1 Introduction

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On 28 July 1914 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. While this marks the beginning of the First World War, European politics had already been transformed by three wars over the previous three years – the wars before the Great War. In September 1911, Italian forces invaded Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, present-day Libya, but then two North African provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire was followed by two wars in the Balkans in 1912 and 1913. In the First Balkan War, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro, forming the Balkan Confederation, defeated the Ottoman Empire; in the Second Balkan War, in July 1913, the erstwhile Balkan allies fought each other, as Serbia, Greece and Romania easily defeated Bulgaria. These wars dominated European politics on the eve of the First World War. They constitute a bridge dividing a period of relative peace on the continent from the era of 'total war'. These three wars accelerated the collapse of Ottoman power in one of Europe's geopolitical cockpits, the Balkans, and the consequences rippled across the continent, raising questions about the balance of power, the visions of future war and the principles that underpinned political action in Europe. The purpose of the present volume is to place these wars and their wider repercussions at the centre of the transformations in international politics on the eve of the First World War.

Contemporaries recognised the significance of these wars. In November 1915 the second edition of *The War in the Balkans* appeared. Written by Noel Buxton, a British Liberal with a long-standing interest in the Balkans and the question of nationality politics, the book was re-issued in a second edition because 'it has been found by experience to meet a widely felt need'. Nobody, argued Buxton, could deny the significance of the conflicts in the Balkans in 1912 and 1913 'as a factor in the European war'.[1] Others pushed the causal chain back to the Italian-Ottoman War and its repercussions in the Balkans. 'The war became inevitable',

[1] Noel Buxton, *The War in the Balkans*, 2nd edition (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), p. 9.

the former French Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon told the nationalist writer Maurice Barrès in May 1916, 'after the march on Fez. This decision released Italy, which was eyeing Tripolitania. Then it was war between Italy and Turkey. There were the Balkan states raising their standards under the protection of Russia. Everything unfolded fatally.'[2] In 1921 Francesco Nitti, the former Italian Prime Minister, recalled: 'It is difficult to explain why Italy went to Tripoli in the way she did in 1911, bringing about the Italo-Turkish war, which brought about the two Balkan wars and the policy of adventure of Serbia, which was the incident, though not the cause of the European war.'[3]

Nor were these simply post-facto judgements, forged in the desperate circumstances of the First World War. Even before the Italian invasion of Tripolitania in September 1911 there were warnings about the possible repercussions. 'The outcome [of an Italian invasion] is uncertain', Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter, the German Foreign Secretary, told Jules Cambon, the French ambassador, on the eve of Italy's attack on Libya, 'and it will be impossible the moment it breaks out to hold back Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece. The Albanians and the Arabs in Yemen will revolt, and Austria, and perhaps Russia, will be compelled to intervene in the conflict which will set fire to the whole of the Orient: it will be a general war.' Cambon, who saw the war as a danger to 'Europe', was sympathetic to Kiderlen's plea.[4] The Italian Prime Minister, Giovanni Giolitti, noted in May 1911 that an invasion risked setting off a wider European conflict.[5] On 25 September 1911, an editorial in the leading Viennese newspaper, *Neue Freie Presse*, predicted that the conflict would spread to Europe, as the Ottoman Empire would respond to military attack by boycotting Italian goods and expelling Italian citizens from the Empire. The racial and religious hatred between Muslims and Christians would resonate in the Balkans, leading to conflict there. National hatred and the use of military power, unfettered by moral and legal restraints, would change the international system.[6]

Yet the significance attributed to these conflicts at the time had, until recently, lost its purchase on historical explanation. What Buxton believed in 1915 could hardly be denied, namely the seminal significance

[2] Maurice Barrès, *Mes cahiers, 1896–1923* (Paris: Plon, 1963), p. 761.
[3] Francesco Nitti, *Peaceless Europe* (London: Cassell, 1922), chapter 3.
[4] Jules Cambon to Selvès, 24 September 1911, *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1930–55), 2nd series, vol. 14 (hereafter *DDF*), doc. 354, pp. 503–4.
[5] See Chapter 2, pp. 24–5.
[6] 'Beginn des Kampfs um Tripolis', *Neue Freie Presse*, 25 September 1911, p. 1; see also Chapter 18, pp. 329–30, on British liberal concerns about the consequences.

of the Balkan Wars, became marginalised in the historiography. In his study of the Balkan Wars, originally presented as a PhD thesis at Harvard in 1932, E. C. Helmreich noted that 'the Balkan Wars were fought only to be at once dwarfed by the World War'.[7] The sheer scale of the First World War encouraged historians to look for longer-term causes and trends, such as imperial expansion, Anglo-German rivalry from the turn of the century and arms races. On the other hand, the debate on the immediate causes, the decisions taken in the July crisis, remained contentious because of the so-called war guilt clause in the treaty of Versailles, which held Germany and her allies solely responsible for the outbreak of war.

In the 1970s Joachim Remak proved to be an isolated voice in arguing that the First World War was, in fact, the Third Balkan War.[8] His argument was largely neglected until the 1990s, when the scholarly gaze turned towards the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean. This reflected changes in contemporary geopolitics since the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall reshaped the map and meaning of Europe. In addition, the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, the emergence of Turkey as a regional power, the enlargment of the European Union and debates about multi-culturalism in contemporary Europe have reframed perspectives on the past. Katrin Boeckh acknowledged the impact of the Yugoslav Wars on her study of the Balkan Wars, while the Carnegie Report on the atrocities in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 was reissued in 1993, with a new preface by the historian and diplomat George Kennan.[9] In 2000, Richard Hall published his single-volume study of the Balkan Wars, concluding that they 'introduced an age of modern warfare, encompassing mass armies, machines, and entire civilian populations'.[10]

This shifting historiographical perspective on the origins of the First World War found its most vivid expression in Christopher Clark's monumental study *The Sleepwalkers*, which places the Balkans at the heart of the debate on the origins of the First World War. He acknowledges the contemporary context in which he writes. The world before 1914 no longer strikes us as strange and distant, but modern and fresh, he argues. Complex European crises, terrorists, rising and declining powers, and

[7] Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912–1913* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. vii.
[8] Joachim Remak, '1914 – the Third Balkan War: Origins Reconsidered', *Journal of Modern History*, 43, 3 (1971), pp. 353–66.
[9] George Kennan, *The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993).
[10] Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 130.

an international public sphere – key features of the pre-1914 world resonate today.[11] Clark shows how the wider tensions within European politics before 1914 intersected with the latent hostility between the national claims of Serbia and the imperial and Great Power status of Austria-Hungary. This produced what Clark calls the 'Balkans inception scenario', in which statesmen, generals and others considered the possibilities, dangers and attractions of a general European war, starting in the Balkans. In turn the 'cascade of wars that brought mayhem to the Balkans', he notes, 'began in Africa' with the Italian invasion of the Ottoman provinces in Libya.[12]

This 'cascade of wars', their consequences for the transformation of international relations, their impact on the European public sphere and their consequences for military thinking and planning on the eve of the war form the central themes of this volume. This is a consciously Eurocentric point of view that neglects other important events in these years before the war, notably the Mexican revolution of 1910, the Chinese revolution of 1911, the shifting balances in the British empire, particularly the negotiations at the 1911 Imperial Conference, and the election of Woodrow Wilson in the United States in November 1912. While the course and legacies of these events transformed global politics, Europe continued to make the global weather, set the agenda and change the world, for good and for ill. And within Europe, these wars were pivotal in the transformation of the international order. This book has four sections, beginning with a series of chapters examining the wars themselves and the belligerents. These states and societies managed to create space in an international order dominated by the Great Powers to assert their own interests, although the ensuing wars entailed terrible suffering, atrocities and political, economic and social upheaval. Caccamo explores Italian foreign policy, while Wilcox assesses the experiences of Italian soldiers in North Africa in 1911 and 1912. Three chapters address various facets of Ottoman history in the Balkan Wars as Tokay examines diplomatic calculations, Ginio the impact of the war on the home-front and on children in particular, and Üngör the ethnic cleansing of Muslims from the Balkans. Two chapters by Newman on Serbian politics and Vukov on Bulgarian politics conclude the section on the belligerents. The second section is devoted to the reactions of European military planners to the wars, the lessons gleaned and ignored, and the impact on their strategic calculations. Whereas Pöhlmann, Wettstein and

[11] Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), pp. xxv–xxvi.
[12] Ibid., p. 244.

Kronenbitter consider to what extent these wars shaped military thinking amongst the German, French and Habsburg officer corps, Menning's chapter shows how the outcome of the wars reshaped Russian mobilisation plans. The Great Powers sought variously to control, manage and exploit the geopolitical and diplomatic consequences of the war, the subject of the third section of chapters. Otte and Kießling assess the crisis management and diplomatic efforts of the British and French Foreign Offices, Hannig reconsiders the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary and Bormann's chapter explores the ways in which notions of racial struggle influenced German foreign policy. The final section considers the popular understanding of the wars throughout Europe at a regional, national and transnational level. Rose's examination of British radicals and foreign policy provides a link between foreign and domestic politics and Kruse scrutinises the role of international socialists in localising war and the limits of the alternatives they offered. While Scheer considers the reaction of the German-language press within the Habsburg Empire, Keisinger compares the media reports on the wars in Germany, Britain and Ireland.

The wars and the belligerents

The wars, on their own terms, were hugely significant events, not least because in their conduct it is possible to identify features that characterised warfare during the two global conflicts between 1914 and 1945. The Italian-Ottoman and Balkan Wars were highly destructive, marked by large-scale, often systematic atrocities against non-combatants, revealing the importance of ideas about ethnicity and religion in these wars. Though German observers attributed the atrocities in the Balkan Wars to the 'primitive level of culture', they were also fearful that these atrocities reflected the character of national wars – and might well be repeated in a general European war.[13] Rather than representing a reversion to ancient ways, the atrocities were a harbinger of the conflicts to come. After Arab and Turkish forces killed 21 officers and 482 soldiers at Shara Shatt, with associated rumours of mutilation and crucifixion, Italian forces responded by executing approximately 4,400 Arab civilians, including 400 women. This marked the beginning of severe repression of civilian resistance to Italian rule in Libya that endured into the 1930s.[14] In the Balkans regular and irregular forces pursued a policy of ethnic cleansing. This included the murder, rape and expulsion of Muslims. This created a crisis on a scale that anticipated the wave of refugees in the Russian

[13] See Chapter 12, p. 224. [14] See Chapter 3, pp. 43–4.

empire in the First World War.[15] Almost half a million Muslims fled eastwards, some of whom were later involved in the Armenian genocide, an act of revenge against an abstract Christian enemy. Once the Balkan states began to quarrel over the distribution of territory in 1913, national minorities, notably Bulgarians in Macedonia, were vulnerable to repression, dispossession and killing.[16]

The conduct of military operations became a subject of intense political, as well as strategic, significance, as armies were judged according to the putative standards of 'European civilisation'. Whereas violence against civilians has long been a feature of warfare, the atrocities in these wars took place against a background of efforts to codify the laws of war at the Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907. The debate about atrocities in the wars before the war, particularly the Balkan Wars, anticipated to a certain extent the debates about German atrocities in the invasion of France and Belgium in 1914.[17] The politics of atrocities both revealed and reshaped existing power relationships in the international system between 1911 and 1914. Standards of behaviour were not applied equally to all belligerents, so that European liberals tended to downplay or ignore atrocities against Muslims, while criticising the Ottoman Empire for the mistreatment of Christians. This confirmed the emerging view amongst Ottoman intellectuals that the empire could not hope to rely on the precepts of 'civilisation' or international law. This mirrors the disillusion amongst Ottoman diplomats with the Concert of Europe.[18] On the other hand, the German press in Austria-Hungary wrote about the atrocities perpetrated by Serbian troops against Muslim civilians. The German press in the Habsburg Empire reflected its political animus towards the Serbian nationalist project, but it proved unable to mobilise any meaningful political support for Muslim victims, let alone the Ottoman Empire.[19]

The politics of these atrocities were complex and dynamic. Violence could, but did not always, escape political control. Belligerent governments exploited atrocities to cultivate popular support for war or for future revenge. Atrocities fuelled a culture of revenge in the Ottoman Empire in 1913.[20] Categories of victims did not remain immutable,

[15] See Chapter 5, pp. 78–82; Peter Gattrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
[16] See Chapter 8, pp. 144–6.
[17] John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2001).
[18] See Chapter 19 and Chapter 4, pp. 355–7 and 67–73; Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 21.
[19] See Chapter 17, pp. 310–17.
[20] See Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, pp. 86–91 and 102–12.

as people found their identities recast through violence and political interest. Balkan Christians could easily be transformed into antagonistic Serbs and Bulgarians. The collapse of the alliance between the Balkan states went hand in hand with violence against ethnic minorities in the newly expanded nation-states.[21] In Italy the killing of Italian soldiers at Sciara Shatt destroyed expectations of a warm welcome from the local Arab populace and hardened attitudes to the conduct of war, justified by a complex assortment of ideas, including the civilising mission, the legacy of the Risorgimento and Catholicism. The Arab 'revolt' also provided Giolitti, the Italian Prime Minister, with an opportunity to pursue his plan to annex Libya, rather than administer it. This amounted to an important escalation of Italian war aims, undermining chances for a rapid negotiated settlement and necessitating a widening of the Italian war effort from North Africa to the eastern Mediterranean.[22]

These wars entailed popular mobilisation, patriotic support, enormous financial costs and the drafting of a large proportion of men into armies. This was less pronounced in the case of Italy, though mobilisation went far beyond the requirements of the initial, limited military plans. Moreover, as other imperial powers before Italy had discovered, a colonial war could shake the fiscal stability of the state.[23] In Serbia and Bulgaria urban crowds greeted the outbreak of war with enthusiasm. Less is known about the reaction in rural areas, where the vast bulk of the population lived. In any case, enlistment rates were very high, sustained in part by popular nationalist mythology. Volunteers came from outside these states, including ethnic minorities in the Habsburg Empire and returning emigrants, demonstrating the transnational character of nationalist politics. Popular mobilisation was an uneven process, even within individual states, a result of changing war aims and enemies, experiences of war and state propaganda. Although the First Balkan War was popular in both Bulgaria and Serbia, the Second Balkan War proved less so, some viewing it as a civil war between Slav brothers.[24] Defeat also spurred preparations for future remobilisation, as thwarted territorial ambitions and fantasies of revenge stimulated popular anger in the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria in 1913.[25]

[21] See Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, pp. 124–7 and 144–6.
[22] See Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, pp. 30–6, 43–4 and 47.
[23] See Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, pp. 35–6 and 44–51; Douglas Forsyth, *The Crisis of Liberal Italy: Monetary and Financial Policy, 1914–1922* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 84–5.
[24] See Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, pp. 124–7 and 141–4.
[25] See Chapter 8, Chapter 6 and Chapter 5, pp. 145–7, 102–12 and 86–91.

Mobilisation sharpened conflicts between and within civilian and military authorities. As happened during and after the First World War, military service enabled officers to assert their claims to represent the nation. In the context of 'institutional radicalism', the Serbian officer corps, already a powerful political force since the coup of 1903, framed the national interest in a particularly aggressive way, escaped the control of civilian authorities, supported paramilitary groups and by the spring of 1914 had provoked a major constitutional crisis. The domestic political crisis in Serbia further exacerbated tensions between Belgrade and Vienna on the eve of the First World War. Blurred lines between civilian, military and paramilitary authorities and institutions in Serbia complicated Austro-Hungarian efforts to manage the threat of Serbian nationalism to the Habsburg Empire.[26] Despite defeat the army remained a significant force in Bulgarian politics. Many Bulgarians, in their analysis of the defeat, emphasised the political errors that threw away early military victories.[27] In the Ottoman Empire, as elsewhere in the Balkans, the lines between military and civilian authority were blurred because of the series of coups and counter-coups since 1908, culminating in the seizure of power by the Committee of Unity and Progress in January 1913. Under Enver Pasha, the CUP sought to forge a militarised national community, rendering conventional understandings of the distinctions between soldier and civilian meaningless. For example, children's education was shaped by their future role as soldiers.[28]

The extent to which remobilisation in 1913 and 1914 was hindered by the experience of wars is touched upon in several contributions. Popular expectations before and at the beginning of these conflicts contrasted with high death tolls, humanitarian crises and financial strain. Although the Balkan Wars were short in comparison to the First World War, death tolls in less than a year of fighting equated to 1 per cent of the population in Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. These were similar to death rates in the early months of the war for the French and German armies. The number of refugees in the Ottoman Empire amounted to over 2 per cent of the population. All of the belligerents were forced to take on foreign loans to service the costs of war – with the exception of Italy, whose fiscal retrenchment since the turn of the century was undone by the ongoing conflict in Libya. In other words, a short war could be extremely costly in blood and treasure. Despite the persistent tensions and the unresolved crises, these experiences acted as a restraint on renewed war in 1914.

[26] See Chapter 7, pp. 122–8.
[27] See Chapter 8, pp. 140–3.
[28] See Chapter 6, pp. 107–10.

Political leaders, even when they entertained hopes of a future war of conquest, wanted peace to consolidate their gains. Even in the Ottoman Empire where greater pressures for revenge existed, diplomacy proved cautious.[29] Of the belligerents in the wars before the war, only Serbia fought from the outset of the Great War.

The reaction of military planners

These wars proved to be the final opportunity for European general staffs to observe combat before the First World War. Despite the employment of aircraft for the first time by Italian forces in November 1911, European observers considered that they had little to learn from the war in North Africa because of the asymmetry between the forces and the particular nature of the environment. Conceptions of cultural and racial differences engendered scepticism about the possible lessons of the Italo-Ottoman War. Italian soldiers viewed their Habsburg foes after 1915 as similar, whereas they dismissed their Turkish and Arab opponents as bestial and barbaric.[30] Indeed assumptions about social and cultural development in the Balkans shaped the attitudes of European observers in the wars in 1912 and 1913. Notions of geography and cultural specifity were closely intertwined. Some admirers of the Balkan states emphasised that atrocities were specific to Ottoman military practice.[31] German military observers blamed the atrocities on the perceived cultural backwardness of the belligerent societies, at the same time harbouring anxieties that they were a product of modern nationalist mobilisations.[32]

Despite these assumptions, European armies sent officers to observe and analyse these wars – as had happened in the Russo-Japanese and South African Wars earlier in the century.[33] These observers, despite their limited access to the front, paid close attention to infantry tactics and artillery support. Yet these observations had no significant impact on military operational and tactical thought on the eve of the war. Wettstein, Kronenbitter and Pöhlmann offer similar arguments as to why this was the case. First there was simply no time for the armies of the Great Powers to learn lessons, update tactical guides and change training techniques in the twenty months or so that separated the outbreak of the First Balkan War from the Great War. Second, armies, like other large institutions,

[29] Aksakal, *Ottoman Road*.
[30] See Chapter 3, pp. 40–2, 48–9.
[31] See Chapter 11, p. 197.
[32] See Chapter 12, pp. 224–6.
[33] Olivier Cosson, *Préparer la Grande Guerre: L'armée française et la guerre russo-japonaise (1899–1914)* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2013).

have a complex bureaucracy that slowed down the possibility of change. Yet even with more time, as all three authors emphasise, it is unlikely that the officers' observations would have altered military doctrine radically. They viewed the battlefields in the Balkans through the lens of pre-existing ideas.[34] Hence Austro-Hungarian and French observers praised the primacy of the offensive in Bulgarian and Serbian operations as the key to their success. The emphasis on the cult of the offensive was further enhanced by the limited equipment of the belligerents – morale, rather than materiel, became the key explanation for the victory of the Balkan states over the Ottoman Empire, reflecting in some ways contemporary Ottoman criticisms of their own military performance. Military observers claimed that good morale derived from the patriotic and offensive spirit. In this sense the Balkan Wars provided the prelude to the offensives of 1914, inspired by patriotic fervour and military training.[35] By contrast the trench warfare at Çatalca, between Bulgarian and Ottoman forces, had little place in the European military imagination in 1914.

The outcome of the wars did have consequences, however, for the war plans of the Great Powers. The Austro-Hungarian general staff, already facing the potential danger of a three-front war, now had to take the Serbian military threat seriously. The Habsburg army would have to be equal in size to its Serbian enemy; it could no longer rely on superior technology, training or command. This exacerbated the strategic dilemma facing the Austro-German alliance, as Habsburg forces were in a worse position to hold off Russian offensives in the east.[36] Russian planners were slower to see how the outcome of the Balkan Wars altered the strategic calculus in Europe, only recognising in 1914, two years after redrafting the mobilisation plan, that the rise of Serbia would draw off Habsburg forces from the Russian front. On the other hand, Russian planners took the diversion of Italian forces to North Africa into account, believing that it was now unlikely that Italy would participate in a war against France, therefore easing the burden on the Franco-Russian alliance.[37] Such an assessment chimed with the drift of Italian diplomacy, but the Chief of the Italian General Staff, Pollio, was busy assuring his German counterpart, Helmut von Moltke, of Italian aid in case of a general European war. Neither the Russian nor the Habsburg generals had worked out adequate plans on the eve of the war, caught as they were between multiple threats and competing intelligence assessments.[38]

[34] See Chapter 10, Chapter 11 and Chapter 12, pp. 183–6, 195–7 and 220–2.
[35] See Chapter 10 and Chapter 11, pp. 180–4 and 198–9.
[36] See Chapter 11, pp. 199–202.
[37] See Chapter 9, pp. 164–6.
[38] See Chapter 9 and Chapter 11, pp. 168–75 and 199–203.