

AMERICAN EMBASSY\*  
CONSTANTINOPLE

November 4, 1915

PRIVATE AND STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

My dear Mr. Lansing:

In compliance with your cable, I shall send you frequent confidential and personal letters concerning the general conditions here, and shall keep the copies, as requested, on my personal file, hoping that you will do the same in Washington, as their publication might affect my usefulness here. I take it for granted that you want me to write very frankly and unreservedly.

At the present time, conditions here are extremely precarious. The Sultan is absolutely powerless. He has to simply affix his signature to whatever Iradés are submitted to him. The Grand Vezier never exercised much power, and now that he has turned over his portfolio of Minister for Foreign Affairs to Halil, he has become merely ornamental. The real governing force in this country is in the hands of the Committee of the Union and Progress Party, consisting of about forty members, of whom the following nine are the leading spirits: Dr. Nazim, Chairman of the Committee; Midhat Chukri, General Secretary; Talaat, Minister of Interior; Enver, Minister of War; Djemal, Minister of Marine and Commander-in-Chief of the 4th Army; Ayoub Sabri (now prisoner of war at Malta); Halil, Minister for Foreign Affairs; Hadji Adil Bey, President of the Chamber of Deputies; Beha-ed-din Chakir.

The real power is exercised by the entire forty or a majority thereof, which is changeable and therefore never definitely fixed. Whenever anyone of the men assumes too much authority, as has occurred several times recently, the majority combine against him and no matter how important his position may be, he is compelled to obey the orders of the Committee and abandon all efforts to become the supreme ruler. This is where their government distinctly differs from the Boss Rule in the United States, and it is intensely interesting to observe its development.

All the important and even some unimportant questions are submitted to this Committee for its consideration. The Committee has at present absolute control of the army, navy and civil government of the country. They have removed many governors of interior vilayets who would not obey their orders. They also completely control the Chamber of Deputies, whose members are absolutely selected by them and the people have no choice but to go through the formality of electing the candidates of the Committee. In the Senate the majority are independent of them, as

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\* Source: NA/RG59/867.00/797.5

Senatorship is a position for life and most senators were elected by Kiamil Pasha and appointed by Abdul Hamid in 1908. Recently, when Senator Ahmed Riza Bey, an ex-Union and Progress man, wanted to champion the cause of the Armenians and questioned their treatment and also wanted to interpellate the Cabinet on the question of the control of the sale and distribution of food supply and the title of "Conqueror" conferred upon the Sultan, I was informed that Talaat sent word to him that if he really wanted to benefit the Armenians, he had better stop his agitation; for, if he continued it, he, Talaat, would publish statements about the Armenians that would incite the Turkish population against them and they would thereupon fare worse than before. From other sources it is stated that the Cabinet promised to modify their attitude towards the Armenians if Ahmed Riza and his friends would agree not to interpellate the Government. This Ahmed Riza and his friends did.

The Committee of Union and Progress have very few actual followers among the people of the Empire. They have some adherents in Constantinople and Smyrna and a few other centers. They rule through the fact that they are in possession of most of the offices and the army, and are so exercising their power that they have frightened almost everyone into submission. They have reinstated the spy system so prevalent under Abdul Hamid. By their treatment of the Armenians, they have so cowed the people that they have succeeded for the time being in suppressing all opposition to them, and they are so determined to retain possession of the government, that they will not hesitate to use any means that will enable them to do so. The only members of the Cabinet, and I believe of the inner Committee, that had any decent standing or possessed of any property prior to the Revolution, were the Grand Vezier and perhaps Halil Bey. When I arrived here two years ago, only one of these nine was a member of Cabinet: that was Talaat. The Cabinet then had amongst its members Djavid Bey, a Deunmé, as Minister of Finance; Oscan Effendi, an Armenian, as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs; Mahmoud Pasha, a Circassian, as Minister of Marine; Bustany Effendi, a Christian Arab, as Minister of Commerce and Agriculture. But at the time Turkey entered the war a year ago, all these men resigned because they could not assent to the war, and the Union and Progress men themselves did not want in the Cabinet anyone except most faithful adherents of the Committee. There is no opposition party in existence. The press is carefully censored and must obey the wishes of the Union and Progress Party. The people have absolutely no part in the government and therefore their opinions and wishes are totally disregarded and only the good of the party is considered. They have gradually filled the various posts with the trusted and leading members of the Union and Progress Committee and are continually strengthening themselves. Last year Enver was made Minister of War, and a little later Djemal was made Minister of Marine; Talaat, besides being Minister of Interior, acted and is still acting as Minister of Finance; Chukri, the Minister of Public Instruction, took also charge of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs after the resignation of Oscan; only last week Halil was given the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Hadji Adil, former General Secretary of the Committee and ex-Governor

General of Adrianople, was made President of the Chamber of Deputies. It is expected here that shortly either Enver or Talaat will be made Grand Vezier. It is a personal government and not one of policy, but unfortunately no one of them has full power, and as there are so many of them attempting to exercise power, absolute confusion and anarchy is resulting therefrom. The most glaring instance of this fact is Djemal Pasha, who at the beginning of the war was Minister of Marine and now is Commander of the 4th Army and has established himself as absolute dictator in Palestine and Syria. Repeatedly, when I have asked Enver to do something for me in that district, he told me that he would recommend it to Djemal and if he had no objection thereto, my request would be granted. I have begged Enver several times to order it done, and he said that he could not do so as military reasons might exist which would justify Djemal to object thereto.

At present the clique in power feel that they have succeeded in abrogating, without bloodshed or fighting, the Capitulations and thereby freed themselves from the control of the six Powers; that they have been able with their own resources (except five million pounds borrowed from Germany) to put an army of over one million men into the field and to successfully defend themselves against the four big nations arrayed against them. They claim with pride that they are the nation that have shown that the English fleet was not unconquerable, and that the Russians, who have for generations held the big stick over them, are unable to carry out their threat to punish them. They have devised a method by which they could put this tremendous army into the field with practically no cash expenditure. They pay some of their soldiers the ridiculous sum of 20 cents a month, and even from that they deduct a share for taxes etc., while others get neither pay nor food. They have requisitioned, without paying for it, a great part of the materials and articles that they required (and even things they did not require) to dress and feed part of their army, and thus demonstrated how to conduct a war almost without cost to the Government.

These men seven years ago were looked upon as a set of irresponsible revolutionists and adventurers, and have now usurped and maintain this tremendous power: you can therefore readily understand that they have become dizzy from success. From a desperate band playing a desperate game, they have become allies and friends of two of the important nations of the world and are convinced that they have been of greater service to their allies than their allies have been to them. They claim, and justly so, that they have compelled England and France to employ 500,000 troops to try and force the Dardanelles and to use a tremendous fleet, sacrifice numerous ships and spend millions of pounds worth of ammunition, all of which greatly diminished their power to defeat the Germans. They feel at present that they have successfully kept the great Powers at bay and are very proud of the achievement.

The oriental temperament and mode of thinking is so different from ours, that no one who has not lived here can understand them. Their absolute frankness (sometimes taking the form of impudence) about all their actions, no matter how brutal or criminal they may be, is at times surprising. They speak of their

determination to destroy the Armenian race as though it were a perfectly justifiable action. A number of the leaders have told me that after the war if they have won, their faults and excesses will be forgotten; if they have lost, they will be destroyed no matter how kind or considerate they might have been towards their enemies. They admit that they have no friends and they do not expect any consideration except such as their position and strength will entitle them to. As a nation, both their hatreds and their friendships are merely superficial and change continually. They have been very much influenced by the Germans who have used them to create this tremendous diversion against the English and French, and who are still thinking and scheming to create uprisings of the Moslem populations in Egypt, India and Persia.

At the present moment, the authorities would be very glad to have this war end. They begin to realize that economically they have injured their country tremendously through these high handed, indiscriminate and mismanaged requisitions. They have destroyed the producing and earning power of their country. Thousands of farmers were deprived of all their animals. The authorities foolishly did not even leave them single pairs of cattle so that the farmers could have a beginning for new herds. They have drawn from the fields the male population and thereby destroyed their agricultural communities. They have annihilated or displaced at least two thirds of the Armenian population and thereby deprived themselves of a very intelligent and useful race. They have used the railroads almost exclusively for military proposes and the ordinary roads have become so unsafe that the little that has been produced cannot be brought to markets. All the products that used to be exported are at their places of production and selling at considerably less than their usual-prices; this particularly applies to tobacco, opium, silk and figs.

I have given you the conclusions first, as I would have done in a first interview with you, and am going to write you special letters on some of the different topics, such as the effects of the abrogation of the Capitulations; the present conduct of their courts of justice and the management of prisons; public debt and internal financial conditions; the educational institutions and the new regulations under which they will probably be compelled to administer them; the Armenian atrocities; the management of the sale of food, bread, meat and other foodstuffs; the diplomatic representatives here, their influence or lack of influence with the authorities; the evils resulting from an invisible and irresponsible government as now conducted here, etc. etc.

With my kindest personal regards, I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

[Signed] Morgenthau