

Quote from Wikipedia, "Fall of the Ottoman Empire".

### **The Decline Theory**

Berkes was one of the first writers in the 1960s to summarise the works on Ottoman socio-economic history.[67] He suggested one of the reasons for Ottoman economic decline was the inability of the ruling class to make a clear choice between war and the more conventional types of capital formation.[68] Berkes' work however focused on the confrontation of the Ottomans and the Europeans, though important however had little detail on the commercial activities of the state. Itzkowitz and Inalcik state Ottoman writers attributed the Empire's troubles to the dissolution of the circle of equity, erosion of the sultan's authority, disruption of the timur system and the demise of the devshirme, "describing symptoms rather than causes".[69] They argue causes comprised geographical and logistical limitations, population growth after the sixteenth century, inflation due to influx of Peruvian silver and the end of profitable conquests.[70] Itzkowitz states, "the state could find no remedy" to these problems, and Inalcik, "As a result of these upheavals, the Ottoman Empire of the seventeenth century was no longer the vital empire it had been in the sixteenth"[71] – however neither show the issues remained a long-term problem.

Some argue several factors contributed to the Empire's decline:

- The European powers wanted to expand[1]
- Religious opposition to critical thinking; the ulema wanted to "protect" the populace from information that might be disseminated through books other than the Koran. Although Muslims had been aware of the printing press by the 13th century, but it was not until 1727—272 years after Gutenberg, and later still than the Chinese—that the Şeyhülislam released a fetva decreeing its compatibility with Islam.[72]
- Economic problems
  - Competition from trade from the Americas[1]
  - Competition from cheap products from India and the Far East[1]
  - Development of other trade routes[1]
  - Rising unemployment within the Empire[1]
- Administrative problems
  - Ottoman Empire became less centralised, and central control weakened[1]
  - Sultans being less severe in maintaining rigorous standards of integrity in the administration of the Empire[1]
- Political problems
  - Sultans becoming less sensitive to public opinion[1]
  - The low quality Sultans of the 17th and 18th centuries[1]
  - The ending of the execution of Sultan's sons and brothers, imprisoning them instead[1]
  - This apparently humane process led to men becoming Sultan after spending years in prison — not the best training for absolute power[1]

### **Economic problems**

The fall of the Ottoman state is often attributed to the failure of its economic structure. The Ottoman state organization was planned when the economics of the period were agricultural. Its public functions depended on public investments through an institution called vakifs. As the economy of the times changed, the Ottoman state was isolated from the public as its economic participation in development of the inns, hospitals, libraries, or indeed as explained before every function was dependent on public cooperation. As the west moved to industrialization, Ottomans failed to adapt their system to the changes. At the turn of the 19th century modern taxation was not used and utility investments were not adapted to modern needs. With the change of trade routes, the Ottoman Empire lost its main income source. Inability to industrialize the state and too great a dependence

on farmers as a source of revenue through taxation were other factors. The economy of the Ottoman state was no match to its counterparts and signalled the end of the empire. The trade dynamics were based on non-state elements. As early as the 1470s Greeks and Jews were the premier traders, not the Ottomans. The Ottoman state concept was based on establishing public order. Consequently, the Ottomans were forced to protect the Greek elite in order to maintain a functioning economy. They were, moreover, constantly obliged to deal with social unrest among the empire's Greek community. When the Greek elite turned against the Ottomans, the empire lost control. The Greek elite blamed the economic problems on the Ottomans and offered an escape route to Greeks by pursuing a nation of their own. In reality, even after the Greek revolution, the same elite was controlling the economy with the trade routes having already been altered.

### Technology

The Industrial Revolution saw even greater changes. The Ottoman Empire did not have a social structure well adjusted to the free-market capitalism needed to build factories. The Empire also lacked crucial supplies of coal and other needed commodities.

Communication technology of its time did not migrate into state structure. With improvements in communication the population that was distributed along the trade routes became concentrated on the centres. This population was highly affected by the economic competition of that time. The populations that moved into cities faced hardships which tested their patience, persistence, and adaptability. The Ottomans had to keep the system running under these social pressures.

### Trade

During the rise and growth era, almost all trade between Asia and Europe had to pass through Ottoman lands or seas. Revolution in shipping in Europe beginning in the 16th century allowed European traders to by-pass the Empire. This also caused a major shift in trade patterns from the Mediterranean Sea to the oceans. With most of the Empire's population and major centres located on the Mediterranean, this greatly affected the Empire as well as other southern European states such as Italy.

An inevitable side effect of this large scale trade with Europe was increasing links between Ottoman provinces and Europeans. As Britain became dependent on Egyptian cotton for its textile mills, Britain became even more involved in the internal politics of that country, eventually declaring it a protectorate in 1882. Lebanese silk was mostly shipped to Marseilles, and increasingly France came to dominate that area. Many of the provinces were more closely linked to Europe than to Istanbul. When railways were built, largely by Europeans, they linked to the coast, not to the capital. As a result the Ottoman Empire shifted from being a producer of manufactured goods to being a producer of raw materials for European industry. Different parts of the empire moved towards producing different commodities. Mount Lebanon became a centre of silk production. Syria, once one of the world's great steel producers, grew foodstuffs. Egypt became one of the world's largest producers of cotton.

### Administrative problems

In any effort to modernize or reform the empire the Sultan was always opposed by the powerful military and religious elite who did not want to lose their traditional powers. One of the most powerful of these elites was the powerful religious body known as the ulema. If the ulema was displeased with a Sultan a decree known as a fetva would be issued and the Sultan would be removed from power. The threat of a fetva was a powerful weapon used many times by the ulema to force the Sultan to back down from reforms.

Unstable leadership was also a problem. The second most powerful man in the Empire was the Grand Vizier, the advisor in chief to the Sultan. This position was considerably weakened by the fact that to prevent a fetva or coup the Sultan would often sacrifice his Grand Vizier. In turbulent times Sultans would thus frequently go through dozens of Grand Viziers in only a few years. This

prevented a stable government, the thing most required in turbulent times.

Other practices weakened the Empire's leadership. One of the most problematic was the method of ensuring that an uncle or brother of the Sultan did not try to seize power. For the duration of the Sultan's reign they would be locked away in a small apartment, known as a kafe, never to see the outside world. Whenever a Sultan died or was deposed of with no male heir, his brother or uncle would be taken out of the kafe and made ruler of the Empire.

Sultans could take several wives and many concubines. It was thus possible for a sultan to have many children, and in particular, many sons. A practice of fratricide grew up, in which on the death of a sultan, one of the sons would become the new sultan, who would then be isolated from all his brothers. Although this did not always happen, many were executed. The thought behind this practice was that it was considered important to remove any possibility of having different focal points for power, and a rationalisation was that the death of a few would be a small price to pay for political stability. The fear of civil war, in which many could die, was a strong driving force for this practice.

### **Political problems**

The autocratic, imperial system of Ottoman rule changed little over the centuries, while its Western European neighbors slowly evolved into fairly stable nation-states. The loss of nearly a quarter of the Empire's territory added to the already existing economic problems to make the situation ripe for revolution. The situation was especially dangerous in Constantinople, which had thousands of refugees fleeing the Balkans. A number of small coups broke out, trying to overthrow the Sultan. None of them were well organized or even remotely successful, but they filled Abd-ul-Hamid II with a paranoia that led to a self-imposed isolation in the palace of Yildiz.

The entire Ottoman Empire was built around the Sultan, but he never left his palace and would only see a few trusted advisors. Unlike other states of Europe, such as Germany, where a weak ruler could be made up for by a powerful Chancellor, there was no one who could make up for a weak Sultan. While in his self-imposed exile the Sultan's Empire continued to fall apart. Egypt had long been only loosely connected to the Ottoman Empire and in 1882 the British invaded it for the Suez Canal. In 1896 Crete revolted and received aid from the Greeks. This soon led to a war between the Ottoman Empire and its former province. For the first time in centuries the Ottoman Empire won a war unaided. Greece was invaded from the North and the Ottoman armies marched south as far as Lamia before King George I of Greece agreed to an armistice. Greece lost some of Thessaly, and had to pay an indemnity to Turkey. Crete was, however, given almost complete autonomy to appease Britain and Russia which did not want to see its Christian inhabitants returned to the Turks. The military victory did nothing to stop the rise of revolutionary sentiments. In 1902 a meeting in Paris brought together the leadership of the "Young Turks" — a group, mainly made of students, who were fervent Turkish nationalists wishing to do away with the archaic Empire. In Bulgaria and Macedonia terrorists started bombing Ottoman banks and government buildings demanding total independence. The two rebellions eventually joined in 1908 when an army regiment stationed in Macedonia rebelled and fled into the hills. It was joined by Macedonian rebels as well as large numbers of Young Turks. This group called itself the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Soon other regiments in Bulgaria and Rumelia mutinied as did many of the Anatolian soldiers sent in to end the rebellion. Abd-ul-Hamid had no choice but to give in to the revolutionaries' demands. A constitution was adopted and a parliament created. Abd-ul-Hamid was now the leader of an Ottoman constitutional monarchy. Soon after the first election, which CUP won easily, there was a counter coup by the more conservative military officers. The coup failed to destroy the new government, mainly due to the skill of an unknown Adjutant-Major named Mustafa Kemal. When the liberals discovered that the Sultan had aided the coup they decided that he must go. Thus a fetwa was issued and Abd-ul-Hamid II's long reign was at an end.

## **Military**

Inefficiencies originating from the size of the empire were significant. Trying to keep the empire intact through internal and external wars was a costly process which compromised the Ottoman Empire's capacity to introduce reform.

To create a modern state out of the Ottoman Empire the area that most needed redevelopment was the military. Most Sultans realised this, but their efforts were repeatedly repelled. The most powerful group in the empire, and the one most averse to change, were members of the Sultan's personal army. These were known as the Janissaries. They were first created from a tax, known as the *devsirme*. The *devsirme* was imposed on all Christians living in Ottoman controlled territory. Every five years one in five Christian sons were given to the Sultan. Some entered the civil service, some went into politics, and a few managed to rise to the position of Grand Vizier. The majority of the boys, however, entered the army. They were trained to be master warriors supremely loyal to the Sultan, and became known as the Janissaries. They were strictly led by an ancient code of honour and were ready to sacrifice themselves for their Sultan at any time. Over time, however, the Janissaries, with their great strength and close attachment to the Sultan, gained a great deal of power in the empire. With power came corruption, and during the 18th century the Janissary code of honour gradually disappeared. The Janissaries became rich through bribes and theft. They used their power to control the government, and do all that was possible to prevent changes to their traditional powers. By the 1820s they were no more than a group of heavily armed thugs rebelling at even minor military changes. The situation was desperate; the Ottoman army had fallen so far behind the rest of Europe that any aggressive power could take the capital. In 1826 the Janissaries revolted against the Sultan's decree that forced them to wear western military uniforms. Rather than back down to the Janissary threat as all previous Sultans had, Mahmud II used his new artillery regiments against the Janissary barracks in Constantinople. The barracks was destroyed and all Janissaries trying to flee were killed. Outside the capital most of the Janissaries peacefully disbanded, but many of them were executed on charges of treason. With the removal of the Janissaries the path to military reform was now open, but after centuries of Janissary interference the Ottoman army could never fully recover.

To modernise the army and bring it up to European standards, outsiders were brought in. These outsiders were regarded with suspicion by the empire's elite. The senior members of the army and government still thought that they were back in the 17th century when the Ottoman army was more powerful than any other on Earth; however, signs of decline were already evident. Catherine the Great annexed the Crimea and Georgia at the end of the 18th century, and the Sultan had no way to intervene. Bessarabia was lost in 1812 after the Ottomans attempted to take advantage of Russia's war with Napoleon. The first losses to Russia, an enemy of the empire for centuries, were a great embarrassment, but they were not enough to motivate reform. In the early part of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire allied with France, and thus it was to the French that the Sultan turned for aid in rebuilding his military might. When they requested help from the Directory, a young artillery officer named Napoleon Bonaparte was to be sent to Constantinople. He did not go, for just days before he was to embark for the near east he proved himself useful to the directory by putting down a Parisian mob and was kept in France. It is interesting to think what a man of Napoleon's skill might have done with the Ottoman army. In his place a parade of French officers were brought in, but none of them could do a great deal. One example of an advisor who achieved limited success was the Baron de Tott. He succeeded in having a new foundry built to make artillery and he directed the construction of a new naval base. It was almost impossible for him to divert soldiers from the regular army into the new units. The new ships and guns that made it into service were too few to have much of an influence on the Ottoman military and de Tott returned home.

## **INSTRUCTIONS**

This time we will try a more analytical text and see how that works out.

Today I want you to work in groups of 3-4. You have in your hand a copy of a text from Wikipedia that actually tries to analyze how important different factors were on explaining the decline of the Ottoman Empire.

Each group should work with one factor. You have until 08.50 to do the analysis. by that time you should have prepared a short (5 minutes) presentation for your classmates explaining how your factor lead to the Decline of the Ottoman Empire. The entire group doesn't have to do the oral presentation. You are of course not allowed to read out from the paper, you have to explain and use the white board.

Group 1 Economic problems.

Group 2 Technology.

Group 3. Trade

Group 4. Administrative Problems.

Group 5 Political problems.

Group 6. Military.