Introduction to Part II

The years between 1300 and 1683 were politically and militarily successful ones in the Islamic World. The Ottoman Empire in particular expanded into the Balkans, the Russian steppe, the Saharan and Syrian deserts, and to the Atlantic Ocean along the North African coast. However, despite this continual growth, it soon found itself falling behind Europe in technology. Where once Muslim states and soldiers had equal or even more advanced weaponry than its European neighbors, by the late seventeenth century it no longer held this advantage. This loss of advantage led to a series of military losses that would lead to the ejection of Ottoman power in Europe for the first time in four centuries and last until its final collapse in 1922—one of history's major turning points.

The role played by Britain in these events is varied. Formal British relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire began at the end of the sixteenth century when Elizabeth I dispatched the merchant William Harborne to be English ambassador to Istanbul. This appointment was primarily commercial, and the relations between the two would remain so until the later seventeenth century when Britain began to pursue more imperial ambitions in the region. A series of wars between the two countries ushered in the era of Ottoman contraction. Adding to the Ottoman Empires woe's, Russia's long-standing desire for control of the Bosporus Straits in order to gain access to the Mediterranean trade coupled with its steady growth in the Far East put them in direct competition with Britain. Faced with increasing pressure from its European rivals, Britain

began to see the Ottomans as a counterweight to Russian interference with British India and its commerce in the Mediterranean Sea. Allying itself with France and the Ottoman Empire against Russia during the 1853 Crimean War, Britain established itself as a protector of Ottoman sovereignty. By 1906, Britain signed numerous agreements with the Ottoman Empire intended to avoid conflict and achieve mutual goals. Many of these treaties were designed to maintain the Ottoman integrity in order to preserve peace.

The size and importance of the Ottoman Empire in history made it of great concern to British leaders. Even as it began to disappear, the British were developing designs on it. Warren Dockter analyzes the influence of writer and anti-imperialist Wilfred S. Blunt on British statesmen and Winston Churchill.

Jim Tallon addresses the impact of these treaties and examines how they led to the rupture of British–Ottoman relations. Though these treaties recognized legitimate Ottoman concerns, they inevitably served British interests. He goes on to analyze how Britain was able to re-estab-lish a working relationship with Turkey in 1923. Justin Quinn Olmstead considers how the rift that developed between the two nations, due to British policy, led Germany to take advantage of the Ottoman desire for self-sufficiency. Ottoman leaders saw decisions made by British leader-ship to treat the Ottoman Empire as a power to be divided up as a more significant threat than Russian desires for the Bosporus Straits. Germany provided the specter of a new supporter and defender of Ottoman integrity.