

# Balkan Wars

The Balkan Wars were a series of two conflicts fought in the Balkan Peninsula in 1912 and 1913. In the first Balkan War the four Balkan states of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro attacked and overpowered the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the Ottoman Empire lost a bulk of its European territory.

The second Balkan war saw Bulgaria attacked by four combatants of the First Balkan war and losing territory as a result.

The outcomes of both the wars would set the stage for World War I. How it came to be will be highlighted in this article. The information from this article would be useful in the IAS Exam.

## Background of the Balkan Wars

The background of the Balkan wars lies in unrealised territorial ambitions of nation states that emerged from the Ottoman Empire in the later half of the 19th century. Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro had gained significant territories following their independence movement.

But they sought more territories from the Ottoman controlled region of Rumelia, which comprised of Eastern Rumelia, Albania, Macedonia and Thrace.

In addition there were other factors that led to the First Balkan Wars:

1. The Ottoman Empire was unable to respond effectively to the rising ethnic nationalism of its diverse peoples
2. The Italo-Ottoman war of 1911 showed a deep flaw in its military and administrative aspects. It made itself largely exposed to attack from others.
3. The Great Powers (At the time, Britain, France, Russia) squabbled among themselves and failed to force the Ottomans to implement the agreed upon reforms. Hence the Balkan states would impose their own solutions as an alternative.
4. The Christian populations of the European territories of the Ottoman Empire were repressed to a large extent. This would not sit well with the Balkan states and thus they would respond as a result.
5. Above all the Balkan League was formed, and its members were confident that under those circumstances an organised and simultaneous declaration of war to the Ottoman Empire would be the only way to protect their compatriots and expand their territories in the Balkan Peninsula.

The cause of the second Balkan wars could be zeroed in on the territorial ambitions of Bulgaria. Although the Balkan states had united to fight their common enemy, they still nursed a mutual dislike of each other. Each side was wary of the other gaining too much of the Ottoman Empires Former territories.

As a result when Serbia and Greece announced their intention of keeping the territories they conquered to themselves rather than equally divide it, the Tsar of Bulgaria invaded his former allies. But the Bulgarians were defeated as a result and lost even more territory as a result.

## Events of the Balkan Wars

The outbreak of the war in October 1912, in which Greece and Montenegro joined the original allies, was followed by the speedy expulsion of the Turks from all of European Turkey, except the Constantinople area.

After the conclusion of hostilities Serbia showed intentions of annexing a large part of Albania, in order to gain an outlet on the Adriatic, but this step toward a Greater Serbia was opposed by Austria-Hungary and Italy and by the Albanians, who had proclaimed their independence.

Conferences of the ambassadors of the Great Powers at London created (1913) an independent Albania of fair size, thus cutting Serbia off from the sea. Dissatisfied with these terms, Serbia demanded of Bulgaria a greater share of Macedonia. Bulgaria thereupon attacked (June, 1913) Serbia, only to be attacked by Romania, Greece, and Turkey. As a result of this Second Balkan War, Bulgaria lost territory to all her enemies by the Treaty of Bucharest.

## Aftermath of the Balkan Wars

The Balkan Wars brought an end to centuries of Ottoman Rule of the Balkan Peninsula with the exception of the Balkan Peninsula. The Young Turk Regime, which had taken power in the years before the conflict, continued as a dictatorship and retained their power as a result. There was a large exodus of Turks from the lost territories to the Ottoman Homeland, swelling the Empire's population by 2.5 million. The aggregate dead would be around 122,000 killed in action, with 20,000 injured from wounds and 82,000 infected with disease.

The major issue was the partitioning of these territories between the allies, which would lead to the outbreak of the second Balkan War. Various nationalities such as the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians and other nationalities occupied the territories conquered by Greeks and Serbs, once their respective countries were established, the Greek and Serbs were asked to leave. Serbia lost an outlet to the Adriatic Sea and Greece would never again gain North Epirus.

Although the Austro-Hungarian Empire stayed out of the conflict, it was vehemently against the idea of a powerful Serbia. A powerful Serbia would lead to insurrections among the Slavic populace of the Empire, ultimately spreading the Balkan wars to its own backyard. It was shocked and disappointed at the outcome of the both the Balkan wars. Though Serbia wasn't crushed, its influence was gaining ground.

By 1913, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and by extension Germany had decided that a pre-emptive strike against Serbia would restore the balance of power in the region. In addition Russia was almost certain to back Serbia in any such conflict, a third war in the Balkans would most likely proceed directly to a general European one, with Germany and Austria-Hungary facing off against Serbia, Russia, Russia's primary ally, France, and possibly Britain.

For the time being, however, both Kaiser Wilhelm, emperor of Germany, and Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, continued to see the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the Balkans question, though they disputed the means of achieving it. Franz Ferdinand's assassination, by a Serbian nationalist, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, however, put an end to any such negotiations and toppled Europe, already teeming with unresolved conflict and irreconcilable differences between the great powers headlong into World War I

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Balkan Wars

### **What Caused the Balkan Wars?**

The Balkan Wars had their origin in the discontent produced in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece by disorder in Macedonia. The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 brought into power in Constantinople (now Istanbul) a ministry determined on reform but insisting on the principle of centralized control.

### **What was the long term consequence of the Balkan Wars?**

The Balkan Wars were marked by ethnic cleansing with all parties being responsible for grave atrocities against civilians and helped inspire later atrocities including war crimes during the 1990s Yugoslav Wars.

### **How is the Balkan Wars viewed in today's context?**

The Balkan Wars was a major disaster as far as the citizens of Turkey are concerned. It lost a large number of people and territory as a result. Nazım Pasha, Chief of Staff of the Ottoman Army, was held responsible for the failure and was assassinated on 23 January 1913 during the 1913 Ottoman coup d'état.

In Greece, the Balkan Wars are regarded as a period of epic achievements. They managed to liberate and gain territories that had been inhabited by Greeks since ancient times and doubled the size of the Greek Kingdom.

