

# Islam Assembled

The Advent of the Muslim Congresses

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## BETWEEN BOLSHEVISM AND ISLAM

*The League of Islamic Revolutionary  
Societies, 1920–1921*

**T**HE League of Islamic Revolutionary Societies represented a belated attempt to organize a Muslim congress by leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress. Their exclusive reliance upon the caliphate had failed to stir Muslim support during the war, and they had fled in disgrace. The League, under the direction of Enver Paşa (1881–1922), was the work of the Committee of Union and Progress in European exile. It led a tenuous existence for which the evidence is scant, and the efforts of its members culminated in a small Muslim congress in Moscow in 1921 which adopted an ambitious program of periodic congresses and branch associations. The League folded some time before Enver's break with Soviet authorities. This modest convention was a direct consequence of the disorientation created by the war, and emerged from the wreckage of a political order which the congress idea had served to indict and undermine.<sup>1</sup>

The most thorough account of the League was offered by Kazım Karabekir, who was well-positioned to observe its activities from eastern Anatolia.<sup>2</sup> Also informed was Ali Fuad [Cebesoy], envoy of Mustafa Kemal in Moscow.<sup>3</sup> Some material concerning the League and its congress seems also to survive in Cemal Paşa's papers at the Turkish Historical Society.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Mudros armistice of October 1918, the discredited leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress scattered and reached Germany and Switzerland. Among the refugees were all three Committee triumvirs, and Enver and Talat, probably at the suggestion of a German intermediary, went together to meet Comintern secretary Karl Radek, then in prison. During their meeting, the Comintern secretary was convinced that the disembodied remnants of the Committee of Union and Progress were of value, and that they might be redeemed to

serve the aims of Soviet policy in Muslim lands. The required task did not differ markedly from that which the Committee of Union and Progress had undertaken itself: the spread of anti-imperialist and particularly anti-British propaganda, conveyed in a Muslim idiom, throughout Anatolia, the Fertile Crescent, Iran, Afghanistan, and India. Few then would have appreciated the paradox of an avowedly Muslim movement directed from Moscow under Soviet auspices. After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks published the secret Entente treaties dividing the Ottoman Empire, and renounced the spoils sought by the old régime. They attacked Anglo-French policy in the East in uncompromising terms, and promised self-determination in those Muslim territories which were their own imperial inheritance. The militant defense of Islam had been one of the fundamental themes of the Ottoman claim to Muslim primacy, and the Soviet Union's promise to continue this struggle, albeit in an altered form, attracted many Muslims in a period of general disorientation. Radek invited his two visitors to the Soviet Union, and while Talat declined, Enver reached Moscow in early 1920.<sup>5</sup> A circle of former associates soon formed around him.<sup>6</sup>

In Enver's letter to Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk], written shortly after his arrival in Moscow, he explained the move from Berlin to the Soviet capital. It must be remembered that Enver and Mustafa Kemal had not yet drawn apart, and still maintained a regular correspondence.

While in Berlin, we saw that throughout the Islamic world, various local movements hostile to the Entente had commenced activity. These movements, deprived of organization and material means, we thought to unify, once the views of our friends had been ascertained. We contacted representatives of various Muslim countries now in Europe, especially the Indian [Khilafat leader] Muhammad ʿAli, with whom a link was established. As a consequence, the direction of these movements will be conducted from one center (*merkez*), where we will create an association (*cemiyet*) composed of delegates (*murahhaslar*) from each country. Finally, I thought the work would be more fruitful if the association were located within Russia. On my arrival in Moscow, I spoke to the commissar of foreign affairs [G.V. Chicherin], who accepted my proposal, and I wrote to members of the association to convene here.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after his arrival in the Soviet Union, Enver claimed to represent a "union of revolutionary organizations of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Tripoli, Egypt, Arabia, and India." This was his own depiction of his ties with leaders of various "local movements" whom he had encountered in Berlin, but there was unable to assemble in one forum. Enver returned to Berlin a short time later to finalize the move to Moscow, and at that time gathered together his associates to define a structure for the League of Islamic Revolutionary Societies (*İslâm İhtilâl Cemiyetleri*

*İttihadı*). Europe had hosted the creation of various émigré Muslim societies, but this was the most ambitious, for those gathered wrote a charter (*nizamname*) to regulate a wide network of other Muslim societies.<sup>8</sup>

The charter (see appendix 2) provided for the establishment of a central committee to oversee centers in each Muslim country, which in turn were composed of branches. Once established, the branches in a given country would meet in periodic regional congresses (*memalik kongreleri*), where they would elect delegates to attend a general congress (*umumî kongre*), at a time and place determined by the central committee. The general congress in session would hear the report of the central committee, review finances, make any necessary changes in the charter, define a program, and finally elect members to serve on the central committee in the interim period until the next congress. The central committee then moved promptly to Moscow along with Enver, and there, with Soviet financial support, began to disburse sums for various projects. One expenditure involved the publication of a newspaper in Berlin, while most of the remaining money went to the support of individuals who directed centers in Berlin and Rome.<sup>9</sup>

Of the actual participants in this activity, there is little to add to the judgment of Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]'s envoy to Moscow, Ali Fuad [Cebesoy], who wrote that the society simply gave another name to the exiled remnants of the Committee of Union and Progress.<sup>10</sup> When Talat, Nazım, and Halil gathered together for what was to be the last congress of the Committee of Union and Progress, in September 1921, their resolutions made it explicit that the League was the foreign-policy arm of the Committee. Through this medium, relations were to be maintained with the Soviet Union and the Third International.<sup>11</sup> The League was thus inseparable from the declining prospects of the Committee of Union and Progress remnant. Later in 1921, Enver finally convened a rudimentary gathering of the League in Moscow, a congress about which regrettably little is known, but about which Soviet archives one day might have much to recount. The Moscow congress was a very small gathering, of perhaps no more than a dozen persons. Among the notable participants were Fahri Paşa, the Ottoman defender of Madina against wartime Arab siege; Shakib Arslan; and Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Shawish.<sup>12</sup> The proceedings were reportedly marked by tension between Enver and the Arabic-speaking participants, and "neither the Russians, the Turks, nor the Muslims were pleased with the result."<sup>13</sup>

The League of Islamic Revolutionary Societies subsequently led little more than a fictitious existence. There survives an outline of the League's

activities, presented by a Muslim spokesman to the Third Congress of the Comintern, convened in the summer 1921 in Moscow. The chairman of the Comintern Executive, G. Y. Zinovyev, introduced the spokesman by noting that he represented "a revolutionary but not a communist organization." The spokesman in turn claimed that the League maintained intimate ties with a number of religio-nationalist movements from Morocco to Java.<sup>14</sup> No independent evidence confirms the existence of such close ties. Occasional contacts maintained with various émigrés in Europe seem more likely to have been the extent of this network. Enver's efforts had yielded unsatisfactory results, and Radek proceeded with an alternative plan, in which the League of Islamic Revolutionary Societies had no role. Soviet emphasis shifted to encouragement of more compliant Muslim national communists,<sup>15</sup> and the development of an alliance of convenience with Mustafa Kemal's nascent Anatolian state.<sup>16</sup> Soviet authorities soon lost their interest in the League of Islamic Revolutionary Societies, and its leader sensed an imminent fall from favor.

Enver was urged repeatedly by friends to move once again, this time to Afghanistan, a state to which many Muslims turned following the Ottoman collapse, and the only Muslim state that had expressed a willingness to receive him. The Kabul invitation was declined nonetheless, for reasons which even now are unclear, but which may have been related to Enver's vaulting ambition. While in Bukhara in the fall of 1921, Enver, perhaps on mission for the Soviet government, went over to the Basmachis, a Muslim movement in open resistance to Soviet consolidation in Central Asia.<sup>17</sup> He was killed by Soviet troops in an armed clash during the summer of the following year, by which time the League of Islamic Revolutionary Societies had disappeared.<sup>18</sup>

## APPENDIX TWO

# THE LEAGUE OF ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETIES CHARTER

### A. THE AIMS OF THE SOCIETY

The aim of the Society is to make the Muslims—who are used like slaves, enslaved and dominated by the imperialists and capitalists—masters of their own fate under the leadership of Turkey; to ensure their free and independent organization within their national culture; and to liberate them from captivity. The aim of the Society is to create the organization necessary to realize the aforementioned goal, by uplifting and uniting the Muslims spiritually. In places where Muslims are in the minority, the Society shall try to safeguard their civil rights.

### B. ORGANIZATION

1. The Society shall be composed of a central committee; one autonomous committee in each land; and branches, as many as required, which shall be linked to the autonomous committees.

2. The central committee shall be composed of 3–7 founding members, and one representative of every autonomous committee affiliated with the Society. Every year, there shall be elected a president, secretary, and treasurer, and these three shall be responsible for presenting specific subjects for discussion in the meetings of the central committee. In the event that any of the three offices becomes vacant, substitute members elected in advance by a majority vote shall immediately fill them. The president and the secretary, or the president and the treasurer, must sign all documents of the Society, alongside the seal.

3. The duties of the central committee shall be to ensure the establishment of the Society in every land; to supervise the Society; to ensure the unity of the autonomous committees; to cooperate with other non-Muslim nations and classes which are struggling for their freedom; and to organize regular contact with them. The central committee shall also

SOURCE: Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimizde: Erver Paşa*, 123–25. I am indebted to Ared Misirliyan for his translation of this document.

be responsible for convening the general congress, and for implementing its resolutions. All activities and public functions shall be carried out with the approval of the central committee.

4. One-third of the members of the central committee shall be replaced at each congress, and new members shall be elected in their place. The reelection of former members shall be permitted.

5. Autonomous committees: Within the geographic confines of each land, there shall be an autonomous committee. Each autonomous committee shall consist of 3–7 members. Their periodic replacement shall follow the example of the central committee, and the responsibilities shall also be distributed in the same fashion as in the central committee.

6. The duties of the autonomous committees: The autonomous committees shall establish and independently direct all kinds of [subordinate] organizations, within their geographic regions, in accord with the principles defined by the central committee, and adopted by the congresses.

7. Branches: Each land shall be divided according to regions [which shall be served by] branches. Each branch shall be administered by a council composed of 3–7 members. These shall be appointed by either the autonomous committee or the central committee. The members shall fulfill their duties in the same fashion as in the autonomous committees. These branches shall receive orders and instructions from the autonomous committees, or from the central committee.

### C. CONGRESSES

8. Congresses convened by the autonomous committee: Each year, each autonomous committee shall convene at an appointed time, a congress of representatives of the branches, in order to discuss various problems related to its organization, and to pass resolutions. They shall also prepare a report on the general situation and the activities undertaken during the year, as well as a financial report, both of which shall be presented to the general congress. In addition, they shall elect new members to the autonomous committee, and delegates to be sent to the general congress.

[Article 9 omitted in source.]

10. General congress: The central committee shall convene, at a time and place which it shall fix, a general congress of delegates from the various lands. Each autonomous committee shall be entitled to one vote, regardless of how many delegates it sends.

11. Upon the conclusion of the general congress, the central committee and the autonomous committees shall be responsible for implementing



its resolutions, and have the right to [discuss the particulars in] smaller meetings.

12. The general congress shall hear the report of the central committee; shall review the financial accounts and activities carried out by the Society; shall approve the budget; shall make changes in the Charter if necessary; shall determine the general outline of the program of political action; and shall elect the members of the central committee.

#### D. MEMBERS

13. Every person who works on behalf of the Society is accepted as a member. There are no differences of rank and prestige among members; all are brothers and equal.

14. In order for a person to be accepted as a member by the Society, two present members must nominate and give assurances regarding him. After the nomination has been studied, and approved in the branch, the procedure of initiation by oath takes place, according to the prescribed formula. Every person who joins the Society shall be bound to it for the rest of his life, and is not permitted to leave it.

15. Every brother must carry out the task appointed to him by the Society, to the best of his capabilities, and must assist the Society by all the material and physical means at his disposal.

#### E. FORMULA OF THE OATH

"I swear before God and give my word of honor, that I will offer even my soul and property, in order to save our oppressed brothers from captivity, and to raise them spiritually and materially. I swear likewise to preserve the secrecy of the Society. So help me God."

31. Percy Cox (at sea) to A. H. Grant, December 27, 1915, L/P&S/10/525, item 754.
32. Minute of A. Hirtzel, January 4, 1915, to letter from Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, January 4, 1915, L/P&S/10/523.
33. For the debate on the need for "consent of his co-religionists," see minute by A. Hirtzel, October 27, 1915, L/P&S/10/523, no. 3935.
34. Translation of a note addressed to Wingate, by Shaykh Mohammed Mustafa [al-Maraghî], Grand Kadi of the Sudan, Khartoum, August 18, 1915, in Hardinge Papers, Cambridge University Library, 72: 387-89.
35. On 'Abduh and Maraghî, see Anwar al-Jindi, *al-Imam al-Maraghî*, 38-47.
36. Elie Kedourie, "Egypt and the Caliphate, 1915-52," 179-81; although for a brief time, Shaykh Maraghî had favored the Sharif Husayn's candidacy. See Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, 23.
37. McMahon (Cairo), dispatch of May 14, 1915, L/P&S/10/523, item 2074.

## 6. BETWEEN BOLSHEVISM AND ISLAM

1. On Enver and this period of his career, see D. A. Rustow, "Enver Pasha"; Paul Dumont, "La fascination du bolchevisme: Enver pacha et le parti des soviets populaires"; A. A. Cruickshank, "The Young Turk Challenge in Postwar Turkey"; and Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, "Fellow Travellers: Enver Pasha and the Bolshevik Government 1918-1920."
2. Kâzım Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimizde: Enver Paşa ve İttihat Terakki Erkânı*.
3. Ali Fuat Cebesoy, *Moskova Hatıraları*.
4. As studied by Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Makedonya'dan ortaasya'ya: Enver Paşa, 1914-1922*.
5. For Radek's description of the meeting, see E. H. Carr, "Radek's 'Political Salon' in Berlin 1919," 419-20.
6. There he joined Cemal Paşa, the other triumvir, who had commanded the Ottoman armies in Syria and Palestine, and Halil Paşa, Enver's uncle, former commander of Ottoman forces in Iraq, and victor of Kut. Enver was also met in Moscow by Hacı Sami, the most renowned wartime Ottoman agent. Hacı Sami spent the war years under cover in India and Central Asia, and Enver came to rely increasingly upon his advice. For one of Hacı Sami's reports, see Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimizde: Enver Paşa*, 57-64.
7. Enver to Mustafa Kemal, August 26, 1920, in Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimizde: Enver Paşa*, 22-23; Dumont, "La fascination du bolschevisme," 148. On August 6, 1920, Indian Khilafat leader Muhammad 'Ali met Talat in Switzerland.
8. The text of the charter is provided by Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimizde: Enver Paşa*, 123-25. The resolutions of the Berlin gathering are given in a summary form by Cebesoy, *Moskova Hatıraları*, 224-25.
9. For a list of expenditures, see Aydemir, *Makedonya'dan ortaasya'ya*, 551-52.
10. Cebesoy, *Moskova Hatıraları*, 230.
11. Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimizde: Enver Paşa*, 151, 153, for texts.
12. A photograph of eleven assembled Muslim delegates at Moscow, including Enver, Fahri, and Shakib, appears in Aydemir, *Makedonya'dan ortaasya'ya*, 587.
13. *Ibid.*, 586-88. Shakib Arslan makes no mention of the congress in his recollection of this visit, but simply writes that he joined Enver in Moscow for a month to satisfy his curiosity about the Soviet Union. See Arslan, *Sıra dhatiyya*, 265.
14. *Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, 103-10.
15. For this development, see Stephen White, "Communism and the East: The Baku Congress, 1920."
16. On this early chapter in Soviet-Turkish relations, see Paul Dumont, "L'axe Moscou-

Ankara. Les relations turco-soviétiques de 1919 à 1922," and Gotthard Jäschke, "Le rôle du communisme dans les relations russo-turques de 1919 à 1922."

17. On Enver's decision to break his Soviet ties, and his role of leadership in the Basmachi movement, see "The Basmachis: The Central Asian Resistance Movement," 242-46.

18. A 1939 survey of Muslim associations active in Berlin made reference to a certain "Union for the Liberation of Islam, a Bolshevik creation originally concerned with Central Europe but now rallied to Nazism. It is now devoted to the Near East." Bernard Vernier, *La politique islamique de l'Allemagne*, 33. Whether this refers to some remnant of the Berlin branch of Enver's society is not clear.

## 7. KEMALIST TURKEY AND MUSLIM EMPIRE

1. This account of the first Kemalist initiative is drawn from a set of Turkish documents secured through "Agent T.20/10," who apparently had penetrated not the Anatolian movement but the Sublime Porte. These are translated in FO371/4162, E177629/521/44. The cover dispatches, but not the translations themselves, were published in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, ser. 1, 4: 1028-31.

2. Particularly by Cemal Kutay, *Kurtuluşun ve cumhuriyetin manevî mimarları*.

3. A Turkish circular which appeared in Aleppo in October 1919, entitled "Mustafa Kemal's Proclamation to the Syrians," reported that the "Unitarians" would "soon be the visitors of their Arab brethren, and will scatter the enemy." Text of proclamation in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, ser. 1, 4: 478.

4. Kutay, *Kurtuluşun*, passim.

5. For example, see the report on the society dated February 6, 1920, in L/P&S/11/169.

6. Weekly summary of intelligence reports from Constantinople branch of Military Intelligence, for week ending February 21, 1920, L/P&S/11/170, p. 2109.

7. Branches in the following cities or locales: Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, Tyre, Baalbek, Haifa, Baghdad, Najaf, Kuwayt, Cairo, Tanta, Rosetta. On November 10, 1919, Meinertzhagen wrote of Syria that "Turkish influence is gradually creeping back, and signs are not wanting of a rejuvenated popularity of Turkish rule with all its forgotten disadvantages. . . . This is not confined to Syria alone, but has recently been traced in Jerusalem and other Palestinian centres." Clayton wrote on October 15, 1919, that "it is safe to say that the majority of the Moslems in Aleppo vilayet, and a very large number in the vilayet of Damascus, are in sympathy with Turkish aspirations, and would prefer union with Turkey to being under an unpopular European power." *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, ser. 1, 4: 522-23, 566.

8. S. I. S. secret police report on Asia Minor, August 12, 1920, in FO371/5178, E11702/345/44.

9. Speech of April 24, 1920, *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, 59.

10. Ryan (Constantinople) to Forbes Adam, October 26, 1919, in Andrew Ryan Papers, FO800/240. On the "Vatican Proposal," see A. L. Macfie, "The British Decision regarding the Future of Constantinople (November 1918-January 1920)," 395-97.

11. For a history of federal solutions built around a Turco-Arab core, see Gotthard Jäschke, "Ein scharifisches Bündnisangebot an Mustafa Kemal." Alongside this effort was an attempt to work through the exiled Sanusi chief, Ahmad al-Sharif. On his arrival and activity in Ankara, see Hüsameddin Ertürk, *İki devrin perde arkası*, 476-81.

12. Although it was documented early, on the basis of then-available published sources, by Gotthard Jäschke, "Nationalismus und Religion im türkischen Befreiungskriege." For