



Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

Britain's Macedonian Reform Policy, 1903–1905

Author(s): Frances A. Radovich

Source: *The Historian*, AUGUST 1981, Vol. 43, No. 4 (AUGUST 1981), pp. 493–508

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24446441>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Historian*

JSTOR

Britain's Macedonian Reform Policy, 1903-1905

By
FRANCES A. RADOVICH*

I

IN 1897 Lord Salisbury, who was then both British prime minister and foreign secretary, defined the great problem of modern diplomacy as "how to exclude the Turk from any kind of power in provinces of the Turkish Empire, while strenuously maintaining its independence and integrity."¹ Arthur James Balfour and Lord Lansdowne had a similar conception of the great problem of modern diplomacy when in the first years of the twentieth century, as prime minister and foreign secretary respectively, they wrestled with Balkan problems and in particular with the difficulties raised by the continuous danger of anarchy and atrocity in Macedonia.

Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia were the main claimants to the Ottoman province of Macedonia. In anticipation of Ottoman collapse in Europe, these Balkan rivals sought the national and religious allegiance of the inhabitants of the province, employing both propagandistic and terrorist tactics. They also wished to strengthen their territorial claims to the province in the competition for Great Power support, support which they could realistically expect because of the region's strategic significance. British interest in the Macedonian question, however, was not motivated by strategic considerations alone. At the turn of the century strife in the region was becoming more and more pronounced, with the indigenous population suffering badly from the violent competition among its neighbors. Moreover, there was the prospect of a Turco-Bulgarian war initiated either by the Ottomans in response to Bulgarian provocations in Macedonia or by the Bulgarians eager to seize the Macedonian plum. The pressure of British public opinion alone was enough to prevent a passive response on the part of the British government to existing and foreseeable events in Macedonia.

*The author was assistant to Marshall J. Orloff, M.D., Editor-in-Chief of *World Journal of Surgery*; she was previously Assistant Editor of *Historical Abstracts*.

¹Salisbury to Sanderson, 23 April 1897, Sanderson Papers, Public Record Office, FO 800/2.

The Historian

Although the Macedonian question was an absorbing and important diplomatic problem, the Macedonian reform policy of the British Unionist government² has been a neglected topic of research. Where it has come under study, it has received only passing reference, usually as a subordinate development on the larger diplomatic stage, and its full scope and impact have been overlooked. Harold Temperley, for example, in an article published in 1933, devoted only one sentence to Lord Lansdowne's reform policy in analyzing British policy in Turkey from 1830 to 1914. He concluded that the British foreign secretary had "pursued reform . . . with a fixed ethical purpose but had not worried about parliaments or constitutions."³ George Monger, in his more recent study of British foreign policy, briefly surveyed Macedonian reform in the context of Britain's gradual process of rapprochement with France and Russia.⁴ F. R. Bridge, likewise brief, viewed British policy from the perspective of growing Austro-English friction.⁵ Douglas Dakin's specialized study on Macedonia, though not neglecting Great Power politics in Macedonian affairs, centered on the Greek struggle in Macedonia.⁶

The intention of this analysis of Britain's Macedonian reform policy during Lansdowne's tenure at the Foreign Office is to demonstrate that the direction of British thought was toward the idea of an autonomous Macedonia—that is, toward the appointment of a Christian governor-general irremovable by the sultan to administer the Macedonian provinces. The governor-general was to have his mandate from the Great Powers and was to be independent of Ottoman control and supervision. Although favoring Bulgarian aspirations for Ottoman territory over those of the other Balkan states, British policy did not encompass any plan to initiate an upset of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, whatever plans the British government may have entertained for the territorial and political map of the Balkans, it was powerless to make any substantial change in the Macedonian situation. From the late summer of 1903 the British government was very much aware that Britain lacked the necessary international support to compel the Turkish sultan to accept Macedonian

²Unionist refers to the political merger in 1895 of the Conservatives with Joseph Chamberlain's Liberal Unionists, who had broken away from the Liberal Party in 1886 over the issue of Home Rule for Ireland.

³Harold Temperley, "British Policy towards Parliamentary Rule and Constitutionalism in Turkey (1830–1914)," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 4, no. 2 (1933): 156–91.

⁴George Monger, *The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy, 1900–1907* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 117, 137–38, 156–58.

⁵F. R. Bridge, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, 1906–1914: A Diplomatic History* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1972), 6–9.

⁶Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, 1897–1913* (Thessalonika, Greece: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966).

Britain and Macedonia, 1903–1905

autonomy. So it used the idea of an autonomous Macedonia as a club to secure the support of Austria-Hungary and Russia in demanding at least minimal reforms from the sultan. What was originally seen as a desirable foreign policy objective became a diplomatic tool for the achievement of more modest objectives.

II

In spite of imminent trouble in Macedonia in the late spring of 1903, Lord Lansdowne and his ambassador at Constantinople, Sir Nicholas O'Connor, were quite content to allow Britain to stand aside while Austria-Hungary and Russia attempted alone to resolve problems in the Turkish provinces.⁷ Even after the outbreak of the Ilinden insurrection of August 1903, Lansdowne was expressing his disinclination to assume a leading role. Doubtless it was with some relief that he could conclude, "Now that we have got rid of Parl[iamen]t we are less likely to be pressed to intervene."⁸

Macedonian affairs took a further turn for the worse, however, in events which were to have an impact on Britain's policy of relative indifference. Russian naval movements had supposedly touched off an outbreak in the Adrianople vilayet.⁹ From Constantinople O'Connor warned with some urgency that excessive Turkish repression of the Macedonians and a Turko-Bulgarian war were likely. Russian, and for that matter Austro-Hungarian, policy was an enigma, though the consensus of opinion among British policymakers was that neither of the two powers wanted a Balkan blow-up. But whether pan-Slavist agitators in Russia could once again compel their country's intervention in the Balkans was a factor in the Near Eastern calculus that could not be ignored.¹⁰ Moreover, although parliament was not sitting, there were signs of increasing public anxiety. The Bulgarian atrocities agitation of 1877 was not far from the minds of British leaders.¹¹ Several months

⁷O'Connor to Lansdowne, 6 May 1903, also 20 May and 16 June 1903, Lansdowne Papers, Public Record Office, FO 800/143 (hereafter cited as LP).

⁸Lansdowne to O'Connor, 14 August 1903, LP, FO 800/143.

⁹Plunkett to Lansdowne, 30 August 1903, no. 64, FO 7/1342; Plunkett to Lansdowne, 30 August 1903, no. 258, FO 7/1340.

¹⁰*Ibid.*; O'Connor to Lansdowne, 28 August 1903, *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, 11 vols. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926–38), 5: 59–60 (hereafter cited as *B.D.*); O'Connor to Lansdowne, 28 August, 4 September, 25 September 1903, LP, FO 800/143; Balfour to Lansdowne, 10 September 1903, and Lansdowne to Balfour, 6 October 1903, Balfour Papers, British Museum, Add. MSS 49728 (hereafter cited as BP).

¹¹Sidney Lee, *King Edward VII: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1927), 2: 265–66; Philip Magnus, *King Edward the Seventh* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1964), 320; Balfour to Lansdowne, 10 September 1903, BP, Add. MSS 49728; Lansdowne to O'Connor, 24 September 1903, LP, FO 800/143.

The Historian

previously Lord Cranborne, the parliamentary undersecretary for foreign affairs, had already noted how “the screamers will make all England’s flesh creep with appalling atrocities.”¹² Public opinion could not be ignored; it required some measure of appeasement.¹³ At the same time O’Conor was referring to the Austro-Russian reform scheme¹⁴ as a “ghastly failure.” “Some more drastic and active measures would have to be enforced in one way or another,” he asserted, “if incalculable misery is to be avoided and the Balkan Peninsula is not to become a scene of desolation, of starving and famine-stricken inhabitants.”¹⁵ Though reluctant to become involved, the British government was finally being compelled to conceive if not an aggressive then at least a far less passive role than it had previously taken in negotiations about Macedonian reform programs.

In the midst of threats to peace, the government had to consider what its Macedonian policy should be. In this connection O’Conor, in an official dispatch of August 28, again recommended for Lansdowne’s consideration a very sketchy scheme of autonomy. In O’Conor’s opinion such an arrangement seemed to offer a better guarantee of Ottoman territorial integrity while at the same time assuring the demise of Turkish administration in Macedonia which, he stated, was a prerequisite if reforms were to be at all possible.¹⁶

O’Conor’s recommendation was not without its faults. In a private letter supplemental to his dispatch of August 28, he himself drew attention to the difficulties involved in obtaining Russian acceptance of his proposal. He supposed Russia would want sole credit for offering autonomy. To make the suggestion palatable, he further proposed that “means might be found of openly leaving to Russia, at all events for the moment both the credit and the odium.”¹⁷ But Balfour saw a glaring inconsistency in O’Conor’s thinking, at least in so far as his proposal was intended to mollify British public opinion. He wrote to Lansdowne that

O’Conor is afraid of Exeter Hall in England, and of Russian susceptibilities in the East. He proposes to conciliate the first by suggesting the adoption of the Lebanon Convention in Macedonia, and to conciliate the second by leaving Russia all the credit of originating and carrying out the policy.

¹²Note on Sanderson to Cranborne, 11 April 1903, Sanderson-Lansdowne Papers, FO 800/115.

¹³Salisbury to Balfour, 20 October 1903, BP, Add. MSS 49757.

¹⁴Known as the Vienna Scheme of February 1903, its provisions called for reorganization of Macedonia’s gendarmerie and police and reform of its financial and taxation system. See Dakin, *Greek Struggle*, 88.

¹⁵O’Conor to Lansdowne, 28 August 1903, *B.D.*, 5: 60.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 61; O’Conor to Lansdowne, 25 September 1903, LP, FO 800/143.

¹⁷O’Conor to Lansdowne, 28 August 1903, LP, FO 800/143.

Britain and Macedonia, 1903–1905

On this I have to observe that if we keep so much in the background that Russia is to have all the credit, it seems hard to see how Exeter Hall will be conciliated!¹⁸

O'Connor's inattention to Austro-Hungarian interests did not escape Balfour's attention. To allow Russia to appear as the sole "friend of the oppressed Slav is *pro tanto* a loss to Austria," he remarked. The prime minister was certain that it was advisable to sound out the Austro-Hungarians privately and unofficially before putting Russia forward.¹⁹ Following through on Balfour's counsel, the British found the Austro-Hungarian government very prompt and emphatic in rejecting the suggestion of an autonomous Macedonia.²⁰ The Russian government as well refused the British proposal, though it was less uncompromising in this than Austria-Hungary.²¹

British policymakers did not despair as a consequence of these rebuffs. They still held the card of autonomy in hand and they intended to play it. They had quite understandably ruled out the use of force for the purpose of affecting the Macedonian situation. Nor did they choose to embark upon an isolated and independent course of diplomatic action. They concluded that it would be profitable to stand with Austria-Hungary and Russia, "encouraging them to hope for our support" and "pressing them to make their [reform] schemes effectual."²² The British ambassador in Vienna, Sir Francis Plunkett, put pressure on the Austro-Hungarians, suggesting to the foreign minister that perhaps an autonomous Macedonia was not so keenly opposed in Russia as it was in the Dual Monarchy. Plunkett hinted that the Monarchy should not seek "to prevent anything which may lead to this question [of autonomy] arising."²³

¹⁸Balfour to Lansdowne, 10 September 1903, BP, Add. MSS 49728. Reference to Exeter Hall, well known in the early 1860s as a meeting place for those who espoused humanitarian causes such as antislavery, indicates British fear of a public outburst in response to reports of Macedonian horrors. The Lebanon Convention refers to the 1861 arrangement whereby a European commission devised a constitution establishing autonomy in Lebanon under a non-European Christian governor appointed by the Porte with the approval of the powers and aided by an elected administrative council and a gendarmerie recruited locally. This constitutional arrangement brought peaceful development until 1914 to a land which had been engulfed in religious strife.

¹⁹Balfour to Lansdowne, 10 September 1903, BP, Add. MSS 49728.

²⁰Plunkett to Lansdowne, 25 September 1903, Tel. no. 75, FO 7/1342; Plunkett to Lansdowne, 27 September 1903, no. 291, FO 7/1341; Plunkett to Lansdowne, 27 September 1903, no. 292, FO 7/1341.

²¹Scott to Lansdowne, 16 September 1903, no. 282, FO 65/1661; Scott to Lansdowne, 23 September 1903, no. 293A, FO 65/1661; Plunkett to Lansdowne, 25 September 1903, Tel. no. 75, FO 7/1342.

²²O'Connor to Lansdowne, 25 September 1903, LP, FO 800/143; Lansdowne to O'Connor, 18 October 1903, LP, FO 800/143.

²³Plunkett to Lansdowne, 25 September 1903, Tel. no. 75, FO 7/1342.

The Historian

Lansdowne was anxious not to "overshoot the mark."²⁴ He did not intend to ask for more than could then be had. The Austro-Hungarian and Russian foreign ministers, Count Goluchowski and Count Lamsdorff, were soon to meet at Mürzsteg for the purpose of revising the Vienna reform program which they had mutually decided upon in February. It was the task of Plunkett to present to the two foreign ministers five points which Lansdowne wished to submit for their consideration. The last four of the five points consisted of provisions for the reorganization of the gendarmerie, the withdrawal of undisciplined Ottoman troops, the accompaniment of Turkish troops by European military attachés, and finally for charitable work in the Macedonian vilayets. Lansdowne lacked faith in the effectiveness of a reform program to be executed by a Muslim governor-general subservient to the Turkish government and independent of foreign control. Thus, in his first point, he offered two alternatives for consideration:

- (a) appointment of a christian Governor unconnected with the Balkan Peninsula or with the Powers signatory of the Treaty of Berlin, or (b) retention of a Mussulman Governor assisted by European assessors.²⁵

The British government had decided to exploit the issue of autonomy not for the achievement of that precise goal but as a tool to achieve some of its own objectives within the revised scheme of the Austro-Russian reform program. And in fact, the new program did provide, among other features, for gendarme reorganization, the accompaniment of Turkish troops by European military attachés, and the appointment of European assessors, called civil agents, to assist the Ottoman governor-general, Hilmi Pasha. Inadequate as the Mürzsteg program was, the British had accomplished through it as much as they were able. Britain's object was to avert further crisis in the Balkans and subsequent disruption of the status quo. The object was hopefully to be achieved by procuring provisions for Great Power control in Macedonia.

III

The next step for British diplomacy was to seek a prompt and speedy implementation of the Mürzsteg program. Lansdowne was not remiss in summoning Austria-Hungary and Russia to action though without much effect.²⁶ But even if the revised reform program were imposed, the British were uncertain whether this would prevent further turmoil in Macedonia or a war between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria.

²⁴Lansdowne to O'Connor, 24 September 1903, LP, FO 800/143.

²⁵Lansdowne to Plunkett, 29 September 1903, *B.D.*, 5: 63.

²⁶Lansdowne to O'Connor, 24 December 1903, *B.D.*, 5: 66-67.

Britain and Macedonia, 1903–1905

As early as October 6 Lansdowne wrote about the prospect that such a war would result in a Macedonia freed from the Turk. He prognosticated that British public opinion would not allow British inaction should an attempt be made to restore a freed Macedonia to Ottoman rule.²⁷ A Macedonia under Bulgarian hegemony seemed to pose no geopolitical problem to British interests. Whether Britain would find itself in confrontation with the Austro-Russian bloc, however, was a possibility which could not be ignored. The British government understood that this bloc was opposed to either the Ottomans or the Bulgarians making any territorial acquisitions. What the two Müritz powers would do in the event of a Bulgarian victory was a matter for deliberation. Lansdowne, for instance, pointedly asked the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in London, Count Mensdorff, whether the Dual Monarchy would be likely to intervene in order to expel Bulgarian military occupation forces from Turkish territory.²⁸

This question took on added significance when, with the coming of 1904, the British government found it necessary to include another factor in its speculations on Macedonia. This was the not infrequent warnings as to the possibility of Austria-Hungary seizing Ottoman territory. The circumstances envisaged for such action were two: a war breaking out between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria, or a Habsburg attempt, alone or in combination with Russia, to force the sultan to impose the reform program. These warnings predated the Japanese attack on Russia at Port Arthur (February 8, 1904), but the Far Eastern war gave them a new urgency.

On this issue, Italy in particular expressed anxiety and fear. On December 21 Ambassador Francis Bertie in Rome first commented on the uneasiness of Tommaso Tittoni, the Italian foreign minister. In particular, according to Bertie, Tittoni's concern was focused on safeguarding Italian interests in the event of an Austro-Russian Macedonian understanding. Fearing that Russia would drag along its reluctant Müritz partner, Tittoni sought British cooperation in restoring the Macedonian question to the concern of the European concert.²⁹ At the end of January Bertie again wrote about Tittoni's fretfulness, this time over the coming Russo-Japanese War. What he wanted was Anglo-Italian preparation for common action against an isolated Habsburg initiative.³⁰ Once more on February 10, two days after the attack on Port Arthur, Bertie reported on another talk with Tittoni which had the same theme as their two previous conversations about Macedonia. A preoccupied Russia, Tittoni feared, would set Austria-Hungary free for Balkan action. Confident as to the accuracy of infor-

²⁷Lansdowne to Balfour, 6 October 1903, BP, Add. MSS 49728.

²⁸Lansdowne to Plunkett, 27 January 1904, no. 12, FO 7/1350.

²⁹Bertie to Lansdowne, 21 December 1903, LP, FO 800/133.

³⁰Bertie to Lansdowne, 30 January 1904, LP, FO 800/133.

The Historian

mation from Viennese and Berlin sources, Tittoni was satisfied as to the reasonableness of his suspicions that the Habsburg military party was in the ascendancy and that it advocated a policy of action. He was concerned that Austria-Hungary should not occupy any Ottoman territory at all, even on a temporary basis, for fear that the Dual Monarchy would extend its dominion thereafter as far south as Salonika.³¹

British concern about an Austro-Russian division of the Balkans with Salonika apportioned to the Dual Empire was of long standing. While British vigilance was concentrated on the eastern half of the peninsula, the South Slavic lands of the west did have strategic value too. They were an outlet from Central Europe through Serbia along the Morava and Vardar valleys to Salonika, the Aegean, and thence to the Mediterranean Sea. But so long as no Great Power seriously threatened to exploit this route, there was little anxiety in this regard. Thus, no effective steps were taken in the last decades of the nineteenth century to prevent Serbia, for example, from falling into the Austro-Hungarian orbit.³²

Balfour and Lansdowne themselves were incredulous with regard to speculations about Austro-Hungarian ambitions. To Lansdowne the hypothesis put forth long before by the Italians that Russia had designs upon Constantinople and Austria-Hungary upon Salonika seemed "more ingenious than probable."³³ This conviction remained unchanged after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. In a private letter to Bertie, Lansdowne wrote,

As to the Italian apprehension of Austrian designs on Macedonia, I cannot help feeling some doubt whether there is really much ground for them. Austrian diplomacy seems to me to be of a very haphazard description, and I see no indication that they have matured, and are ready at the proper moment to push a really ambitious scheme of territorial expansion.³⁴

³¹Bertie to Lansdowne, 10 February 1904, no. 17, FO 45/889. This document was minuted, "Lord Lansdowne wished to see this dispatch again in print before circulating to the Cabinet. RPM[axwell]."

³²Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, 4 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922, 1931–32), 2: 245–49, 261; Edmond Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Lord Granville, 1815–1891*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1905), 2: 202; William L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments, 1871–1890*, 2d ed. (New York: Random House, 1950), 323–30; Paul Knaplund, *Gladstone's Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 156–60.

³³Bonham to Lansdowne, 3 May 1903, LP, FO 800/142; Lansdowne to Bonham, 12 May 1903, LP, FO 800/142. Plunkett's correspondence doubtless confirmed Lansdowne in his conclusion to disregard the Italian hypothesis. See Plunkett to Lansdowne, 5 May 1903, Tel. no. 24, FO 7/1342, and Plunkett to Lansdowne, 7 May 1903, no. 126, FO 7/1339.

³⁴Lansdowne to Bertie, 16 February 1904, LP, FO 800/133. Enclosed with this letter was another which Lansdowne had received from George Buchanan, the newly appointed British representative to Bulgaria. Like Plunkett's dispatches of May 1903,

Britain and Macedonia, 1903–1905

Balfour concurred with Lansdowne's view. He believed that Austrian policy was drifting and regarded the optimism of the Ballhausplatz as "only the cloak with which [Austria] endeavours to conceal her helplessness and indecision."³⁵

In spite of their incredulity, however, they did not omit to make contingency plans for any Macedonian disturbance likely to lead to an Austro-Hungarian, or Russian, occupation of Ottoman territory. After all, Lansdowne concluded, the Austrians "may be more ambitious and more slim than I suppose, and we should be ready to act should the emergency present itself."³⁶ With this consideration in mind, the British did not permit the idea of an autonomous Macedonia to fall into abeyance. They were opposed to Austria-Hungary and Russia acting either jointly or separately in the event that the Mürzsteg program became inoperative. Instead they supported international intervention and, in case of this necessity, hoped to obtain a more permanent settlement of the Macedonian situation through a European congress or conference. A precondition for British consent to this course of action was that some agreement be decided upon in advance, at least by Italy and France, regarding the policy they were to advocate at the projected conclave. "We shall be ready," Lansdowne disclosed, "to propose that Macedonia shall become an autonomous Province of the Turkish Empire under a Governor appointed by the Sultan for a term of years on the recommendation of the Signatory Powers, and that its finances shall be placed under some form of International control."³⁷ Balfour described this policy as "practical autonomy, with the technical maintenance of Turkish sovereignty." He was optimistic about the ease with which it could be carried out—if, as he observed, it was in accordance with Bulgarian desires.³⁸

What very much disturbed the prime minister was the prospect of hostilities breaking out between Turkey and Bulgaria with the latter being victorious. In Balfour's opinion that contingency would have raised embarrassing foreign policy questions. British policymakers were committed to the maintenance of the territorial status quo which reform of the Ottoman administration was to render tolerable. Balfour set forth the problem on which he feared his colleagues would all too soon have to decide. "To preserve the *status quo*," he reasoned,

Buchanan's letter served to reaffirm Lansdowne's skepticism about Austro-Hungarian aggressiveness. See Buchanan to Lansdowne, 10 February 1904, LP, FO 800/118.

³⁵Draft memo by Balfour (unsigned and undated), BP, Add. MSS 49698.

³⁶Lansdowne to Bertie, 16 February 1904, LP, FO 800/133.

³⁷Lansdowne to Bertie, 23 February 1904, *B.D.*, 5: 69. See also Bertie to Lansdowne, 24 February 1904, no. 30, FO 45/889. The question of Macedonian autonomy was brought before the cabinet. See the minute on Lansdowne to Monson, 20 February 1904, no. 83, FO 27/3662.

³⁸Balfour to Lansdowne, 22 February 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49728.

The Historian

is one thing: to restore it when it has been disturbed by war is quite another. It might be justifiable (I think it would be) to insist that no military successes on the part of Turkey should have the result of putting a free Christian population under her rule. What we have to consider is whether any corresponding principles ought to be laid down in the case of Bulgaria.³⁹

A Big Bulgaria was an alternative to an autonomous Macedonia and, as we have seen, had from the necessity of Balfour's logic come under some discussion among the British. Balfour in particular was the exponent of an enlarged Bulgaria *under certain conditions*. He was not alone among his associates in holding the Bulgarians in high esteem,⁴⁰ especially in comparison with the other nationalities of the Balkan Peninsula. "The Bulgarians are the only Nationality in the Balkans with the making of a nation in them," he presumed, "and I hold (in this differing from Percy and many others) that they would be much more efficient guardians of the Straits than Turkey seems ever likely to be." But Balfour was not ready to recommend that a Big Bulgaria could or should "be the aim of diplomacy *in existing circumstances*."⁴¹ (Italics added.) What Balfour wanted was the status quo and reform.⁴²

The very keen sense of urgency felt in February 1904 about Macedonia soon dissipated, and, with the exception of Italy,⁴³ Britain stood alone and thus paralyzed in its policy of Macedonian autonomy. The French ambassador to Britain, Paul Cambon, had expressed sympathy with and, on one occasion, even support for a policy of autonomy.⁴⁴ But for all intents and purposes France disappointed the British hope for assistance. The French government was reputedly stymied by its Russian ally which did not welcome Britain's solution for the Macedonian problem.⁴⁵ Warnings came from Plunkett that the Mürz-

³⁹Draft memo by Balfour (unsigned and undated), BP, Add. MSS 49698.

⁴⁰See, for example, the views expressed by O'Connor and Lansdowne in Lansdowne to Balfour, 6 October 1903, BP, Add. MSS 49728, and O'Connor to Lansdowne, 9 October 1903, LP, FO 800/143.

⁴¹Balfour to Lansdowne, 22 February 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49728.

⁴²Balfour to Lansdowne, 28 February 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49728.

⁴³For an indication of Italian support for a policy of autonomy, see Bertie to Lansdowne, 24 February 1904, no. 30, FO 45/889. However, compare this dispatch with O'Connor to Lansdowne, 23 February 1904, LP, FO 800/143. By January of the next year Italian support for Britain's proposed policy was becoming uncertain. See Plunkett to Lansdowne, 20 January 1905, no. 17, FO 7/1362.

⁴⁴Lansdowne to Monson, 7 October 1903, no. 506, FO 27/3617; Lansdowne to Monson, 14 October 1903, no. 513, FO 27/3617; Lansdowne to Monson, 20 February 1904, *B.D.*, 5:68–69; Bertie to Lansdowne, 24 February 1904, no. 30, FO 45/889.

⁴⁵Lansdowne to Monson, 21 October 1903, no. 529, FO 27/3616; Bertie to Lansdowne, 22 February 1904, LP, FO 800/133; Lansdowne to Monson, 25 February 1904, *B.D.*, 5: 70; a long letter by Spring-Rice dated 12 May 1904 and marked "private & secret," LP, FO 800/140.

Britain and Macedonia, 1903–1905

teg powers opposed autonomy and that advocacy of this policy would perhaps drive Austria-Hungary even further into the Russian camp.⁴⁶ Cecil Spring-Rice from St. Petersburg emphasized the harm that would be done to Anglo-Russian relations should Britain deviate from a policy of firm support for the Mürzsteg powers.⁴⁷ In any case the course of Balkan events did not unfold in accordance with Balfour's most feared projections.⁴⁸ The bellicosity of the Balkan states diminished when it became apparent that a preoccupied Russia would be unable to rescue them from battlefield reverses.⁴⁹ Moreover, while suspicion of the Dual Monarchy did not abate appreciably, especially among the Italian and Balkan peoples, Ambassador Bertie in particular came to believe that his French counterpart in Rome was leaving no stone unturned in attempting to alienate the Austro-Italian allies. "It is probably [Camille Barrère]," he commented,

who encouraged Tittoni in the views that Austria is meditating an advance into Turkish territory and that she is much more dangerous to peace in the Balkans since Russia's war with Japan and the consequent lessening of Russian restraint on Austrian ambitions.

Tittoni told me that Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro were all apprehensive of an Austrian occupation of Macedonia and might be expected to join Turkey in resisting it. Barrère also takes the line that the Balkan states suspect Austria and not Russia of designs at the expense of their aspirations. I have no doubt that he sows as much distrust as he can between Italy and her Triplice partners.⁵⁰

IV

Yet with the approach of a new year, the British government showed continuing interest in influencing Macedonian reform policy. Dissatisfaction with the progress of the Mürzsteg program was justified, although in fact the level of violence in Macedonia had abated. Gendarme reorganization, a minor point in the reform program, was the one and only area of achievement.⁵¹ So the British, early in 1905, revived their suggestion for Macedonian autonomy—once more as a lever to secure further reform, this time of a financial nature. Parliamentary and public pressure was only one factor which prevented the government from ignoring the Macedonian issue.⁵² The government remained apprehensive not only about the inadequate implementation

⁴⁶Plunkett to Lansdowne, 25 February 1904, *B.D.*, 5: 71.

⁴⁷Spring-Rice to Mallet, 13 April 1904 (marked "seen by Lansdowne"), Sander-son-Lansdowne Papers, FO 800/115.

⁴⁸Draft memo by Balfour (unsigned and undated), BP, Add. MSS 49698.

⁴⁹Extract from the annual report for Bulgaria for 1906, *B. D.*, 5: 108.

⁵⁰Bertie to Lansdowne, 25 February 1904, LP, FO 800/133.

⁵¹Dakin, *Greek Struggle*, 155–62, 167–69.

⁵²Bertie to Lansdowne, 24 January 1905, LP, FO 800/126.

The Historian

of the Mürzsteg program but also about the sufficiency of the program itself. What arose as a special concern for the British foreign secretary was the lack of Ottoman financial resources to execute the Mürzsteg program. Military needs in the Macedonian provinces were absorbing available revenues.⁵³ Another factor keeping British concern alive was the continued anticipation of insurrection and hostilities in an area for which the Unionist government sought sufficient tranquillity so that its successor government would not be confronted with a Balkan conflagration upon assuming power.⁵⁴ Misgivings about Austro-Hungarian and, in particular, about Russian intentions in the Balkans were another important factor. The Italians were fanning British suspicions about the control exerted by the two Mürzsteg powers over the Macedonian situation and about the supposed aspirations of those two powers in the peninsula. In July 1904 Foreign Minister Tittoni had relayed information to the British about Austro-Russian negotiations to secure German acquiescence to a virtual partition of Macedonia between the Mürzsteg powers.⁵⁵ Lansdowne noted as "interesting" the reported remark of the Italian king about Austro-Russian attempts "to get hold of everything at the expense of the other Powers."⁵⁶

The continuing allegations as to Austro-Hungarian territorial aspirations in the Balkans perplexed Prime Minister Balfour "beyond measure." "What precisely," he asked, "is the Austrian game?" In his view the designs of the Dual Monarchy were "in some respects the key to the situation." He concluded that "our diplomacy cannot move with assured steps until we know what they are."⁵⁷ Plunkett, however, continued to send his reassuring dispatches which, along with reports from other British representatives,⁵⁸ somewhat lessened the influence of the expressions of alarm arising in Italy and the Balkan states. Lansdowne himself persisted in his disbelief as to Austro-Hungarian expansionism.⁵⁹

About Russian ambitions, however, Lansdowne seems to have had

⁵³Lansdowne to Monson, 30 July 1904, no. 416, FO 27/3663.

⁵⁴Percy to Balfour, undated but written at Christmastime 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49747. Read the speeches of Percy and Balfour delivered in the House of Commons on 27 February 1905 in conjunction with Percy's letter. 4 *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 141 (1905): 1384, 1395.

⁵⁵Lansdowne to Rodd, 27 July 1904, no. 136, FO 45/888.

⁵⁶Lister to Lansdowne, 29 November 1904, no. 187, FO 45/890.

⁵⁷Balfour to Lansdowne, 6 January 1905, BP, Add. MSS 49729.

⁵⁸Plunkett to Lansdowne, 25 June 1904, no. 157, FO 7/1352; Plunkett to Lansdowne, 21 August 1904, no. 179, and 5 May 1905, no. 106, FO 7/1352; Bertie to Lansdowne, 5 March 1904, *B.D.*, 5: 74; Bertie to Lansdowne, 15 March and 14 June 1904, LP, FO 800/133; Bertie to Lansdowne, 24 January 1905, LP, FO 800/126; O - Conor to Barrington, 6 September 1904, LP, FO 800/143; Lister to Lansdowne, 31 December 1904, no. 207, FO 45/890.

⁵⁹Lansdowne to Balfour, 9 January 1905, BP, Add. MSS 49729.

Britain and Macedonia, 1903–1905

no doubt at all. He believed that territorial aspirations and not philanthropy motivated Russian diplomacy in the Balkans as elsewhere.⁶⁰ In addition, Lansdowne may well have looked favorably upon some action in Macedonia in order to preserve British influence over Bulgaria and to prevent the latter state from falling in on the Russian side. The British minister at Sofia, Sir George Buchanan, privately warned that Bulgaria's Prince Ferdinand would consider turning completely to Russia if it seemed nothing could be had from Britain. Buchanan even suggested that if no substantial concession could be offered, his government should resort to sheer cajolery in order to maintain British influence over the prince.⁶¹ The British knew that the ill-equipped insurgents in Macedonia needed money for weapons and that Russia was not likely to supply assistance.⁶² But still, in light of the above, it is improbable that Lansdowne disregarded Italian fears that Russia would seek to reestablish its prestige, tarnished by Far Eastern defeats, through action in the Balkans.⁶³

It is little wonder then that Earl Percy, the then parliamentary undersecretary for foreign affairs, thought it "a great pity . . . if we don't make a serious effort before we go out [of office] to get the principle publicly affirmed that the settlement of the Near East must be an international one."⁶⁴ Once the Austro-Russians submitted their own financial reform proposal in January 1905, Lansdowne became intent upon its modification in order to secure British interests. To Count Mensdorff, for example, he quite explicitly stated his determination not to give the Mürzsteg powers a free hand in Macedonia, especially since British financial and commercial interests had become involved.⁶⁵ In a conversation of February 3 with Paul Cambon, Lansdowne made it clear that he had conceded no privileged position to Austria-Hungary and Russia. From this talk Cambon concluded that Britain would not permit Macedonia to fall into the grasp of these two powers and that the time was approaching when the thorny Macedonian question would have to come under the Concert of Europe.⁶⁶

⁶⁰Cabinet report to the king, 16 December 1904, CAB 41/29/43.

⁶¹Buchanan to Lansdowne, 16 November 1904, LP, FO 800/118.

⁶²Notes of a conversation with Mr. Graves, H. B. M. Consul General at Salonika, 29 November 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49700.

⁶³See Lister to Lansdowne, 6 January 1905, no. 4, FO 45/906.

⁶⁴Percy to Balfour, undated but written at Christmastime 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49747. See also Lansdowne to Lister, 19 January 1905, no. 14, FO 27/3686.

⁶⁵Lansdowne to Plunkett, 22 March 1905, no. 30, FO 7/1361; Lansdowne to Bertie, 27 March 1905, no. 141, FO 27/3703; Lansdowne to Hardinge, 29 March 1905, no. 106, FO 65/1697.

⁶⁶Paul Cambon to Delcassé, 9 February 1905, *Documents diplomatiques français (1871–1914)*, 2^e série (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1929–59), 6: 103–6 (hereafter cited as *DDF*₂). Compare Cambon's account of this conversation with Lansdowne's in Lansdowne to Bertie, 3 February 1905, *B.D.*, 5: 77.

The Historian

Balfour and Lansdowne, in first moving forward toward the formulation of a specific financial reform program, realized that a majority of the powers would reject their suggestions.⁶⁷ Lansdowne calculated that with French assistance they could perhaps compel Austria-Hungary and Russia to put forth “more extensive reforms . . . ostensibly of their own accord.” He recollected that “the two Powers would never have brought out the Murzsteg scheme if it had not been for pressure of this kind, and I think it is conceivable that we may now be able to accelerate their pace *by similar methods*.”⁶⁸ (Italics added.) Lansdowne claimed in a conversation of January 6 with Cambon that the appointment of Austro-Russian civil agents (i.e., European assessors) had resulted in no improvement in the Macedonian condition. For this reason, he continued, the British government was suggesting a scheme for financial reform which would provide for the appointment by the powers of a commission which would have independent administrative and executive powers. Its task would be to control the administration of justice and finance.⁶⁹ This was a virtual proposal of autonomy.

It was not long after Lansdowne’s talk with Cambon that the Murzsteg powers formulated a financial reform scheme of their own. In this connection, Lansdowne was well aware that Austria-Hungary and Russia wanted “no mention . . . of the fact that these exchanges of views [with regard to a British-suggested scheme] had taken place.”⁷⁰ Yet later on in March the *Standard* carried a timely report about British proposals “to the French Ambassador for the establishment of a European commission to supervise the general administration of Macedonia.”⁷¹ It might well be surmised that Lansdowne, dissatisfied with the provisions of the Austro-Russian counterscheme, was resorting to the same expedient used in September 1903. Thanks supposedly to an enterprising and eavesdropping newspaper correspondent, or to an indiscreet public official in another country,⁷² this bit of information about a British-suggested scheme was disclosed at precisely that moment when Britain was seeking at least two concessions from Austria-Hungary and Russia. The first was for compliance with its minimal requirements for the financial administration of the Macedonian provinces. The second was for recognition of the principle, as Earl Percy put it, “that the settlement of the Near East must be an international one.”

⁶⁷Cabinet report to the king, 16 December 1904, CAB 41/29/43.

⁶⁸Lansdowne to Balfour, 23 December 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49729.

⁶⁹Lansdowne to de Bunsen, 6 January 1905, no. 20, FO 27/3686; see also Paul Cambon to Delcassé, 13 January 1905, *DDF*₂, 6: 31n.

⁷⁰Lansdowne to Bertie, 3 February 1905, *B.D.*, 5: 77.

⁷¹The Earl of Lytton had drawn attention to the report appearing in the *Standard*. See 4 *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 143 (1905): 1320.

⁷²This was the explanation Lansdowne gave to account for the newspaper leak. See 4 *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 143 (1905): 1345–46.

Britain and Macedonia, 1903–1905

Not long after this parliamentary disclosure, Sir Charles Hardinge, who had become Britain's ambassador to Russia in 1904, could communicate that Austria-Hungary and Russia were formulating a proposal for international financial control in Macedonia of which they hoped the British government would approve.⁷³ Lansdowne could also report some success. The Mürzsteg powers were now admitting that they had no exclusive mandate to formulate and execute Macedonian reform measures without other powers who had signed the Treaty of Berlin.⁷⁴

But still the concessions which Lansdowne was able to wring from Austria-Hungary and Russia left much to be desired and an end to the wrangle with them was not yet in sight.⁷⁵ Then, after the European powers had finally agreed upon a financial reform program, they had to resort to a combined naval demonstration in the autumn of 1905 in order to induce the sultan to accept the new scheme.⁷⁶

In the initial deliberations in December 1904, Balfour had wondered whether his government's scheme would be of any real benefit if political as well as financial reform could not be imposed. What Balfour had in mind was to establish a Macedonian constitution using the Lebanon system as a model; in other words, he was thinking of an autonomous Macedonia. He feared that no reform program would be durable without this feature. But like Lansdowne in September 1903, Balfour too did not now want to "overshoot the mark." He cautioned that in proposing

too much, we may get nothing. We may arouse the susceptibilities not merely of Bulgaria, but of Austria and Russia, and the Turks, tacitly encouraged by them, and, of course, by Germany also, may refuse to move, *and we shall be helpless.*⁷⁷ (Italics added.)

What an isolated British government would not, and could not, do was to compel the introduction of that radical measure of autonomy which it thought indispensable for the solution of the Macedonian question. Stoppag measures were all that could be obtained. Spring-Rice stated the issue succinctly: "And are we prepared," he asked, "to follow up words by action? I don't think we can afford to send ships or troops to the Balkans."⁷⁸ Public utterance was given to this feeling

⁷³Hardinge to Lansdowne, 6 April 1905, Tel. no. 45, FO 65/1706.

⁷⁴Lansdowne to Hardinge, 12 April 1905, no. 122, FO 65/1697.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*; Lansdowne to Hardinge, 3 October 1905, no. 298, FO 65/1697.

⁷⁶See *B.D.*, 5: 80–99.

⁷⁷Balfour to Lansdowne, 30 December 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49729.

⁷⁸Spring-Rice to Mallet, 13 April 1904 (marked "seen by Lansdowne"), Sanderson-Lansdowne Papers, FO 800/115. Of interest is Mallet's minute: "This is a strong argument against making any fresh proposals, such as Buxton & Lytton suggest, for a European gov[ernor] but it is not an argument against circularizing the Powers as to the inadequate manner in which the Mürzsteg programme has been carried out."

The Historian

when Percy and Balfour spoke for the government on February 27 in the House of Commons. In the words of the prime minister,

Is it conceivable that against the will of Russia, and against the will of Austria, when the other Powers at the best are lukewarm, we could either morally or materially carry on any great scheme of reform? The thing is not possible as far as I am concerned—I would never consent to such action on the part of this country. . . . The burdens which this country has already to bear are sufficiently great; and this Government, at all events, is not going to add to them by an insane policy of philanthropic adventure in the Near East. . . . Therefore let it not go forth to any part of the world that, because we think that in certain particulars the schemes of the Powers are imperfect, we are going to separate ourselves from them and advance our own scheme by the strength of our own right hand. . . . The particular ground and policy on which we base our action are not shaken, and cannot be shaken, by any mere detailed accounts of the harrowing horrors which undoubtedly take place both in Eastern Europe and Armenia; you cannot base a policy upon considerations like these taken alone. If your policy is to endure, and if it is to be fruitful of good, you must consider not merely what it is you would desire to do, but what means you have of doing it, and how those means can be adjusted to the desired end.⁷⁹

In this fashion the British government under Balfour and Lansdowne gave public notice of Britain's impotence to influence Macedonian reform schemes in the direction which it considered most conducive to Macedonian tranquillity. The dangers and burdens of imposing a policy of autonomy for Macedonia outweighed the possible advantages. Yet this public admission came after Lansdowne, on more than one occasion, had used the threat of autonomy as one weapon in his diplomatic arsenal to secure minimal reforms for the amelioration of the Macedonian situation and for the protection of British Near Eastern interests. Whatever impact his threat may have had on Austro-Hungarian and Russian policy, what cannot be denied is the effect of those threats on the Balkan states, where autonomy for Macedonia was a crucial question. Some political leaders in these states looked to Britain as the arbiter of Macedonia's fate in spite of Balfour's public admission of Britain's inability and unwillingness to resolve the tangled Macedonian question.⁸⁰

⁷⁹4 *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 141 (1905): 1394–95; also 1383–84 for relevant parts in Percy's speech.

⁸⁰This topic will be developed in a forthcoming study by the author on British foreign policy and the Serbian conspiracy question.