

[*The Berliner Tageblatt* (Radical Liberal Daily), January 24]

## TURKISH DREAMS AND GERMAN BLUNDERS

BY ERNST PARAQUIN

*Formerly Royal Ottoman Lieutenant-Colonel and Chief of General Staff*

WHEN the deep red sunsets threw their lurid glow over the desert surrounding Mosul and the tormenting heat of the day was relieved by the first cool breeze of evening, I used to have my regular audience with Halil Pasha, the commander of the Turkish army in Mesopotamia, and the youthful uncle and intimate friend of Enver Pasha. After the reports of the day were over, unless there was some matter between the German and the Turkish troops' commanders to be adjusted, Halil Pasha would always turn the conversation to a theme that was far closer to his heart than strategy and military science—to his dream of Turkey's future. Usually, an English atlas lay before him, captured by the conqueror of Kut-el-Amara in the personal luggage of General Townsend. In faultless French, and with a wit and clearness of perception that would have been flattering to any son of France itself, he would unfold his favorite theme of a Pan-Turkish Empire. His pencil would travel quickly around the borders of Turan, a country existing as yet only in the songs of Young Turk poets, but, in his opinion, soon to become a glorious reality—a land to be created under the resolute leadership of the Committee of Unity and Progress, who then held the reigns of power in Turkey.

First of all, every tribe with a Turkish mother tongue must be forged into a single nation. The national principle was supreme; so it was the

design to conquer Turkestan, the cradle of Turkish power and glory. That was the first task. From that base connections must be established with the Yakutes of Siberia, who were considered, on account of their linguistic kinship, the remotest outposts of the Turkish blood to the eastward. The closely related Tartar tribes of the Caucasus must naturally join this union. Armenians and Georgians, who form minority nationalities in that territory, must either submit voluntarily or be subjugated. The Armenian question had approached solution in the course of the war; for all the Young Turks were determined that this people should be exterminated. It was embarrassing that the Georgians, fearing a similar fate, had appealed to Germany, and that the German Government was officially protecting them. But my commander did not attach much importance to Germany's future rôle in the Caucasus. The diplomats of his country would surely be able to play off England or Russia against us, and thus drive us from this point of vantage, where we had no more business than the Turks would have in Courland. Therefore, the time would come when the Turks and Tartars would surround and strangle the Georgians, weakened as they were by their religious division into Mohammedans and Christians. In order to accomplish this, it was essential to control the Georgian harbor of Batum; a point that the Germans with incom-

prehensible lack of foresight allowed to go to the Turks under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Such a great compact Turkish Empire, exercising hegemony over all the Islam world, would exert a powerful attraction upon Afghanistan and Persia. The former of these two countries sympathized closely with the Turks because both nations belonged to the Sunnite sect. The heir-apparent should always be educated to depend on Turkey. It was expected that the richest province of Persia, Azerbaijan, which was inhabited mainly by Tartars, would speedily join Turkey. The rest of Persia was not highly valued. Halil Pasha recognized the bitter hatred which its Moslem factions cherished toward the Sunnites; but he felt that they would be incapable of resisting Turkish supremacy. Furthermore, the Pan-Islam movement would sweep away all such resistance.

His attitude toward Arabia was interesting, as revealing the skill with which the Young Turks were manipulating this situation, and the differences of opinion within their own body. Halil Pasha himself championed the Pan-Turkish point of view, while Enver Pasha was the masterly exponent of Pan-Islamism. Halil Pasha made no effort to conceal his contempt for the 'Arabian swine.' He considered Arabia a convenient object of barter in negotiating with England. He was certain that England would raise no opposition to Turkey's appropriating Turkestan, if it could be assured beforehand of the possession of an Arabian corridor between Egypt and India. If we won a decisive victory over England, it would not be necessary to relinquish the Arabian provinces. That would be still better for Turkey.

Enver Pasha, who had become the

hero of the Islam world from the time he defended Tripoli, regarded Arabian policies from the standpoint of Turkey's leadership in the Islam world. He skillfully utilized Arabians in his pro-Turkish propaganda in the Caucasus, because they were honored by these simple mountaineers as the holy fellow countrymen of the Prophet himself. He planned to restore the old Arabian empire under a Turkish caliph, and not only to annex the Turkish-speaking people of Asia to Turkey proper, but also to use the Arabs to extend Islam's political sway far into Africa.

These brilliant dreams, which Halil Pasha with glowing eyes used to picture to me evening after evening, were not allowed to remain mere Oriental visions. Energetic measures were taken to realize them.

Messengers were constantly going and coming between Mosul and the Caucasus, Persia, and Turkestan. Turkish propaganda centres had been established in all these regions, working for the intervention of that country. Turkish money, which Germany was depriving itself painfully of its own gold to mint, played no small part in this nationalist propaganda. Enver Pasha sent his twenty-nine-year-old brother, Nuri, with the rank of Lieutenant General, to the Caucasus to agitate for the cause of Islam and of Turkey. When the Caucasus separated into four republics, an effort was made to strengthen the Tartar republic in the Southeast, by giving it the name of Azerbaijan. Halil Pasha thought this was a clever move, as it would naturally facilitate annexing the adjoining Persian province by that name. Nuri Pasha was the unchallenged master of the new Tartar government. When I visited that region in the summer of 1918 it had all the appearance of a Turkish province.

Every strategic point in the country was occupied by Turkish troops, who bore the name of 'the Islam army.' The Minister of War, who was a Tartar lawyer, wore the uniform of a Turkish general. Turkish officers and Mahdis were everywhere preaching submission to the Caliph in Stamboul, and over every public building fluttered the Turkish Crescent. Energetic proselytizing was going on among the Mohammedan people of the Northern Caucasus. Already it was easy to recognize the circle that was closing in around Georgia, then under German occupation.

A campaign to annihilate the Armenians formed part of this broader policy. First, all the Armenians in the Turkish vilayets were being transplanted to the Arabian vilayets. As a matter of fact, they fell the victim of famine or illness by thousands on the route and in the deserts. Sven Hedin gives notable evidence of this in his cautiously written book upon his experiences in Mesopotamia. Armenian women and girls thronged the Turkish and Arabian harems of Mosul. The few men who escaped with their bare lives and led a miserable existence about Mosul were organized in the spring of 1918 — a period when provisions were extremely scarce — into road-building detachments and taken into the desert. Such ruthless measures to destroy their hated fellow subjects were the more repugnant because they were officially not open to protest. Any representations made by our authorities were met by the Turkish Government with hypocritical demonstrations of horror whenever a barbarous incident was brought to its attention. The evacuation of Anatolia by the Russians gave the Turks a long sought for opportunity to clean out the Russian Armenians dwelling between the old Osman terri-

tories and the new Turkish sphere of influence in Azerbaijan. So their troops pressed forward across the frontier set by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, although these forces were urgently needed in Palestine, and invading the Russian Caucasus drove the Armenians from house and home and murdered and plundered all those who did not escape into the mountains.

Alexandropol had already fallen, and the Turkish forces were close to Erivan when something unanticipated happened. The victorious column advancing toward Tiflis unexpectedly encountered German forces. There were skirmishes with wounded and prisoners. The Turks withdrew, gnashing their teeth, in view of this determined opposition, but one of their main objects had been obtained. The fertile Aras plains inhabited by Armenians were in Turkish hands and the Russian Armenians like their persecuted brethren in Turkey proper, had been driven destitute into the mountains. Again the Turks attained their purpose of eliminating the Armenians and creating a continuous Islam territory from the Mediterranean to the Caspian. This was a mighty step forward to their goal. When the 'Caucasus Song' was played in Batum, which was conquered on September 16, 1918, my Turkish superior assured me: 'We shall recover all our ancient empire.'

With the same inflexible purpose and ruthlessness the Turks started a campaign against the Armenians in Persian Azerbaijan, and against any person of prominence who did not commit himself unconditionally to their plans. Turkish troops were sent into that country in preparation for a gigantic effort to recover Bagdad scheduled for 1919. These troops were concentrated at the principal city of that neutral province, Tabris. The Turkish commander showed bitter

hostility to the German Consul in that city and charged him with hostility to Islam.

In December, 1917, when the Turkish front in Mesopotamia again threatened to yield, Halil Pasha said to me, half vexed, half jokingly: 'Suppose we let the English have this cursed desert hole and go to Turkestan, where I will erect a new empire for my little boy.' He had named his youngest son after the great conqueror and destroyer, Genghis Khan. During the autumn of 1918, when addressing his Tartar fellow Mohammedans in the Caucasus, he repeatedly referred to Turkestan; and the mention of that country was always followed by enthusiastic applause.

The Entente, recognizing that Halil Pasha was one of the shrewdest and most active members of the Young Turk clique, imprisoned him at Constantinople. Since then we have learned that he subsequently escaped and presumably has gone to Eastern Turkey. This attractive adventurer, attractive in spite of many faults of character,—raised by his own merits from a constabulary officer and chief of irregular troops in Macedonia to be a leader of the Bedouin forces in Tripoli, and finally becoming a victorious commander in Irak and one of the most influential public men of his country,—will show the same determination and ability and persistence in promoting his scheme for a Pan-Turkish empire. Whether or not he succeeds will depend in no small part upon whether Russia or England get the upper hand in the Caucasus and Turkestan.

Turkish plans in Asia bear no relation whatsoever to the resources at their command. Those plans could never have been realized unless Germany were strong enough to defeat Russia and England. It is entirely

mistaken to suppose that Turkey would have continued to be Germany's friend. That country was willing to accept aid from us, but it never contemplated making any return. The Russian Colonel Oern asked Halil Pasha, at a banquet to celebrate the armistice in Mosul, whether Turkey did not fear our might. Halil replied with a smile: 'Why? Wealthy Germany has lent us much money, so that we might keep the Russians and English employed in Asia. It knows it will never get that money back; but if Germany should try to collect from us by force'—and here his eyes flashed —'then Germany becomes our enemy.'

It was very difficult to get even the slightest commercial concession from Turkey. For instance, a German Fuel Commission was organized in Arabia to explore for petroleum wells in Mesopotamia. The Turks pried about in every way to find out how much we learned. They made it quite obvious that they intended to utilize our assistance only where their own lack of technical knowledge and equipment made this unavoidable. They intended that all the profits of exploitation should remain in Turkish hands. It was proposed to use the money that was being received by millions from Germany, and was going into the private pockets of the Turkish rulers, to finance enterprises of this character.

At the same time, Turkey did not shrink from open and insulting disregard of German interests. We tried to mediate between the Turks and Arabs when they were at swords' points. Since nothing but money was needed to win over the Bedouins, and Germany would have to supply the money, the German commanders naturally insisted on seeing how the money was used. Naturally, our government expected to shape our relations with the

Arabs so they would be favorable to our trade and industries. Thereupon the Turkish Government issued a short, brusque order, in the spring of 1918, terminating immediately all negotiations between the Germans and the Arabs. They were actuated solely by jealousy of their German Allies. The impression that this humiliation of Germany made upon the Arabs lessened our prestige throughout all Western Asia. That prestige was already seriously undermined by the loss of Bagdad and by our military failures in Persia.

In the latter country the constabulary, which by international agreement was officered by Swedes, who were for the most part friendly toward Germany, resisted the advance of the Russians and joined the Turkish-German forces which had advanced into their territories. When we withdrew the Persian constabulary followed us across the border. They placed themselves under German leadership, and we provided for their subsistence. Immediately, however, the Turkish Government demanded that sole control of these forces should be given to Turkish representatives. The Persians refused. So we had months of useless and tedious negotiations and finally had to send the Persian constabulary home. When they returned to their own territories, the nearest English Consul received them with a scornful smile, and ordered them to report to the new constabulary establishments which the British Government had set up in Persia. So the blind jealousy and distrust of the Turks robbed them of important military assistance on their own frontier and turned that assistance over to their enemies. Their only motive was fear lest the Persians might think the Germans were the superior party in the alliance.

In the middle of July, 1918, I paid a parting visit to our Ambassador in Constantinople, Count Bernstorff, just before leaving for the Caucasus. I asked him to give all the support possible to our consular representative in Tabris, who was trying to checkmate English influence in North-eastern Persia. The Ambassador obviously had received an unpleasant surprise. 'What,' he said, 'a German Consul in Tabris? That will only make difficulties with the Turks.' I permitted myself to point out that, since Persia was neutral country, we must look out for German interests there. The Ambassador replied with a pained shrug of the shoulders: 'What would you then?' Our policy gives us no choice but to allow our dear allies to annex Persian-Azerbaijan, which it considers within its own sphere of interest.' Unhappily, the Ambassador was right. Every German in Western Asia who knew the situation understood how we had blundered; but we were powerless. A bad policy in times of peace avenges itself in times of war.

What good did we get out of our Turkish alliance then? Just the same advantage that we received from our alliance with Austria-Hungary. The weaker member of the bargain was always the more exacting, and in both cases consistently employed the support of his powerful ally to pursue his own selfish purposes.

I asked a representative of our Foreign Office, who was detailed to assist me when I was in Asiatic Turkey, what the real intentions of our government toward Persia were. I had very imperfect information, something about maintaining 'a *status quo*,' so I made my questions plain, and pointed out the very different outcome that would result from different solutions of the Persian problem. We might leave the country to England or Russia

in return for compensation elsewhere, or we might try to maintain artificially a government that would always be the source of friction between our enemies. We should also consider the possibility of creating a great East Asia empire of Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan, in which we might exercise controlling economic and political influence. Last of all, we might honestly protect Persia in its entirety, and insist upon its being kept an open field for the trade and investments of every country. But we must have one definite plan. In pointing out the necessity of this I drew the comparison between a military campaign and a diplomatic campaign. The only reply I received was that diplomacy could not look forward. It had to shape its course from day to day.

That was the very spirit of the foreign office revealed from the lips of its representative. Meantime, England had far-sighted plans. She changed her instruments but she kept inflexibly forward toward her main object, while we were easily led astray into the most impulsive undertakings. I mention only two — the expedition to Afghanistan and the Holy War.

The military leader of the expedition to Afghanistan was a Captain Niedermeyer. He and his diplomatic assistant carried out their expedition with admirable energy. But they knew perfectly well from the outset that they could not accomplish what was expected of them. I learned this personally from their own lips. How was a little group of Germans, with no military resources, cut off from their homeland by vast Russian territories, to persuade the wise old Emir of Afghanistan to attack England and support a revolution in India? Our country, that was so fond of placing its trust in the armored fist, all at once expected miracles from mere empty words.

When the Holy War was first declared, in the autumn of 1914, I had a talk about it with a captured French diplomat, who had formerly been an attaché at Vienna and a member of the Delcassé ministry. He asked me sarcastically: 'Do you expect much from that?' I said no, but expressed the hope that it might at least immobilize the colonial troops of the Entente. It did not even accomplish this. The Holy War was an absolute fiasco, just because it was not a Holy War. At a time when Christians and Mohammedans were fighting shoulder to shoulder such a war could not arouse fanaticism, and only fanaticism would have given it a 'holy' character. How could the Christians be deadly enemies of Mohammedans when other Christians were their friends and allies? The shrewd Bedouins at once saw that the thing was merely an ordinary war trick, and with their usual sharp eyes for the main chance in money matters, sold their services to the Christians who would pay them best. And although, if I am rightly informed, we spent at least one hundred million marks in coin gold in the Orient, the English overbid us.

[*The Frankfurter Zeitung* (Radical Liberal Daily), January 16]

## THE STRUGGLE FOR ASIA

VIEWED under some important aspects, the stage of the Paris Conference has become a vast gambling hall and on the table just at present the stakes are Asia. Remarkably enough, only one of the players still sits in the game. It is England. The other gamblers, Russia, Japan, America, stand aside and watch. Russia with its Bolshevik government is disqualified and in any case is out of the running. Japan and America have withdrawn because they purpose set-