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***Mapping out a Liberal Programme of Imperialism:
The Liberal Party on the Eastern Question
and British Policy in the Berlin Congress and beyond***

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In his first ministry (1868-74) Gladstone achieved important reforms in domestic affairs. But Conservative reaction to reforms and a weak foreign policy defeated him in the general election of 1874. The Liberal leader then retreated into a life of quasi-retirement from politics. In 1876, Gladstone published a pamphlet entitled *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Questions of the East*, attacking the Disraeli Government for its indifference to the brutal repression by the Turks of the Bulgarian revolt. The book was quite a hit,¹ which sent Gladstone back to active politics. From 1876 to 1880, Gladstone, with a strong sense of individual duty, made the Eastern Question the main business of his life. Gladstone's campaign involved his countrymen in a heated debate on the Eastern Question, and clarified the party line between the Liberals and the Conservatives in regard of foreign policy.² It was mainly due to him, and to those who acted under his influence and guidance, that the policy of the British Government during the earlier stages of the Russo-Turkish War took its direction. His renewed attack on Disraeli's pro-Turkish and generally aggressive imperialist policy in the Midlothian campaign brought the Liberals back to power in 1880, though, according to himself, he did it without a thought of leadership.³

¹ The book was published on 6 September 1876, and 200,000 copies were sold by the end of the month.

² For further discussion see G. D. Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question: Missolonghi to Gallipoli* (London: University of London Press, 1971), 153-54. Lord Argyll once said that on the subject of Turkey one could not trust any political party, and that before 1878 the Eastern Question had no bearing upon domestic politics. See Duke of Argyll, *The Eastern Question* (London: Strahan & Co., 1879), vol. I, xi-xii, and *Our Responsibilities for Turkey: Facts and Memories of Forty Years* (London: John Murray, 1896), 158.

³ British Library (BL), Add. MSS. 44790, f.111, Gladstone, '1879-94'. Also John Brooke and Mary Sorensen eds., *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone*, vol. I: *Autobiographica* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971), 113. Lord Hartington, the Liberal leader in the House of Commons, wrote in early 1878: 'I do trust that Mr. Gladstone may find it in his power to resume the leadership, at all events until this crisis is over. He must be aware that it is he who has formed and guided the opinion of the Liberal Party throughout these transactions, and I think that he ought to be at its head.' Hartington to Grenville, 29 Jan. 1878, quoted in Edmond Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville George Leveson Gower, Second Earl Granville* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1905), vol. II, 174. Hartington was put in an awkward position by Gladstone's independent and charismatic activities. Some understood Gladstone to be a political agitator during the Bulgarian crisis and the following years. See Richard Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question, 1875-1878* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), 384. For Hartington's complaints about his difficulties in Parliament and in the Liberal Party because of the active part Gladstone took on the Turkish affairs, see Public Record Office (PRO), PRO30/29/26A/2, Hartington to Granville, 5 Oct. 1878. For further discussion see Marvin Swartz, *The Politics of British Foreign Policy in the Era of Disraeli and Gladstone* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 109.

During the late 1870s, the Eastern Question was, as Gladstone observed, the question of dispute between the two parties and the question out of which every other question grew collaterally.⁴ In his view, the action of the Liberals as a party began with the revival of the Eastern Question after Russia waged war upon Turkey in 1876. And the Liberal policy in the East was, as he defined, ‘the cause of liberty and justice.’⁵ The Eastern Question was that which made the Whigs ‘liberal’ in diplomacy, but it also revealed how difficult it was to distinguish themselves in practice from the Conservatives as far as British foreign policy was concerned. Whether there was a natural connection between Liberalism and a high morality in international politics was a question that defied absolute solution. But it had not been so obvious as it was after the Liberals as a government began to execute the Treaty of Berlin in 1880. While it is a truism to say that the Liberals were not so naïve and idealistic as to reject imperial heritage, the question has not been fully explored that how and when they came to terms with the necessity of keeping Britain imperial.

1. Ideology vis-à-vis Realpolitik: The Liberal Views of the Eastern Question before the Berlin Congress

The Liberal Party had not expressed their views fully on the Eastern Question during Gladstone’s first premiership (1868-74). The reason was simply that it was not politic for any government voluntarily to raise the Eastern Question, which had for years been the nightmare of all the Great Powers in Europe. It was then assumed that the Liberals as the Opposition could have but little to criticize the policy of the Conservative Government on this affair, as they had no policy of their own. The Liberals’ policy in regard of the Eastern Question was understood to be no more than letting matters drift or joining hands with Russia and fighting Turkey. To a great extent, this was true.

Gladstone was very reputed for his detestation for Islam, a feeling that accounted for his lack of practical or integral policy towards the Ottoman Empire. He was particularly outspoken, for instance, in his accusation of the Muslims for committing atrocities, while ignoring those committed by the Bulgarians.⁶ His vehement demand was much more expressive than useful that the Turks should be cleared out ‘bag and baggage...from the province they have desolated and profaned.’ Foremost among Gladstone and his followers’ few general ideas about the solution of the Eastern Question before 1878 was rejecting an Anglo-Turkish alliance against Russia. To the Radicals, it was a partnership in no degree necessary to Britain’s interests, and degrading to her fame as a Christian nation.⁷ On 2 January 1878 Lord Carnarvon spoke at the Colonial Office, publishing his confidence that Britain would not ally with Turkey to make war on Russia.⁸ The Liberals were much refreshed by the Colonial Secretary’s speech, which appeared incompatible with the Government’s

⁴ Gladstone’s speech at Edinburgh, 25 Nov. 1879, in A. T. Bassett ed., *Gladstone’s Speeches* (London: Methuen, 1916), 564.

⁵ BL, Add. MSS. 44665, f.150, Gladstone’s note, undated (c. 31 Oct. 1878).

⁶ Gladstone said: ‘It is not a question of race... [The Turks] were, upon the whole, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity.’ Quoted in Azmi Ozcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 42. Also cf. BL, Add. MSS. 44763, f.84, Gladstone’s sketch of question and contingent motion on Bulgaria, ? Feb. 1877.

⁷ John Bright to R. P. Brown, 1 Sept. 1876 (read at a meeting held at Rochdale on 4 September to protest against the Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria), in H. J. Leech ed., *The Public Letters of John Bright* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1895), 18.

⁸ *The Times*, 3 Jan. 1878, 10c.

announcement to Parliament of precautionary warlike measures.⁹ Both W. E. Forster at Bradford and W. V. Harcourt at Oxford used Carnarvon's speech in order to harden opinion against war with Russia.¹⁰

Gladstone's response to the possible incursion of Russia into Turkey was: 'As an Englishman I shall hide my head, but as a man I shall rejoice.'¹¹ And his opposition to Russia's aggression on Turkey was based upon a fear of loss of prestige, rather than material interests, for Britain. In fact, Gladstone did not think Russian power on the Straits a practical possibility, nor did he have fear of the territorial expansion of Russia in Asia.¹² Yet, Gladstone, to be sure, was no Russophile: he did not favour the aggrandizement of Russia in the East.¹³ The golden mean for Britain in the Russo-Turkish conflict was hard to catch indeed. To Lord Hartington, the Liberal leader in the House of Commons, who advocated a policy of 'fairness to Russia,' to show too much sympathy with Russia and dislike of Turkey would weaken the effect of the argument against the war party.¹⁴ The problem for the Liberals was how to enact their appeals in accordance with the demands of legality and liberty, without militating against the assertion of power.

Complementing this objection to an Anglo-Turkish alliance against Russia was the principle of the Concert of Europe on the Eastern Question. Gladstone never proposed to take action in chime with any particular power for solving the difficulties in the East. He condemned Disraeli's pro-Turkish policy as preventing the union of the European Powers; and by so doing Britain had actually secured to Russia immense advantages that she ought not to have possessed. In agreement with the aim of the Treaty of Paris of 1856, Britain should keep the separate action of Russia out of Turkey by means of the common action.¹⁵ In the Liberals' eyes, Disraeli was deliberately reversing the policy pursued by the Palmerston Government in the Crimean War.

There was, naturally, a tendency among the Liberals to sympathize with Slav insurrections in support of popular liberties. A big Serbian state was to them a guarantee for freedom and self-government to the other European provinces of the Turkish Empire. But Gladstone's idea of 'religious nationality' in the Balkans did not necessarily imply political independence from the Porte;¹⁶ he contended that the advance of national freedom should be promoted in a manner that would impart as

⁹ BL, Add. MSS. 44171, f.155, Granville to Gladstone, 4 Jan. 1878. Gladstone wrote: 'I look upon Carnarvon as decidedly the most trustworthy man, for this subject, in the Cabinet. PRO, PRO30/29/29A, Gladstone to Granville, 5 Jan. 1878.

¹⁰ See *The Times*, 5 Jan. 1878, 10c, and 10 Jan. 1878, 7a.

¹¹ Quoted in G. D. Clayton, *op. cit.*, 155.

¹² W. E. Gladstone, 'Aggression on Egypt and Freedom in the East', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2, no. 6 (Aug. 1877), 154; W. E. Gladstone, *Gleanings of Past Years, 1843-78* (London: John Murray, 1789), vol. IV, 350; and W. E. Gladstone, *Midlothian Speeches, 1879* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1971), 119.

¹³ There was a strong suspicion that Gladstone and Granville were devoted to Russia, and the dupes of her policy. 'It is perfectly untrue about Gladstone,' Granville wrote. 'I doubt whether there be any statesman at home or abroad who is more opposed to her having any paramount power at Constantinople.' Granville to Lord Odo Russell, 13 Oct. 1880, quoted in Edmond Fitzmaurice, *op. cit.*, 219.

¹⁴ Hartington to Harcourt, 10 Jan. 1878, quoted in A. G. Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt* (London: Constable, 1923), vol. I, 325.

¹⁵ W. E. Gladstone, 'The Peace to Come', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3, no. 12 (Feb. 1878), 215.

¹⁶ Gladstone was in concert with the Liberals on the subject of nationalism, though his nationalism was primarily religious rather than liberal in origin. H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875-1898* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1995), 19, 27-30.

little shock as possible to the territorial arrangements of the East. The adjustment to make, therefore, was to establish relations between the Porte and its provinces as 'easy and elastic' as might be.¹⁷ However, there was little doubt that Turkish difficulty was Christian opportunity. Anxious to issue a disclaimer of the peace-at-any-price cry, the Radicals demanded that if the British Government was to take any decisive steps hostile to Russia, an authoritative declaration should be made in the mean time that the ultimate object of British policy was the independence of the Slav nationality, as opposed to any reconstruction of the Turkish Empire.¹⁸ It follows that the integrity of the Ottoman Empire as a political necessity was second to the universal principle of nationality, which eminently served what in Gladstone's conviction was the first and highest of all the objects of policy – humanity and justice.

Due to the great change in the diplomatic state of affairs in late 1877, Parliament was summoned together at an unusual period. When the Government's decision to summon Parliament for 17 January 1878 was published by the press on 19 December 1877, suspicion arose as to whether the step meant war or peace. The leading Liberals were puzzled over what to make of the move, and denounced it as either an empty threat or a step towards hostilities.¹⁹ Gladstone actively showed an anti-war attitude, while the Opposition leaders in the Houses, Hartington and Granville, hesitated to express themselves as usual. Finally, on 20 December the Liberals agreed to publicly deprecate premature agitation and argue for neutrality, with H. C. E. Childers being the only exception to pacifism. During the short time preceding the opening of Parliament, the strong feeling in favour of neutrality and peace was expressed throughout the country. Under such circumstances, Gladstone purposely remained passive in face of many solicitations, for fear lest he should contribute, unintentionally, to 'throw the question into the archer of party.'²⁰ Both he and Granville agreed that the best way to block Disraeli and his desire for war was to create a non-party agitation upon the broadest national ground, which would strengthen the pacifist element in the cabinet. The Liberal leaders were unanimous enough on this point, though they had not many signs to give of the missing Liberal programme, which seemed wanting to consolidate the party.

In their annual addresses to their constituents the Liberals all emphasized a non-military solution to the crisis, insistently repeating the warning of Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, that Britain would not interfere to save Turkey from her fate. Many of them, particularly Forster and Chamberlain, held that there was no danger of Russia's taking Constantinople; and Sir Charles Dilke envisaged a European partition and the creation of a bulwark against Russia.²¹ Until now, the Liberals' position on the Eastern Question was still a little ambiguous, except that they did not expect

¹⁷ W. E. Gladstone, 'The Paths of Honour and of Shame', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3, no. 13 (March 1878), 599.

¹⁸ Randolph Churchill to Charles Dilke, 8 Feb. 1878, quoted in W. S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (London: Macmillan, 1906), vol. I, 101.

¹⁹ Richard Millman, *op. cit.*, 343. For some observers, Parliament was summoned to set the mind of the country at rest on the rumours of war abroad, and of dissensions in the cabinet at home.

²⁰ BL, Add. MSS. 44125, f.23, Gladstone to Joseph Chamberlain, 3 Jan. 1878. Also cf. *The Annual Register: A Review of Public Events at Home and Abroad, 1878* (London: Longmans & Co., 1879), 1; and Forster to Pulszky, 8 Jan. 1878, quoted in T. W. Reid, *Life of the Right Honourable William Edward Forster* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1888), 186.

²¹ See *The Times*, 7 Jan. 1878, 11a; 10 Jan. 1878, 7a; 14 Jan. 1878, 10a, 10d; 16 Jan. 1878, 6b; Eastern Question Association, *The Eastern Question: Speech addressed by Sir William Veron Harcourt to His Constituents at Oxford, 9 January 1878* (London: Eastern Question Association, 1878), 23; and G. B. Smith, *The Life and Speeches of John Bright, M.P.* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1881), vol. II, 417.

Russia to ask what was commonly expected in respect of the Straits and Constantinople.

When Parliament opened on 17 January 1878 – three weeks before the usual time, no explanation was given of the object of the meeting; but the supporters of the Government in the press announced that it was in itself in the nature of a warning to Russia. The important point in the Queen's speech delivered to the Houses was the demand made for taking precautions in expectation of a possible eventuality. This demand, as Granville observed, would excite a great deal of feeling in the country, for it was contrary to the expectation of peace. Hartington thought the paragraph about precautions cruel to the Turks, whom it would encourage in resistance, and he deprecated war at the present moment in the strongest terms. The interference of Britain would, he believed, blast the hope of localizing the war, and reopened the Eastern Question in a violent way.²² Gladstone, whose speech was short, entirely coincided with Hartington on this point. The Liberals' arguments were all anti-Turkish in keynote, contrasting with the Government's 'tolerably well-known' policy of supporting Turkey against Russia. In reply to their questions, Disraeli ridiculed the idea that British interests meant peace, pointing out that the sense of national interest was obvious and had nothing to do with the cardinal virtues.

The declaration of Lord Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the House of Commons counteracted the disquieting effect of the paragraph in the Queen's message speaking of an 'unexpected occurrence.' But the prospect in the East became gloomy immediately after the rapid progress of Russia towards Constantinople. Northcote announced soon that he proposed to move a supplementary estimate for military and naval supplies, and then the country was startled by the intelligence that the English fleet had been ordered to the Dardanelles.²³ Then the rumoured dissensions in the cabinet took shape, and it became known that, in consequence of the grave disagreement with a resolution arrived at by their colleagues, Derby and Carnarvon had resigned. (Derby later withdrew his resignation.)²⁴ In Parliament, Northcote's announcement of the supplementary estimate created great excitement: the statement was received with a fair amount of cheering on the Government side, and with silence on the Opposition side. Its gravity seemed to be fully comprehended. With abundance of detail, Northcote endeavoured to persuade the House that a grant of six million would enable the representatives of Britain to enter the forthcoming Congress on the Eastern Question with the consciousness of being the plenipotentiaries of a united nation. John Bright doubted the advisability of Britain's entering the Congress of Berlin with 'shotted cannon and revolvers';²⁵ and the Liberal Party demanded the Government not to ask for a vote until the terms of the peace between Russia and Turkey were known, though that agreement had been generally understood. Anyway, in this debate on supplies, which virtually meant a vote of confidence, the Liberals' position on the Eastern Question was clearly and unanimously expounded for the first time.

²² *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 3rd Series, vol. 237, 'Address in Answer to Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech', 17 Jan. 1878, Lord Hartington, pp. 88-89.

²³ In the Oxford Dictionary, 'Jingo' was described as 'a nickname for those who supported and lauded the policy of Lord Beaconsfield in sending a British fleet into Turkish waters to resist the advance of Russia in 1878.' See F. W. Hirst, *Early Life and Letters of John Morley* (London: Macmillan, 1927), vol. II, 44.

²⁴ Northcote had failed to dissuade Carnarvon from giving up his office. PRO, PRO30/6/13, Northcote to Carnarvon, 3 Jan. 1878.

²⁵ *The Annual Register, 1878*, 13; G. B. Smith, *op. cit.*, 418.

At first, the Liberals had great difficulty in coming to conclusion as to the amendment to be moved to the vote of credit that the Government demanded. Hartington, the party leader, doubted the wisdom of direct opposition to the vote, while Forster intended to give his own notice of amendment, causing considerable uneasiness and anxiety among his colleagues.²⁶ Hartington regarded a vote of non-confidence in the Government at this critical moment as a very serious evil, not to mention the fact that it was impossible for the Liberals to form a government with the present Parliament. Indeed, Hartington agreed, to a certain extent, to the general policy of the Disraeli ministry since the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War: he acknowledged that the Conservatives had convinced the Turks that Britain was not prepared to fight for the maintenance of their empire. As a matter of fact, unlike the great majority of his party, who held that no British interests in the Black Sea were involved for which the nation ought to fight, Hartington thought that circumstances were likely to arise in which Britain should do her duty and fight.²⁷ Childers and G. J. Goschen shared the opinion, and found it impossible to define their views in a resolution acceptable to the others.²⁸ On the other hand, Gladstone, Harcourt, Bright, Argyll and Forster were all strong for a resolution.²⁹ Despite some misgivings, the leading Liberals decided at last to challenge the Government's request for funds.

With the concurrence of most of the Liberal leaders, Forster rose to move an amendment in Parliament on 31 January 1878.³⁰ But his opening speech was conciliatory, with the main point being that the Government should not be supported in any attempt by force to prevent the temporary occupation by Russia of Constantinople. In the debate Gladstone confined himself to showing how the vote could not possibly give the Government the strength of an undivided nation. In his view, the vote was only a sign and cause of dissension, for 'majority' did not mean 'unanimity.'³¹ And he urged that to usher in an international conference on the Turkish question with the clash of arms would destroy its peaceful character.³² An armistice between Russia and Turkey was announced on 1 February, but no details were released as to the terms and no explanation was given of why Russian troops continued to advance. The uncertainty and the sense of impending danger put the

²⁶ Bright diary, 29 Jan. 1878, in John Bright, *The Diaries of John Bright* (London: Cassell, 1930), 402-3.

²⁷ Hartington to Granville, 29 Jan. 1878, in Edmond Fitzmaurice, *op. cit.*, 174.

²⁸ Childers memoir, 1 Feb. 1878, in Spencer Childers, *The Life and Correspondence of the Right Hon. Hugh C. E. Childers* (London: John Murray, 1901), vol. I, 252; and Goschen diary, 31 Jan. 1878, in Percy Colson ed., *Lord Goschen and His Friends* (London: Hutchinson, undated), 178.

²⁹ According to Goschen, at a meeting of Liberal front-benchers at Granville's on 29 January 1878 everyone except Hartington and himself wished to fight the Government's motion. A. D. Elliot, *The Life of George Joachim Goschen, First Viscount Goschen 1831-1907* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), vol. I, 183. Hartington felt that Gladstone was attempting to oust him as party leader and was on the verge of resigning that post.

³⁰ Forster moved that 'this House, having been informed in Her Majesty's gracious speech that the conditions on which Her Majesty's neutrality is founded had not been infringed by either belligerent engaged in the war in the East of Europe, and having since received no information sufficient to justify a departure from the policy of neutrality and peace, sees no reason for adding to the burdens of the people by voting unnecessary supplies.' *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 237, 'The Supplementary Estimate,' 31 Jan. 1878, W. E. Forster, p. 750.

³¹ BL, Add. MSS. 44665, f.23, Gladstone's note, undated.

³² Nevertheless, Gladstone was anxious above all things that the Government should go into the congress with the strength of a united nation at its back, and he proceeded to dwell on the various points to be discussed in conference on which the Opposition would gladly support the Government. For instance, if Russia put in any claim that would interfere with the freedom of the Danube, by demanding a cession of Roumanian territory, it ought to be resisted.

Liberals on the defensive.³³ Inevitably, Forster's action – first moving this resolution and subsequently withdrawing it under dramatic circumstances – was severely censured by certain members of his party.

Gladstone opened the debate with a carefully studied vague speech, which ended with a proposal that both Houses should address the Crown with a vote of confidence in the Government and the vote for money be postponed. It was a remarkable offer he had no authority to make. By this Gladstone seemed to assume the leadership of public opinion. He appeared as a mediator, but did not abandon opposition to the vote. Gladstone's suggestion was ignored, naturally. In fact, he had understood that the Conservatives would obtain a large majority, yet by this debate he attempted, successfully, to prevent the Government from posing before the Congress of Berlin as representing a united country set for a warlike policy.³⁴ Hartington and Granville, on the other hand, did not express a distinct opinion either way, and the speeches of the Liberal Party except Childers and Chamberlain were generally mild. Obviously, an atmosphere of defeatism was hanging over the Opposition.³⁵ As a whole, the Liberals, seeing that the Ottoman power was heavily crushed, asked the Government to discard its outdated policy towards Turkey, and boldly face the changes in the whole aspect of the Eastern Question.

While the debate was prolonged, the apprehension of a collision with Russia was increasing. A serious war panic troubled the London Stock Exchange, and the British Funds went down one. It was announced that the Russians had occupied the Turkish capital, and it was affirmed that they were still advancing, with the concurrence of the Porte. The impression grew that some conditions of peace had been arranged between Russia and Turkey, of which Britain was ignorant. In view of the great commotion and patriotic demonstrations, the Liberal Party could not but agree to the vote of credit. On 7 February the leading Liberals met and agreed to stop challenging the Government. Forster's amendment was withdrawn immediately. He justified his retreat by showing that any further opposition would endanger peace by emphatically identifying the Government with the war party.³⁶ The discussion in the House of Commons on the motion then terminated by a division of 328 for the Government, and only 124 against it – a majority of 204. The Liberal leaders (inc. Hartington and Forster) and many of their followers, along with most of the Irish members, abstained; a few Liberals and independents voted with the Conservatives, whose ranks were unbroken. The desertion of the Opposition by its leaders, after some of them had made the strongest possible speeches against the vote, was vehemently criticized by Gladstone and the Radicals.³⁷

On 3 March the Treaty of San Stefano was signed between Russia and Turkey.³⁸ And as soon as its terms were partially known (published on 22 March), they served to dispel the current wild reports of the permanent occupation of Constantinople by

³³ A. P. Saab, *Reluctant Icon: Gladstone, Bulgaria, and the Working Classes, 1856-1878* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 178.

³⁴ Cranbrook diary, 5 Feb. 1878, in N. E. Johnson ed., *The Diary of Cathorne Hardy, Later Lord Cranbrook, 1866-1892: Political Selections* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981), 354. Also A. P. Saab, *op. cit.*, 178.

³⁵ BL, Add. MSS. 43878, f.20, Dilke to Granville, 14 Feb. 1878.

³⁶ Forster to Pulszky, 11 March 1878, quoted in T. W. Reid, *op. cit.*, 198. 'We thought it better to throw the whole responsibility on the Government,' Forster continued.

³⁷ John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (London: Macmillan, 1903), vol. II. 573.

³⁸ See *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1878 LXXXIII, Turkey No. 22 (1878) [C.1973], 'Preliminary Treaty of Peace between Russia and Turkey', pp. 241-65. Also Edward Hertslet ed., *The Map of Europe by Treaty* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1891), vol. IV, 1672-96.

Russia, of the confiscation of the Egyptian tribute to Turkey, and other direct attacks upon British interests, which the treaty left intact. The agitation for war soon died away, and the negotiations for a congress were reopened. The treaty declared Montenegro independent with a considerable extension of territory, Roumania a free state, Serbia independent with an addition of territory, Bulgaria an autonomous principality with a Christian governor to be elected by the people; reforms were to be introduced into Bosnia and Herzegovina, under the arrangements with Austria. The question of the Straits was left nearly as before, though right of passage was guaranteed to merchant ships at all times. When the whole of the arrangements was published, the difficulty arose whether the congress should be competent to discuss them as a whole. And the technical difference between a congress and a conference created some alarm and some debates, as the Powers began to look with some hope to the meeting as promising some solution of the entire Eastern Question. Derby maintained that a European sanction must be given to the new settlement that was now to supersede the arrangements of 1856, and to that end he insisted on the submission of the whole Treaty of San Stefano to the congress.

In contrast to the Government's uneasiness, the news of the Russo-Turkish peace greatly satisfied the Liberals. 'I feel a weight taken off my shoulders,' Gladstone wrote in his diary.³⁹ In their eyes, the treaty was good as a charter of freedom to the Slavs, and the stipulations in regard to Armenia were fair and moderate. A big Bulgaria was welcomed, for it might serve as a security against Russian influence. Their only complaint about the treaty was that the limited advantages conferred on the Greeks, as compared with those on the Slavs, were neither just nor politic. The Liberals were ready to look upon the Treaty of San Stefano as an end to the crisis in the East.

Yet, at the end of March Derby resigned as Foreign Secretary because the cabinet decided to take Cyprus by a secret naval expedition from India. Meanwhile, the Government announced that it was going to call out the military reservists for permanent service. Derby's resignation caused a painful feeling in the Liberal Party, both from the loss of the chief opponent of the war party, and from the dread that there might be something behind the step to mobilize the Reserve Forces, which seriously threatened war. The Liberals were helpless about it. They were in the minority, and any attempt on their part to protest against war would only bring forth another outburst of patriotism, by which the Government could be forced farther than their own intentions.⁴⁰ On the critical question of the moment Gladstone spoke with hesitation, and 'almost with despondency.'⁴¹ The Government had already taken a new departure from the Treaty of San Stefano and the diplomatic difficulties to which it had given rise. And the Powers were now concerned not so much with the fate of Turkey as with the purpose and policy of Russia. The Liberals' cause was much weakened under these circumstances.

On 1 April, Salisbury, who succeeded Derby as Foreign Secretary, published a circular on the Eastern Question to expound the Government's views on the Treaty of

³⁹ Gladstone diary, 4 March 1878, in H. C. G. Matthew ed., *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. IX (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1986), 295. Lord Selborne's impression was 'nothing alarming in the Treaty.' And so was Argyll's. Roundell Palmer (Lord Selborne), *Memorials: Personal and Political, 1865-1895* (London: Macmillan, 1898), vol. I, 450.

⁴⁰ Chamberlain to W. T. Stead, 27 March 1878, quoted in A. P. Saab, *op. cit.*, 183-84; and same to same, 30 March 1878, quoted in Marvin Swartz, *op. cit.*, 90. Also cf. John Birkbeck, *The Present Position of the Eastern Question* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1878), 32-33.

⁴¹ *The Times*, 29 March 1878, 9d.

San Stefano, and to indicate the course which they were to take in dealing with Russian claims.⁴² He urged in detail various objections against the main stipulations of the treaty, and was opposed to separate discussion of any one portion of these stipulations apart from the rest. He showed that the treaty would make the will of Russia dominant over the Black Sea, emphasizing particularly the danger likely to result from Russia's acquisition of Armenian strongholds. The effect of Salisbury's circular in the nation was curious: it was taken not for what it was, but for what it professed to be – an argument in favour of free discussion.⁴³ The whole and every part of the Treaty of San Stefano were condemned. According to Argyll, all those who favoured a war in support of the Turks were in transports of delight.⁴⁴

The Liberals' response to the Salisbury circular was mixed. Granville questioned the Government's decision to publish this circular instead of privately communicating to Russia, though he concurred in a great many of Salisbury's criticisms on the treaty, and hoped that it would be modified. And although his criticism was effective, it was directed mainly to points in the conduct of past negotiations. Dilke supported Salisbury's circular, because it substituted the maintenance of the Concert of Europe for the mere defence of British interests.⁴⁵ Gladstone and Selborne both based their attacks upon the timing of the publication of the circular, and omitted some important elements in their criticism. The most serious blow at the circular was the elaborate proof offered by Gladstone that the points selected by Salisbury as affording grounds of complaints against Russia had actually been brought forward beforehand in the Russian communications of June 1877. It was dubious that the Government did not then enter its protest against the proposed arrangements. But the Liberals were handicapped in their offense. The dilemma for them was that to refute the reasoning of Salisbury's despatch was to condemn the Government's measure of calling out the reserves, which was sure to invite accusations of disaffection.⁴⁶ Therefore, although their examination of the circular was on many points successful, they left the substance of its conclusion undisturbed.

As the issue of calling out the Reserves was not seriously in dispute, a great part of the debate was deprived of practical points, and was occupied with the exposition by several Liberal speakers of their views on the Eastern Question at large. Even the Radicals had decided not to present an amendment, but Sir Wilfrid Lawson acted in spite of this.⁴⁷ Lawson's amendment met with no support from Hartington, who asked him to withdraw it, and offered the Government instead a little mild apologetic criticism in his usual manner. The bulk of the Liberal Party followed Hartington's example, and declined to vote on the amendment, which Lawson refused to withdraw.

⁴² *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1878 LXXXI, Turkey No. 25 (1878) [C.1989], 'Despatch addressed by the Marquis of Salisbury to HM's Embassies', 1 April 1878, pp. 767-71.

⁴³ Even Hartington admitted publicly that the object of the Government was a legitimate one, and that the whole subject of the Eastern Question should be open to discussion in the congress. *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 239, 'Message from the Queen – Army Reserve Forces', 9 April 1878, Lord Hartington, p. 1017.

⁴⁴ Duke of Argyll, *The Eastern Question* (London: Strahan & Co., 1879), vol. II, 125.

⁴⁵ Dilke memoir, undated, in Stephen Gwynn and G. M. Tuckwell eds., *The Life of the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles W. Dilke* (London: John Murray, 1917), vol. I, 250.

⁴⁶ Hartington, for example, strained after a criticism, and could only find that 'Lord Salisbury's circular did not propose any alternative policy to that of the Treaty of San Stefano.' *The Quarterly Review*, 'The Aggression of Russia and the Duty of Great Britain', vol. 145, no. 290 (April 1878), 569.

⁴⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 239, 'Message from the Queen – Army Reserve Forces', 8 April 1878, Wilfrid Lawson, p. 899. Some other Radicals, like Chamberlain and Dilke, expressed their sympathy. *Ibid.*, 9 April 1878, pp. 983 & 1008.

It was finally negated by a division of 310 votes to 64. Gladstone voted with a minority of Liberals; Hartington and others abstained.⁴⁸ After this, Granville described the debate to Hartington as ‘one of the heaviest blows to the disciplines of a party I had ever remembered.’⁴⁹ Gladstone thought that the Liberal Party had been hurt by ‘the alarm of some members for their seats,’ but, on the other hand, was pleased to see that the effect of the debates in Parliament was favourable to the cause of peace.⁵⁰

After the adjournment it was revealed that the Indian Government was ordered to despatch a force of 7,000 native troops to Malta. The step was a grave one, because the rule was that all native troops employed out of India should be paid for by the British Government. And it would be necessary to provide for an outlay, since Parliament had just been dismissed for three weeks. To the Liberals, the Government seemed to have taken another step towards war. These combined movements greatly irritated the Radicals, who denounced the impropriety of bringing an Eastern army into the operations of a European war.⁵¹ When Parliament reconvened on 6 May 1878, Hartington propounded a gentle inquiry about the state of negotiation and the movement of the Indian troops. Chamberlain, in the absence of all practical leadership, made himself the spokesman of Liberal opinions, by proposing to move a strong vote of censure. Northcote, the Conservative leader in the House of Commons, was apologetic and explained nothing, preferring to deal with Hartington’s meaningless motion, which left the policy of the Government unchallenged.⁵² Hartington apparently took great care to narrow the issue.⁵³ Most of the Opposition leaders condemned the Government’s act as unconstitutional, and Gladstone held that the ministers had violated the Bill of Rights and the Indian Government Act. But even he did not persist on this occasion.⁵⁴ On 20 May Hartington spoke in favour of not

⁴⁸ The ex-officials of the Liberal Party unanimously decided against the amendment. Gladstone had feared that a debate on the amendment would be a poor affair and ‘show the nakedness of the land.’ He thought that having made a protest it was not so necessary for the Liberals to clear themselves again by vote as well as by speech. In his view, Lawson had caused an unfavourable and untrue exhibition of the state of opinion, and had placed Hartington in a grave difficulty. Chamberlain to Collins, 5 April 1878, quoted in J. L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1932), vol. I, 249. Although most Liberals disapproved of a particular amendment, yet, concurring in the objection, some felt a personal obligation to vote for it, because it contained a sentiment in which they agreed. BL, Add. MSS. 44171, f.178, Granville to Gladstone, 11 April 1878. Gladstone explained his attitude on this occasion to Granville: ‘I was by no means led into the lobby by my concurrence with Lawson’s words, but by my relation to the mass of feeling and opinion out of doors, in concert with which I have worked all along, and which would have been utterly bewildered by my not voting.’ PRO, PRO30/29/29A, Gladstone to Granville, 12 April 1878. In the House of Lords the address was agreed to, without a division.

⁴⁹ Granville to Hartington, 10 April 1878, quoted in Edmond Fitzmaurice, *op. cit.*, 175-76.

⁵⁰ Gladstone to Stead, 9 April 1878, quoted in Richard Millman, *op. cit.*, 593n.

⁵¹ George Hamilton, *Parliamentary Reminiscences and Reflections, 1868-1885* (London: John Murray, 1917), 135.

⁵² It merely affirmed that no forces ought to be raised or kept by the Government in time of peace without the consent of Parliament in any part of British dominions except India. Hartington’s motion carefully questioned the constitutionality of the expedition but not the policy which it represented and from which he somewhat artificially separated. Richard Millman, *op. cit.*, 443.

⁵³ BL, Add. MSS. 44144, f.257, Hartington to Gladstone, 9 May 1878; and *ibid.*, f.260, same to same, 11 May 1878.

⁵⁴ For his detailed arguments see W. E. Gladstone, ‘Liberty in the East and West’, *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. III, no. 14 (June 1878), 1154-55. For the Conservatives’ retort see *The Quarterly Review*, vol. 146, no. 291 (July 1878), ‘The Crown and the Army’, 254-55; and R. S. Ross, *Removal of the Indian Troops to Malta* (London: Trübner & Co., 1878), 9-77. Gladstone said later: ‘The impolicy of the use of Indian troops is a matter upon which I entertain a strong opinion; but, at the same time, I do

opposing the Government further. And then the vote for the Indian troops carried by 214 to 40, after nearly all the Liberals had followed their leader and walked out of the House. Parliament now seemed to be at Disraeli's feet.

The difficulties of the situation for the Liberal Party were great indeed. So far, the action of the Government had not caused the Opposition to unite in their attitude of resistance. With a few exceptions, the Liberal Party still seemed destitute of opinions of their own, as they had been practically without leadership since Gladstone's withdrawal from vigorous party politics. Furthermore, many of the Liberal leaders, including Gladstone and Bright, believed that although the Government sometimes used warlike language, they really meant peace; and they even agreed with the Government that the policy of the bully would probably be successful.⁵⁵ As a result, the difference in tone between Disraeli and his submissive cabinet was not more marked than that between Gladstone and his party. The Liberal front bench failed to present any well-defined alternative to Disraeli's foreign policy, partly due to Hartington's weak leadership, and partly the result of differences of opinion in the Liberal ranks.⁵⁶ The language of Gladstone and Hartington had been, throughout these occurrences, very guarded and moderate. They very much refrained from embarrassing the Government; and although they dissented from some of the resolutions that had been taken, they had actually done little to weaken the action of the country.⁵⁷ Indeed, many of the Liberals had openly expressed their approval of the conduct of the Government. Gladstone found that the Government must have its way, and that all the Liberal Party could do was to enlighten public opinion. In the House of Commons, only a group of Radicals, consisting of Chamberlain, Dilke, George Trevelyan, Wilfrid Lawson, Henry Fawcett, L. H. Courtney, and Joseph Cowen, were active in opposing the Conservatives' Eastern policy.⁵⁸ But in the Liberal leaders' opinion, the Radicals' movements were often ill-timed, ineffective and even injurious. After the division on the Reserves turned out badly, Hartington refused to join the Radicals in further opposition until the end of the Berlin Congress. And the Radicals became more cautious afterwards. Both the discipline and morale of the Liberal Party were at a low ebb in mid-1878.

II. Party Politics amid International Politics: The Liberals on the Berlin Treaty

In early June the Government declared in Parliament that Germany had invited the Powers to a congress at Berlin for 13 June 1878 to discuss the provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano. Great interest was created by the announcement that Britain's principal plenipotentiaries were to be the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

not hold it as an ultimate and unchangeable opinion.' *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 240, 'The Eastern Question – Policy of the Government – The Indian Contingent – Observations', 27 May 1878, Gladstone, p. 768.

⁵⁵ Chamberlain to Collins, 2 April 1878, quoted in J. L. Garvin, *op. cit.*, 248.

⁵⁶ Granville wrote to Gladstone on 9 April on the question of calling out the Reserves: 'In your House the confusion of our party seems worse than ever.' BL, Add. MSS. 44171, f.176, Granville to Gladstone, 9 April 1878. In fact, at the start of the 1877 session the Radicals had grown impatient and begun to call for Gladstone to assume the lead again. F. W. Hirst, *op. cit.*, 45.

⁵⁷ It was not on the Opposition, but on the ministry itself, that these discussions had thus far produced the most serious consequences for the Government. *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 147, no. 302 (April 1878), 'The Present and the Future of the East', 588.

⁵⁸ At the time, a deputation from the Liberal Associations throughout the country, introduced by John Bright, after passing resolutions expressive of 'passionate earnestness' to keep Britain out of war, met with lukewarm encouragement from Hartington and Granville to expect decision of any kind. *The Annual Register*, 1878, 42.

There were curious enquiries in both Houses. Granville asked if there was any precedent for such a nomination, suspecting that everything substantial had already been settled between the Powers before going into congress; and he cited Lord Derby's authority as to the unwisdom of sending the Foreign Secretary.⁵⁹ Indeed, with agreements signed with Russia (30 May), Turkey (4 June) and Austria (6 June), the outcome of the congress was a foregone conclusion for Britain.

On 14 June 1878 the text of a secret Anglo-Russian agreement, signed on 30 May at the British Foreign Office, appeared in the *Globe* suddenly and without warning.⁶⁰ Under this agreement, the two Powers agreed that Bulgaria should be divided into two provinces, of which the northern one should be independent, and the southern one governed like a British colony; Europe was to settle the organization of the Greeks and other Christian provinces; the Russian Government was not to be paid its indemnity in land. Also, Bayazid was to be restored to Turkey, but Batoum and Kars might become Russian. In view of this, the duty of protecting the Ottoman Empire from the danger of the extension of Russia would henceforth rest upon Britain. Subject to these points, ten in number, the British Government engaged not to dispute the articles of the preliminary Treaty of San Stefano. The effect of this document was curious. The Liberals, who had long been calling for an Anglo-Russian understanding on the Eastern Question, were delighted to find that many provinces were delivered from Turkish rule, while the Turkish party in England found the ground cut from under their feet.

Then, on 8 July the Liberals were stunned by the Government's astounding announcement of the Anglo-Turkish convention, signed on 4 June 1878.⁶¹ By this treaty Britain engaged for the future to defend the Asiatic dominion of the Ottoman Empire 'by force of arms,' in return for a promise by the Sultan to introduce all necessary reforms in Turkey, and for the assignment of Cyprus to be occupied by Britain (its reversion to Turkey being provided if Russia should give up Batoum, Ardahan and Kars).⁶² A week later, on 13 July the Berlin Congress ended, having

⁵⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 240, 'The Eastern Question – The Congress – Ministerial Statement', 3 June 1878, Granville, p. 1057. Gladstone considered it as a strange scheme worse than sending Disraeli alone as regards the general business of the country, but better as regards the purposes for which the congress was summoned. Gladstone to His Wife, 3 June 1878, in A. T. Bassett ed., *Gladstone to His Wife* (London: Methuen, 1936), 223-24.

⁶⁰ The document comprises two memorandums. The title of the first is 'Project of a Memorandum Determining the Points upon Which an Understanding Has Been Established between the Governments of Russia and Great Britain, and Which Will Serve as a Mutual Engagement for the Russian and English Plenipotentiaries at the Congress'; the other is an annex to this memorandum. See PRO, FO65/1022; also M. S. Anderson ed., *The Great Powers and the Near East, 1774-1923* (London: Edward Arnold, 1970), 103-5. The secret agreement had never been communicated to Parliament; and if the Government could have helped it, it would never have seen the light.

⁶¹ See *British Parliament Papers*, 1878 LXXXII, Turkey No. 36 (1878), [C.2057], 'Convention of Defensive Alliance between Great Britain and Turkey', p. 5; *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1877-1878, vol. 69 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1885), 744-46; also T. E. Holland ed., *The European Concert in the Eastern Question: A Collection of Treaties and Other Public Acts* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1885), 354-58; and Frederick Madden and David Fieldhouse eds., *Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth*, vol. V: *The Dependent Empire and Ireland, 1840-1900* (New York: Greenwood, 1991), 695-96. So hastily was that agreement concluded that it did not even follow the ordinary form of a convention between sovereign states. It ran in the name of 'England' and 'Turkey' (or 'the Porte'), and not of the Queen and the Sultan. The secrecy and haste with which the convention was concluded was because of the fear that, if time and publicity were given, the Sultan would refuse to sign. The treaty was not immediately disclosed to the public, which caused some suspicion and rumours.

⁶² J. C. Hurewitz ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, vol.

lasted just one month. The Berlin Treaty provided, among others things, for the independence of Montenegro, Serbia and Roumania, the constitution of Bulgaria as an autonomous principality, the formation of the new province of Eastern Roumelia, the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria, and the cession of Batoum, Ardahan and Kars to Russia.⁶³

After Disraeli's statements in Parliament on 18 July presenting the protocols of the Berlin Congress and the Treaty of Berlin, the Anglo-Turkish Convention and the Berlin Treaty were debated on as a whole. Like what they had done in the debate on the employment of the Indian troops, the Opposition on this occasion were unable to take a decided course either in approval or in disapproval of the conduct of the Government. A great part of their criticism on the proceedings of the ministry was evidently conceived in the spirit of party. Granville spoke gently enough: he criticized in detail, but exhibited no disposition to grapple with the main principle of settlement. Hartington had no stronger motion to put forward than an expression of 'regret' about Greece, about the new liabilities in Asia Minor, and about the manner in which Parliament had been kept in the dark until the Government's measures were accomplished. The 'congratulatory regrets' – as Disraeli understood it – of Hartington later took the shape of a motion of mild censure in the House of Commons.⁶⁴ His resolution, as had been expected, was made along the lines of a party contest and did not impugn the main points of the Berlin Treaty. His most severe criticisms were on the Anglo-Turkish convention, yet his objection was rather to the manner in which it had been framed than to any necessary evil results from it. Gladstone did not deal with the question of the Anglo-Turkish convention in the parliamentary debate: he took the course of a violent extra-parliamentary series of pamphlets and speeches, denouncing the conduct – not necessarily the policy – of the Government.⁶⁵

In general, the Opposition also approved the Treaty of Berlin, for it really carried out in a very large measure the views of the Liberal Party, particularly with respect to the issues of nationality. No wonder Hartington's resolution was rejected by the immense majority of 143 (338:195).⁶⁶ The Liberal papers expressed their opinion strongly, and there were many voices loud in condemnation, but the vote was decisive in its way.

However, the Opposition talk about the Berlin Settlement was very expressive of liberalism in foreign policy. Lord Rosebery, who became a 'liberal imperialist' only a few years later, spoke at a Liberal demonstration in October 1878: 'There never was a more favourable opportunity for really carrying out a very noble foreign policy.'⁶⁷ By

I: *European Expansion, 1535-1914* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), 412.

⁶³ *British Parliament Papers*, 1878 LXXXIII, Turkey No. 44 (1878), [C.2108], 'Treaty between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia, and Turkey, for the Settlement of Affairs in the East', pp. 677-705; Edward Hertslet, *op. cit.*, 'Protocols of the Berlin Congress', 2729-57, and 'Treaty of Berlin (full text with maps)', 2759-99.

⁶⁴ See *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 242, 'Eastern Affairs – Resolution', 29 July 1878, Hartington, pp. 527-28.

⁶⁵ For Northcote's complaints about Gladstone's campaigns out of doors, see Andrew Lang, *Life, Letters, and Diaries of Sir Stafford Northcote First Earl of Iddesleigh* (London: William Blackwood, 1891), 287.

⁶⁶ The analysis of the vote showed that in Scotland alone did the Liberal Party obtain a majority. The so-called Irish Liberals gave only three more votes to the Liberals than they gave to the Conservatives. Excluding the Irish votes, the Liberal Party fell short of its full strength by 24 votes, of which 5 were given to the enemy. The Conservatives had no deserters on this occasion, showing heroic party discipline. *The Annual Register*, 1878, 112.

⁶⁷ Rosebery's speech at Aberdeen, 10 Oct. 1878, quoted in Lord Crewe, *Lord Rosebery* (London: John Murray, 1931), vol. I, 107.

this, Rosebery was dealing with the matter of form rather than of substance in international politics. The Liberal attacks on the Government's act in the Berlin Congress were primarily based upon the demand for the justice of the proceedings or, in this case, the principle of open diplomacy. Granville, for instance, publicly confessed that he did not oppose the Government coming to such an understanding with Russia as would enable the congress to meet with the prospect of a rapid conclusion, provided that it was done 'in a perfectly open manner.'⁶⁸ Likewise, Hartington, Gladstone and many other Liberals thought the occupation of Cyprus objectionable mainly because it had not been accomplished in an internationally legal manner: to them, the Anglo-Turkish convention was in itself a gross and manifest breach of the public law of Europe. The question mattered because it concerned not only morality but national security and interest. The Liberal shadow war secretary H. C. E. Childers warned that 'England never yet gained by secret diplomacy, aimed at outwitting Europe,' awaiting anxiously the counter moves by the other Powers to the Anglo-Turkish convention.⁶⁹

Related to the emphasis on open diplomacy was their argument for the Concert of Europe on the Eastern affairs. Since the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish War, Britain had expressed frequently her disapproval as to the secrecy with which the Treaty of San Stefano was entered into. The Government declared that Britain should not recognize any agreement as binding which affected European interests and had not received the approval of the Powers. Hence the conclusion that the Treaty of San Stefano should be submitted to the Berlin Congress. As soon as the Liberals knew of the secret treaty between Britain and Turkey, they inquired whether the convention had been communicated to the other Powers. The gist of Gladstone's argument against the Berlin Treaty was that the provision in the Treaty of Paris against the single action of any one of the Powers in the Turkish Empire was wanting in the present settlement. In brief, under the Berlin Treaty there was no Europe. The Liberals considered that the failure of the Government in their attempt to protect Turkey against Russia lied in the fact that they created a treaty which gave each and all the Powers separate rights of direct recourse against Turkey. Thus, while the Government claimed that they had brought home an assurance of 'peace with honour,'⁷⁰ the Opposition speakers maintained as strongly that there never had been any danger of war except what Britain had raised.

It was hard to say whether the Berlin Treaty had terminated the British policy of maintaining the independence and integrity of the Turkish Empire. The reason why the Liberal Party considerably approved the treaty was that it, to a certain extent, embodied and carried out a principle of policy advocated by them – the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. But the Liberals differed as to the impacts of the Berlin Congress upon Turkey's fate. Gladstone was concerned that the life of Turkey would

⁶⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 242, 'Eastern Question – The Treaty of Berlin – Alleged Agreement between England and Russia', 26 July 1878, Granville, p. 384.

⁶⁹ Childers to Sir Andrew Clark, 9 Sept. 1878, in Spencer Childers, *op. cit.*, 256.

⁷⁰ According to H. H. Asquith, a young Liberal then, the Berlin Treaty and its authors were received in London and in Parliament with an almost delirious welcome, which intoxicated the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, his more fastidious and sober colleagues detected the 'artificial activities of the wire-pullers' and grimly predicted that 'they would find it out at the polls.' H. H. Asquith, *Fifty Years of Parliament* (London: Cassell, 1926), vol. I, 51. In contrast to the high appreciation by contemporaries of his achievement in the summer of 1878, Salisbury referred to the subject in a very different tone. He said: 'I never wish for my foreign policy to be judged by my action in 78. I was only picking up the china that Derby had broken.' Quoted in Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), vol. II, 231-32.

be elongated by the Berlin Treaty, under which she was, in a sense, concentrated rather than dismembered.⁷¹ Some other Liberal leaders (e.g. Northbrook, Kimberley, Chamberlain, and Rosebery) expected an imminent demise of the Porte. Though the Liberals disagreed about the effects of the congress on the practical partition of the Turkish Empire, they definitely felt little regret at such a result. So Granville and Harcourt were glad to see that the treaty had given to Russia all she really wished to have, while others might 'detest the sinner, but approve the sin.'⁷²

Under the Berlin Treaty, 11.5 million out of 17 million people were freed in European Turkey, and all the provinces were to have parliaments of their own, similar to the elective parliament of Crete. In view of these achievements, Hartington hailed the treaty as 'a complete settlement.'⁷³ Yet most of the Liberal Party were highly dissatisfied with its provisions in respect of Greece, especially when comparing the fate of Greece with that of the Slav states. The arrangement concerning the Greek question was no doubt the most vulnerable point in the work of the British Government at Berlin.⁷⁴ Before the congress, Gladstone, who was an ardent philhellene, had cordially expressed his wish for revising the Treaty of San Stefano in favour of Greek nationalism.⁷⁵ And the Salisbury circular indicated a wish to patronize the Greek claims. The results, particularly the denial of the claims of Greece for the possession of Crete, were much to Gladstone's disappointment.⁷⁶ In Hartington's opening debate on the Berlin Settlement, his words did not strike a note of discord until they referred to the question of Greece. And Dilke's statement of the case against the Government in regard to Greece was made with considerable power and attracted much attention. Only Kimberley thought the Berlin Treaty was better than the Treaty of San Stefano because it avoided the risk of allowing the Bulgarians to overrun the whole of the territory occupied by the Greek population in the southern part of Turkey in Europe.⁷⁷ The Berlin Congress almost did nothing about Greece, because it understood that if the hopes of the Greeks were realized, the Ottoman power in Europe would disappear. Apparently, the Liberals' support for the extension of Greece was in proportion to their desire to overthrow the Turkish Empire.

As to the Anglo-Turkish convention, it was in Gladstone's eyes an 'insane covenant.' Although Gladstone loved to see the end of the Turkish Empire, he detested the idea of its partition by the Great Powers. He emphasized that the cession

⁷¹ BL, Add. MSS. 44665, f.137, Gladstone's not, 'Reversal of 1856', undated; and W. E. Gladstone, 'England's Mission', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. IV, no. 19 (Sept. 1878), 561.

⁷² Granville thought that the best justification of Russia's expansionism in Afghanistan was Britain's threatening attitude in Turkey, and that the great mistake of Britain after peace was her communicating with the hostile Ameer instead of Russia. BL, Add. MSS. 44171, f.194, Granville to Gladstone, 18 Sept. 1878.

⁷³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 242, 'Eastern Affairs – Resolution', 29 July 1878, Hartington, p. 535.

⁷⁴ Greece went to the Berlin Congress as an outside suppliant, and came away empty-handed. Disraeli, in consideration of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, suggested that Greece was 'a country with a future, who could afford to wait.' He apparently thought that if the Ottoman Empire were to disappear from Europe, its inheritance would not now fall to the Greeks. J. A. R. Marriott, *The Eastern Question: A Historical Study in European Diplomacy* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940), 364-65.

⁷⁵ See W. E. Gladstone, 'Liberty in the East and West', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. III, no. 14 (June 1878), esp. 1172.

⁷⁶ See BL, Add. MSS. 44665, f.129, Gladstone's note, 'England and Greece'; and R. A. Cross, *A Political History* (London: Privately Printed, 1903), 53.

⁷⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 241, 'Congress – Correspondence and Protocols', 18 July 1878, Lord Kimberley, p. 1833. Hartington, on the other hand, thought that the Great Bulgaria, which was planned in the Treaty of San Stefano, would have left open to Greece an extension in the direction of Epirus and Thessaly. *Ibid.*, vol. 242, 'Eastern Affairs – Resolution', 29 July 1878, Hartington, p. 534.

of Cyprus was a violation both of the letter and the spirit of the Treaty of Paris. And he thought it inexpedient to acquire possessions which, like Cyprus, could never become truly British. Granville also denounced the move as '[adding] to our power by increasing our vulnerable points.'⁷⁸ With Malta supplying all that Britain needed for a base in the Mediterranean, he doubted whether Cyprus was wanted as a naval station. And he and many Liberal leaders belittled the use of Cyprus for defending the Suez Canal. Forster insisted on the madness of turning England into a great Continental Power who was burdened with a long land frontier, conterminous with Russia. To the general public, however, the acquisition of Cyprus seemed a masterly stroke of policy, and it had the effect of silencing those who were angry about the concessions made to Russia. To reconcile this bargaining for a territorial gain with any high idea of political morality was not easy for the Liberal idealists, who tried hard to comfort themselves by the thought that thorough British instrumentality the people of Cyprus could be liberated. As William Harcourt observed, the Opposition did not object to the grandness of the conception of taking Cyprus, for 'hitherto conquest had been the only mode of civilizing Asia.'⁷⁹

While the Berlin Treaty did not provide for the improvement of the internal administration of the Asiatic dominions of the Porte, Britain undertook in the Anglo-Turkish convention to prevent misgovernment in Asiatic Turkey. But she did not, and could not, specify the reforms to be adopted by the Porte; nor did she specify what was to be done if the Turks failed to carry out the reforms. Most Liberals were suspicious about the Government's determination to effect Turkish reforms, believing that the Government was to use Turkey's failure to reform herself as an excuse for keeping Cyprus permanently. Indeed, if the Anglo-Turkish convention were treated as a serious thing, the burden – defence of Asiatic Turkey against Russia – would be intolerable for Britain. The Liberal Party generally regarded this convention as a transaction unworthy of English statesmanship, for it put forward conditions that were not intended to be fulfilled. The most embarrassing part of Hartington's resolution was exactly that which referred to the 'protectorate' of Turkey in Asia. But it was clear that the Opposition was not able to frighten the country by emphasizing the vast responsibility Britain had incurred by her compact with Turkey. '[Responsibility] is a vague word...and custom has made the load seem light,' *The Times* commented.⁸⁰

The statement made by Disraeli in Parliament gave occasion for some very animated criticism, but there was no sign of profound intention on the part of the Opposition to challenge the policy of the Government by a formal resolution. In the Liberals' view, the policy pursued in the East for the last two or three years had now reached its natural termination. The general character of the Berlin Treaty was understood to be inevitable. And they admitted that, considering all the circumstances, the Berlin Congress had made the best it could of the mess it had to deal with. The settlement, as far as the nationalist issues and territorial arrangements were concerned, was more in accordance with Gladstone's and the Radicals' policy,⁸¹ than with the

⁷⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 241, 'Congress – Correspondence and Protocols', 18 July 1878, Granville, p. 1781.

⁷⁹ *The Annual Register, 1878*, 111. The problem followed that, without sovereignty there might be occupation and administration, but sovereignty alone was the source of legislative and judicial power.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 22 July 1878, 9b.

⁸¹ Gladstone announced in the House of Commons: 'Taking the whole of the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin together, I most thankfully and joyfully acknowledge that great results have been achieved in the diminution of human misery, and towards the establishment of human happiness and prosperity in the East.' *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 242, 'Eastern Affairs – Resolution', 30 July 1878, Gladstone, p.

hopes of the press and the supporters of the Government. (The Salisbury circular had created great enthusiasm among the supporters of the Government, but the Berlin Treaty turned out to be an immense disappointment to them.) It was ironical that the formal complaint of the leading Liberals was that the Berlin Treaty contradicted the public professions of the Government on the Eastern Question. Generally, the Liberal Party was much more satisfied with the Berlin Treaty than with the Anglo-Turkish convention. The paradox was that this convention was a precondition to the congress. The Liberals predicted failure for the Berlin Congress somewhat too soon in a case where time was obviously needed. After the event, even the Anglo-Turkish convention was believed by the practical minds of the Liberal Party to be more than a mere sham: it would produce an enormous disturbance of the balance of power in Europe in favour of Britain.⁸²

The performance of the Liberals in the debate on the Berlin Treaty did not win them much critical acclaim. The Liberal Party was still believed lacking in complete and consistent views on foreign policy. Harcourt, in a speech at Scarborough, made the strongest attack yet made upon the whole of the Government policy, and earnestly protested against the comfortable doctrine that the Opposition was never to object to foreign policy.⁸³ His propaganda campaign was not far-reaching. By the end of 1878 the Liberal Party had become ready to offer their support for the execution of the Berlin Treaty and the Anglo-Turkish convention, and their words about the policy of the Government in the East had become more favourable. Granville admitted in the House of Lords in December 1878 that the Berlin Treaty would prove a very satisfactory arrangement indeed, if the Government could guarantee that Russia and Turkey would carry out their engagements under it. And when the Conservatives began to recognize that Cyprus was not a very great acquisition after all, Granville showed great expectations for the future of the island, and the other Liberals justified its cession on the grounds of good government by the British.⁸⁴ But the Radicals' antagonism towards the Government in regard of the Eastern affairs was still very strong.⁸⁵ Serious divisions in the Liberal Party sustained or even sharpened the popular impression that they had not an Eastern policy of their own. Deep sympathy with Russia and want of patriotism had been the charges incessantly reiterated against them.⁸⁶ Therefore, although the temporary popularity that the Conservatives had won at the time of the Berlin Congress was now gradually diminishing while the Afghan trouble was striking on the other hand, the Liberal leaders did not think the time had come for a change of government.

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⁸² Both Gladstone and Granville agreed in mid-September to leave the Government alone in regard to the question of the defence of Asiatic Turkey in their public criticism of the Berlin Settlement. And in his article entitled 'England's Mission' (*The Nineteenth Century*, vol. IV, no. 19, Sept. 1878), Gladstone argued against Disraeli's imperialism without discussing the Anglo-Turkish convention. PRO, PRO30/29/29A, Gladstone to Granville, 17 Sept. 1878; and BL, Add. MSS. 44171, f.212, Granville to Gladstone, 30 Oct. 1878.

⁸³ *The Annual Register, 1878*, 175.

⁸⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 243, 'Address in Answer to Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech', 5 Dec. 1878, Granville, p. 25; and PRO, PRO30/29/37, Granville to Victoria, 9 June 1880. Also *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 148, no. 304, 'England in the Levant', 566.

⁸⁵ See BL, Add. MSS. 44104, f.101, Argyll to Gladstone, 25 Nov. 1878; Add. MSS. 43385, f.267, Gladstone to Bright, 15 Nov. 1878; PRO, PRO30/29/26A/2, Edward Grey to Granville, 14 Nov. 1878.

⁸⁶ Victoria complained at the end of 1878 that the conduct of the Opposition on the Eastern Question for the last two years had been most unpatriotic. Victoria to Henry Ponsonby, 10 Dec. 1878, quoted in Arthur Ponsonby, *Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria's Private Secretary: His Life from his Letters* (London: Macmillan, 1942), 180.

III. Mapping out a Liberal Programme: The Liberal Party and British Policy in the East, 1879-80

The troubles in Afghanistan, and later in South Africa, diverted public attention from the movement of affairs in the East under the provisions of the Berlin Treaty and the Anglo-Turkish convention. But whether these treaties were producing their supposed effects or not, it was from the beginning of 1879 a very fertile topic of discussion in the newspaper and in the speeches of leading politicians. In general, behind Gladstone's splendour of speech there was no practical alternative policy to that of the Government,⁸⁷ as the debates and divisions before had placed them in a position of undisputed dominance during the continuance of the Eastern trouble. However, in criticizing the Conservative Government in their execution of the Berlin Treaty, the Liberals had presented their Eastern programme in a more definite and practical manner in the course of 1879 up to the general election in 1880.

Two of the most notable attacks by Liberal leaders before the opening of Parliament in 1879 was made by Harcourt (at Oxford on 14 January) and Forster (at Bradford 20 January), who complained of the slow progress made in the settlement of the East. That part of the Government's Eastern policy which was most discussed when the Houses met in February was the acquisition of Cyprus. British rule in Cyprus was a tempting theme for the Liberals, for it had many peculiarities, some of which were vulnerable. The Government appeared to try to keep back information relating to Cyprus, because there was now more doubt as to the wisdom of occupying the island. Gladstone was bold enough to label Cyprus as 'a valueless incumbrance,' and meant to give it away.⁸⁸ Harcourt and Dilke were able to point out some curious consequences of British rule.⁸⁹ And Granville and Dilke demanded that the administration of Cyprus should be transferred from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, since, for a long or a short time, Britain must govern Cyprus as a

⁸⁷ Salisbury said in 1877 that the Liberals did not have 'the faintest notion' what to put in the place of the Turkish Empire. And that was still the Conservatives' response in early 1879 to the criticisms by the Liberals on the Government's Eastern policy. See David Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography* (London: University College London Press, 1999), 126; *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 243, 'Business of Parliament – Ministerial Statement', 13 Feb. 1879, Granville, p. 1050; and Henry Ponsonby memorandum, 20 Oct. 1879, in Arthur Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, 170. The pith of Gladstone's 'England's Mission' in *The Nineteenth Century*, published in August 1878, was that the Disraeli Government had 'set up the principles of Metternich and put down the principles of Canning.' (p. 562) The editor of this Liberal Journal, James Knowles, was delighted with it, saying: 'Now people will not be able to say that the Liberals have no clear chart to sail by in foreign policy.' Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister, 1865-1898* (London: The Penguin Press, 1999), 224. In fact, the Liberals had gradually come to agree with the Government in many respects on the Eastern Question. As Harcourt said to the Russian Ambassador, Schouvaloff, in London in January 1879, the Liberals, like the Conservatives, should never allow Russia to occupy Constantinople or to get command of the Straits. *Esher Journal*, 12 Jan. 1879, in M. V. Brett ed., *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1934), vol. I, 56.

⁸⁸ BL, Add. MSS. 44666, f.151, Gladstone's note undated (1879). Gladstone challenged the assumption that the benefits of British rule would earn from the Cypriots 'gratitude and attachment in the form of a disposition to continue in political connection with [Britain].' John Reddaway, *Burdened with Cyprus: The British Connection* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), 10.

⁸⁹ Curiously enough, Dilke advocated strongly a railway from Constantinople to the Persian Gulf as an alternative route to India, which necessitated the control of Cyprus. He said: 'I am favourable to the construction of the Baghdad line, and to that amount of intervention in Asiatic Turkey which is necessary to secure it; and I should contemplate a military occupation of Cyprus and Scanderon in time of war, in order to provide for the security of our line.' Quoted in D. E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), 126.

Crown Colony. Anyway, in 1879 most of the Liberal Party already accepted the occupation of Cyprus as an accomplished fact and began to press ahead with internal reforms in the island, particularly the abolition of slavery and the enactment of racial equality.

The Berlin Treaty and the Anglo-Turkish convention laboured under some serious defects. These instruments were couched in terms so vague that differences easily arose on the interpretation of the clauses: indeed, it was apparent that some of the clauses were understood differently by the several contracting powers. Nor was anywhere stated that the Treaty of San Stefano was abrogated consequently. If the execution of the Berlin Treaty failed, Russia would possibly fall back on the previous contract, and the web of the Berlin Congress would be unraveled. In fact, another definitive treaty between Russia and Turkey on the basis of that of San Stefano had since been proposed by Russia, which would confirm some of the provisions of the former instrument that were most repugnant to Britain. Furthermore, no distinct evidence could be found that the provisions of the Berlin Treaty would be executed; in several respects no effectual means had been provided for implementing them.⁹⁰

One of the earliest declarations, constantly repeated, was that the Berlin Treaty should be fulfilled in the spirit and in the letter. It was doubted soon after the close of the Berlin Congress whether the Liberals would be as well qualified to carry out all the arrangements as the Government, which was responsible for the compact.⁹¹ Most of the leading Liberals expressed in 1879 their wish for the execution of the Berlin Treaty.⁹² The resolution Hartington moved in July 1878 already expressed in general terms an approval of the treaty, and Granville declared several times since that he was no opponent to the treaty. Even Gladstone expressed his deep respect for the settlement as a result of the Concert of Europe. 'I feel that the authority of the Treaty [of Berlin] is something very much higher and stronger than any argument I can use,' he told the House of Commons in July 1879.⁹³ Actually, the Liberal Party had carefully abstained from all proceedings and remarks calculated to hinder or prejudice the execution of the treaty. The Liberals viewed with satisfaction the progress in its execution, but they complained that what had been done within the year after the congress was for the most part regarding the easiest portions of the treaty, such as the rectification of the frontiers of Turkey, Montenegro and Roumelia. Those portions that were more difficult of execution or open to question – e.g. the relations between Turkey and Greece – were far from accomplished.

The execution of the Berlin Treaty was not discussed in Parliament until after 3 May 1879, the date by which Russia was bound to evacuate Eastern Roumelia and

⁹⁰ *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 148, no. 304 (Oct. 1878), 'England in the Levant', 591.

⁹¹ *The Times*, 22 July 1878, 9a.

⁹² Granville's attitude was typical of the leading Liberals on the subject. He said to Gladstone: 'Although there are mistakes in the Treaty [of Berlin], I have [no] wish to disturb its execution, in the manner which will keep us free from unnecessary entanglements and which will provide best for the happiness of the populations in question.' BL, Add. MSS. 44171, f.231, Granville to Gladstone, 4 May 1879. A fortnight later he told the House of Lords: 'With regard to the Berlin Treaty, I may say that I am not an opponent of it. I do not wish to see it remain unexecuted. I wish to see it carried out as far as possible so as not to embarrass or entangle us, while being of the greatest advantage to the Christian populations of Eastern Europe.' *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 246, 'Foreign Policy of Her Majesty's Government – Observations', 16 May 1879, Granville, p. 564.

⁹³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 248, 'Congress of Berlin (Unfulfilled Arrangements)', 22 July 1879, Gladstone, pp. 1073-74. Gladstone strongly opposed severing Eastern Roumelia from Bulgaria, but, as he himself said, so profound was his respect for the Berlin settlement that during the whole period of that arrangement he had never uttered a word of criticism.

Bulgaria. A sharper fire of questions was maintained when it became apparent that the Russians could not complete their evacuation by this day. Presently it leaked out that the construction of the treaty held by the Government was that the evacuation should only begin on 3 May. On 5 May Salisbury in the House of Lords explained at length how the Government construed the terms of the article relating to Russia's evacuation, and gave a general review of the progress that had been made up to that time in the execution of the Berlin Treaty. Its terms, he contended, had been in all respects scrupulously fulfilled: the principality of Bulgaria had been constituted; Eastern Roumelia had been established as a province under a Christian governor; Bosnia and Herzegovina had been occupied by Austria as was provided; the districts specified had been ceded to Montenegro; and he anticipated no difficulty in the delimitation of Serbia and Roumania. Besides, the Porte had revised the Cretan constitution in a liberal sense. It had not yet introduced reforms into Armenia, but it had sent a commission to ascertain the local needs and the local means. However, the first point on which Granville challenged an explanation was the very important one of the evacuation by the Russian troops of the occupied territories. That was the principal test of the practical execution of the treaty; and until it was carried into effect, not a judgement of the real condition of affairs in Roumelia and Bulgaria could be formed. With this question the Foreign Secretary was not able to confront directly. Harcourt repudiated afterwards Salisbury's interpretation by reference to Salisbury's famous circular and the terms of the Berlin Treaty. Neither could Granville agree with the ministerial construction of the treaty, but he did not want in the circumstances to press the Government to take too strict a view of the meaning of its terms. Granville had detected that the vacillation with regard to the execution of the treaty was in some degree owing to the difference of opinion between Disraeli and Salisbury on the Ottoman Empire. Granville was convinced that the Berlin Treaty would be carried out, but he complained of the enormous extent to which the Government had magnified its advantages, instead of giving it its real and practical value.

On 16 May a double attack was made by Argyll in the Lords and Harcourt in the Commons respectively upon the manner in which the Berlin Treaty was being put in practice and upon the policy it embodied.⁹⁴ Already Argyll and Harcourt had said much on this subject, and had expressed strong opinions respecting it. Argyll had published not merely pamphlets but volumes in denunciation of the Government's policy in the East; and Harcourt had availed himself of all the opportunities to hold up to ridicule the engagements to which Britain had been pledged, and had staked his statesmanlike foresight on predictions of their futility. With the exception of Hartington, the leaders of the Liberal Party continually denounced the Berlin Treaty as impracticable in many ways, evoking sometimes an impression that they neither wished nor expected the fulfilment of the treaty. That was not the case, to be sure. In July the desire of the Liberals to help forward the execution of the Berlin Treaty took the form of a motion in the House of Commons.⁹⁵ On account of the Anglo-Turkish clandestine conditional convention, the Liberals demanded that Britain should be the first among the Powers to insist on the implementation of the Berlin Treaty. So far as

⁹⁴ See *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 246, 'Foreign Policy of Her Majesty's Government – Observations', 16 May 1879, Lord Argyll, pp. 508-36; and *ibid.*, 'Treaty of Berlin – Execution of Articles – Question', William Harcourt, 16 May 1879, pp. 567-8.

⁹⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 248, 'Congress of Berlin (Unfulfilled Arrangements)', 22 July 1879, Charles Dilke, p. 1027. In mid-June Dilke had urged Gladstone to move. Gladstone agreed that there should be a debate on the question, but declined to be the mover. PRO, PRO30/29/29A, Gladstone to Granville, 13 June 1879.

the chief 'political' stipulations of the treaty were concerned, they were being carried into effect steadily; little, indeed, was left to be desired for now. Therefore, the Liberals' emphasis was placed on matters of 'cultural' importance, namely the questions of Turkish reforms and Greek frontiers.

The unfulfilled arrangements of the Berlin Treaty were brought into debate in the House of Commons on a motion for an address by Dilke on 22 July 1879. The procrastination of the Porte in giving self-rule to all the European provinces and in conceding to Greece the rectification of frontier promised by the treaty was the main point of Opposition arguments. The Liberals strenuously demanded the Government to carry out, in co-operation with the Great Powers, the promise jointly guaranteed by Europe that all the provinces of European Turkey were to set up a parliament on the basis of election. But on the other hand, most of the Liberal Party were much more pessimistic and much less demanding about the execution of reforms in Asiatic Turkey prescribed by the Anglo-Turkish convention, because they cared neither for the fall of the Turkish Empire nor for the keeping of Cyprus. Harcourt was by no means alone in saying: 'To my mind, no Eastern policy is worth discussion which does not assume as its basis, and make provision for, the inevitable and proximate dissolution of the Turkish rule.'⁹⁶ In view of the great difficulty in reviving the Turkish power by means of reform, the Liberals embarked on a plan for keeping the balance of power in the Balkans. To avoid the Russians from acquiring supremacy in Eastern Europe, it was thought 'legitimate and necessary to play off Austria against [Russia],' to the extent and in a way that would strengthen the Concert of Europe there and assist the native populations in organizing themselves.⁹⁷ The delay in readjusting the Greco-Turkish boundaries recommended in the 13th Protocol of the Berlin Congress excited much indignation in philhellenic circles, to which most of the Liberals belonged. For the Liberal Party, it was impossible to consider the Eastern Question settled until the needs of Greece had been satisfied. But it was improbable to meet the Gladstonian wish to give full effect to the Berlin Treaty, 'not with injustice to Turkey, but in the interests of Greece.'⁹⁸ In reality the Liberals were much more radical with the issue of Greek frontiers than with that of Turkish reforms, and they were prepared to have Britain act as the protector of Greece even at the cost of the Concert of Europe.

The constant contention of Gladstone (hence his followers) was that Turkey could be compelled, without war, to comply with what she was ordered to do, if Britain would bring about unanimous moral and diplomatic action on the part of Europe. In brief, his solution of the Eastern Question, in all its branches, was the moral coercion of Turkey by the European Concert. This was the Liberal programme in the East: simple but tough.

After the end of 1878 the Conservative Government was gradually losing its popularity because of – among other things – its foreign difficulties.⁹⁹ Meanwhile the

⁹⁶ *The Times*, 15 Jan. 1880, 9e.

⁹⁷ BL, Add. MSS. 44104, f.159, Argyll to Gladstone, 22 March 1880.

⁹⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 245, 'Treaty of Berlin – Protocol 13 – Resolution', 17 April 1879, Gladstone, p. 544.

⁹⁹ The Government had won two seats since the last general election, while the Liberal Party had won ten since the Eastern Question had been before the public. Gladstone wrote to Granville in November 1878: 'My belief has been pretty firm since the Anglo-Turkish convention that the Tory Party is traveling towards a great smash... I had no wonder at seeing you in their place before a twelvemonth.' PRO, PRO30/29/29A, Gladstone to Granville, 2 Nov. 1878; and BL, Add. MSS. 44171, f.194, Granville to Gladstone, 18 Sept. 1878.

Liberal Party was gaining strength as a result of its campaign to change British position overseas. Salisbury complained in August 1879 of the obstruction of the Government's domestic programme by Liberal eloquence on foreign policy.¹⁰⁰ By the time the foreign policy of the Liberals, in contrast to that of the Conservatives, became recognizable and began to appeal. At the end of the year Gladstone enumerated in his third Midlothian speech six principles with respect to foreign policy, which were soon to direct the diplomacy of a new Liberal government. He meant to foster the strength of the British Empire by just laws and by economy (rather than the naked force), to seek to preserve the world's peace, to strive to cultivate and maintain the principle of the Concert of Europe, to avoid needless and entangling engagements, to see that British foreign policy should be 'inspired' by such love of freedom as had marked the prominent Whig leaders Canning, Palmerston and Russell, and to acknowledge the equal rights of all nations.¹⁰¹ Gladstone later defined his own understanding of 'the special commission under which the Government had taken office' in 1880 to be to reconstruct the whole spirit and effect of the foreign policy of Great Britain.¹⁰² In his Midlothian campaigns, Gladstone kept the foreign policy of the Government well in the foreground, dealing only occasionally with domestic issues like the Land Laws, Local Government, Irish Home Rule, the National Debt, etc. In this way he launched severe attacks on the Conservatives' Eastern policy, and helped, for good or bad, to establish a new identity for the Liberal Party on the strength of the idea of foreign relations.¹⁰³

IV. Conclusion: The Eastern Question and the Formation of Liberal Diplomacy

The word 'imperialism' was invented by certain liberal-minded observers in England to stamp Disraeli's foreign policy with popular reprobation.¹⁰⁴ But this invention turned to be a two-edged sword, and the weapon wounded the hand that wielded it. When the Liberal Party saw its way clear to winning the general election of 1880, a suspicion was engendered, which seriously injured the Liberal cause, that liberalism was in some sort an antithesis to imperialism. It cost the Liberal leaders, particularly Hartington and his associates, great pains to eradicate this popular belief, as imperial enterprises and competitions had become keenly active since the Berlin Congress in 1878. While Gladstone proposed admirably his liberal programme on foreign affairs, Hartington pledged himself, in the name of the party he headed, 'to uphold the power of the Empire, secure the safety of our own country, and maintain

¹⁰⁰ Salisbury's speech to the London and Westminster Workingmen's Constitutional Association, 4 Aug. 1879. *The Times*, 5 Aug. 1879, 4e.

¹⁰¹ W. E. Gladstone, *Midlothian Speeches, 1879* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1971), 115-17. Also cf. BL, Add. MSS. 44666, f.98, Gladstone's note 'Foreign Policy: Right Principles', undated; W. E. Gladstone, *Third Midlothian Campaign: Political Speeches* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, undated), 40; and John Morley, *op. cit.*, 595.

¹⁰² Dilke memoir, undated, in Stephen Gwynn and G. M. Tuckwell, *op. cit.*, 318.

¹⁰³ In an address to the electors of Midlothian in March 1880 Gladstone said: 'Abroad [the Ministers] have strained, if they have not endangered, the prerogative by gross misuse; have weakened the Empire by needless wars, unprofitable extensions, and unwise engagements; and have dishonored it in the eyes of Europe by filching the island of Cyprus from the Porte, under a treaty clandestinely concluded in violation of the Treaty of Paris, which formed part of the international law of Christendom. If we return from considerations of principle to material results, they have aggrandized Russia; lured Turkey on to her dismemberment, if not her ruin; replaced the Christian population of Macedonia under a debasing yoke.' BL, Add. MSS. 44764, f.24, Gladstone's note 'To the Electors of Midlothian', 11 March 1880. Also cf. *The Annual Register, 1880*, 35; and John Morley, *op. cit.*, 607.

¹⁰⁴ *The Times*, 11 March 1880, 'The Opposition and the General Election', 11b.

its possessions.’¹⁰⁵ Although he declared at the same time that the Liberal Party would engage in no policy of disturbance or uncalled-for annexation, but the Conservatives would also give the same assurance with as much sincerity. There was, indeed, no material difference between Hartington’s description of the future policy of the Liberal Government in foreign affairs and Northcote’s vindication of Conservative policy in the past.

The foreign policy of the Liberal Party around 1880 was actually that of Gladstone, at first in theory and then in practice. The Liberal Party’s foreign policy had been taking shape in their attacks on Disraelian imperialism and against the background of an intensifying scramble for the Ottoman Empire since 1876. As an opposition to conservatism, the Liberals followed Gladstonianism. In respect of foreign affairs, Granville’s defence was generally not concise and direct, but it was quite as uncompromising as Gladstone’s. In the Liberal election campaign in March 1880 Granville declared assertively that the Liberal Party would in the future pursue a vigorous and firm policy in foreign affairs, and secure all the ends which the Disraeli Government had attempted to achieve overseas by more appropriate measures and with greater practical success. Forster urged the same arguments in the meantime, and professed what some of his colleagues would have denounced not long ago as ‘imperialism.’ This was the gist of nearly all the Liberal speeches of the day, which indicated that a new Liberal cabinet would be most resolute in carrying out the Berlin Treaty. It is interesting to compare them with the party discourse during 1877-1878 (particularly before the Salisbury circular was published), when non-intervention principle was affirmed impregably.

After the Liberals’ victory in the election, much speculation arose as to who would be the new Prime Minister. On the resignation (21 April 1880) of Disraeli, Hartington and Granville were sent for by the Queen. Although Victoria wished to charge Hartington with forming a government,¹⁰⁶ he advised her to summon Gladstone, for he knew that Gladstone would not accept any post in the government except premiership, and that no strong Liberal government could be formed without the support of Gladstone.¹⁰⁷ The Queen then asked, with great reluctance, Gladstone to form a government, and warned him that he would have to bear the consequences of his previous sayings, to which he entirely assented.¹⁰⁸ Granville, who was mostly in accordance with Gladstone on foreign affairs, became Foreign Secretary. The 1880 election proved to be a plebiscite in favour of Gladstone’s imperial thinking.

Writing to Granville in September 1878, Gladstone said, ‘Diplomacy is essentially irresponsible and I hold it to be the worst possible training for responsible, and *a fortiori* for despotic government.’¹⁰⁹ However, he tried to show that the moral duty of promoting ‘justice, humanity and freedom’ was not incompatible with national interests in dealing with the Turkish question.¹¹⁰ In less than two years,

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Hartington said to his audience on 25 March 1880: ‘if the Liberal Party were in power...[they] would not stake the interests or the honour of England upon the maintenance of the integrity and independence of an unreformed Turkish government. They would not treat the condition of those people and the relations of the Turkish Government to its Christian subjects as a matter which was only of interest to Russia and to Turkey, and in which we had no call to *interfere* except so far as certain definite interests of our own were concerned.’ Quoted in *The Annual Register, 1880*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Victoria Journal, 22 April 1880, in G. E. Buckle ed., *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd Series, vol. III (London: John Murray, 1928), 80.

¹⁰⁷ Granville, after a vain attempt to form a cabinet, declined the task as well.

¹⁰⁸ BL, Add. MSS. 44764, f.50, ‘Audience with the Queen’, 23 April 1880.

¹⁰⁹ PRO, PRO30/29/29A, Gladstone to Granville, 17 Sept. 1878.

¹¹⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 237, ‘The Supplementary Estimate’, 4 Feb. 1878, Gladstone, p. 959. More

Gladstone returned to power to redress Disraeli's jingoism in the East. Nevertheless, sensible of the expediency of maintaining the continuity of foreign policy, the Liberals were quick to seek for a ground of action common to both political parties in regard of the fulfilment of the Berlin Treaty. As such, the Liberal Party had built up a reputation for itself in the power politics of Europe, but by so doing it tragically debased itself as a critic of imperialism.

than three years later, Gladstone still held to this ideal solution to the Eastern Question. He told his Midlothian constituents: 'Beyond sea, in Europe, Asia and Africa, we have carefully and constantly striven to fulfil the expectations I may have led you to entertain. And although all the clouds have not yet disappeared, I am thankful to say that the horizon has been greatly cleared and a progress made in the sense of *liberty, justice and humanity*, at least as great as in a time so limited it would have been reasonable to expect.' Gladstone to J. Cowan, 30 May 1881 (read to the annual general meeting of the Midlothian Liberal Association), in H. C. G. Matthew ed., *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1990), 73.