

On the Question of Prince Abdülkerim Effendi's Becoming the Emperor of Turkestan with Japan's Support*

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Abstract

Japan, whose modernization began in 1868 with the Meiji Restoration taking the West as a model, became powerful enough to change the previous balances in Asia in a short time through its achievements in the economic and military fields. This fact inevitably gave way to conflicts first with China and then with Tsarist Russia. Japan was victorious in both wars and began to pursue new land gains on the mainland through the direction of nationalist groups that were influential in the military and civil bureaucracy and gathered around the idea of 'Greater Asianism'. Japan expanded her field of influence through direct occupations and founding puppet states and attempted to infiltrate the Turkic world. Japan supported the 1933 uprising in East Turkestan with the intention of making Sultan Abdülhamid's grandson Prince Abdülkerim Effendi, the Emperor and Caliph of Turkestan, if the uprising were successful. This article investigates the new documents found in the Japanese archives and sheds light on the attitudes of the Turkish Republic and the Soviet Union towards this development.

Keywords: Pan-Asianism, İttihad-i İslam, East Turkestan, Prince Abdülkerim Effendi, Japan and Turkestan, Caliphate, Ottoman Dynasty

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Introduction

Getting to know Turkic peoples and their territory in the 1880's, Japan came to the realization of the geopolitical, economic and military significance of Eastern Turkestan in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895 and that of the Western Turkestan after the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905. Since acquiring the military power necessary to become the leader of Asia and one of the great nations of the world was dependent upon seizing the continent's raw material sources and market, Japan considered the Muslim Turkic peoples in the region as potential allies. Especially the ideology of "Greater Asianism" (Miwa 2007: 21), which aimed at uniting the whole of Asia under the Japanese Empire by cleansing it of Christian and white people, was one of the tools Japan used so as to infiltrate into the Turkic peoples.² Based on the ideas of İttihad-ı İslâm (Unity of Islam) and Turkism that were influential in the region, this movement was also partly welcome by some leaders of Turkic origin. Ultra-nationalistic associations such as *Genyousha* and *Kokuryukai* supported explicitly or implicitly the demands and struggles for independence in Asia by means of the Turco-Tatars, who had organized under the leadership of Mollah Muhammed Abdulhay Kurbanali (Gabdulhay Kurbangali) (Dündar 2006: 180-182). Invading Korea and later a part of China until the 1930s, Japan managed to have access to large farming land, raw material and markets that it needed and in addition created convenient stepping stones for its future operations in the continent. It is possible to say that until 1932 the Japanese used the method of direct invasion to the extent that the geographical and political circumstances allowed. After invading China, Japan launched its project of establishing buffer zones under its own management by means of creating puppet states. The first example is the state of Manchukuo (*Manshū-koku*), established in Manchurian region and part of Inner Mongolia in 1932 (Yamamuro 2006: 39-82). Other territories that Japan wished to get hold of included Outer Mongolia under Russian rule and Eastern Turkestan under Chinese rule.

The most important operation Japan launched in the Turkic world by means of its ultra-nationalistic organizations, army and nationalistic wing

² See Aydın (2007: 31-38) for the relationship between İttihad-ı İslâm (Unity of Islam) and Greater Asianism.

of the government was its effort to establish a new puppet state under the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II's grandson Prince Abdülkerim Effendi and under the guidance of Japan by supporting the revolt in Eastern Turkestan in 1933. The ruling of this state by Prince Abdülkerim Effendi would mean not only the revival of the Ottoman Dynasty but also the reinstatement of the caliphate by the Prince, which would enable Japan to attempt to have greater control over the Muslims in the world to Japan. In the end, Abdülkerim Effendi, who went to the USA after the failure of this operation, committed suicide in a hotel room. I had previously analyzed in detail the Prince's life and the political relations of some other members of the Ottoman dynasty with the Japanese, based on documents from Japanese, US, UK, Turkish and Turco-Tatar archives in *Panislamizm'den Büyük Asyacığa Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Japan ve Orta Asya* (From Pan-Islamism to Greater Asianism: The Ottoman Empire, Japan and the Middle East) (Dündar 2006: 222-251). One of the conclusions I reached in that book was that the Republic of Turkey and the Soviet Union cooperated to fence off this operation backed by Japan. Prince Abdülkerim's relations with Japan will not be scrutinized once again in this article, though some necessary references will be made. Instead, I will attempt to shed more light on the issue by means of two intelligence reports from the Japanese archives, which I have recently obtained.

Prince Abdülkerim Effendi's Arrival in Japan and the Reactions It Created

Arriving in Tokyo on May 21, 1933, following the route of Bombay, Singapore, Shanghai, (Honna I.1933: 134) Prince Abdülkerim Effendi was welcome by a committee of 100-150 including National Congress members, generals and members of the Japanese Nationalist Group, who chanted the slogan *Banzai* (Long Live). The Prince, who arrived in Tokyo at 9 p.m., was escorted by the police to his hotel and began to receive his visitors (Yeni Yapon Muhbiri 7. 1933: 44). The Prince, visiting historical places during his stay in Tokyo, also met frequently with some Japanese senior officials and Turco-Tatars in Tokyo. In the meantime, the world press, especially the Russian papers, printed news claiming that

Abdulkerim Effendi would become the Emperor of Eastern Turkestan. Upon this news, the Prince disavowed these claims in press conferences. In his speech printed in the *Yeni Yapon Muhbiri*, (The New Japan Journal) Abdulkerim Effendi explained his trip to Japan as follows:

I have been travelling the world for six months and finally I have managed to arrive in Tokyo. There have been people who produced false and groundless news concerning my coming here. For example, the daily *Pravda*, printed in Moscow, stated in this connection that Japan is the hub of Pan-Islamism and that I have the intention of dominating Chinese Turkestan. Such news is absolutely false and totally groundless, disseminated for the sake of serving different ends. Since I am a member of the Turkish nation, which is one of the Turan nations, it is quite natural that I should have a deep interest in Turanism. I came to Japan in my world trip. I came to see Japan, visit Turkish martyrs and pay a visit to Emperor Meiji's Memorial. I have nothing whatsoever with the incidents in Chinese Turkestan (*Yeni Yapon Muhbiri* 10. 1933: 41).

The Prince's visit to Japan disturbed not only the Soviet Union but also the Turkish government of that time; upon this, Jitsukawa Tokijiro, a member of Kokuryukai, an ultra-nationalistic Japanese association, paid a visit to the Turkish Embassy in order to dissolve doubts concerning the Prince. Despite the fact that Jitsukawa maintained that the Prince's presence in Tokyo has merely touristic reasons, the Turkish Ambassador Nebil Bey stated that the Prince ought to leave Japan as soon as possible, which is important in terms of the Turco-Japanese relations (Esenbel 2002: 207, 208).

The Turkish Efforts to Restraint the Prince

Abdulkerim Effendi communicated not only with the Japanese but also Molla Muhammed Abdulhay Kurbanali, who was to some extent the fortuitous leader of Turco-Tatars. Kurbanali, thus, had become one of the key figures for the Japanese propaganda aiming at the Islamic world launched by the army, ministry of foreign affairs and nationalistic Japanese leaders, as well as for the anti-Soviet activities. However, the existence of Kurbanali, who was vital in terms of the Prince's connections with the Japanese, depended on the continuation of the Turco-Tatars. In other words, if the

Turco-Tatars living in Korean, Chinese and Japanese cities in an organized fashion stopped supporting Kurbanali, he would automatically lose his leadership position in the eyes of the Japanese. In May 1933, when Abdulkirim Effendi came to Japan, two Tatar leaders, Ayaz Ishaki and Abdurreshid Ibrahim, both well known amongst the Idil-Ural Turco-Tatars and Russian Muslims and respected by the diaspora, arrived in Japan too. My conjecture is that their arrival was an outcome of Turkey's support and guidance (Dündar 2006: 239). Indeed, a short while later Ayaz Ishaki freed Turco-Tatars in the Far East from the Japanese manipulation by establishing an organization called *Idil-Ural Turco-Tatar Society of Japan* and helped them adopt a position closer to Turkey. As a result, Kurbanali, who fell into disfavor, was deported in 1938 despite the opposition of the Japanese nationalists.³ Japanese intelligence reports dwell on Ishaki's close dialogues with the Turkish Embassy and even the Soviet Embassy. Moreover, a Japanese lawyer of the Turkish Embassy, Tanaka Nobuo, was also assigned at times in the case of the Ishaki group against Kurbanali. I have the conviction that Turkey tried to hamper Japanese efforts to gain power in the Middle East by means of obtaining the alliance of the Turco-Tatars, who had helped Japan to contact Turkic peoples with the support of the Soviets. In other words, they attempted, by means of the Prince, to affiliate with the leaders of the Eastern Turkestan uprising, which began to escalate in 1933 through the agency such leaders as Ayaz Ishaki and Abdurreshid Ibrahim.

The Relationship Between the Prince and a Suspicious Turk According to Intelligence Reports

Two new documents in the Japanese archive suggest that Turkey and the Soviet Union, acting in cooperation, did their best to stop the Eastern Turkestan operation planned by the Japanese by exploiting the Prince. The documents, four pages in total, are comprised of two police intelligence reports. The documents in question were intelligence reports sent by Shohe Fujinuma, Director General of Public Security, to Yamamoto Tat-

³ Another reason why Kurbanali was deported was that India replaced Russia as Japan's target as of 1938. In the wake of the Second World War Japanese strategists were beginning to plan fighting Britain rather than Russia.

suo, Minister of Internal Affairs, Uchida Kousai, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and seven province governors; they also included Fujinuma's own opinions.⁴ The first report, No. 1957, dated August 19, 1933, bearing the inscription *Secret*, provides information about a suspicious Turk. The sentences in the translation of the document has been modified for the sake of clearer comprehension.⁵

Concerning the Arrival of the Suspicious Turk in Tokyo.

Turkey, İstanbul, Kadıköy⁶ Mühürdar Gürbüz Türk Mahallesi No 26. According to his own statement, he is a professor at Istanbul Vocational School. Turkish. S. M. Osman Bey. 34 years of age.

The above-mentioned person arrived in Yokohama via Singapore and Shanghai and checked in the Imperial Hotel in the neighborhood of Yamashita in the township of Kojimachi on the 14th day of this month. He claims to have lent approximately 10,000 yens to the Turkish Prince Abdulkerim, who at present resides in Harajuku neighborhood, in Yoyogi, and that he has come here to collect the sum of money in question. He says he visited Kerim's place to talk to him many times but each time he was refused. He says he will soon take legal action by hiring a lawyer and also reveal this person's swindle to the foreign press. This person by the name of Osman previously worked as an intelligence officer at GPU [State Political Administration] center in Moscow for 6 years from 1918 until 1924. Later in 1928 he was expelled from his position as secretary at Turkish Consulate in Damascus for spending public funds illegally. The purpose of this person's arrival is to investigate the relationship between Japan and Kerim, who has connections with the Soviet Union and Turkey, and convince him (Kerim) to go to the Soviet Union with him. It is believed that he has been commissioned to maintain Eastern Turkestan's struggle for independence and then attack Turkey, thus encourage many nations to adopt a negative attitude towards Japan.

Director General of Public Security Shohe Fujinuma makes exaggerated guesses about the reason why the suspicious Turk by the name of S. M. Osman came to Japan, while explaining the issue based on the infor-

4 Japan Center for Asian Historical Records Ref. Cod: B04013098700, 0382-0385. See the Appendix for the Japanese originals of these documents.

5 I would like to thank Dr. Tsuyoshi Sugiyama for assisting the translation of the reports.

6 The document misspells the word as Radikoy.

mation he obtained and observations he made. Even though the idea of taking the Prince to Russia is a real one, I assume that this was intended to hold Abdulkerim Effendi hostage so as to intimidate the leaders of the uprising rather than to enable him to manage the Eastern Turkestan uprising from Russia. On the other hand, Fujinuma anticipated that the Russians will support the Prince and the uprising in Eastern Turkestan and, when the uprising succeeds, the forces under the charge of the Prince will attack Turkey, which is far from convincing.

The Director General of Public Security, who apparently does not know anything about the Army, Foreign Affairs and the nationalists' plans for Abdulkerim, believes that everything has been designed by the Soviet Union government to launch anti-Japanese propaganda.

Because he has made several visits to the Soviet Union Embassy since his arrival in Tokyo as of 16th of this month we suspect him of gathering information for the Soviets. Though his activities are extremely secret, his statement is as follows: While in Bombay Osman visited the Turkish Prince, who was hospitalized. Since the Prince told him he was in dire straits, he (Osman) paid the hospital expenses for him. Last year in the month of November he met with the Prince at the Adelhi Hotel in Singapore. There the Prince told him that he will move onto Japan since with the support of the Japanese, an independent state will be established in Eastern Turkestan in the future and a secret agreement has been drawn between him and Japan, due to which he will be declared the King/Emperor of this state; he also promised to give Osman a high position if everything went smoothly and requested him to provide him with some financial support. Upon this Osman lent him 10,000 yens. However, after the Prince arrived in Japan, Osman failed to hear from him. Osman said that when he saw in June this year the news in the Russian daily called Slovo, printed in Shanghai, stating that "The Turkish Ex-Prince will become the King of Eastern Turkestan with the Support of Japan" he thought he had been swindled and came to Japan to get back his money. However, Kerim claims that the aforesaid sum of money will be paid through Muhsin Bey.⁷

As can be deduced from the report Osman Bey frequently visited the Soviet Embassy, which seems to confirm the information that Osman Bey

⁷ Japan Center for Asian Historical Records Ref. Cod: B04013098700, 0382-0385

previously worked for the GPU. On the other hand, considering the circumstances in 1933, it is highly unlikely that a high school teacher could afford a holiday in Singapore. I suggest that Osman Bey went there with other purposes. What is more, the alleged amount of 10,000 yens lent to the Prince was a huge sum of money in those days. In addition, Prince Abdulkerim did not deny having borrowed the money; on the contrary he said the debt would be paid by Muhsin Çapanoğlu. Shohe Fujiuma sent his second secret report (No. 2038) on the same issue to the same recipients on August 30, 1933, explaining the course of events:

The person dwelling at the Sanno Hotel in Nagata neighborhood, Kojimachi-ku. Turkish, Osman Bey (34 years of age). The said person came to Tokyo and checked in at the Imperial Hotel as was stated in the document No. 1957 sent on 19th of this month concerning the debt dispute with the Turkish Ex-Prince Kerim; failing to pay for the 300-yen hotel bill, he moved to the Sonno Hotel on 28th of this month. His subsequent activities are reported below; the said person is still being tracked.

APPENDIX: Osman demanded an appointment with "Kerim" as of 19th day of this month; upon being refused, he visited the Turkish representative Nebil Bey, who was on holiday in Karuizawa with a view to discuss the solution of the debt dispute in question. Apparently, he was advised to take legal action because immediately after the meeting on the 20th of the month, he entrusted the procuration to lawyer Tanaka Nobuo, resident at Tokyo, Asakasa, Kudaicho No. 11. On 22nd of the month the two applied to the Tokyo District Court for the payment of the debts totaling 19,344 yens (including 9,672 yens he gave Kerim and 2,500 yens for the expenses of passage to Japan), submitting also the debit voucher signed by "Kerim". The said person is apparently backed up by the Turkish Embassy. Tanaka, the lawyer, who is intent on reaching a deal, is in the process of having negotiations with Jitsukawa Tokijiro, who advocates Kerim. We believe that these two will have a meeting very soon. The said person (Osman Bey) expresses his anger that in case a deal is not reached he will publicize the fact that Kerim is a swindler.

Surely, there can be nothing wrong in Osman Bey's meeting with the Turkish Ambassador. However, as is known, in those days Prince Abdulkerim Effendi was denationalized. This being the case, he could not act as

a negotiator between two Turkish citizens. What is more, the fact that the Turkish Embassy's lawyer Tanaka advocated for Osman Bey suggests that Turkey was indirectly involved in the case.

Conclusion

The plan to assign Prince Abdülkerim Effendi as the Emperor of the Islamic State to be established in Eastern Turkestan with the support of Japan worried Turkey and the Soviet Union, which did not wish to have such a state next to its borders. The new entity to be comprised of Uighur, Cossack, Kirghiz and Chinese Muslims would definitely be a source of inspiration also for the people of these ethnicities living under the Russian rule. What is more, this would pave the way for Japan to support Turkist activities in Russia via Unity of Islam movements. For the Soviet regime, which had maintained stability by means of oppression within its borders, a neighboring country led by Prince Abdülkerim acting as Caliph would not be admissible in the days when the WWII was drawing near. Therefore, this person by the name of S. M. Osman must have been sent over to Japan by Russia. In this move of counter-intelligence activity, which I believe is connected with Turkey, the Prince must have been offered a huge sum of money (the said amount could afford at least two houses in Tokyo in those days) so as to persuade him to cut his ties with the Japanese. It is possible to assume that the Prince first accepted this offer but after he went to Japan, he changed his mind or was made to change his mind. The risk that concerned Turkey was that the Prince might declare his Caliphate and the Ottoman Dynasty might reincarnate in another land. The rise of strong opposition at home and abroad, an example of which was seen even among the Indian Muslims, following the abolition of the Caliphate and Sultanate, was considered as a threat by the Turkish administrators of the period. In addition, Turkish authorities did not want to damage the ties of friendship and cooperation with Russians established through the end of WWI. They did not want the idea of Turkism to be also available among Turkic peoples living in Russian lands to come under expansionist influence of Japan. For this reason, the governments of the Turkish Republic and the Soviet Union made a joint counter-move against the operation launched by the Japanese and deactivated their plans.

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Appendices

右者本月十四日上海經由「シガホル」横次渡米期前
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内務大臣 山本 達雄 殿
 外務大臣 内田 康哉 殿
 昭和八年八月十九日
 啓 祝 德 藍 藤 沼 庄 平
 容疑士耳古人ノ入京ニ關スル件
 士耳古イスタンブール市ラズマニ「ムレグ」レアル「ストロ」街ニテ
 自稱「スタンブル市立専門學校教授」
 士耳古人 エス、ジャ、オスマン、
 自稱「スタンブル市立専門學校教授」
 昭和八年

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 稱シ居ルモ「カラム」子後者ハ該立替金ハ依然公
 「シガホル」ラ通シ返荷セリト稱シ居レリ。

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 事實ニ等ニ懲シ「ウ」上ノ側ニ連絡シ「モ」密報セラル
 ル点ヲ言動旅取視察中ナル左記言動アリ
 石又申（通）報旅
 記
 「ボン」イ 滞在申 旧士耳古皇太子ヲ誘惑シ「既中會
 見同人ヨリ「窮水」ヲ許ハレテ「既料」ヲ立替金取申 上月「
 「シガホル」レ「アル」ヒ「木」ニシテ 滞在中「相會」見同人ハ
 自分ハ日本政府ノ援助ヲ受ケ近ク渡日將米支那」

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