

## CHAPTER 13

# THE YOUNG TURKS AND THE BAHA'IS IN PALESTINE

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The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 was a turning point that opened up new prospects for Ottoman society and politics. It created a milieu in which new ideas could be shared in a relatively open manner. The case of the Baha'is in Palestine, even though they were seemingly a *quantité négligeable* among the religious communities, is a good example of the dissemination of reformist thoughts in that period. Based on unpublished letters of 'Abdu'l-Baha written in Ottoman Turkish, this chapter deals with the post-Revolutionary relations between the Baha'i leader 'Abdu'l-Baha ('Abbas Effendi, 1844–1921) in Ottoman Palestine and the Young Turk elite. It discusses the significance of Palestine to the development of the Baha'i community, the contributions of 'Abdu'l-Baha to the reform discourse in the Ottoman Empire, the tense relationship between 'Abdu'l-Baha and Sultan Abdülhamid II, 'Abdu'l-Baha's previously unknown connections with some leading Young Turks, and the Baha'i leader's attempt to infuse Baha'i thoughts into the CUP. The chapter rounds with an overview of the declining relationship between the CUP and 'Abdu'l-Baha during World War I.

### **The Baha'i Religion in Late Ottoman Palestine**

Baha'u'llah (Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, 1817–1892), the prophet-founder of the Baha'i religion, was expelled from his native country of Iran in

1853 due to his leading role in the revolutionary religious Babi movement.<sup>1</sup> With the approval of the Ottoman state, Baha'u'llah chose Baghdad as his place of exile. When tracing the life of Baha'u'llah from Baghdad – where he remained in exile for ten years and was given Ottoman citizenship to protect him from Iranian interference – to the Ottoman capital Istanbul, Edirne in Rumelia (1863–68) and finally to 'Akka [Acre] in Palestine, the development of the Baha'i religion needs to be situated in the wider context of late Ottoman reformism. It was largely due the tolerant attitude of the Sublime Porte in general that the Baha'i religion survived and took on its present form as the successor to the Babi faith that was nearly eradicated in Iran.<sup>2</sup>

Baha'u'llah died in Palestine as a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire. He was allowed to live outside the prison-city of 'Akka for the last fifteen years of his life. During these rather silent years when he was not under the spotlight of the Ottoman government, he composed many of his important writings that refer to the reformation of the world in general and to reforms in the Ottoman Empire and Iran in particular. His opus magnum, *al-Kitab al-Aqdas* [The Most Holy Book], which he composed in 'Akka, constitutes the core of his universal reforms. In Palestine he continued writing and sending letters to the political and religious leaders of his day in which he called upon them to establish world peace. He invited them to follow his religion as it offered solutions to the ills of the age and would, he claimed, usher in a 'Golden Age'.

Baha'u'llah also entrusted his son and successor 'Abdu'l-Baha with the external affairs of the community vis-à-vis the Ottoman authorities, and it was in this period until 1908 that 'Abdu'l-Baha was increasingly in the fore. The prestige of the Baha'is in Ottoman Palestine was enhanced through 'Abdu'l-Baha's friendly relations and connections with some Ottoman officials such as Midhat Paşa, and later liberal Young Turks. These contacts opened the gates of the citadel to Baha'u'llah after nine years of incarceration within the city walls, provided a safe environment for the development of the religion and paved the way for 'Abdu'l-Baha's release from his own confinement in 'Akka.

### 'Abdu'l-Baha on Reforms

The wave of reforms in the Young Turk period allowed for an exchange of ideas among diverse ethnic and religious groups. Education was regarded as the pivot of reform by the Young Turks, and this common feature linked them with Baha'i ideas. Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha were in contact with Ottoman reformers from the 1870s onwards. With a claim to a new religious faith, in many of his writings, Baha'u'llah, calling himself a 'World Reformer',<sup>3</sup> stressed the need for education as a means toward the spiritual regeneration and the material progress of humanity.<sup>4</sup> He repeatedly linked chiliastic concerns with democratic themes, showing the way in which he saw his appearance as a world messiah to have turned the world upside down.<sup>5</sup>

The political climate during the reform period in the Ottoman Empire (*Tanzimat*, 1839–76) and Iran, are discussed in 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Risala-yi Madaniyya* [Treatise on Civilization, 1875] and *Risala-yi Siyasiyya* [Treatise on Politics/the Art of Governance], 1892).<sup>6</sup> In his first treatise 'Abdu'l-Baha deplores the backwardness and decadence of Iran and proposes reforms in all spheres of the state, affirms the need for a parliament and ethical and secular education and the employment of able statesmen to ensure just rule.<sup>7</sup> He calls the *Risala-yi Madaniyya* 'a tribute' to the 'high endeavor' of Nasiru'd-Din Shah (r. 1848–96), the incumbent Qajar ruler, to improving the conditions in Iranian society; 'a brief statement on certain urgent questions'.<sup>8</sup> The treatise was circulated anonymously and is said to have attracted wide readership among the Iranian intelligentsia, particularly after its printing in 1882. But later when it became known that its author was a Baha'i, no one would admit to having read it.<sup>9</sup> His *Risala-yi Siyasiyya*,<sup>10</sup> written as a response to the events during the Tobacco Revolt in Iran (1890–92), is a discussion of politics and society.<sup>11</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha emphasizes that man-made laws are not enough to enable human progress and that divine law or religion is indispensable to educate the people. He adds that the interference of religious leaders (*ulema*), especially ignorant ones, in political affairs is dangerous and cites the deposition of Ottoman Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–76) as an example. In that 'greatest object lesson', students of religious schools revolted, demonstrating against

the Bulgarian uprisings, the massacres of Muslims in the Balkans and the inability of the state to deal with the affair.<sup>12</sup> In a letter written during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (*masbrutiyyat*, 1906–11) ‘Abdu’l-Baha refers to his *Risala-yi Siyasiyya* and sums up the involvement of religious leaders and students in the fall of Abdülaziz. He says that in Istanbul on every corner and bazaar their cry ‘We want war! We want war! (*harb isteriz, harb isteriz*)’<sup>13</sup> could be heard. After this conflict during which religion was abused for political ends and much blood was shed, the Ottomans lost most of their domains in Rumelia and Anatolia. He says that despite his advice and exhortations in the *Risala-yi Siyasiyya*, ‘the ears were deaf and the eyes blind’ and similar violent events occurred during the Constitutional Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

In one of his unpublished Turkish letters dealing with reform in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, ‘Abdu’l-Baha once more advocates the non-involvement of ‘ulema in politics. This letter is also probably his only known direct reference to the *Tanzimat*. He speaks about Iran’s worsening conditions caused by ignorant ‘ulema and the country’s need for reform after the model of the Ottomans as inaugurated by Sultan Mahmud II. His emphasis is on secular reforms; clerics should only be concerned with spiritual and ethical matters; i.e., they should educate the people and guide their conduct. He furthermore commends the shah for having inaugurated reforms for the betterment of Iranian society.<sup>15</sup> Here reference is made either to the reform attempts of Nasiru’d-Din Shah in the 1870s<sup>16</sup> or the ‘useful reforms of the just government’ of Muzaffaru’d-Din Shah (1896–1906).<sup>17</sup>

### ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Sultan Abdülhamid II

‘Abdu’l-Baha actively disseminated Baha’i reformist thoughts and was in touch with leaders of the dissident ‘Young Ottoman’ movement such as Namik Kemal, Ziya Paşa and Midhat Paşa, either through letters or personally.<sup>18</sup> These contacts made him a political mischief-maker in the eyes of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Moreover, he was accused by local Ottoman officials in Palestine of having harmful relations with foreigners and of buying land for the Zionists in Palestine in the 1890s. Some Arab local officials in Palestine reported false accusations

to the sultan that the Iranian 'Abbas Efendi, who was in exile in 'Akka and able to obtain anything he wanted through his wealth and influence, had allied himself with like-minded officials to buy land at a cheap price from poor people, then to sell it to Jews and foreigners for profit.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, news of subversive religious activities in Lebanon and in 'Akka in 1905 reached Istanbul. It was claimed that committees under the supervision of Muhammad 'Abduh, then the grand *mufiti* of Egypt, were attempting to spread the 'Babi [Baha'i]' and 'Wahhabi [Salafi] sects' by exploiting the laxity of Ottoman civil and military servants. Conservative Ottoman *'ulema* who opposed reformism made the Salafis and their leader Muhammad 'Abduh appear dangerous in the eyes of the sultan, by insinuating that the expansion of the superstitious and mischievous ideas of these 'sects', which contradicted the Islamic *shari'a*, along the Syrian coast, poison the people's minds. The argument went on that, foreign intrigues heightened the nefarious impact of the Baha'i and Salafi activities. Therefore, the propagandists of these heretical sects need to be monitored, their efforts in establishing committees prevented and the coastline constantly controlled; if necessary more troops should be sent there.<sup>20</sup> The Hamidian regime had also been concerned for some time that 'Abbas Efendi was maintaining good relations with Bedouin sheikhs, and this issue needed proper attention in order to prevent an Arab revolt.<sup>21</sup> Later the sultan sent a Commission of Inquiry (1905) to investigate the matter and 'Abdu'l-Baha was interrogated. As a result he was accused of mischief and almost exiled to Fizan in the Libyan Desert.<sup>22</sup>

Earlier, in 1901, Abdülhamid had renewed 'Abdu'l-Baha's confinement in 'Akka. The Ottoman authorities were observing the activities and development of the Baha'is inside and outside the Empire closely. 'Ali Ferruh Bey, the then Ottoman ambassador to Washington D.C., filed a report<sup>23</sup> on the strong influence of the Baha'i leader on people and his loyalty to the Sultan, and was convinced of the 'future power and importance' of the 'Babi sect'. He advised Abdülhamid to use 'Abdu'l-Baha as a 'spiritual weapon' (*manevi bir silah*) against Iran and its efforts to spread Shi'ism. This did not convince the Sultan. Neither was he persuaded by 'Abdu'l-Baha's own pledge of loyalty.

In a Turkish letter to Abdülhamid – to my knowledge the only letter directly addressed to the Sultan – the Baha’i leader talks about the imperial decree ‘that has been issued recently’ concerning his confinement in ‘Akka.<sup>24</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha most probably wrote his letter as a response to the renewal of his imprisonment in 1901.<sup>25</sup> He says that ‘no dishonorable condition and act contrary to the imperial will has manifested itself on my behalf or our community’ and assures the emperor that he and his followers are his loyal subjects who ‘hesitate to meddle in the affairs of the government (*umur-i hükûmet*) and the transactions of the people (*muamelât-ı abali*)’, as required by Baha’i principles (non-involvement in partisan politics).

The motivation for the letter was ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s contacts with Americans and the report that they were joining the religious community he headed. Here and in other Turkish letters ‘Abdu’l-Baha presents the Baha’i religion as a *tarikât* [‘way’, ‘path’ or ‘religious order’] within Islam, and not as a new religion. Throughout their stay in Ottoman domains – until the death of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in 1921 – the Baha’is presented themselves to outsiders in the Middle East as followers of Islam and as advised by Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha refrained from attracting Ottomans to the Baha’i faith. Any other course of action would have been disastrous because the Baha’is would have faced severe persecution. ‘Abdu’l-Baha notes in his letter to Abdülhamid that ‘nothing has been undertaken to attract and admit even a single individual from among the Ottoman subjects to join our *tarikât* during our lengthy stay in ‘Akka for more than thirty years’. ‘Abdu’l-Baha consequently states that the Americans were guided to Islam (*ibtida*) through the teachings of Baha’u’llah. Initially, American Protestant missionaries in Iran engaged in religious conversations with the Baha’is and joined the ‘Baha’i *tarikât*’. The new converts returned to America, propagated the Baha’i teachings and won over many Americans in a short time. Later, some Americans who travelled to Palestine met ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and this resulted in their belief in the ‘manifest religion of Muhammad’ and they recognized ‘the unity of God, approved and confirmed the prophethood (*nübüvvet*) of His Holiness, the glory of the Messengers [Muhammad], and believed in the greatness (*ulviyet*) of my late father Baha’u’llah’.

These conversions prompted anger and enmity among the American Protestant community in Palestine, 'they gave the affair a different coloring and informed his Majesty'. This resulted in the renewal of 'Abdu'l-Baha's imprisonment. Nevertheless, he expressed the wish that the guidance of Americans to Islam would please Abdülhamid and his subjects.<sup>26</sup> He asks him to examine the appended Baha'i chronicles written during his father's time and so witness 'the affection (*iblas*) and loyalty (*sadakat*)' of Baha'u'llah toward the Sultan.

After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 'Abdu'l-Baha freely expressed his disapproval of Abdülhamid's injustices toward Baha'u'llah, himself and the Baha'is. Before this, notwithstanding the steps taken by the Sublime Porte against the Baha'is in that period, 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke with gratitude about Abdülhamid at that time and stressed the Sultan's impartiality towards the Baha'is. Owing to the atmosphere of censure and the tight network of spies working to identify subversive activities during the Hamidian reign, 'Abdu'l-Baha could not have done otherwise.<sup>27</sup>

### Secret Connections and a Baha'i Paşa

In August 1908, immediately after the Young Turk Revolution, 'Abdu'l-Baha was released from imprisonment as a result of the amnesty for political prisoners.<sup>28</sup> A few years later, he was able to leave the 'Akka-Haifa area and travelled to Egypt, Europe and North America to spread the Baha'i teachings (1910–1913). Often in his talks he praised the CUP for releasing him and for their efforts to secure freedom. 'Abdu'l-Baha expressed his appreciation for his liberation before it was clear that the military wing of the CUP would take over with a *coup d'état* (1913) or what that would mean. Past research was unable to determine how and through whom 'Abdu'l-Baha was freed from imprisonment. In the light of Turkish letters that he wrote after his release, we know now that he had had secret contacts with the civilian, parliamentary wing of the Young Turk circles in Istanbul and Salonica during the reign of Abdülhamid. In those letters 'Abdu'l-Baha praises the CUP and supports its goals.

'Abdu'l-Baha made contact with the leading Young Turk Bursalı Mehmed Tahir Bey (1861–1925). He was a military man, teacher, mystic and Ottoman writer, who had been assigned to different military and administrative posts including Salonica and Istanbul and was delegate for Bursa at the Ottoman Parliament from 1908–11.<sup>29</sup> Tahir Bey was also cofounder of the secret *Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti* [Ottoman Freedom Society] in Salonica (1906). Around that time Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) founded a similar organization when he was stationed in Syria<sup>30</sup> and went secretly to Salonica in 1906 to make contact with the like-minded Mehmed Tahir, who had been his teacher at the military school there.<sup>31</sup> It is possible that as a well-known reformist figure in the Middle East 'Abdu'l-Baha made contact with Tahir Bey through reform-minded officers such as the young Mustafa Kemal during his postings in Syria and Palestine.

What is certain is that 'Abdu'l-Baha was in contact with Tahir Bey via a Baha'i in Istanbul by the name of Ahmed Şevki Efendi and through an Ottoman official named Bedri Paşa. The latter, Hasan Bedreddin (1851–1912),<sup>32</sup> was a military commander and writer who had been involved in the deposition of Sultan Abdülaziz in 1876.<sup>33</sup> Due to the repressive atmosphere during the reign of Abdülhamid, he was removed from Istanbul to Syria and Palestine where he served as colonel.<sup>34</sup> After the Young Turk Revolution, Bedri Paşa was governor general (*vali*) of the province of İşkodra [Shkodër, today in Albania], from 1909 until 1911.<sup>35</sup> In Persian Baha'i sources he is mentioned as Bedri Bey (Badri Beg), who was exiled to 'Akka before 1908, was translator of 'Abdu'l-Baha into French and a Baha'i.<sup>36</sup> The latter's other contact person, Giridî Ahmed Şevki Efendi, was a soap-maker/merchant (*sabuncu*) from Crete. He is not mentioned in available Baha'i sources but appears in a photograph of Baha'is of Istanbul, taken in April 1919.<sup>37</sup>

'Abdu'l-Baha must have come in contact with Bedri when he was deputy commander in 'Akka around 1898. Because of having been a Young Turk and the injustices he allegedly committed at that post, he was sent to another place.<sup>38</sup> According to the letters of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Bedri's next posts were in Beirut and then Damascus.<sup>39</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha's more substantial letters to Bedri Paşa in terms of political matters



were written during the latter's governorship in Īškodra and after his retirement. As military governor Bedri Paşa had to face uprisings by Albanian insurgents against the CUP and clashes between Christians and Muslims. He proclaimed 'holy war' against Christian rebels and tried to suppress them.<sup>40</sup> As the troops were insufficient, he used religion and appealed to the Muslims to accept arms from the government and defend their town and faith.<sup>41</sup> He wrote to Istanbul asking for permission to pursue a more aggressive policy toward the Albanian rebellion. Bedri wanted more control over the mountainous Īškodra region in the north and requested more troops. The Sublime Porte praised the governor for his initial reforms but encouraged him to proceed with caution.<sup>42</sup>

'Abdu'l-Baha refers to events in Albania during the governorship of Bedri Paşa and praises him for the 'exceptional administration' in view of the rebellions all over the Ottoman Balkans, particularly in Albania.<sup>43</sup> He adds that it is crucial to deliver the people from ignorance and inertia and bring them into the civilized world. 'Abdu'l-Baha encourages Bedri to establish unity based on Baha'i core beliefs by abolishing division and enmity among the diverse people of the province. The means for this 'foremost achievement' was the diffusion of knowledge and education, making it accessible to all, and so delivering the diverse sects from evils and foolish prejudices.<sup>44</sup> Through Bedri Paşa's 'divine confirmation', the people and tribes of Īškodra, 'who are the most fanatical in Albania, live in comfort and peace' and the province is 'different from other provinces as regards the perfect safety and peace in such a time of tumult and rebellion'.<sup>45</sup> According to 'Abdu'l-Baha a practical and beneficial step to be taken for the security of the country would be the construction of roads everywhere in the province.<sup>46</sup>

In another letter written after Bedri Paşa's retirement and his stay in Istanbul, 'Abdu'l-Baha states that in talks he held during his travels in Europe he always praised the CUP. When he was a prisoner during the time of Abdülhamid's 'despotism', he was freed by the 'resolute efforts' of the Committee as soon as liberty was proclaimed. When he came across some objections in newspapers towards the 'esteemed Committee', he 'candidly and justly defended it for the sake of seeking

the truth'.<sup>47</sup> Referring to the war between the Ottomans and Italy in Libya in 1911–12 in the same letter 'Abdu'l-Baha warns the Turks against Italy's nationalistic and imperialistic ambitions: 'Detailed information about Italy's violent breaking of treaties, its utter oppression, injustice, and finally the harmful consequences of the sudden cruel and bloodthirsty attacks causing destruction, has been delivered with conclusive proof'. In line with Baha'i ideas, he adds though that 'inasmuch as there are many traitors in Europe, there are also faithful people who think beyond national lines and promulgate universal peace and expect the advent of the unity of mankind'. He wrote to Bedri Paşa that he was willing to present the ideals of the CUP in the United States where he was invited by leading public figures: 'If there are suitable thoughts that the esteemed Committee has and wants to present and promulgate there, I ask you to convey these to me through your Excellency'.<sup>48</sup>

In yet another letter to Bedri Paşa 'Abdu'l-Baha also talks about enemies and nay-sayers in the Ottoman Empire who want to cause chaos because of their selfish interests, and who, as part of their schemes, presented him as an enemy of Abdülhamid. He writes that 'it is evident and known to you and to the world that my secret connections with the Young Turks in the time of Abdülhamid have been always the cause of hardships'. After his release he was accused of being a supporter of despotism so as to instigate the CUP to turn against him. 'Since my conduct and manners are as manifest as the sun for your Excellency', he then asks Bedri Paşa, 'investigate the matter and inform the esteemed Committee of Union and Progress in Istanbul and Salonica, especially Tahir Bey, the Bursa delegate, of the truth'.<sup>49</sup>

From Palestine 'Abdu'l-Baha contacted Mehmed Tahir Bey through the Baha'i Ahmed Şevki Efendi in Istanbul, and sent two Baha'is to meet him.<sup>50</sup> After the meeting, 'Abdu'l-Baha expressed his gratitude. He wanted to convey to members of the CUP, especially to Mehmed Tahir Bey, that if the principles of 'the Baha'i *tarikāt*, the teachings of his holiness Baha'u'llah, his exhortations and counsels are understood properly, it is impossible not to admit that it is the source of happiness to mankind'. 'Abdu'l-Baha thanked the CUP for having sent a person to meet him [i.e. 'Abdu'l-Baha] and asked for further meetings

between a person appointed by the CUP with Baha'is he dispatched to Istanbul.<sup>51</sup> In still another letter to Ahmed Şevki Efendi, 'Abdu'l-Baha expresses his hope of meeting and talking with a figure from the CUP; specifically Mehmed Tahir Bey should visit him in Egypt.<sup>52</sup> He then talks about the Young Turks as 'the destroyer of the edifice of tyranny and the source of life for Turkey and Iran' and hopes that the 'righteous liberals of Iran may live long through the aid and grace of God' because 'since the day on which liberty (*hürriyet*) was proclaimed in Iran, the Baha'is live overall with joy and peace'. He adds that he prays that God may assist and confirm the CUP. As he was in prison for thirty years under Abdülhamid, after the Revolution the CUP 'took the chains and fetters' from his neck and placed them around the neck of the 'tyrannical and bloodthirsty' Abdülhamid. Thousands of oppressed victims were liberated from chains and fetters and from exile, and the 'rascal (*berif*)' himself was incarcerated.<sup>53</sup> Despite Abdülhamid's tyranny that surpassed that of Yazid,<sup>54</sup> foolish common people would still respect and love him; because they were blind and ignorant they despised the CUP.

'Abdu'l-Baha directed Ahmed Şevki to present his letter to Mehmed Tahir Bey.<sup>55</sup> Then, in his letter to Mehmed Tahir Bey himself, 'Abdu'l-Baha thanks the Committee for its 'zeal and justice (*bimmet ve adalet*)' in liberating him and adds that through the Revolution 'the radiating light of the morn of liberty illumined the horizons of the country'.<sup>56</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha calls Rumelia, were the Revolution started, 'the day-spring of the lights of freedom' and 'dawning-place of the lights of truth'.<sup>57</sup>

### Young Turk and Baha'i Ideas

In another letter, written in Persian, 'Abdu'l-Baha underscores the similarity between the ideals and goals of the CUP those of the Baha'is.<sup>58</sup> He states that the 'Baha'is assist the Committee of Union and Progress with heart and soul. They are on the same path, have the same disposition, seek freedom and love liberty (*azadi-talab va hurriyyat-parvar*), hope for equality, are well-wishers of humanity and ready to sacrifice their lives to unite humanity (*vahdat-i bashari*).

Despite the laudable efforts of the CUP in striving for unity among the various groups in the Ottoman Empire, 'Abdu'l-Baha states that the aims of the CUP are only concerned with the physical world and those of the Baha'is are broader in that they seek the unity of humanity as a whole and are concerned with spiritual progress. He affirms that true progress comes from spiritual power, and the East is its source. But presently the East is the captive of the West; they are at war because Europe made it its policy to constantly attack defenseless Asia. A look at history reveals that throughout the ages and centuries the East has been victorious over Europe through its spiritual power (*quvvat-i rubani*) and not through material power (*quvvat-i jismani*). There were times when troops of the East – the Umayyads, Tamerlane, Genghis Khan and Sultan Selim [Selim I, the Ottoman sultan] – were victorious over the West; however, this was not continuous and it was only through its spiritual powers that Asia subdued Europe and won immense victories. 'Abdu'l-Baha calls on the East, here represented by the CUP, to use its spiritual power once again to oppose Europe and shake its pillars, and so reveal the true splendor of Asia.

In line with this 'Abdu'l-Baha cautions the CUP not to rely on conventional politics and refers to Baha'u'llah's teachings which stress that however much human politics (*siyasat-i bashariyya*) shows progress (*taraqqi*), it is nothing compared to divine politics (*siyasat-i ilahiyya*), because 'divine politics is the light of the physical world and an immeasurable mercy that encompasses all peoples and nations. [...] Therefore we need to follow divine politics, especially in this glorious century and this age of the progress of humanity in which nothing but divine politics leads to success'. By conforming to divine politics Baha'u'llah bestowed a new spirit (*rub-i-yi jadid*) on Iran that has easily penetrated and influenced even the remotest places in America. 'Now all the peoples of the East must be content and happy with this politics, and delighted in the pervading influence of the teachings of Baha'u'llah in Europe and America'. Lastly, he calls on the Baha'is to do everything in their power to familiarize themselves with the 'benevolent aims' (*maqasid-i khayriyya*) of the CUP and respond to its just endeavors by assisting it.

This opportunity was afforded when 'Abdu'l-Baha visited Washington D.C. in April 1912 in the first week of his travels in the United States to present the Baha'i religion.<sup>59</sup> There he met Yusuf Ziya Paşa, the Ottoman ambassador to Washington. For the Sublime Porte 'Abdu'l-Baha's presence in the American capital was a sensitive political issue that could upset the balance with Iran and Russia. Hence, initially it did not want the ambassador to be contact in with him. In his memorandum to Istanbul Yusuf Ziya Paşa states that considering 'Abdu'l-Baha's positive reception by eminent people in America, his constant praises of the CUP that displayed justice and liberated him and the gathering held in his honor by the Iranian embassy<sup>60</sup> at which he was present, the Ottoman Embassy could not be indifferent toward him. Therefore 'Abdu'l-Baha and some of his followers were honored at a dinner. He adds that this was received positively and his followers (about 800) wrote and signed a letter of gratitude to be forwarded to the Young Turk government, hoping that the Baha'is could be of assistance to the CUP.<sup>61</sup>

### 'Abdu'l-Baha and Cemal Paşa in Palestine

Even though 'Abdu'l-Baha was shown due respect initially by the Young Turks, the tides turned against him once more after the militant nationalist Young Turks seized power in 1913 and Enver Paşa, Talat Paşa and Cemal Paşa took over as a dictatorial triumvirate.<sup>62</sup> The euphoria over the 'liberty', 'equality' and 'brotherhood' of the Young Turks did not last long. On the contrary, the rule of those three Paşas in particular proved to be more repressive and bloodier than that of Abdülhamid and ended in the collapse of the Empire after World War I. Non-Turkish and non-Muslim minorities, especially Christians, suffered from the radical nationalistic ideology of the CUP which resulted in forced settlements, deportation and a 'Turkification' policy.<sup>63</sup> The Baha'is were not affected by this, but CUP antagonism manifested itself otherwise.

The attitude of General Cemal Paşa (1872–1922), Military Governor of the Ottoman troops in Syria (1914–17), towards 'Abdu'l-Baha was the opposite of the early and liberal Young Turk leaders.<sup>64</sup> Whereas

the latter approached Baha'i ideas positively, Cemal was a sworn enemy of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Baha'is. According to Baha'i sources due to false accusations the Paşa originally wanted to execute him. Later, when he met 'Abdu'l-Baha in Palestine, his anger subsided and he enjoyed the Baha'i leader's presence. Cemal Paşa, as reported by a Baha'i eyewitness, supposedly asked 'Abdu'l-Baha what the cause of the Ottoman Empire's weakness was and he responded, 'the existence of diverse religions'. And when Cemal asked what the remedy was, the Baha'i leader allegedly replied, 'that the leaders of all religions and denominations existing within the Ottoman Empire and Islamic lands gather in Constantinople and, after consultations, agree on a single and unifying religion'. Cemal Paşa is said to have approved these words and added: 'After my return [from the Suez campaign], I will take you to Constantinople. There I will gather the religious leaders and force them into unity and agreement on one religion'.<sup>65</sup>

After this positive encounter Cemal Paşa's attitude towards 'Abdu'l-Baha once again changed for the worse due to negative reports sent to him about 'Abdu'l-Baha. He promised to crucify the Baha'i leader when he returned victorious from his military campaigns in Sinai, but his troops were defeated by the British army and this did not take place. At the beginning of World War I, 'Abdu'l-Baha planned to take practical steps to intervene peacefully against belligerence. He intended to convene a gathering of leading Muslim and Christian leaders in Palestine where he hoped to advise them to cooperate to avoid disorder and chaos in the region. 'Abdu'l-Baha was prevented by opponents from doing so. Despite this he was occupied with local affairs and took over the task of providing food for the people in the region who suffered from the mismanagement of the Ottoman overlord.<sup>66</sup>

### Conclusion

The attitude of the Ottoman government during the reign of Abdülhamid II towards the Baha'i leadership was generally hostile. Constant efforts by opponents of 'Abdu'l-Baha reinforced the Sultan's antagonistic policy. However, 'Abdu'l-Baha was able to ally himself with like-minded reformers within the Young Turk movement, and

familiarize them with Baha'i reformist thoughts which resulted in his release. His vision of the West and modernity and his international ties may have been attractive and beneficial to the governors. On the whole, whereas the approach of the Young Turk reformers was embedded in the framework of a secular modernism and nationalism, the reforms of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha were beyond the proposals of the reformers in the Ottoman Empire in that they were universalistic and emphasized not only material civilization but also moral and religious values.

The first years of the Young Turk rule were crucial for the development of the Baha'i faith as a religion independent of Islam. 'Abdu'l-Baha was free to travel outside the Ottoman domains and was given the opportunity to spread the Baha'i ideas in the West, which led to success and the positive reception he received from high and low alike was echoed in the Ottoman Empire. In Palestine the Baha'i religion was significantly consolidated by its founder and 'Abdu'l-Baha, and from there he organized its expansion in numbers and disseminated its ideas to other regions inside and outside the Ottoman domains. The Baha'is were spared by the aggressive minority policies of the CUP. After the initial positive reception of Baha'i ideas by early Young Turks and the improved conditions that prevailed for six years after 'Abdu'l-Baha's release by liberal members of the CUP, he again faced the enmity of the Ottoman government – this time led by the military wing of the Young Turks who apparently tried, in vain, to use him for their political goals.

## Notes

\* I would like to thank Prof. Houchang Chehabi (Boston University, USA) and Dr. Moojan Momen (independent scholar, England) for their valuable comments. I am also grateful to Dr. Momen for proofreading the text several times. In this chapter I used a simplified Arabic/Persian transliteration system without specific signs above and below letters. Ottoman names and words are rendered in the modern Turkish alphabet.

1. For the Babi and Baha'i religions, see e.g., Smith, Peter, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge, 1987); Amanat, Abbas, *Resurrection and Renewal – The Making of the Babi Movement*

- in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca/London, 1989); Momen, Moojan, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: Some Contemporary Western Accounts, 1844–1944* (Oxford, 1981); idem, *A Short Introduction to the Baha'i Faith* (Oxford, 1997); Cole, Juan R. I., *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York, 1998).
2. Alkan, Necati, *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Reformers, Babis and Baha'is* (Istanbul, 2008).
  3. Baha'u'llah, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa, 2002), pp. 92, 161.
  4. For a discussion, see Christopher Buck, 'Baha'u'llah as "world reformer"', *Journal of Baha'i Studies* 3/4 (1991), pp. 23–70; Cole: *Modernity*; Alkan: *Dissent*.
  5. Cole: *Modernity*, p. 62.
  6. All Baha'i writings in the original Arabic/Persian and those that are officially translated into English and used in this chapter, are available online at the Baha'i Reference Library (official digital library of the Baha'i World Centre, Haifa, Israel), <http://reference.bahai.org>
  7. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, English translation by Gail, Marzieh (Wilmette/Ill., 1990; henceforth *SDC*), p. 118. For a discussion of *SDC*, see Momen, Moojan, 'The Baha'i influence on the reform movements of the Islamic world in the 1860s and 1870s', *Baha'i Studies Bulletin* 2/2 (1983), pp. 47–65; Saeidi, Nader, *Risala-yi Madaniyya Va Mas'ala-i Tajaddud dar Khavar-i Miyana* [The Treatise on Civilization and the Issue of Modernization in the Middle East] (Dundas/Ontario, 1993) [in Persian]; McGlinn, Sen, 'Resala-ye madaniya' [Treatise on Civilization], online entry in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranica.com/newsite/home/index.isc>
  8. 'Abdu'l-Baha: *SDC*, p. 6.
  9. Momen: 'Baha'i influence', pp. 48–9.
  10. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Risala-yi Siyasiyya* [Treatise on the Art of Governance] (Tehran, BE 91/1933–4) [in Persian]. For provisional translations, i.e. individual translations of Baha'i scripture not made at and approved by the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, see Cole, Juan R.I., 'Abdu'l-Baha's treatise on leadership', online at H-Bahai, Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts, vol. II/ 2 (May, 1998), <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/vol2/siyasi.htm> and McGlinn, Sen, 'A sermon on the Art of Governance (Resale-ye siyasiyyah) by 'Abdu'l-Baha', H-Bahai, *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts*, vol. XII/1 (March, 2003), <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/trans/vol7/govern.htm>.
  11. See also Baha'u'llah's 'Lawh-i Dunya' [Tablet of the World], *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed After the Kitab-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette/Ill., 1988), pp. 83–97.



12. Cf. Shaw, Stanford and Ezel K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey* (Cambridge, 1977), vol. II, pp. 162–3.
13. Ottoman Turkish in the original.
14. Provisional translation of a letter in Persian, *Makatib-i 'Abdu'l-Baha* [Letters of 'Abdu'l-Baha], vol. 5 (Tehran, 132 BE/1975–76), pp. 173–6 [in Persian].
15. Undated letter addressed to the Baha'is of Saysan in Iranian Azerbaijan, Baha'i International Archives (henceforth BIA), AC3/8/305. Certified copy of the original letter attached to the memorandum to the present writer, dated 22 June 2008. I am indebted to the Baha'i World Center (Haifa, Israel) for permission to quote from this and the following Turkish letters of 'Abdu'l-Baha; memorandum to the present writer, dated 12 June 2008. This and subsequent letters from the BIA are the author's translations.
16. Cf. 'Abdu'l-Baha: *SDC*, pp. 5, 16. At that time in Iran, there were many attempts to set up a 'Council of State'; see Nashat, Guity, *The Origins of Modern Reform in Iran, 1870–80* (Urbana, 1982), pp. 95–113, and Bakhsh, Shaul, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy & Reform under the Qajars: 1858–1896* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 133–186.
17. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of Abdu'lu'l-Baba Abbas* (Chicago, 1915 & 1919), vol. 2, p. 401. There were really no reforms of any great substance in Iran until the Constitutional Revolution. The major change was a more benevolent attitude by Muzaffaru'd-Din compared to his father. See Martin, Vanessa, *Islam and Modernism: the Iranian Revolution of 1906* (London, 1989); Bayat, Mangol, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909* (Oxford/New York, 1991).
18. Alkan: *Dissent*, pp. 100–102, 109–114.
19. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Y.PRK.AZJ. 27/39, dated 3 Ağustos 1309 [15 August 1893]; quoted in Uçar, Ahmet, 'Filistini kim sattı?' [Who Sold Palestine?], *Tarih ve Düşünce* 29 (June 2002), pp. 20–23.
20. BOA, Y.PRK.ASK. 228/60, 26 Safer 1323 [2 May 1905].
21. BOA, DH.MKT. 438/43, dated 4 Rebiülevvel 1313 [25 August 1895].
22. For a discussion of these issues, see Alkan: *Dissent*, pp. 161–70.
23. 'Amerika'da Tarikat-ı Babiyye', BOA, Y.MTV. 214/176, 11 May 1901; Alkan: *Dissent*, pp. 155–9.
24. BIA, undated draft letter to Sultan Abdülhamid II, AA001/003/00249.
25. Balyuzi, Hasan M., *'Abdu'l-Baha: The Centre of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 95–6.
26. On the issue of conversions of Christians in the Hamidian period, see Deringil, Selim, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London/New York, 1999), pp. 84–91.

27. Alkan: *Dissent*, pp. 159–61.
28. Balyuzi: *'Abdu'l-Baba*, pp. 123–4. For the amnesty granted to political prisoners in the Ottoman legal code from 1908, see Biliotti, A. and Ahmed Sedad, *Législation Ottomane depuis le rétablissement de la constitution 24 Djemazi-ul-abir 1326–10 Juillet 1324/1908* (Paris, 1912), p. 3, texte IV.
29. Vehbi, Muallim, *Brusalı Tabir Bey* (Istanbul, 1334/1915–6); Woodhead, Christine, 'Mehmed Tahir, Bursali (1861–1925)', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition (*EI*<sup>2</sup>), vol. IX, p. 616. He later distanced himself from the Young Turks and politics.
30. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey*, vol. II, pp. 264–5. The Society was integrated in 1907 into the CUP.
31. Ramsaur, Ernest E., *The Young Turks: Prelude to the Revolution of 1908* (Princeton, 1957), p. 98; see further Baer, Marc David, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford, CA, 2010), p. 99.
32. Gövsa, İbrahim A., *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi* [Encyclopaedia of Famous Turks] (Ankara, 1946), p. 68 [in Turkish]; İnal, İbnülemin M. Kemal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri* [Turkish Poets of the Last Century], 4 vols. (Ankara, 1969), vol. I, p. 157 [in Turkish]; Bursalı, Mehmet Tahir, *Osmanlı müellifleri* [Ottoman Writers] (Ankara, 2000), vol. I, p. 2 [in Turkish]; İz, Fahir, 'Hasan Bedr al-Din', *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. 12 (Supplement) (Leiden, 2004), p. 359. Bedri Paşa was a playwright, producing plays such as one on abortion as a social ill in the Ottoman Empire: *İskat-ı Cenîn: Facia* [Abortion: a Calamity] (Istanbul, 1290/1874–5) [in Ottoman Turkish]; he was moreover a military instructor at the Imperial Academy of War and specialized in explosives and cosmography. He composed and published plays together with his classmate and colleague Manastırlı Mehmed Rifat (1851–1907); they were also the first to translate European operas into Ottoman Turkish; Demirci, Tuba and Akşin Somel, 'Women's bodies, demography, and public health: Abortion policy and perspectives in the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17/3 (September 2008), p. 417, n. 139.
33. Devereux, Robert, 'Süleyman Pasha's "The Feeling of the Revolution"', *Middle Eastern Studies* 15/1 (January 1979), pp. 22–4, 30. Mehmed Rifat was also among the soldiers who surrounded the palace the night that Sultan Abdülaziz was deposed. After Abdülhamid II came to power, Rifat was suspected of having plotted against Abdülaziz, consequently exiled to Syria and forbidden to return to Istanbul; on Rifat, see Gövsa: *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi*, p. 324; İz, Fahir, 'Manastırlı Mehmed Rifat', *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. 6 (1991), pp. 372–3; Kahraman, Âlim, 'Mehmed Rifat, Manastırlı', *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 28 (Ankara, 2003), pp. 519–20 [in Turkish]; see

- also Devereux: 'Süleyman Paşa', p. 21. 'Abdu'l-Baha had secretly communicated with Mehmed Rifat; see Alkan: *Dissent*, p. 145, n. 3.
34. İz: 'Hasan Bedr al-Din', p. 359.
  35. For his appointment and retirement, see BOA, DH.MKT. 2688/87, 28 Zilkade 1326 [22 December 1908] and BOA, İ.HB. 104/1330/M-041, 11 Muharrem 1330 [1 January 1912].
  36. Mu'ayyad, Habib, *Khatirat-i Habib* [Memoirs of Habib] (Hofheim, 1998), vol. I, pp. 164–5 [in Persian]. For an annotated English translation see Rabbani, Ahang (trans.), *Eight Years Near 'Abdu'l-Baha: The Diary of Dr. Habib Mu'ayyad* (e-book at <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/muayyad>), pp. 239–40; Afroukhteh, Youness, *Khatirat-i Nub Sala* [Memories of Nine Years] (Los Angeles, 1983), p. 354 [in Persian]. Here it is mentioned that Bedri Bey and two other Ottoman officials were removed from their office, without no reason given. It may have been due to their sympathy toward 'Abdu'l-Baha. For an English translation of Afroukhteh's memoirs see Mansour, Riaz (trans.), *Memoirs of Nine Years in 'Akka* (Oxford, 2007).
  37. Photograph dated 22 April 1919 at the Baha'i Center in Fatih, Istanbul, with the names of mostly Iranian (Azerbaijani) Baha'is. As noted above, Baha'is were not allowed to attract Ottomans to their religion. Bedri and Ahmed Şevki are exceptions among others, such as Dr. Süleyman Rifat Bey, Hasan Hilmi Efendi and Emin Âli Bey who appear in the photograph. On the latter, see Alkan: *Dissent*, pp. 185–7.
  38. BOA, Y.PRK.ASK. 228/60, 16 Rebiülevvel 1316 [4 August 1898].
  39. BIA, undated draft letters to Bedri Paşa, AC006/434/00001 and AC005/254/00001.
  40. Durham, Mary Edith, *The Struggle for Scutari* (London, 1914), pp. 19–20; Pearson, Owen, *Albania in the Twentieth Century: a History* (London, 2006), vol. I, p. 14.
  41. Kondis, Basil, *Greece and Albania* (Thessaloniki, 1976), p. 51.
  42. Gawrych, George Walter, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule: Islam and the Albanians, 1874–1913* (London, 2006), pp. 160–61.
  43. BIA, undated draft letter to Bedri Paşa, AC005/010/00012.
  44. BIA, undated draft letter to Bedri Paşa, AC005/457/00009.
  45. BIA, undated draft letter to Bedri Paşa, AC006/175/00006.
  46. BIA, undated draft letter to Bedri Paşa, AC005/010/00012.
  47. BIA, undated draft letter to Bedri Paşa (Samatya, Istanbul), AC005/261/00010.
  48. Ibid.
  49. BIA, undated draft letter to Bedri Paşa (Erenköy, Istanbul, at the Mansion of Sâdeddin Paşa), AC005/368/00012.

50. BIA, undated draft letter to Sabuncu Giridî Ahmed Şevki Efendi (Istanbul, Çakmakçılar, Sümbüllü Han, no. 38), AC005/352/00007.
51. BIA, undated draft letter, AC005/387/00002.
52. 'Abdu'l-Baha was in Egypt twice, in 1910 and in 1913 for longer periods before and after his journeys to the West.
53. BIA, undated draft letter, AC005/674/00001. Cf. 'Abdu'l-Baha: 'Abdu'l-Baha in London (London, 1982), p. 119; see also 'Abdu'l-Baha's interpretation of the verse in Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa, 1992), verse 89, referring to the ominous 'hooting of the owl' (*sawt al-bum*) and the 'throne of tyranny' (*kursi az-zulm*) concerning Istanbul that he associates with the oppression of Abdülhamid and his opposition to 'Abdu'l-Baha; see Ishraq-Khavari, 'Abdu'al-Hamid, *Ma'ida-i Asmani* [Heavenly Food], vol. V (Tehran, 129 B.E./1972), pp. 129–34 [in Persian and Arabic].
54. Yazid (r. 680–83), the second Umayyad caliph and son of Mu'awiya, whose troops killed Imam Husayn at Karbala and is hated in Islamic history, especially by the Shi'is.
55. BIA, undated draft letter, AC005/374/00007.
56. BIA, undated draft letter to Mehmed Tahir Efendi, through Giridî Ahmed Şevki Efendi, AC005/376/00004.
57. BIA, undated draft letter, AC006/092/00006.
58. BIA, AC006/595/00001, undated letter of 'Abdu'l-Baha in Persian, the addressee is not known but it may be a CUP official; 'Abdu'l-Baha mentions at the end that he is in Alexandria for a 'change of scene'; attached to the memorandum to the present writer, dated 12 August 2009.
59. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette/Ill., 1944/1979), p. 289.
60. On the reception, see Gail, Marzieh, *Arches of the Years* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 80–81.
61. BOA, HR.SYS. 70/31, 1 July 1912; Alkan: *Dissent*, pp. 171–3.
62. Dyer, Gwynne, 'The origins of the "nationalist" group of officers in Turkey 1908–18', *Journal of Contemporary History* 8/4 (1973), pp. 121–64.
63. Hanioglu, Şükrü, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 295–302; Kayalı, Hasan, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Los Angeles, 1997), pp. 82–4.
64. Such as Abdullah Cevdet and other founding fathers of the Young Turk movement; see Alkan: *Dissent*, p. 188.
65. Mu'ayyad: *Khatirat-i Habib*, vol. 1, pp. 318–320 and pp. 451–2 (translations).
66. Balyuzi: *'Abdu'l-Baha*, pp. 413–15.