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Introduction

THE MAN stood on the rolling train, nervous and uncertain. Twenty-six years old, he was traveling to the port city of Salonica, a Mannlicher carbine slung over his shoulder. The heat of the summer day had long since dissipated, and a cool night breeze—what remained of the day's *meltem*, the Etesian wind—drifted inland from the Aegean. A gibbous moon glistened in the cloudless sky, bathing in its soft light the throngs moving along the city's streets. They, too, were streaming toward the railway station. Oil lamps and torches lined the station's platforms and surrounding avenues, their flares and glows overlapping and intermingling, illuminating against the starry night the banners and flags adorning the approaches.

The crowds were electric with anticipation. Salonica was caught up in the fever of revolution. Since morning orators had spoken without pause; far from wearying their listeners, the repetition had only stoked their fervor. No resident had experienced anything like this. When word spread that the heroes of the revolution were arriving ahead of schedule, excitement surged anew, and the multitude pressed toward the station. Bands played, heightening the sense of drama.

The shriek of the approaching train's whistle sent a shiver of exhilaration through the crowd. The anxious young man aboard the train was a junior army officer—a distinguished graduate of the military academy and a veteran, already known for his courage and daring in combat. Yet neither his training nor his experience had prepared him for this. Apprehension had seized him and would not relent. He stood almost motionless, absently fingering the sling of his weapon.[1]

As the locomotive slowed and began to pull into the station, a waiting band struck up a march composed no more than seventy-two hours earlier. Buoyant voices sang out in unison:

Today we made a revolution
Without a match in the world.

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Traitors, scoundrels, tyrants
We laid waste.
Working as one we formed
An alliance, a fortress.
We represented freedom
The nation, with right.

As the voices rang out, the train rolled to a soft halt astride the platform. The music ended, individual shouts went up, and then the crowd as a whole began to roar. The throng was demanding something—or someone—but amid the din and clangor it was difficult to understand what. Now thoroughly rattled, the anxious junior officer had not even realized the train had stopped until it was past time for him to get off it. Even so, he could not move by himself. He whispered to a man standing to his side, "Let's step off the train together." Clinging to his comrade with one hand and struggling to keep his carbine from sliding off his shoulder with the other, the young officer stepped onto the platform. Looking like a "nervous school child" called to receive a prize, he shuffled forward awkwardly.[2]

The officer's hesitant gait only further roused the crowd. As their cries and chants swelled once more, an older bearded man broke from the throng, approached the officer on the platform, and embraced him. First the elder began to weep, then the younger. Those looking on erupted in jubilant cheers at the sight. A still greater roar arose when the inspector general—the most senior authority in the province, Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha—stepped forward to embrace the young officer, in effect acknowledging the twenty-something as not merely an equal but a superior.

Then a series of men closer to the officer's age came forward, greeting and embracing him in turn, gradually pulling and pushing him toward a large table set up in the middle of Olympos Square, amid the vast sea of bodies. Slight of build and not especially tall, he would vanish in the crowd and then resurface again as the small swarm of young men propelled him onward. Once he reached the table, those nearest lifted him up and pulled him onto it.

Decorated with carpets and woolen throws, the table served as an improvised speaker's platform. Standing above the crowd at the center of the square, the officer could now discern some of their shouts and cries—"Long live Enver!" among them. He caught sight of a familiar face in the front row: a thick-set, dark-complexioned colleague named Talat. Yet he remained ratted, still fumbling with his Mannlicher—now trying to rest it against the table, now to lay it down.

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A fellow officer, Cemal, approached, slapped him on the knees, and hissed in exasperation, "Be strong, Enver! Everyone is waiting for you. Come on, let's go!"

The crowd had fallen silent. It was Enver's moment—he was the focus of all eyes, the hero for whom the multitude had waited. Yet he stood there dumbstruck, frozen in place. He looked down at Cemal, who gestured urgently with his eyes and eyebrows, imploring Enver to speak.

Enver summoned his reserves of strength to master his nerves. After a long moment of hesitation, he began. He made a halfhearted gesture with his right hand and then uttered, "Countrymen!"—in a voice so tremulous it carried barely ten meters before dissipating into the dark, humid night air.

"Enver! What are you doing?" Cemal exclaimed in disbelief. Enver turned toward him, a look of helpless embarrassment on his face. Cemal saw that the man who was meant to play the evening's hero was instead utterly lost.

"He's choking. Let's get him out of here—into the club. Now!" Cemal said to those beside him. He seized the nonplussed officer's hand and, with the others, pulled him down from the table and hustled him away. Enver, the military academy's standout and lion of the battlefield, had faltered, reverting to the shy introvert he had been as a boy.

The "club" Cemal had mentioned was not a place of leisure or amusement but a meeting ground for the once-clandestine conspirators who had plotted to overthrow the absolutist rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Barely three weeks earlier, those conspirators—including Enver and Cemal—had orchestrated a mutiny against the sultan. Abdülhamid was a cunning guardian of his throne who, for three decades, had ruthlessly suppressed opposition to his rule through relentless surveillance, rigorous censorship, and extensive spying. Rising against him was an act of extraordinary daring: the chances of success uncertain, the penalty for failure certain—death.

Yet the mutineers had dared, and their mutiny became a revolution. On Thursday, 23 July 1908, the sultan, realizing he had lost control of his army, yielded before the threat of a march on Istanbul and announced that he would meet their demand and restore the constitution he had suspended thirty years earlier. The proclamation sparked jubilation in Salonica and much, though not all, of the rest of the empire.

A principal instigator of the mutiny-cum-Constitutional Revolution was the same shy young officer—Enver Bey. A precocious student and standout in the classroom, he had, upon his posting to the Balkans, earned a reputation as a hard-charging officer who hunted insurgents relentlessly and fought them without fear. His role in what came to be known as the Young Turk Revolution catapulted

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FIGURE 1. Enver Bey, One of the Heroes of the Ottoman Constitution. Souvenir postcard from Salonica. Courtesy Turkish Historical Society, Türk Tarih Kurumu.

him to worldwide fame as the Hero of Liberty, as millions throughout the Ottoman Empire and beyond hailed his name and the promise of a brighter, freer future (fig. 1).

He Rose like the Sun

As the night of 26 July in Salonica had awkwardly revealed, Enver was scarcely suited to the public role he found himself compelled to play.

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One of his early and close colleagues, a Romanian named Nicolae Batzaria, wrote that at their first meeting in 1907, the bashful Enver reminded him of nothing so much as a blushing girl. Reflecting six years later at the sheer improbability of Enver's ascent to global celebrity, he marveled, "This man was born on a lucky day."[3]

Yet his fame—and power—would continue to swell. Over the next six years, Enver would quash a counter-revolution, travel across Europe as a celebrated military attaché, lead a major anti-colonial insurgency in North Africa, overthrow an Ottoman government, help install a modern one-party regime, marry a sultan's daughter, assume supreme command of the Ottoman army and direct its foreign policy, and ultimately plunge the empire into the First World War. To the surprise of allies and the bitter regret of enemies, the army he reshaped would endure four years of total warfare—prolonging the Great War by two. During those tumultuous years, Enver became the face of the Ottoman Empire. Contemporaries around the globe described him as not merely the most important man in the Middle East but "the most fascinating figure of the war."[4]

By November 1918, however, the tide had turned. Enver fled a vanquished homeland. Adversaries at home and abroad barred his return, vilified him, and hunted him for "crimes against humanity"—a term of art coined to describe Enver and his colleagues' wicked wartime annihilation of the Ottoman Armenian and Syriac Christian communities. Some sought justice through his trial and execution; others sought vengeance through his assassination. Refusing to concede defeat, he pressed on. Over the next four years, he brokered rapprochement between Germany and Bolshevik Russia, founded the world's first global organization for Islamic revolution, and forged an anti-imperial alliance linking Soviet power and the colonized Muslim world—before ultimately breaking with the Soviets and meeting a legendary death in battle against the Red Army in Central Asia.

While alive, Enver fired the imaginations, dreams, and fears of millions (fig. 2). His decisions brought ruin to multitudes. He played on a global stage. Muslims both inside and outside the empire hailed him as a hero and source of inspiration; thousands named their sons in his honor. Kaiser Wilhelm II, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin were among those whose lives intersected with his. Among his closest associates were a group of unruly and violent men—gunslingers inspired by such ferocious loyalty to Enver that they were willing to kill or die for him. Germans referred to the Ottoman Empire as "Enverland." British novelists cast him as a cunning villain, orchestrating religious messianism to topple the British empire.[5] Western journalists found him captivating, and

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FIGURE 2. Demonstration in honor of Enver Bey in Salonica on 25 July 1908. Courtesy of Picryl.

feminists penned admiring portraits. Armenian revolutionaries, seeking retribution, stalked and haunted him to his final days. Through all the years of revolution, war, and exile, he sustained a passionate and tender relationship with his beloved princess wife, Naciye Sultan.

Enver's legacy has remained as complex, confused, and contested as his life. Inside Turkey, he has for a century been an object of derision and contempt. Supporters of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), depicted Enver as a reckless dreamer and bungling commander, a near-traitor whose attachment to Islam and miscalculations on and off the battlefield caused the deaths of untold numbers and the loss of an empire. Meanwhile, more religious Turks viewed him as a lawless bandit who undermined the Islamic caliphate and paved the way to the secularization and westernization of their country and culture. On the far right of the Turkish political spectrum, extreme nationalists inverted the Kemalist depiction, cultivating a mythical figure who fought to the end for the glory of all Turkic peoples. Western observers and historians routinely portrayed Enver as the embodiment of the dysfunction of the Islamic East—an exemplar of the preening narcissism and rank incompetence all too typical of dysfunctional Orientals. Still others excoriated him as a fanatic whose megalomania led to the genocide of a million Armenian and Assyrian Christians.

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Just two weeks after Enver's death in 1922, the editors of *The New York Times* denounced him as a "devil incarnate," but concluded with an intriguing declaration, "The true story of Enver's life would be more absorbing than the fictions that have grown up about it."[6] He was indisputably a figure of extraordinary fascination, yet he has been the subject of only one comprehensive and credible biography, which was written over a half century ago.[7] Thus, as one historian observed, Enver remains "the most enigmatic and romantic figure the Muslim world has produced in the 20th century."[8] We need not remain in the shadow of the enigma. Enver's public life is exceptionally well documented, and extensive collections of his personal correspondence with family and colleagues provide direct access to his private thoughts and confidences.

Moreover, his life offers more than an object of curiosity. Although historians have most often portrayed him as an anachronism, his career reflected and anticipated the currents that would shape the twentieth century in the Middle East and beyond. As Batzaria observed, as improbable as Enver's ascent might have been, ultimately it was not luck that propelled him to fame: "The truth is that he owed his situation to the qualities he possessed."[9]

There is no shortage of sources on Enver. As a leading political figure in the final decade of the Ottoman Empire, he left a voluminous paper trail in the form of orders, reports, and decisions preserved in the imperial archives.[10] Colleagues, rivals, subordinates, superiors, friends, and enemies wrote memoirs and produced critiques, appreciations, and reminiscences of him. As a global political actor, Enver also drew the close attention of foreign leaders, diplomats, and journalists, many of whom recorded their impressions and analyses. Not least, he left behind an extensive corpus of personal letters to his family and closest friends, offering remarkable insight into the thoughts, motivations, and emotions of one of the most consequential figures of the twentieth century.[11]

The true story of Enver's life *is* more absorbing than the fictions and legends around it. But it has been too big, too complex, and too controversial to be told. Seeking to muffle that history, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, his colleague and rival, once advised, "Enver rose like the sun and departed with the splendor of a sunset. Let's leave the rest to history." It is beyond time to delve into that history. This is the story of that anxious and uncertain young man on the train.

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