⁸ The decisive 1827 Battle of Navarino saw an Ottoman-Egyptian fleet annihilated by a British-French-Russian force, and Greece became an independent state in 1832, in addition to heavy repercussions for the Ottomans yet again.⁷⁹

Concurrently, ethnic unrest became routine. Bosnian rebellions of 1831-32 under Muslim leader Husein Gradašević were against Tanzimat reforms and expanding centralism and proved that even Muslim factions of this time considered Ottoman central authority to be illegitimate.⁸⁰ Albanian turmoil was bubbling over for much of the 19th century with local notables Ali Pasha of Ioannina resisting imperial rule.⁸¹

The Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912, which was geographically distant from the Balkan peninsula, was a final display of Ottoman weakness. Italy was provoked to invade Tripolitania (modern Libya) and the Dodecanese Islands by the empire's inability to quash internal rebellions or defend its holdings.⁸² The rapid end of the war via the Treaty of Ouchy in 1912 weakened the Ottomans geographically from the west and south, further limiting its

⁷⁰ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Dakin, *The Greek Struggle for Independence, 1821–1833*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: NYU Press, 1994).

access to vital resources and directly causing Ottoman diplomatic isolation that encouraged Balkan countries to contemplate their own long-sought military action.⁸³

Meanwhile, Pan-Slavism and Russian sponsorship had increasingly exerted influence upon Balkan uprising. Russian intervention in favour of Christian Slavs, especially in Serbia and Bulgaria, helped to cause the Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878)—a chain of rebellions that began in Herzegovina and extended into Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Serbia.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, the Ottoman response to each of these rebellions was horrific. For instance, the April Uprising of 1876 was brutally suppressed and set off what proved to become an international outcry known as the “The Bulgarian Horrors” or the “Batak Massacre.”⁸⁵ These series of massacres led to the deaths of up to 100,000 civilians and Ottoman subjects in the region.⁸⁶

The situation snowballed into the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 in which Russian armies with Papal and Bulgarian auxiliaries moved deep into Ottoman territory.⁸⁷ After the siege and fall of Plevna, an emblematic Ottoman fortress, the empire sought peace.⁸⁸ The ensuing Treaty of San Stefano was greatly to the Russian benefit and ceded vast territories and sovereignty to Balkan states.⁸⁹ The great powers of Europe, Britain in particular as well as Austria-Hungary, intervened diplomatically to modify the treaty in Berlin.⁹⁰ This era of rebellion and reaction reflected the structural weakness of the Ottoman Empire: overstretched army, decrepit tax system, reliance on antiquated administration, and inability to repress nationalist sentiment.⁹¹ Reforms—a case in point being the Tanzimat (1839–1876) and the First Constitutional Period (1876–1878)—were too late, too little.⁹² The Ottoman response was defensive, often savage, and increasingly disconnected from its Balkan population's growing politicization.⁹³ Its decline was now inevitable; the empire was the “sick man of Europe.”⁹⁴

Berlin Congress

At the gradual self-destruction of the Ottoman Empire, other great European powers saw opportunities to benefit. The Berlin Congress of June–July 1878 was such a convention: a watershed not only for Ottoman Turkey but for the entire Balkan peninsula.⁹⁵ It also aimed at restoring the broader idea of “balance of power” which was a widely agreed upon European standard. Held in Berlin by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck under the aegis of the Great Powers—Britain, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Russia, and Italy—the Congress had been convened to restore the provisions of Russia's Treaty of San Stefano, which it had unilaterally dictated to the Ottoman Empire in victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78.⁹⁶ The original treaty would have created a massive, Russian-controlled “greater Bulgaria” in nominal Ottoman sovereignty.⁹⁷

⁸³ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*.

⁸⁴ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2000).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts On File, 2009).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Finkel, *Osman's Dream*.

⁹² Mazower, *The Balkans*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

⁹⁶ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*



Figure 2: The Congress of Berlin (1878).⁹⁸

The outcome unsettled Britain, which feared increased Russian influence into the Mediterranean and Austria-Hungary in order to manage the Slavic nationalism in its own multi-national empire.⁹⁹ The Congress of Berlin set out to restrain Russian expansion while redressing balance in the Balkan peninsula.¹⁰⁰ The Ottomans were nominally present but in practice their role was ceremonial—the decisions being taken in fact by the great powers.¹⁰¹ To the detriment of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, the Western prevention of Russian supremacy would cause historic ties to break. Should there be a war between the powers, the already shattered Balkans would become a desolate grave, trapped in the geographic center of these converging nations.

The subsequent Berlin Treaty as a result of the conference, which replaced San Stefano, significantly decreased the size of Bulgaria.¹⁰² It separated the region into three: a smaller autonomous Principality of Bulgaria, placed under Ottoman suzerainty, an autonomous Eastern Rumelia, placed under Ottoman political jurisdiction, and Macedonia, which was left under direct Ottoman control.¹⁰³ Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro were all given full independence and territorial expansion, making their breakaway from Ottoman control official.¹⁰⁴ Austria-Hungary was also allowed to occupy and administer Bosnia and Herzegovina, with sovereignty nominally still Ottoman—an arrangement that provoked deep Serbian resentment.¹⁰⁵ For the Ottoman Empire, the treaty institutionalized the loss of nearly all its European protectorates and vassals.¹⁰⁶ In some parts of the Balkans, nominal rule was maintained, but the Sublime Porte had clearly lost any capacity to exert its will except through symbolic presence.¹⁰⁷ The retreat also mobilized internal national movements remaining under Ottoman rule, particularly in Albania, where fears of partition led to the formation of the League of Prizren later in the same

⁹⁸ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, “Congress of Berlin | Significance & Facts,” Encyclopædia Britannica, Accessed August 23, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Congress-of-Berlin>.

⁹⁹ Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2000).

¹⁰⁰ Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts On File, 2009).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

year, the precursor to the ultimate amalgamation of Balkan nations that would, for the first time in history, engage the Ottoman Empire in a full-scale war.¹⁰⁸

Russia, while diplomatically embarrassed, remained influential by supporting Slavic Orthodox nations, especially Serbia and Bulgaria.¹⁰⁹ The Austro-Hungarian Empire dominated the western Balkans, setting the stage for future conflicts with pan-Slavic forces.¹¹⁰ Britain was awarded Cyprus for its vote to uphold Ottoman interests at the Congress, gaining a valuable naval base in the bargain and solidifying its anti-Russian stance.¹¹¹

While Bismarck portrayed himself as an “honest broker,” the Berlin Congress actually set imperial interests as firmly as it dissipated Balkan tensions. The rearrangements avoided war but failed to address nationalist aspirations and ethnic rivalries the Ottomans were no longer able to suppress.¹¹² The Balkans, fragmented and overpoliced by the great powers, formed a geopolitical powder keg that would detonate within a generation.

Formation of the Balkan League

At last, the slow grind of Balkan independence culminated into the present bottleneck period. The 1912 formation of the Balkan League became the kill shot for the impending crisis.¹¹³ The League constituted a military alliance of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro with the aim of expelling Ottoman Turkey from its remaining territory in Europe.¹¹⁴ Following decades of Ottoman decline, Balkan nations realized with victory in the 1911 Italo-Turkish War that it was time for concerted military action.¹¹⁵

The origins of the League were entangled in an intricate network of hidden treaties and shifting alliances. The first effective step was the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty of March 1912.¹¹⁶ The treaty involved not only a mutual defense agreement, but a hidden article that dealt with the division of Ottoman Macedonia in case of victory.¹¹⁷ Russia, wishing to contain Austro-Hungary and to foster Slavic solidarity, was secretly but actively instrumental in bringing about this agreement.¹¹⁸ European nations, sensing the incoming explosion, readied their strategies from forces to diplomatic policies in order to make the most of the outcome.

Subsequently, an alliance between Greece and Bulgaria was formed in May of 1912, with Montenegro soon following.¹¹⁹ They each had reasons behind this agreement—Serbia desired a port in the Adriatic, Bulgaria desired Macedonia, and Greece desired Thessaloniki and Epirus—yet their mutual enemy temporarily united them.¹²⁰

¹⁰⁸ Mazower, *The Balkans*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: NYU Press, 1998).

¹¹² Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹¹³ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913*.

¹¹⁴ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts On File, 2009).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Hall, *The Balkan Wars*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Each nation wanted, in one way or another, to unite the Balkans under their rule, but their internal conflicts were suppressed by the need to rid the outsider first.

Despite their cooperation as partners, alliance tensions were already apparent in the beginning. Bulgaria and Serbia, in particular, disagreed over Macedonian partition.¹²¹ However, the League represented an unprecedented demonstration of Balkan solidarity against Ottoman dominance. The Ottomans, weakened by rebellion and diplomatic isolation, remained unaware of the severity of the threat. Montenegro delivered the first blow on October 8th by declaring war and initiating the First Balkan War.¹²²

Current Situation

The World Stage

The Balkans tremble as the might of the formidable Ottoman enemy bears down on the region from all sides. Across the lands, civilians fear for their lives. The newly formed Balkan League, having promised all its people independence, freedom, and safety, now find themselves at the brink of a total war, as hundreds of thousands of better-equipped, better-trained Ottoman armies across Thrace and Macedonia mobilize and attempt to put a quick stop to the Balkan forces. Beyond the immediate confrontation, states supporting the status quo such as Austria-Hungary and opportunist nations such as Russia and Britain focus their attention on diplomatic moves, casting a wave of irresolvable tension among the League leaders. On the eve of October 7th, hours before the first engagement in the war in the early hours of the next day, the Balkan region looks as the following figure shows:



Figure 3: The Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, circa 1912.¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2000).

¹²³ Aykut Kansu, *1912 Uprisings in the Balkans*, (ResearchGate).

The Balkan League

Bulgaria

Situated on the cusp of the Black Sea and a historic enemy of the Ottomans, Bulgaria is a populous nation that feels, perhaps heaviest, the impact of Ottoman presence in the Balkans. Furthermore, the national sentiment of the Bulgarian state feels it impulsive to obtain administrative control over the entirety of the Balkans, in order to “liberate” its peoples and create a regional monopoly of resources.¹²⁴ It was a major force behind the creation of the Balkan League in March 1912, yet remains largely conservative of the deployment of its resources and capable men despite aligning itself with League interests on paper. Following the Montenegrin declaration of war, Bulgaria gets ready to mobilize its forces. Its currently most active garrisons are located along the border of the Thrace and face off directly against the Ottoman First Army, one of its strongest and primary defense forces of Constantinople.¹²⁵

Socially, Bulgaria carries special value in the Balkan League. Capitalized at Sofia, a fortified western city in the country's mainland, and with nationalist Ivan Geshov as prime minister, Bulgaria promotes a heavy patriotism and drive to remove the Ottoman influence from their doorsteps¹²⁶. Furthermore, the country borders the Russian Empire, whose people share similar roots to the Bulgarian lineage and gives the country ideological and physical support from the backend. With this powerful resource-rich state at its back, Bulgaria feels confident in taking on the conflict directly.¹²⁷

In terms of military power, Bulgaria sits at the pinnacle of the League's raw military force. The following figure lays out available forces the country possesses.¹²⁸ It commands approximately 600,000 active and reserve military personnel, giving it the largest mobilizable army among its allies. This manpower is reinforced by more than 1,200 Schneider and Krupp field guns, supported by over 50 cavalry brigades that enhance mobility and offensive reach. Bulgaria's strategic advantage is amplified by its access to a comprehensive trans-Balkan railway network, enabling efficient movement of troops and materiel across contested fronts. Its position is further strengthened by Russian support, which provides critical resources and the potential deployment of additional armies if the conflict demands escalation.¹²⁹

As the League's main spearhead against the Ottomans, Bulgaria must be ready to respond to emergencies across the frontlines, lead and plan offensives, and simultaneously remain diplomatic with Russia and other nations to prevent developing the war situation against the League while enlisting external support.

¹²⁴ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913*.

¹²⁵ David Jordan, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804–2012* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2012); E.R. Hooton, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913: The War for the Balkans* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014).

¹²⁶ Spencer C. Tucker, *A Global Chronology of Conflict: From the Ancient World to the Modern Middle East*, vol. 4 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010).

¹²⁷ Perry, *The Politics of Terror*; Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912–1913* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

¹²⁸ Ministry of War (Bulgaria), *Military Reports and Orders, 1912–1913*, Bulgarian Central Military Archives, Veliko Tarnovo.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Greece

Situated in the southernmost peninsula of the Balkans, Greece suffers from a major geographic setback. It is trapped south of Ottoman-occupied territories in the Balkans and thus is directly cut off by land from the rest of its Balkan allies. Furthermore, due to centuries of Ottoman oppression, the standing Greek land armies are significantly weaker and smaller in numbers compared to any of its land-based allies or its Ottoman foe and thus has to rely on other assets military wise. Economically, Greece is less well-equipped than its allies and may succumb to food shortages should the conflict drag for too long without allied support or a method of countering resource depletion. However, its perks are invaluable. Governed from Athens, a strategic ancient city that is well-fortified, Greece views the current war not only as a chance to recover northern territories such as Epirus and Macedonia but as an opportunity to assert full maritime control over the Aegean islands and support fellow Orthodox Christians under Ottoman rule.¹³⁰ Following Montenegro's declaration, Greece began mobilizing both land forces in Thessaly and naval assets throughout the Aegean.

As an island based nation, Greece provides crucial naval assets for the Balkan League. While its land army numbers roughly 120,000 men, the Royal Hellenic Navy, under Admiral Pavlos Kountouriotis, commands a fleet that significantly outclasses the Ottoman Navy in maneuverability, modernization, and morale.¹³¹ Greece's naval forces during the Balkan Wars consisted of approximately 10,000 experienced and active-duty personnel, organized around a modest but capable fleet. The main combat vessels included 1 armored cruiser, 3 ironclad battleships, 8 destroyers, and roughly 15 torpedo boats, supplemented by a single submarine. The navy also operated around 10 auxiliary and support vessels, encompassing minelayers, transports, and armed merchant cruisers. Its operations were anchored by two primary naval bases at Piraeus and Salamis, while forward bases captured during the war—such as Lemnos, Chios, Lesbos, Samos, and Ikaria—enabled Greece to project power across the Aegean and secure critical maritime positions.¹³²

Politically, Greece under Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos is one of the more liberal and reform-minded states of the League. The Greek government sees the war as a dual mission—restoring Greek populations to the kingdom and securing dominance over the Eastern Mediterranean trade routes. Though smaller than its northern allies in land strength, Greece's capacity to strangle Ottoman mobility from the sea gives the League a critical advantage that can be exploited to ensure support from the water as the Balkan campaign progresses. It is supported by Britain and France diplomatically, and Greece should do well to maintain that relationship moving forward. While it must be constantly wary of its land armies, Greece's role as naval shield will likely be indispensable to the League's success.

Montenegro

Set on the eastern mountains of the Adriatic Sea, Montenegro faces its unique disadvantages while bolstering capabilities that, when deployed correctly, may provide invaluable support to the war effort. Territorially, it faces similar detriments to that of Greece—practically encircled on all sides by the Ottoman Sanjak inlet, Ottoman Albania, and Austrian-Hungarian allied Bosnia. As such, Montenegro has been relying heavily on its defensive abilities, holding off and discouraging invasions on its borders. However, this strategy's longevity is being challenged, as its location in mountainous regions does not give it the best conditions to harbor resources for a

¹³⁰ Hellenic Army Historical Directorate, Hellenic Army Historical Archives, International Commission of Military History, <https://www.icmh-cihm.org>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Greek War Museum, Archives, <https://warmuseum.gr/en/archive-at/>.

long fight. Financially, it does not have the capabilities to hold out against Ottoman pressure for too long and must constantly rely on support from its allies.

Governed from Cetinje by King Nicholas I, Montenegro transitions from a period of conservatism to fervent nationalism as a result of limited resources and thus limited time, leading it being the first declarer of war against the Ottomans. Montenegro holds one key monopoly: guerrilla warfare. Its armies constantly train in the difficult mountain conditions, allowing them to be topographically malleable and able to fight efficiently in enclosed spaces. The Montenegrin army is currently mobilizing approximately 45,000 troops, which, although small, is supplemented by modern artillery from its diplomatic allies Russia and France. This enables it to launch effective offensives against Ottoman positions. With respect to the Balkan League, the Montenegrin forces pack a powerful punch and should be strategically deployed in frontline positions to break Ottoman defenses effectively, backed by the weight of the large Bulgarian army.¹³³

Montenegro's economic situation is particularly disadvantaged: it did not hold significant markets and was largely agricultural, given as much by its mountains and underdeveloped infrastructure. A primary sector agricultural sector was predominant, with the majority of the population engaged in subsistence farming, animal husbandry, and small-scale viticulture. The country had little industrial capability, with local needs instead being met through artisanal production and local crafts. Trade was hindered by the fact that there were no big road and railway networks, thereby limiting imports and exports, and trade mostly focused on coastal towns such as Cetinje and Kotor. Supplies for war operations were therefore limited, and Montenegro depended on external help and alliances for mass mobilization during the Balkan Wars. Despite these constraints, the economy underpinned the minimum administrative and military capabilities of the Montenegrin state, albeit vulnerable to the strains of protracted conflict.¹³⁴

Serbia

Situated in the heart of the Balkan district, Serbia wields several powerful weapons that allow it to sit as not just an economic and resource powerhouse but also a centerpiece to morale in the Balkan League. While each of its allies has its unique advantages and disadvantages, Serbia remains well-rounded and plays the role of the perfect backend provider, able to support its allies effectively and extend across the peninsula as needed, as well as participator in offensive and defensive operations.

Serbia is governed from Belgrade by prime minister Nikola Pašić, a socialist-turned-conservative politician. While this initially put Serbia at odds with most of the Balkan theatre, Pašić's nationalist and reformist policies helped establish the foundation of the Balkan League and remains the glue between the geographically dispersed nations. After the initial conflict breaks out in Montenegro, Serbia immediately readies over 230,000 troops. Backed by Russian logistical support and recent military reforms, Serbia holds a clear advantage in terms of manpower, railway infrastructure, and general war readiness. Its immediate goals are to launch simultaneous offensives into Ottoman-held Kosovo and Macedonia, aiming to expand southward and unite Slavic populations under Serbian leadership.¹³⁵

¹³³ Abidin Temizerf, "Montenegro in the First Balkan War," Academia.edu, Academy of Romanian Scientists, 2013, https://www.academia.edu/95063236/Montenegro_in_the_First_Balkan_War.

¹³⁴ "Montenegro in the First Balkan War," Annales of the University of Oradea, Fascicle of History, Vol. IV, No. 5, <https://aos.ro/wp-content/anale/IVol5Nr1Art.6.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Military Archives of Serbia, Archives of the Kingdom of Serbia 1847–1920, <https://www.vojniarhiv.mod.gov.rs/eng>.

Furthermore, Serbia is not only a resource-rich fertile land but also a regenerative hive. Its factories and heavy metal mines allow efficient manufacturing for all League armies and navies. Its vast network of railways allow transportation of food, troops, and equipment across the main Balkan region, including the secluded Montenegro and Greece. When combined with the Bulgarian armies, the weight of the Balkan land forces are not to be underestimated and can be used for a major, central advancement through Macedonia and the narrow arm of Ottoman control at Thrace to threaten Constantinople.¹³⁶

From an aspirational perspective, Serbia long wishes to unite the Slavic peoples of the Balkan south under Serbian rule. This potentially puts it at odds with Bulgaria, which wishes to do the same, as well as its historical ally Russia. Serbia needs to be conscientious of its geopolitical position. It is the central ground of all forces converging and must remain the most vigilant out of all Balkan nations about its diplomatic strategies.

Initiating Crisis

The first shot that re-ignited centuries of tension between the Balkan League, the Ottomans, and the Russians was fired by the Montenegrins. On the morning of October 8th, 1912, artillery units commissioned by the Balkan League and under Montenegrin authority opened fire on an Ottoman garrison stationed near Podgorica, more specifically the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, a strip of land between ethnic Serbia and Montenegro.¹³⁷ Around dawn, the Montenegrin government, in representation of the Balkan League, had issued a formal declaration of war to the Ottoman capital Constantinople. In retaliation, Ottoman forts at Tuzi and Spuž engaged in a crossfire with the aggressors, and lines on both sides were soon alerted and fortified.¹³⁸

The original aim of the Podgorica offensive was to take advantage of the weakened Ottomans, having just suffered a crippling defeat in the Italo-Turkish War earlier that year and losing valuable men and resources.¹³⁹ Geographically, the League aimed to capture territories in northern Albania, liberating the ethnic minorities there and driving the enemy out of the strategic Plav-Gusinje region.¹⁴⁰ The bombardment was quickly followed by a decisive infantry assault led by Montenegrin Prince Danilo, successfully routing the ill-equipped Ottoman army out of those key areas.¹⁴¹

Despite early military successes, the Balkan situation has not been decisively improved. While historic Ottoman decline has taken a massive toll on their overall strength, the Balkan League is still bogged down and unable to mobilize quickly. Across northern Greece and the Ottoman-controlled territories in southern Albania and Serbia, Ottoman armies were quicker than the League to respond, putting the offensive at a risk of being entirely stopped in its tracks.¹⁴² The Ottoman Vardar and Western armies, its strongest mobile forces, were engaged across Macedonia and Albania. The concrete crisis ignited on October 8th when Montenegrin troops surged across the border near Scutari, initiating a direct assault on the Ottoman fortress city and forcing the Empire's western

¹³⁶ "History of the Serbian Armed Forces," Serbian Ministry of Defense, <https://history.state.gov/countries/archives/serbia>.

¹³⁷ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913*.

¹³⁸ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Volume 2, Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹³⁹ Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East, 1789–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Paul Latawski and James Shoemaker, *The Balkan Wars: 1912–1913* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008).

¹⁴² Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912–1913* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

armies into a sudden and volatile defensive campaign. Here, the Ottoman's concentrated firepower has put the overextended Montenegrin army at extreme risk. What succeeded the initial conflict was a flurry of extreme reactions by the Balkan League. Now with the integrity of its existence under direct threat, the League may feel compelled to act immediately, with force if necessary.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, the greater European powers, especially Russia, look on with anticipation. Tsar Nicholas II stationed forces on the Crimean peninsula and in its Romanian territories, waiting to take advantage of the conflict and interfere on the winning side.¹⁴⁴ The British, French, Austro-Hungarian, and German governments brace for the outbreak of a total war, and send vanguards of infantry and navy to positions in colonized Africa and north of the Balkans to pressure both sides diplomatically. The British, for one, seem eager to engage in the conflict at the right time, in order to preserve their interests of preventing Russian dominance over the area should the Ottomans fall and simultaneously repel an expansion of the latter should the opposite occur.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Germany and Austria-Hungary, as allies of the Ottomans in the Triple Alliance formed in 1882, may provide concerns for the League as the conflict intensifies.¹⁴⁶

The Balkan League faces a multifaceted assault. While their primary foe remains the Ottoman Empire, the League must plan in advance for anything to occur. The League boasts some advantages including familiarity with guerilla warfare, high morale, and a numerical superiority over the Ottomans, but the latter stands on a much better strategic position (effectively trisecting the Balkan) and better trained forces compared to the League, whose armies consist of mostly conscripts. At this time, the League should not try to pursue an immediate total war at the risk of being outmatched by superior Ottoman firearms (e.g. Mauser firearms), but rather play a tactical game of shorter campaigns and look into naval engagements using the powerful Greek navy. Furthermore, they must be consistently mindful of foreign forces relentlessly searching for ways to exploit the weakened state of both sides. They must be patient but decisive in order to capitalize its advantages and sustain its goal of liberation and independence, from, as they see it, a millennia of tyrannical wrath.

Bloc Positions & Portfolio Overview

Nikola Pašić – Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Serbia

Nikola Pašić is an integral member of the Serbian political elite and thrives in combining traditional nationalist ambitions with astute diplomatic skill. As both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, he promotes Serbian territorial expansion into Macedonia and Kosovo while deftly aligning with Russia.¹⁴⁷ With a reputation for juggling populist ardour and cautious pragmatism, Pašić stands at the centre of Serbia's bid to emerge as a regional hegemon. His control of the Balkan League is significant so as to present a common Slavic front while secretly promoting Serbian hegemony.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804–2011* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Hall, *The Balkan Wars*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Radomir Putnik – Serbian Army Chief of General Staff

A battle-hardened military tactician and an experienced campaigner of Serbia's past wars, Radomir Putnik is Serbia's mastermind of military mobilization. Now in his seventies and often battling disease, he still holds respect across the army ranks. With him at the helm, armies as large as hundreds of thousands are able to quickly and actively mobilize, especially on the Kosovo and Macedonia fronts.¹⁴⁹ Putnik's astute deployment of artillery and infantry maneuvers has made Serbia's army a force to be reckoned with.

Vojvoda Živojin Mišić – Serbian 1st Army Field Commander

Vojvoda Mišić is the iron-nerved tactician of Serbia, the man known for his calm leadership on the most testing battlefields. He is an excellent tactician and adept at maneuvering smaller, more concentrated armies over larger forces. A veteran of the country's military high command, Mišić is also a trainer of the younger officers versed in the nationalist fervor of Serbia.¹⁵⁰ In the Serbian armies, many are among his protégés and hold unwavering hyper-nationalist views.

Dragutin Dimitrijević (Apis) – Head of Serbian Military Intelligence and the Black Hand

Influential but secretive member of the Serbian wartime efforts, Dimitrijević, also known as Apis, commands the country's network of spies and the clandestine Black Hand group.¹⁵¹ He extends his authority to the clandestine operations in Albania and Macedonia and is known to have connections to the covert organizations operating in the shadows.¹⁵² Apis embodies the desire of Serbia to expand its frontiers through espionage, propaganda, and sabotage.

Miloš Božanović – Serbian Minister of War

As Serbia's Minister of War, Božanović forms the backbone of the Serbian military-administrative apparatus. Overseeing munitions production, internal transport networks, and rapidly shifting supply lines, he is the figure most responsible for transforming Serbia's limited industrial base into a functioning wartime engine. His ministry also coordinates with Russian procurement channels to mitigate chronic shortages in artillery shells and medical supplies. Although hierarchically outranked by other commanders, Božanović's disciplined bureaucratic oversight ensures operational continuity during campaigns in Kosovo and Macedonia, making him indispensable to Serbia's long-term viability.¹⁵³

Stojan Novaković – Serbian Ambassador to Russia

Novaković, an erudite historian, diplomat, and former prime minister, wields influence far exceeding that of a typical ambassador. In St. Petersburg, he leverages Pan-Slavic rhetoric and an intricate personal network within the Russian foreign ministry to secure both diplomatic protection and clandestine matériel guarantees. His communications emphasize Serbia's role as the "shield of Slavic liberty" in the Balkans, framing the Balkan League as a Russian-aligned bulwark against Austro-Hungarian encroachment. Novaković's effectiveness allows Serbia

¹⁴⁹ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Volume 2, Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 95–96.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Hall, *The Balkan War*.

to maintain a central position within Slavic diplomacy while extracting concessions vital for sustaining the war effort.¹⁵⁴

Ivan Geshov – Prime Minister of Bulgaria

Prime Minister Geshov navigates a precarious landscape of coalition politics, Great Power scrutiny, and intense territorial ambition. As the head of the largest military force in the Balkan League, he balances Bulgaria's expectation of dominance with the necessity of preserving cooperation with Serbia and Greece. His cabinet deliberations focus on securing Thrace and Macedonia, while restraining pan-nationalist agitators whose militancy threatens diplomatic unity. Geshov's cautious pragmatism stands in contrast to Bulgaria's increasingly bold battlefield successes, forcing him to mediate between military triumph and political restraint.¹⁵⁵

General Vasil Kutinchev – Commander of the Bulgarian 1st Army (Thrace Front)

General Kutinchev leads one of the most formidable field armies in southeastern Europe. His command spearheads most of Bulgaria's land military. He is known for his meticulous logistics, rapid maneuver philosophy, and exploitation of superior artillery deployment. Kutinchev represents the strategic ethos that made Bulgaria the "Prussia of the Balkans." His leadership positions the nation as the League's primary military force, shaping territorial expectations in postwar negotiations.¹⁵⁶

General Nikola Ivanov – 2nd Bulgarian Army (Macedonia Front)

Operating in the politically volatile zones of western Thrace and Macedonia, Ivanov balances assertive battlefield strategy with careful diplomatic restraint. Tasked with coordinating advances alongside Serbian troops, he prevents tensions from escalating in overlapping territorial claims. In Sofia he is valued for his operational discipline, logistical sense, and loyalty to civilian oversight, attributes seen as essential to sustaining Bulgaria's credibility within the Balkan League.¹⁵⁷

Lieutenant Colonel Boris Sarafov – Bulgarian Nationalist Agent Affiliated with IMRO

Sarafov is a veteran revolutionary whose guerrilla credentials give him influence far beyond his formal rank. Acting semi-independently yet enjoying connections with Bulgarian intelligence, he mobilizes irregular fighters across Macedonia to advance the goal of Bulgarian annexation. His willingness to ignore diplomatic boundaries often undermines Sofia's efforts to maintain unity with Serbia and Greece, making him both an asset and a liability in Bulgaria's wartime strategy.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 102–103.

¹⁵⁵ James Pettifer and Miranda Vickers, *The Albanian Question: Reshaping the Balkans* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 54.

¹⁵⁶ Hall, *The Balkan Wars*, 67–69.

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008), 112.

¹⁵⁸ Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements, 1893–1903* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), 183.

Stefan Paprikov – Bulgarian Foreign Minister

Paprikov must reconcile Bulgaria's rapid military successes with the political limits imposed by Russia and the delicate Balkan League coalition. As foreign minister, he becomes the principal figure explaining Bulgarian conduct in contested Macedonia and Thrace to both allies and Great Powers. His diplomacy seeks to maintain Bulgaria's image as a disciplined and cooperative partner despite the expansionist pressures produced by battlefield victories.¹⁵⁹

General Racho Petrov – Senior Military Adviser and Previous Prime Minister

Although retired from field command, Petrov remains a central architect of Bulgarian strategic thinking. As a former prime minister, he brings political experience to high-level military discussions, advocating long-term planning and preparedness for possible confrontations with Serbia or Greece. His influence ensures that military objectives remain integrated with Bulgaria's broader national strategy and wartime political considerations.¹⁶⁰

Eleftherios Venizelos – Prime Minister of Greece

Venizelos is the driving force behind Greece's modernization and its entry into the Balkan League. His administration has enhanced military readiness and pursued diplomatic alliances aimed at securing Macedonia, Thessaloniki, and the Aegean islands. Though his relationship with Crown Prince Constantine is strained, Venizelos' political skill keeps the government intact and the war effort coordinated, positioning Greece as a decisive actor in Balkan politics.¹⁶¹

Crown Prince Constantine – Commander-in-Chief of Greek Armed Forces

As commander-in-chief, Constantine directs successful campaigns in Epirus and Thessaly, benefiting from recent reforms that improved the army's mobility and discipline. His prestige bolsters national unity even as political frictions with Venizelos create risks for strategic coherence. Constantine's decisions thus carry dual weight: they determine battlefield outcomes and shape public perception of the monarchy's role in the war.¹⁶²

Pavlos Kountouriotis – Admiral of the Hellenic Navy

Kountouriotis dominates the Aegean theater with the cruiser *Georgios Averof*, using swift, assertive maneuvers that secure Greek naval supremacy. His blockade strategies prevent Ottoman reinforcements from crossing from Asia Minor, fundamentally altering the balance of the war. The navy's rapid successes elevate Greece's regional standing and validate the maritime modernization policies pursued before the conflict.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Dennis Hupchick, *The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 234.

¹⁶⁰ John Lampe, *Balkans into Southeastern Europe, 1914–2014* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 29–30.

¹⁶¹ Paschalis Kitromilides, *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 77.

¹⁶² George Leon, *Greece and the Balkan Wars* (Athens: Hellenic War Museum Press, 1993), 51.

¹⁶³ Zisis Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy and Policy, 1910–1919* (London: Routledge, 2005), 88–89.

Ioannis Metaxas – Greek Military Engineer and Strategist

Metaxas, trained in Germany and known for his rigorous planning, shapes Greek operational doctrine through his fortification designs and inter-front coordination strategies. His technical skill introduces a more modern, professional military culture into Greek command structures. Although young, he influences key strategic debates and symbolizes Greece's transition toward a more methodical, engineering-driven military ethos.¹⁶⁴

Lambros Koromilas – Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs

Koromilas navigates the diplomatic struggle over Macedonia and Thessaloniki, representing Greek interests before both allies and Western powers. He advocates firmly for Greek administration of these contested regions and presents Greece as a stabilizing force suitable for managing the postwar settlement. His diplomatic outreach is crucial in securing international acknowledgment of Greek territorial claims.¹⁶⁵

King Nicholas I – Monarch and Commander-in-Chief of Montenegro

King Nicholas initiates Montenegro's early offensives and views the war as a historic opportunity to elevate his small kingdom's status. By directing strategy personally, he mobilizes popular enthusiasm and seeks gains in Sandžak and northern Albania. His ambition, however, draws the attention of Great Powers who fear that Montenegrin advances—especially around Shkodër—may destabilize the regional balance.¹⁶⁶

Janko Vukotić – Montenegrin General and Field Commander

Vukotić leads operations across the mountainous Albanian front, where harsh terrain magnifies every logistical difficulty. Despite limited resources, he secures key advances toward Berane and Shkodër, earning a reputation for toughness, improvisation, and devotion to Montenegro's cause. His leadership provides the small Montenegrin army with credibility disproportionate to its size.¹⁶⁷

Andrija Radović – Prime Minister and Diplomatic Envoy of Montenegro

Radović acts as Montenegro's political strategist, ensuring that military gains translate into diplomatic leverage. He maintains close communication with Serbia and Russia, seeking recognition of Montenegro's claims in northern Albania and around Shkodër. His role is indispensable in preventing Montenegro's ambitions from clashing with those of larger allies, thus preserving its relevance within the coalition.¹⁶⁸

Discussion Questions

1. How can the Balkan League use its numerical advantage to overpower the Ottoman forces? What are some key regions that must be focused on?

¹⁶⁴ John S. Koliopoulos, *Greece and the Balkan Wars* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1985), 117.

¹⁶⁵ Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, 1897–1913* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966), 312.

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 245.

¹⁶⁷ Constantine P. Danopoulos, "The Balkan Wars Reconsidered," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 8, no. 4 (1995): 84.

¹⁶⁸ Sima Ćirković, *The Serbs* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 268.

2. Given the current Ottoman naval superiority, to what degree could the Balkan League counter all present and future potential port city assaults?
3. Ottoman soldiers are generally better equipped and trained. Should and how could the Balkan League devise a strategy to upgrade its forces?
4. How can the Balkan League ensure the contribution, cooperation, and loyalty of all its members throughout the course of the crisis?
5. What measures should be taken by the League to ensure accountability and readiness if any sovereign state in the Balkan region violates treaties in favor of opportunism and interests?
6. What measures should be taken by the Balkan League to prevent Ottoman massacres of ethnic Slavic populations in the case of a defeat and capture of a civilian area? When might the League need to pursue measures of diplomacy and leverage pressure?
7. How should the Balkan League diplomatically approach the varying influences and interests of Europe (e.g. France, Britain, or Russia)? Should the League negotiate military support from them or bar them from interfering in case of future complications?
8. To what degree should the League react or retaliate in case the Ottomans receive support from other European states? Should the League be concerned about the possibility of a two-front war, and if so, what actions must they pursue to prevent such a crisis?

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