

Revisiting Dominant Paradigms on a Young Turk Leader

Ahmed Rıza

Erdem Sönmez

Ahmed Rıza is considered to be a major ideologue and intellectual and one of the most significant leaders of the Young Turk movement. His political and intellectual portrait is particularly noteworthy because he stood between two generations of constitutionalism: the Young Ottomans and the Unionists. Moreover, after the 1908 revolution, he was elected to be the Speaker of the parliament in deference to his longtime efforts in opposition to the Hamidian regime. He was later appointed as a member of the senate.

Ahmed Rıza was born in 1858 in Istanbul, to a father who was nicknamed “English” and an Austrian mother who was a convert to Islam. After graduating from the Mekteb-i Sultani (Imperial School),¹ he worked and received his informal training in the Tercüme Odası (Translation Bureau) as many of the Young Ottomans had done before him. Within a relatively short time span he went to France to study agriculture.² Upon returning to the Ottoman Empire, he applied to the Ministry of Education because no suitable position at the Ministry of Agriculture was available at the time. He was appointed to the National Education Office in Bursa. Not content with his appointment, he resigned during his visit to Paris for the centennial exhibition of the French Revolution.³ While in Paris, Rıza wrote six reform bills and submitted them to Sultan Abdülhamid II, only to be ignored.⁴ Despite the silence from Yıldız Palace, he published the first of these reform bills and shortly thereafter joined the ranks of the Young Turk movement.⁵ Most importantly, perhaps, he was

the name-giver of the Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress: CUP).

During the opposition years Ahmed Rıza's intellectual framework and political attitude bore traces of the generations that came before and after him. As in the case of the Young Ottomans, his constitutionalist opposition and propaganda in Paris are considered to be mainly an intellectual activity rather than an organizational action of the Unionists. Islam, which was treated with great importance by the Young Ottomans, was replaced by positivism in the political thought of Ahmed Rıza, in line with the spirit of his time. He nevertheless pointed out the benefits of the religion for the sake of progress, as did the Young Ottomans. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of education, another significant theme apparent in the writings of the Young Ottomans. Intellectually, Rıza was not as sophisticated as the Young Ottomans; yet he was not eclectic like the Unionists either.

Rıza's relationship with the "state circles" resembled that of the Unionists rather than the Young Ottomans. His understanding of opposition and his relations with the palace were not flexible (as was the case with the Young Ottomans) but rather intransigent. He also had an organic bond with the constitutionalist generation that came after him via the key figures Doctor Nazım (his protégé) and Bahattin Şakir. He persistently opposed adopting militaristic solutions, whereas the Second Constitutional period was attained through violence employed by the Unionists. Last but not the least, while a proponent of Ottomanism, he did not lean toward the idea of Turkish nationalism. In comparison with Ziya Gökalp, Ahmed Rıza was considered to be a much more cosmopolitan Ottoman intellectual.

These instances illustrate the continuities and breaks in the two constitutionalist movements in the Ottoman Empire (any further discussion is beyond the scope of this study). Therefore this chapter attempts only to highlight the main characteristics of Ahmed Rıza's political thought and attitudes. For this purpose I first scrutinize the dominant narrative on the 1902 congress in the literature, which contains many prejudgments about Ahmed Rıza that need revision. Second, I seek to examine the pre-conceptions of the literature that characterized Ahmed Rıza as a Turkish nationalist and a militaristic pro-coup figure. Finally, I concentrate on his approach on the European intervention, another significant feature of his political activity. Analyzing these aspects is also useful in contextualizing the Young Turk movement and reviewing the current literature from a critical perspective.

THE CONGRESS OF OTTOMAN LIBERALS
AND AHMED RIZA

At the turn of the twentieth century two prominent members of the Ottoman administration, İsmail Kemal and Damad Mahmud Paşa, joined the Young Turk movement. İsmail Kemal was a close friend and a colleague of Midhat Paşa, and Damad Mahmud Paşa was the former minister of justice, ambassador, and son-in-law of Abdülhamid II. Their participation undoubtedly revitalized the opposition movement. After arriving in Europe with his sons Sabahaddin and Lütfullah, Damad Mahmud Paşa came into contact with the Geneva organization of the Committee of Union and Progress and started to write in *Osmanlı* (Ottoman), the newspaper of the organization. Mehmet Hacısalihioğlu states that the chief aim of Damad Mahmud Paşa and İsmail Kemal was to provide British assistance in bringing down the Hamidian regime in 1900–1901.⁶ This revival evoked suggestions from the Young Turks for organizing a congress to bring together various factions of the opposition.⁷ Eventually the Congress of Ottoman Liberals was convened in Paris in February 1902 at the initiative of Sabahaddin and Lütfullah.⁸

The 1902 congress, however, was not able to unite the constitutionalist movement. On the contrary, the factions within the Young Turks came into conflict with each other on the issues of the Great Powers' intervention and the military involvement in reinstating the constitutional regime. The first of these issues particularly caused fierce debates and divided the Young Turk movement into two major fronts: the *müdahaleci* (interventionist) faction, called *ekseriyet* (majority) and the *adem-i müdahaleci* (noninterventionist) group, called *ekalliyet* (minority).⁹

There is a consensus in the current literature that this dividing line at the congress occurred between the groups led by Sabahaddin and Ahmed Rıza.¹⁰ For instance, according to François Georgeon, Sabahaddin was a “confirmed liberal” and a “decentralist.” Ahmed Rıza (the main exponent of the opposing view), in contrast, was a “Turkish nationalist” and a “centralist.”¹¹ Accordingly, the central argument in the existing literature is that “Ottoman liberalism” faced off against “Turkish nationalism” at the 1902 congress. Hence, as can be observed in the following examples, the Young Turk movement was bifurcated between these two camps based on a dichotomy of centralism versus decentralism:

In the midst of all this confusion stood Sabahaddin, who was beginning to formulate his idea of an Ottoman Confederation in

which the various nationalities of the Empire would have a great measure of autonomy and in which the main bond would be the dynasty. At the other extreme were Ahmed Rıza and his associates who...represented a Turkish nationalism which admitted only that the reigning Sultan was evil and maintained that the solution to everything was to replace him with another member of the same family and revive the constitution which had been suspended in 1878.¹²

For Sabahaddin, the solution for the nations that had centrifugal tendencies was a liberal decentralization. Ahmed Rıza, on the contrary, defended [the view] that only an authoritarian centralism could prevent the dissolution of the empire.... The controversy became obvious at the Congress of Ottoman Liberals that convened in Paris in February 1902.... The very reason for the Young Turks to adopt Turkish nationalism was to provide the domination of the Turkish element over others through coercion, assimilation, etc. This tendency was apparent in Ahmed Rıza.¹³

At the congress...CUP divided into two factions. The liberal group led by Prince Sabahaddin established the League of Private Initiative and Decentralization [Teşebbüs-i Şahsi ve Adem-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti] and the other faction organized the CPU under the leadership of Ahmed Rıza.¹⁴

[T]he difference between his [Ahmed Rıza's] party and that of Prince Sabahaddin begins to crystallize from now onwards as one between Turkish nationalism and Ottoman liberalism.¹⁵

In contrast to the centralist, authoritarian, rationalist...attitude of Ahmed Rıza and his followers, Prince Sabahaddin was a representative of decentralist, empiricist, pragmatist, and liberal political doctrine.¹⁶

This discord in the literature has created a hegemonic narrative on Turkish political life: two controversial lines that emerged at the 1902 congress have played a dominant role in the political life of Turkey from 1902 onward. Although Tarık Zafer Tunaya was the first to point out this dichotomous schema,¹⁷ İdris Küçükömer laid a stronger emphasis on it.¹⁸ In addition, Şerif Mardin also took up this approach, refining and strengthening it.¹⁹

This narrative stresses that a Turkish nationalist, centralist, authoritarian, militarist, and pro-coup political line, ranging from the CUP to the Republican People's Party and the Nationalist Action Party, stemmed from the stance taken by Ahmed Rıza and his followers at the 1902 congress. In contrast, Sabahaddin and his associates initiated a liberal, decentralist, and anti-coup political position, which has been represented by a wide range of organizations, including the League of Private Initiative and Decentralization, the Party of Ottoman Liberals, the Party of Freedom and Understanding, the Democratic Party, the Justice Party, the Motherland Party, and the Justice and Development Party. Although this dichotomous model could be regarded as functional for analyzing Turkish political life, it must be noted that these interpretations, and thereby the positions attributed to Ahmed Rıza and Sabahaddin at the 1902 congress, have substantially been teleological.

It is useful to reconsider the historical accounts themselves. İsmail Kemal's mention of the congress's organizing process is particularly noteworthy:

Prince Saba Eddine and Prince Lutfullah...they were planning the calling of a congress to discuss the situation of Turkey. They wanted me to take part in this, and Prince Lutfullah came to Brussels to see me on the matter. I was willing to take part in the congress on certain conditions—namely, that all the ethnical elements in Turkey should be represented, so that the desiderata of all the people of the Empire might be formulated.... My second condition was that the Powers signatory of the Treaties of Paris and Berlin should know that in the eyes of the Ottoman people they had pledged their honour concerning the adoption of reforms for the good of the Empire. If the aid of Europe were invoked, the congress might be of some value, but if it stopped at the mere expression of opinions and nothing more was done, I could not see any use in it.... My conditions were, however, accepted, and I came to Paris.²⁰

Ahmet Bedevi Kuran, a disciple of Sabahaddin, also described the debates at the congress:

Two issues were discussed during the negotiation: (a) A revolution cannot be made solely by propaganda and publication. Therefore, an effort toward military involvement in the revolutionary movement must be provided. (b) Reformation must be attained

in the empire by means of European intervention. This first point was suggested by İsmail Kemal, who claimed to be representing an important military force at the congress.... The second point was proposed by the Armenians.... After these two issues gave rise to heated debates, two points of view emerged: "interventionist" and..."noninterventionist." As Prince Sabahaddin mentioned, interventionists were the majority. This faction was led by İsmail Kemal. Ahmed Rıza was the leader of the noninterventionist group. In this way the congress divided into two fronts.²¹

Moreover, Yahya Kemal shed light in his memoirs on the discussions at the congress:

İsmail Kemal was the preeminent person of the congress.... The congress was divided into two factions when the intervention of a Great Power such as Britain came into question. The followers of İsmail Kemal and Sabahaddin regarded demanding foreign intervention to end the Hamidian rule as a civilized action. Ahmed Rıza, Doctor Nazım, Halil Ganem, and their friends fully repudiated this. In effect the real rivalry at the congress was between Ahmed Rıza and İsmail Kemal.²²

Soon after the congress, on April 16, 1902, Sabahaddin published an article in *Osmanlı* about the dividing lines that surfaced at the congress:

The minority faction declared as follows: "The Constitution is the guarantor for all kinds of happiness and salvation of the diverse peoples of the Ottoman Empire. We do not need the Great Powers' assistance. Moreover, this assistance will be unfavorable for us.... This kind of assistance will weigh heavily on our national honor.... We should rely on and believe in ourselves." The majority: "The Constitution is our noble wish. The intervention of Europe will occur inevitably.... The peoples of the Ottoman Empire will demand European assistance in unison."²³

These debates were also portrayed in a more recent study:

Although the delegates were unanimously opposed to the Hamidian rule, they suggested completely different courses of action to change the regime. There were two problems at the center of these debates. İsmail Kemal proposed collaboration with the army, with

the conviction that it was not possible to make a revolution solely by propaganda and the press. The other issue was on the intervention of foreign powers.²⁴

Another monograph further stated that the congress divided the Young Turks into “interventionists” and “noninterventionists”: “İsmail Kemal represented the former and Ahmed Rıza the latter.” İsmail Kemal was the head of the interventionists, as Hilmi Ziya Ülken underlined, and the other faction was led by Ahmed Rıza.²⁵

Soon after the congress the interventionists established the Ottoman Freedom-Lovers Committee (*Osmanlı Hürriyetperveran Cemiyeti*) under the leadership of İsmail Kemal.²⁶ This also corroborates my conclusion that Kemal was leading the interventionist front. After all, his senior position made him better suited than Sabahaddin to lead the interventionist group at the congress: he was fifteen years older than Ahmed Rıza and thirty-five years older than Sabahaddin. Besides, he had been a colleague of Midhat Paşa and previously had been offered the leadership of the committee by İshak Sükuti.²⁷ It is important to note in this light that seven years later Ahmed Rıza would be replaced by İsmail Kemal, not Sabahaddin, as the chair of the parliament during the March 31 Movement.²⁸

To argue against the divide between the “centralists” and the “decentralists” that is said to have occurred at the congress it is imperative to note that Sabahaddin began shifting his focus to decentralism and set out to defend decentralist ideas only around 1906, not on the eve of the 1902 congress.²⁹ Also, Sabahaddin established the League of Private Initiative and Decentralization not just after the congress but instead in 1906.

To sum up, the Young Turks discussed mainly two issues during the congress. The first was proposed by İsmail Kemal and related to the collaboration with military forces. The second debate was about the Great Powers’ assistance in bringing down Hamidian rule, for which İsmail Kemal and Damad Mahmud Paşa had been striving since 1900.³⁰ Ahmed Rıza, however, was the leader of the “noninterventionist” group at the congress and an opponent of any application of violence.

A TURKISH NATIONALIST OR AN OTTOMAN PATRIOT?

Existing studies mostly characterize Ahmed Rıza as a Turkish nationalist, as noted.³¹ My own purpose here is to reexamine this approach and focus on Ahmed Rıza within the context of Ottomanist ideology.

Rıza published a programmatic text in the first issue of *Mechveret* and explained the objectives of the committee: "We do not demand reforms for any particular province. We demand reforms for the whole empire. We do not demand reforms for any specific group, such as Jews, Christians, or Muslims. We demand reforms for all Ottomans."³²

According to Ahmed Rıza, whatever their religion or nation, all inhabitants of the empire were "Ottoman." "Without discriminating against any nation or religion," he called for the "unification of all Ottomans" to regenerate the empire by restoring the constitutional and parliamentary regime that would represent every Ottoman.³³ The transition from autocracy to constitutional monarchy not only would provide a rejuvenation of the state but would obstruct nationalist currents within the empire, for which absolutism prepared the ground.³⁴ "Instead of serving the absolutist regime by struggling against each other," Ahmed Rıza stressed that the different elements in the Ottoman Empire "must unite to change the Hamidian regime."³⁵ Although the "Hamidian rule alienated the Christians from the Ottoman Empire," "the most pressing duty of the day" was "to invite each and every Ottoman to unite." He defended the position that this was the only way to dethrone Abdülhamid II, who "sought to separate Christians from Muslims."³⁶

Nevertheless, this particular emphasis on the unity of Muslim and non-Muslim elements in the empire sometimes caused tensions and factionalisms within the Young Turk movement. In this context growing disputes on the Armenian Question generated a harsh debate between Ahmed Rıza and Mizancı Murad. The key difference was Murad's support for the Hamidian regime in regard to the Armenian issue,³⁷ whereas Rıza accused the palace of the massacres and sought to collaborate with Armenian organizations against Hamidian rule.³⁸ Moreover, he showed a similar attitude on the Cretan question. In contrast to Murad and his followers, Ahmed Rıza held the Hamidian "autocracy" responsible for the uprising in Crete, rather than the Cretans or the European powers.³⁹ Furthermore, he often warned the Young Turks against any Turkist tendency by stating that "it is harmful to propagandize Turkishness or Islam in our country because the people are not composed of a single element, religion, and nation."⁴⁰ For Ahmed Rıza, the peoples of the Ottoman Empire would find the salvation of their country only in the union of all Ottomans. This staunch Ottomanist position would evoke criticisms directed at him by the Turkists of subsequent generations. For instance, Kazım Karabekir portrayed him as "cosmopolitan" and "a person who completely lost his nationalist feelings."⁴¹ Yahya Kemal described Rıza as "too much Ottoman" and noted that he did not adopt Turkish identity.⁴²

Erik J. Zürcher argues that the Ottomanist position of Ahmed Rıza started to change at the turn of the century and that he endorsed Turkish nationalism in time.⁴³ M. Şükrü Hanioglu contends that Turkism was one of the most crucial common denominators of the groups that would constitute Şura-yı Ümmet (Council of the People) in 1902, including Ahmed Rıza's *Mesveret* (Consultation).⁴⁴ He also asserts that the Young Turks had already begun to emphasize the priority and importance of the Turkish element against others within the empire before 1902. Hanioglu bases his argument on the idea laid out in *Mesveret* as follows.⁴⁵ "Among the developed nations and even those that are not developed, the right to rule is in the hands of that nation which constitutes the largest community in a society. Why should Turkey be an exception to this rule?"⁴⁶ According to him, their tendency toward Turkism strengthened step by step until Turkism finally crystallized as the Young Turk movement's predominant ideology between 1902 and 1905.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, by late 1907 the leadership of the Young Turk organization perceived the difficulty in carrying out a revolution by promoting a "strong Turkist ideology." Therefore the Young Turks temporarily abandoned Turkism, and in Hanioglu's view this should be viewed as a tactical move.⁴⁸

The text in *Mesveret* that underscored the priority of the Turkish element within the empire and thus formed the mainstay of Hanioglu's approach, however, was in fact not an article published in the newspaper: it was a reader's letter that had been sent to the paper. Furthermore, the editorial board of the newspaper annotated the letter, although presumably the annotation was dictated by Ahmed Rıza himself: "We received several letters on the Armenian issue. They are mainly concerned with aims and intensions of the Armenians. We have published one of them as a sample. These letters complain about...Armenian demands for autonomy.... We request an explanation on this issue from Armenian committees in order to avoid any careless statements and hesitation."⁴⁹

Considering this letter as a mirror for the political thought of the Young Turk movement is quite problematic. Hanioglu's claim about Şura-yı Ümmet's Turkism is also debatable because one of the most important components of the newspaper was *Kürdistan*, published between 1898 and 1902 by Mikdad Midhat Bedirhan.

Nevertheless, Ottomanism, Turkism, and Islamism cannot be sharply separated from one another, as Hanioglu pointed out, because each of them included elements of the others. Therefore some aspects within Ottomanism later would also contribute to shape Turkish nationalism. This perspective facilitates an understanding of how the pioneers of Turkism emerged from within the Young Turk movement. Moreover,

Hanioglu's approach illuminates the existence of Islamist and Turkist elements within the Young Turk organization. This viewpoint also explains foundations such as Uhuuvet-i İslamiye Cemiyeti (Association of Islamic Brotherhood),⁵⁰ which had been founded by the CPU before 1908 with the aim of building unity among Muslims.

It is important, however, to note in this context that Ottomanism, Turkism, and Islamism were political projects. Thus each of them determined separate regime strategies and alliance politics. Obscuring differences among these three ideologies complicates our understanding of the Young Turks' political projects, regime strategies, and alliance politics in this period. When Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism are analyzed as political projects and the regime strategies of the Young Turks are taken into consideration, it can be asserted that the idea of the adoption of Ottomanism as a tactical move is controversial. The crucial point is that Turkism did not provide a purposeful political project for the Young Turk movement and consequently did not evoke a convenient politics of alliance after 1902, when the major goal of the Young Turks was the promulgation of the constitution and the dethronement of Abdülhamid II during the years leading up to 1908. Thus Turkism could never find its expression in the programmatic texts of the Young Turk movement. In a similar vein, despite the existence of Turkist elements within the Young Turk opposition, Yusuf Akçura's work *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Three Types of Policy, the first manifesto of Turkish nationalism) did not receive any attention from the Young Turks, illustrating the gulf between Akçura's work and the goals of the constitutionalist movement.⁵¹ Shifts in the dominant ideologies of the Second Constitutional period (such as Islamism and Turkism after the Balkan Wars and the Armenian expulsion, respectively) corroborate that Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism should be analyzed in the context of the political project/regime strategy. The framework of this political project/regime strategy is much more decisive and explanatory for conceiving the ideological orientations of the Young Turk movement than personal attitudes. For instance, even Behaettin Şakir, who christened his son "Gökalp,"⁵² was personally a Turkish nationalist but could still write scripts that were quite harmonious with the political agenda of the Young Turk movement before 1907. The following can hardly be characterized as a tactical move:

Our occupation and program are obvious.... It is to unite... Turkish, Kurdish, Bulgarian, Arab, Armenian, etc., citizens, a unity

that will be attained only by a constitutional government. This country belongs neither to the Turks nor to Bulgarians or Arabs. It belongs to everyone who calls himself an Ottoman. Whoever accepts and confirms this reality, regardless of his religion and nation, is a fellow compatriot. Anyone who thinks on the contrary, that is, whoever seeks to divide the country into different nations, is our opponent and enemy, even if he be Turkish. Unlike the other committees of various Muslim and Christian nations, ours is not a “nationalist” party, heeding only nationalist interests.⁵³

In the light of these notes on the ideological positions of the Young Turk movement and Ahmed Rıza, it is no coincidence that he did not participate in the associations such as Türk Derneği (Turkish Association), Türk Yurdu (Turkish Homeland), and Türk Ocağı (Turkish Hearth), all of which preached cultural or political Turkism in the Second Constitutional period. More importantly, he criticized the Armenian and Greek expulsions during World War I, when he was a member and later the head of the Ottoman senate.⁵⁴ Rıza wrote that he was completely against Turkism because “it separate[d] Turks from the other Ottoman elements and consequently ruin[ed] fraternity among them.” In his view “Turkism not only [was] hazardous for the state policy but also [was] contrary to the laws.”⁵⁵ As a result it is difficult to picture Ahmed Rıza as a Turkish nationalist: he should be considered in the frame of Ottomanism.⁵⁶

DISAPPROVAL OF THE USE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

As noted, existing literature mostly focuses on Ahmed Rıza within a militarist and pro-coup context. Current studies underline that he and his followers initiated an authoritarian, pro-coup, and militarist political line. But Ahmed Rıza and Sabahaddin were indeed thoroughly distanced from the positions attributed to them. In contrast to Sabahaddin and İsmail Kemal, who established the Ottoman Freedom-Lovers Committee with the purpose of staging a coup d'état,⁵⁷ Rıza opposed the use of means of violence and refused to take part in any such measure. Therefore he took great pains to separate himself from the “activists” within the Young Turk movement.

Ahmed Rıza's reluctance to employ militarist solutions drew criticism over his leadership within the constitutionalist movement. For instance, Tunalı Hilmi criticized Rıza for not being a proponent of the revolution

and action and believed that the present situation called for nothing less than bloodshed.⁵⁸ Some figures within the Young Turk movement believed that the most direct way to reach “salvation” was an uprising, stating that there was no other way.⁵⁹ Ahmed Rıza presented them with a clear answer: “If the people do not have the ability to understand the importance of the entente of ideas and the progress of civilizations, then the words union, freedom, and law will be degraded to mere phantasms of poetic and desperate actions. No use or benefit would be obtained from the change in administration and government.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, in a lengthy article entitled “İhtilal” (Revolution) he returned the attacks of the activists:

Most of the letters that I have received from Istanbul and the provinces...stress the necessity of the revolution. They say that “the Committee of Union and Progress does not know its real mission. It does not act.... What nation ever restored freedom without the use of weapons?”...In the old days people were accustomed to attack the palace, shouting, “We do not want [this]” without being aware of what they were doing and why they were rising. With such blindfolded uprisings, it is impossible to make a grand revolution today. The people should have a well-constituted idea and a grand desire, which should channel the people to a political goal. The ancient Greeks, Romans, and Arabs had such goals. The French Revolution was the product of century-old publication activities.... It is easy to agitate the public. Nonetheless, it is difficult to tranquillize a heedless and ill-advised revolution.... The people...revolted in Yemen, Syria, Crete, and Albania. Nevertheless, this rage and agitation remained merely as provocation; they did not evolve into political revolutions.... The dethronement of Sultan Abdülaziz and the promulgation of the Constitution effected grand change. However, this was a revolution made by the endeavors of a few persons and was destroyed together with them. To avoid its ruin, it became imperative to make the entire folk to love the Constitution and be aware of the necessity of a constitutional regime. In England the Constitution is not written in a book but in the memory of the people. It became a right and a property of the people. Everyone in England understands the importance, necessity, and holiness of the Constitution.... Therefore, it is necessary to educate and awaken public opinion and orient all Ottomans to a definite political goal.⁶¹

A counterargument can be suggested: Ahmed Rıza's view on violence and activism transformed after the 1902 congress. For instance, Mardin states that Rıza began leaning toward the idea of activism and seeking a theoretical explanation for militarism, especially after 1905.⁶² On balance, however, Rıza was relegated to a passive position within the committee, which obliged him to a great extent to approve the decisions made by the men of action in this period.⁶³ Nevertheless, he tried to distance himself from this particular activism. In his pamphlet *Vazife ve Mesuliyet* (Mission and Responsibility), which was published in this period, he wrote that progress and civilization were contingent upon law and order.⁶⁴ On the eve of 1908 he warned the men of action that this activism would not provide the intended results: "Today the people do not seek their freedom.... Abdülhamid tyrannizes and oppresses the people.... However, he harms the people by means of a group within the people. The people do not move except to destroy and kill their fellow citizens."⁶⁵

The theoretical basis of Ahmed Rıza's attitude on violence undoubtedly stemmed from positivism, which rejected the employment of any means that could interrupt the proper progress of the society. It is important to note in this context that he wrote in *Mechveret* as follows: "We want to work, not to overthrow the ruling dynasty, which we consider necessary for the maintenance of good order, but rather to propagate the notion of progress through which we want a peaceful triumph. Our motto is 'Order and Progress.' We find horror in concessions obtained through means of violence."⁶⁶ He also had a pragmatic reason for his position against the use of violent means. According to Ahmed Rıza, an upheaval would bring the Great Powers' intervention: "A revolution without the unity between the Muslims and the Christians in terms of ideas and ideals would be very harmful for our state, which is under foreign intervention."⁶⁷

OBJECTION TO THE GREAT POWERS' INTERVENTION

His objection to the European intervention was one of the most distinctive features of Ahmed Rıza's political attitude. He had placed a strong emphasis on this topic since joining the ranks of the Young Turk movement. For instance, he wrote that they opposed the direct intervention of foreign powers in Ottoman authority.⁶⁸

Rıza pointed out that any intervention by the Great Powers would be detrimental to the Ottoman Empire rather than being profitable. Therefore he fully repudiated the idea of intervention by the Great Powers.⁶⁹ Furthermore, instead of leaning toward European assistance, he sought to promote unity within the empire: “It is obvious that a dethronement with the assistance of foreigners would result in destructive conditions and concessions. Had the Ottomans united without discriminating between religion and nationality...there would be no need for interposition and intervention by the foreigners.”⁷⁰

Ahmed Rıza’s objection to foreign intervention was also a significant source for his opposition to the Hamidian regime. He accused the Hamidian rule of protecting the foreign companies.⁷¹ Thus his objection to Great Powers intervention also had an economic aspect:

The only Ottoman feature of the Ottoman Bank is its name. Save for its name, it does not have any national designation. Both its administration and capital belong to foreigners. If the National Maritime Line [*idare-i mahsusa*] fails to transmit the percentages that had been pledged for a few years...the Bank would seize first the ferries and then its management, in which case the government would not have the right to sue the Bank.⁷²

It could be argued that Ahmed Rıza’s opposition to foreign interference contained a Turkist approach, as objection to foreign intervention would later become a significant characteristic of some variants of Turkish nationalism. His opposition did not stem from Turkish nationalism, however: he based his objection to the Great Powers’ intervention on the dichotomies of “East” versus “West” and “Islam” versus “Christianity” rather than national loyalties: “The deep abyss between the two parts of the world has been growing day by day, since the Crusades, forcing the peoples of the East to continue to reject everything that comes from the Christian West.”⁷³

I wanted the Constitution to be enforced and the capitulations to be abrogated. These demands were not in harmony with the eastern policy of the Europeans. Some people said that “Turks do not put any effort to this matter. Had they taken any course of action they would have attained affinity with Europe.” This is not true. Europe does not support Islam. There have been numerous

Islamic revolts in Yemen, Egypt, and India. In European newspapers there is not even a single word in favor of these revolts.⁷⁴

The Crusades...encouraged cruelty...and exhausted the military power of the Islamic states that maintained balance, stability, and confidence. They threw the social and political life into disorder, paralyzed industry and commerce, and finally interrupted the intellectual movement that developed from the seventh century on with much enthusiastic zeal. In addition, the Crusades created a disastrous moral effect on the Muslim world [against Christian Europe] that still continues.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the dichotomies between East and West or Islam and Christianity never transformed into an anti-Western attitude in the political thought of Ahmed Rıza:

We are bound to France by the oeuvres that stand on solid basis that are superior to temporary French politicians...I can only have admiration for the nations that have produced so many masterpieces. When a thought of revolt against Europe inspires me, I seek to follow the tradition of European thinkers. And if I vehemently protest against the acts of some of its rulers, it is because I find them unworthy of the country honored by Descartes, Bacon, Leibniz, Hume, Diderot, Kant, Montesquieu, Condorcet, Bichat, Newton, Auguste Comte, and many others.⁷⁶

Rıza stressed that his book attempted to show how eastern societies, due to the eastern policy of the West, more readily began to refuse every development that originated in the West.⁷⁷

It is also important to note the hierarchy in Ahmed Rıza's thought between his objection to the use of political violence and his opposition to foreign intervention. From this viewpoint the objection to the Great Powers' assistance was more vital than the opposition to the use of political violence. He approved, though reluctantly, the declaration of the 1907 Congress, which included armed actions. Nonetheless, it must be noted in this context that the precedence given to his objection to foreign interposition should not trivialize his criticism against the use of political violence. As pointed out at the outset Ahmed Rıza always took pains to be coherent in his political arguments and positivist ideas. Aside from this

theoretical basis, as an intellectual gradually losing his power and influence, he had to proceed with the men of action within the movement, especially after 1905.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

After striving many years in the opposition movement, Ahmed Rıza lost his power and was relegated to a passive position within the committee by the *actionnaire* generation that came after him. He was reduced from being a charismatic leader of the CUP to being an eminent member and became a respected elder who had very little influence in decision making.⁷⁹ His attitude on the use of political violence and activism no doubt played an important role in the change of his position within the organization.⁸⁰

Eventually Ahmed Rıza did not have a significant impact on the CUP decision that ignited the revolution in 1908.⁸¹ Nonetheless, he was the most prestigious figure in the early stages of the Second Constitutional period because of his longtime efforts in the opposition movement against Hamidian rule. He was named “Ebu’l-ahrar” (father of the freedom-lovers) in the welcoming ceremony that was conducted for him when he returned to the Ottoman Empire in the immediate aftermath of the 1908 revolution, after nineteen years of absence.⁸² Shortly thereafter he was elected as chair of the parliament,⁸³ a position that was ineffective in policy making.

Ahmed Rıza did not directly participate in practical politics and played the role of a statesman during the Second Constitutional period. In addition to his particular stress on the unification of ethnic and religious elements and Ottomanism, he underscored the importance of the constitutional regime and the rule of law throughout this period.⁸⁴ In accordance with his emphasis on the supremacy of law and constitutionalism he did not hesitate to criticize the CUP governments. The focal point of this criticism was the “authoritarian and despotic” attitude of the committee.⁸⁵ In addition he condemned the participation of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.⁸⁶

Ahmed Rıza insisted on his staunchly Ottomanist position even when the dominant ideology of the empire later shifted to Islamism and Turkish nationalism.⁸⁷ He contended that Turkism not only ruined the feeling of kinship among the citizens but also contradicted the laws. He opposed every initiative that could harm the coexistence of different religious or ethnic elements in the empire. It was in this context and from

a supranational perspective that he accused the CUP government of the Armenian expulsion. Although Rıza did not assume a position in policy making, he still headed the Ottoman senate. In official settings he underlined the Ottoman citizenship of the Armenians and that any occurrence of insurgence should be handled through legal means.⁸⁸

All in all, one of the most interesting aspects of Ahmed Rıza's case is the strong consistency in both his political thought and practice throughout the long period in which he was politically active. As noted, his opposition to the Hamidian regime was quadripartite, consisting of constitutionalism, Ottomanism, objection to the Great Power intervention, and disapproval of the use of political violence. He carried on his steadfast Ottomanist stance in a political conjuncture in which the CUP and many Young Turks long embraced Turkish nationalism. Thus the reasons why he could not occupy any position in the elite circles of the early Republican period were shaped by the growing gulf between his Ottomanist position and the nationalist paradigm of the new regime. In the end his emphasis on the rule of law and constitutionalism not only opposed the absolutist rule of Abdülhamid II but also was critical of the autocratic policies of the CUP. At a time when ideological and political identities were fluid and permeable, his undeviating line was exceptional.

NOTES

1. Ziyad Ebuzziya, "Ahmed Rıza Bey," 124.
2. Ahmet Bedevi Kuran, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İnkılap Hareketleri ve Milli Mücadele*, 452.
3. Ahmed Rıza, *Meclis-i Mebusan ve Ayan Reisi Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları* (hereafter *Anılar*), 9–10.
4. Ahmet Bedevi Kuran, *İnkılap Tarihimiz ve Jön Türkler*, 27; Yuriy Aşatoviç Petrosyan, *Sovyet Gözüyle Jön Türkler*, 177.
5. Ahmed Rıza, *Anılar*, 11; Ebuzziya, "Ahmed Rıza Bey," 124; Kuran, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İnkılap Hareketleri ve Milli Mücadele*, 153.
6. Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu, 1890–1918*, 86–89.
7. Several attempts were made to organize a Young Turk congress in this period. For an example, see Ali Fahri, *Yeni Osmanlılar Kongresi* (lithograph), 1316.
8. François Georgeon, *Abdulhamid II*, 382–83; M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 44; Kuran, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İnkılap Hareketleri ve Milli Mücadele*, 216.
9. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 3–4; Kuran, *İnkılap Tarihimiz ve Jön Türkler*, 152; Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*, 62–63.
10. For example, see Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Gelişmeler (1836–1938): Kanun-ı Esasi ve Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2003), 102.

11. Georgeon, *Abdulhamid II*, 381.
12. Edmondson Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 72–73.
13. François Georgeon, *Aux origines du nationalisme turc*, 15, 16–25.
14. Suavi Aydın, “İki İttihat-Terakki,” 122 (my translation).
15. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 203.
16. Doğan Özlem, “Türkiye’de Pozitivizm ve Siyaset,” in Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, ed., *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce, vol. 3: Modernleşme ve Batıcılık*, 3rd ed. (Istanbul: İletişim, 2004), 459 (my translation).
17. Tanık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler, vol. 1: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi (1908–1918)*, 3rd ed. (Istanbul: İletişim, 2009), 53. See also Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Gelişmeler*, 104–6.
18. İdris Küçükömer, *Batılışma & Düzenin Yabancılaşması*, 84–88.
19. Şerif Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations,” 180–88.
20. Sommerville Story, ed., *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 306.
21. Kuran, *İnkılap Tarihimiz ve Jön Türkler*, 151–52.
22. Yahya Kemal, *Çocukluğum, Gençliğim, Siyasi ve Edebi Hatıralarım*, 190–206 (my translation).
23. Prens Sabahaddin, “Yabancı Müdahalesi Üzerine,” 46 (my translation).
24. Petrosyan, *Sovyet Gözüyle Jön Türkler*, 217.
25. Hilmi Ziya Ülken, *Türkiye’de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi*, 133.
26. Hacısalihoğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu*, 99.
27. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük*, 366.
28. Story, *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 335.
29. Hacısalihoğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu*, 129–30. See also Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 82–90.
30. For further information, see Erdem Sönmez, *Ahmed Rıza*, 86–97.
31. For instance, see Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 90–93.
32. “Notre programme,” *Mechveret (supplément français)* 1, December 1, 1895, 1. In another study I have emphasized that Ahmed Rıza wrote this text. See Sönmez, *Ahmed Rıza*, 98.
33. Ahmed Rıza, “İfade-i Mahsusa,” *Meşveret* 24, 25 Rebi’ülâhîr 1315 (September 23, 1897), 1; Ahmed Rıza, “İcmal-i Ahval,” *Meşveret* 13, 12 Muharrem 1313 (June 23, 1896), 2.
34. Hacısalihoğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu*, 82.
35. Ahmed Rıza, “İcmal-i Ahval,” *Meşveret* 15, 12 Safer 1313, (July 23, 1896), 2.
36. Ahmed Rıza, “İcmal-i Ahval,” *Meşveret* 19, 12 Rebi’ülâhîr 1314 (September 23, 1896), 1–2.
37. Suavi Aydın and Ömer Türkoğlu, “İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti Programının ve Eyleminin Radikal Dönüşümü,” 264; Petrosyan, *Sovyet Gözüyle Jön Türkler*, 190–91.
38. Ahmed Rıza, “İcmal-i Ahval,” *Meşveret* 2, 28 Cemâziyelâhîr 1313 (December 16, 1895), 1–2. Also see Ahmed Rıza, “L’Origine des Massacres,” *Mechveret (supplément français)* 19, September 15, 1896, 4–5; Ahmed Rıza, “Agitation arménienne,” *Mechveret (supplément français)* 42, September 1, 1897, 3–4.
39. Ahmed Rıza, “İcmal-i Ahval,” *Meşveret* 16, 27 Safer 1313 (August 8, 1896), 1–2; Ahmed Rıza, “Girit,” *Meşveret* 12, 26 Zilhicce 1313 (June 8, 1896), 1.

40. Ahmed Rıza, "İcmal-i Ahval," *Meşveret* 24, 25 Rebi'ülâhîr 1315 (September 23, 1897), 4.
41. Kazım Karabekir, *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, 293.
42. Kemal, *Çocukluğum, Gençliğim, Siyasi ve Edebi Hatıralarım*, 208.
43. Erik J. Zürcher, "Kemalist Düşüncenin Osmanlı Kaynakları," 48.
44. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 39–40; M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "Turkish Nationalism and the Young Turks, 1889–1908," 90–91. For a similar emphasis, see Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, "Hürriyet'in Basması Kadar Basını da Ünlüdür," 188.
45. Hanioglu, "Turkish Nationalism and the Young Turks," 89.
46. M. A., "Osmanlı İttihadı," *Meşveret* 5, 17 Şaban 1313 (September 1, 1896), 1.
47. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 173.
48. Ibid., 295–302; Hanioglu, "Turkish Nationalism and the Young Turks," 94.
49. "Meşveret," *Meşveret* 5, 17 Şaban 1313 (February 2, 1896), 2.
50. Kudret Emiroğlu and Çiğdem Ö. Emiroğlu, eds., *Osmanlı Terakki ve İttihad Cemiyeti Umur-ı Dâbiliye Şubesi Memuru Dr. Bahaeddin*, Tahrirat nos. 366 and 372.
51. Kemal, *Çocukluğum, Gençliğim, Siyasi ve Edebi Hatıralarım*, 192.
52. Murat Bardakçı, *Talat Paşa'nın Evrak-ı Metrûkesi*, 256.
53. Emiroğlu and Emiroğlu, *Osmanlı Terakki ve İttihad Cemiyeti Umur-ı Dâbiliye Şubesi Memuru Dr. Bahaeddin*, Tahrirat no. 349.
54. See *Meclis-i Ayan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 3, İçtima Senesi 5, vol. 1, 11. İnikad, 21 Teşrin-i Sâni 1334 (1918), 117, 120.
55. Rıza, *Anılar*, 78–79.
56. For further information, see Sönmez, *Ahmed Rıza*, 97–102, 114–17.
57. Kuran, *İnkılap Taribimiz ve Jön Türkler*, 155–56; Story, *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 220; Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 76; Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*, 65; Hacısalihioğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu*, 129; Petrosyan, *Sovyet Gözüyle Jön Türkler*, 223–24.
58. Sabri Ateş, *Tunalı Hilmi Bey*, 58.
59. Ibid., 160–61.
60. Ahmed Rıza, "Mukaddime," *Meşveret* 1, 13 Cemâziyelâhîr 1313 (December 1, 1895), 1. Also see Ahmed Rıza, "L'inaction des Jeunes Turcs," *Mechveret (supplément français)* 135, December 1, 1902, 1; Ahmed Rıza, "Confusion de pouvoirs en Turquie," *Mechveret (supplément français)* 2, December 15, 1895, 1; Ahmed Rıza, "İcmal-i Ahval," *Meşveret* 6, 2 Ramazan 1313 (February 15, 1896), 1.
61. Ahmed Rıza, "İhtilal," *Meşveret* 29, 21 Şaban 1315 (January 15, 1898), 2.
62. Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri*, 179.
63. See Sönmez, *Ahmed Rıza*, 118–23.
64. Ahmed Rıza, *Vazife ve Mesuliyet: Üçüncü Cüz*, 3.
65. Ahmed Rıza, *Vazife ve Mesuliyet: Birinci Cüz*, 7–9 (my translation).
66. "Notre programme," *Mechveret (supplément français)*, 1.
67. Rıza, "İhtilal," *Meşveret*, 3.
68. "Notre programme," *Mechveret (supplément français)*, 1.
69. Ahmed Rıza, "Mısır," *Meşveret* 9, 18 Şevval 1313 (April 2, 1896), 1.
70. Ahmed Rıza, "İcmal-i Ahval," *Meşveret* 18, 27 Rebi'ülevvel 1314 (September 8, 1896), 18, 2. See also Ahmed Rıza, "İcmal-i Ahval," *Meşveret* 4, 10 Şaban 1313 (January 26, 1896), 1; Rıza, *Vazife ve Mesuliyet: Birinci Cüz*, 4.

71. Barış Alp Özden, "Ahmet Rıza," 123.
72. Ahmed Rıza, "Kuvve-i Bahriyemiz," *Osmanlı* 13, 1 Muharrem 1316 (June 1, 1898), 1. See also Ahmed Rıza, "A propos du jubilé," *Mechveret (supplément français)* 104, October 1, 1900, 1.
73. Ahmed Rıza, *La faillite morale de la politique occidentale en Orient*, 5–6.
74. Rıza, *Anular*, 23.
75. Rıza, *La faillite morale*, 65.
76. *Ibid.*, 15.
77. *Ibid.*, 19, 27, 29. See also Ömer Turan, "Oryantalizm, Sömürgecilik Eleştirisi ve Ahmed Rıza," 6–45.
78. For further information, see Sönmez, *Ahmed Rıza*, 107–14.
79. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 139.
80. Sönmez, *Ahmed Rıza*, 119.
81. Celal Bayar, *Ben de Yazdım (Milli Mücadele'ye Giriş)*, 196–97; Hacısalihoglu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu*, 150.
82. Sönmez, *Ahmed Rıza*, 124.
83. *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 1, İçtima Senesi 1, vol. 1, 5. İnikad, 13 Kanun-ı Evvel 1324 (1908), 50.
84. For example, see *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 1, İçtima Senesi 1, vol. 1, 5. İnikad, 13 Kanun-ı Evvel 1324 (1908), 51–52; *Meclis-i Âyan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 3, İçtima Senesi 5, vol. 1, 2. İnikad, 19 Teşrin-i Evvel 1334 (1918), 8–9.
85. Rıza, *Anular*, 44; *Meclis-i Âyan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 3, İçtima Senesi 3, vol. 2, 38. İnikad, 5 Mart 1333 (1917), 86; *Meclis-i Âyan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 3, İçtima Senesi 1, vol. 1, 21. İnikad, 7 Şubat 1330 (1914), 332; *Meclis-i Âyan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 3, İçtima Senesi 4, vol. 1, 7. İnikad, 26 Teşrin-i Sâni 1333 (1917), 87–88; *Meclis-i Âyan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 3, İçtima Senesi 3, vol. 2, 48. İnikad, 24 Mart 1333 (1917), 324–26.
86. *Meclis-i Âyan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 3, İçtima Senesi 2, vol. 1, 23. İnikad, 14 Kanun-ı Sâni 1331 (1915), 397.
87. Sina Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ve Milli Mücadele-I* 17.
88. *Meclis-i Âyan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 3, İçtima Senesi 5, vol. 1, 11. İnikad, 21 Teşrin-i Sâni 1334 (1918), 117, 12. See also Sabahattin Özel and Işık Çakan Hacıbrahimoglu, *Osmanlı'dan Milli Mücadele'ye Seçilmiş Mülakatlar*, 202.