

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 65

“The Panther Leap”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

For decades now, one of the most important sources of international tension in Europe has been the situation in the Balkans. The Ottoman Empire, long regarded as “the sick man of Europe” is crumbling. Everyone sees that. The Empire has only held its European territories this long by treating its mostly Christian subjects with a brutality that shocks the rest of Europe.

But as bad as Ottoman oppression was, this is a case where the only thing worse than the disease is the cure. Fears abound that were the Empire actually evicted from the Balkans, the resulting turmoil could trigger a general war in Europe. And indeed, that is exactly what is going to happen.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 65. The Panther Leap.

We are back in the Balkans this week, to pick up where we left off all the way back in episode 51. As you may recall from that episode, something close to a coup had broken out in Constantinople. The so-called “Young Turks,” many of whom were army officers in command of the low-grade guerilla war the Empire was fighting against its restive Balkan subjects, and were getting pretty sick of it, forced the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, to reinstate the constitution of 1876 and call elections. The idea being to grant democratic powers and minority rights to the peoples of the Empire, especially those very unhappy Balkan provinces, not to mention the very unhappy Arabs, the very unhappy Armenians, and so on. So instead of fighting guerilla wars forever, Sultan, how about if we just go ahead and grant these people some rights? It’s all the rage in the rest of Europe.

This constitution had originally been drafted back in 1876, when the previous sultan, Abdul Hamid’s brother, had been deposed. Abdul Hamid had become sultan, and had agreed to a constitution, in much the same way that Franz Josef of Austria became Kaiser after his uncle abdicated in 1848 and agreed to a constitution in the face of revolutions in his empire. And, Abdul Hamid quickly reneged on his 1876 promise of constitutional reforms, much as Franz Josef quickly reneged on his uncle’s 1848 promise of constitutional reforms, and in much the

same way that the Russian Emperor Nikolai II agreed to constitutional reforms during the revolution of 1905 and then quickly reneged on them afterward.

You know, I can't help but feel there's a pattern in here somewhere, if only I can find it....

Anyway, in 1908, the Sultan was forced to reinstate that 1876 constitution, which, you may recall, was one of the factors that drove Austria-Hungary to formally annex Bosnia, lest the people living there get to participate in the Ottoman elections of 1908 and decide that maybe being part of the Ottoman Empire wasn't anything they needed to be rescued from by Austrians after all. Similarly, Bulgaria declared its full independence from the Ottoman Empire at the same time, and it became a monarchy under Ferdinand.

Crucially, a diplomatic crisis arose between Austria and Russia as a result of that annexation. The Austrians claimed that the Russians had already agreed to the annexation. The Russians denied this, but the Austrians made them look pretty bad and then the German government quietly informed the Russian government that if it came to war, Germany was going to support Austria. Russia, still recovering militarily, politically, and financially from their expensive and humiliating defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1905, felt they had no choice but to back down. But the incident put Austro-Russian relations into the deep freeze, as Russian government ministers became determined never to let Austria get away with this kind of shenanigans in the Balkans ever again.

Alexander Izvolsky, the Russian Foreign Minister, was demoted as a result of the outcome of the Bosnian annexation crisis, and made the Russian ambassador to France. People mockingly called Izvolsky "the Prince of the Bosphorus," because the only thing he had gotten out of Austria in return for the Bosnian annexation was a promise to support Russia taking control of the Bosphorus, a promise that was meaningless without the consent of the other Great Powers. It was said that Izvolsky was so vain that he failed to understand that he was being mocked.

The new foreign minister was Sergei Sazonov, who was the brother-in-law of the Russian Prime Minister Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin. The religious Sazonov was a strong believer in the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans needing to be freed from Turkish Muslim rule. One of his first diplomatic moves was to arrange a meeting between his Emperor and the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II. This was meant to signal Russia's displeasure with Britain for failing to back the Russian position during the Bosnian annexation crisis.

The Balkans have been both a playground for the Great Powers and a powder keg threatening to explode into a general European war for decades now. But what has changed since the dawn of the twentieth century is that the Balkan states are becoming stronger, more independent, and more able and willing to assert their own foreign policies, rather than merely being the pawns of Britain or Austria or whoever. You may recall, for instance, the new trade agreements between Serbia and Bulgaria.

As a result, the Balkan countries are becoming less likely to accept support from outside powers unless it comes unconditionally, which complicates Sazonov's efforts to strengthen the Russian diplomatic position there. Romania is naturally suspicious of Russia, with which it shares a border and some border disputes. King Ferdinand of Bulgaria has proved to be a demanding ingrate, as we have already seen, and he was a German noble, and so the Russian government has good reason to view him with some suspicion. Montenegro is a tiny country with a capricious monarch, so that leaves Serbia as Russia's most promising diplomatic opportunity. The trouble is that Serbia is also becoming more demanding, and increasingly provocative in its relations with Austria and with the Ottoman Empire. This puts Russia in something of a bind. To back down and allow Serbia to be bullied by the Sultan or the Austrian Kaiser would make Russia look like a weak and unreliable ally. To stand with Serbia threatens to get Russia drawn into a war she doesn't want to fight. In other words, a situation not unlike the ones that Russia and the United States would find themselves getting sucked into by their small and capricious allies during the Cold War.

After the Bosnian crisis, the only European territory controlled by the Ottoman Empire was Thrace, that is, Constantinople and its environs, and a patch of territory running across the central Balkans that I'm going to call Macedonia, because it's approximately the location of the ancient kingdom of Macedonia, although the borders aren't quite the same. Exactly what this region is and what to call it are contentious topics in 1909. The people living there are ethnically a mix of Albanians, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks. And to make things more complicated, these various peoples are mixed together pretty thoroughly. There are no easy lines you can draw and say to yourself, for example, the people on this side of the line are mostly Greek, and the people on that side are mostly Bulgarian, so let's put the border there. And, as we saw back in episode 27, there are smaller ethnic groups living here who consider themselves distinct, although some Serbs or Greeks or Bulgarians would argue that no, you are not that little unique ethnic group you claim to be, you are actually just a Serb. Or A Greek. Or a Bulgarian, like us.

Of course, in Vienna, they had figured out the perfect solution to the Macedonian Question. If all these ethnic groups are too intermingled to make national states a real prospect, why not hand over control to a multiethnic Christian empire? Like Austria? Many of the people in Macedonia are ethnically similar to some of the nationalities we have in our Empire, right? And so, Austrian elites looked covetously at Macedonia, and the lovely port of Salonika, on the Aegean.

But there was a problem. Austria's highway to Macedonia runs through Bosnia. Yes, Bosnia has been annexed. But within the Dual Monarchy, Bosnia is neither Austrian nor Hungarian. That's because the government of Hungary will not consent to Austrian annexation of Bosnia. But Hungary doesn't want Bosnia for itself either, since, as we've seen, that would probably make Magyars, the ethnic Hungarians, a minority group in their own country, assuming they aren't already. But they don't want Austria to have it, either, because that will make Austria more powerful relative to Hungary. So, Bosnia lies in a sort of administrative no-man's land. It's being governed jointly, through the Austro-Hungarian finance ministry, because as you may recall, the

only government ministries the two halves of the Dual Monarchy actually share are finance and war.

So Austria's long-range plan is to annex Macedonia. Her short-range plan is to figure out some way around the Hungarian veto so that Austria can fully annex Bosnia so that it can reach Macedonia so that it can annex it, too.

You got all that?

Okay. Now, remember how in 1908 the Young Turks forced the Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, to reinstate the constitution, and there were elections in the Ottoman Empire in December 1908, and now the Empire has a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate, with representatives of religious and ethnic minorities, like Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, and Jews, represented in the Ottoman government. Optimism swept across Ottoman lands. The Empire was modernizing at last.

It lasted four months. Conservative Muslim Turks were not happy with the way things were playing out. I mean, it's not only Greeks and Armenians and Slavs who get to feeling nationalistic, you know. Nationalism also works for Muslim Turks, and to them it looked like Christian powers hostile to the Empire were imposing their will on Constantinople. And the secularism of the Young Turks was disturbing to these conservative Muslims, who saw a plot between secularists at home and Christian enemies abroad to strip the Empire of its Muslim heritage. And so, in April 1909, amid cries to restore Sharia law and the privileges of the Sultan, mobs stormed the new Ottoman parliament, killing two deputies.

Now, it's unclear whether the Sultan instigated these riots, but there's no doubt he was the beneficiary. Bear in mind that the Ottoman Sultan also claims the title of Caliph, the religious leader of Islam, much in the same way that the Byzantine Emperors of old claimed authority over Orthodoxy. As the constitutionalist reformers became more closely identified with secularism, that gave the Sultan, with his special religious authority, an opening to claim the mantle of defender of Islam. The word went out to the provinces that absolute rule was back and Sharia was back, and then conservatives in Constantinople set about killing Young Turk sympathizers and trashing the offices of pro-reform newspapers.

The idea of restoring Sharia law, which had been abandoned by the Ottoman Empire seventy years ago, was hugely unpopular among the Christian minorities of the Empire, and protests broke out in Christian regions. In the Turkish city of Adana, Armenians protested the decision, and twenty thousand of them were killed.

So the Empire went from repression and absolute rule to constitutional reforms and elections and back to absolute rule and repression in a period of four months. Are you still keeping up? Well, here's another one for you. The Young Turks still controlled the army, and within two weeks, there was a counter coup. Army units took control of Constantinople, declared martial law. Abdul

Hamid II was deposed, sent into exile in Salonika, and replaced by his brother, who ruled as Mehmet V.

This new Sultan was something of a puppet of the Young Turks, but through this arrangement, they were able to keep the Empire stable for the time being. The Young Turks would reform the Ottoman Army and make it more effective. And they would learn their lesson from the events of April 1909, embrace Islam, and slowly move away from secularism.

[music: “Kâtibim”]

The Balkans and Europe in general got a breather during 1910, which was a year of relative calm and pretty friendly relations among the major powers. That was the year of the death of the British King Edward VII, whose funeral, as we have seen, brought together a gathering of the crowned heads of Europe as never before seen, and would never be seen again. The new German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, was pursuing a policy of détente between Germany and Britain. Germany was easing back on her naval buildup, mostly because it was clear that the naval race with Britain was by now a lost cause. Bethmann-Hollweg was sounding out British diplomats about German naval reductions in exchange for assurances from Britain that it would remain aloof from any potential conflict between Germany and France or Germany and Russia.

Meanwhile, in 1910, Kaiser Wilhelm met with the Russian Emperor, his cousin Nikolai. They ironed out a dispute over a German proposal to build a rail line from Constantinople to Baghdad, which Russia had opposed, and in the wake of the ugly dispute between Russia and Austria over the annexation of Bosnia, Wilhelm promised that Germany would no longer unconditionally back Austrian expansionism in the Balkans. And that’s a promise you can take to the bank, right? So anyway, Europe was looking a lot more peaceful by the end of 1910.

But one exception to the good feelings of 1910 was in Albania. Now, I mentioned the European territories of the Ottoman Empire, which I labeled Macedonia as a sort of catch-all name, and I said the ethnic groups there were pretty commingled. But there’s one exception—what we today call Albania, which then, as now, had a population largely of ethnic Albanians. There was a revolt against the Empire in 1910, which was put down, with Ottoman authority re-established in the cities, but anti-Ottoman forces still roamed the mountains. Similar anti-Ottoman forces of ethnic Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks were active in other parts of Macedonia, increasingly with support from Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece.

But when international tensions began rising again in the summer of 1911, it was not in the Balkans, but in Morocco. Remember Morocco? You do? Well, then you are probably thinking, didn’t you already do this? Didn’t you already tell us all about how the Germans sent Kaiser Wilhelm II to Morocco as a challenge to the French, who are increasingly intervening in an increasingly chaotic and ungovernable Morocco?

Why, yes, you're right. I did do all that, all the way back in episode 40. And we are about to do it all over again, only this time, instead of a Kaiser, the Germans are sending a gunboat. *Panther*, or "panther," a smallish ship armed with what the Kaiser Wilhelm dismissively described as "two or three popguns." But give me a minute here, I'm getting ahead of myself.

We looked at the situation in Morocco up through the Algeiras conference of 1906. The major powers of Europe agreed to French and Spanish intervention in Morocco, ostensibly because of the political disorder and threat to European interests, but actually the French are angling to make Morocco a French protectorate, along with some scraps of territory for Spain.

All well and good, but no European conference is going to bring stability to the troubled nation of Morocco. And, indeed, the situation there continued to deteriorate, in spite of Europe giving France the run of the place. Morocco's corrupt and unpopular Sultan, the now thirty years old Abdel-Aziz was deposed in 1908, and replaced with his older brother, the 33-year old Abdel-Hafid.

But an uprising against Abdel-Hafid broke out in 1911, and the new Sultan was in danger of losing his throne, not to mention his life. In Paris, at this same time, the Third Republic was going through another one of its frequent Cabinet shuffles, and ended up with a rookie prime minister named Joseph Caillaux.

By spring, France and Spain were preparing to send troops to Morocco, ostensibly to protect Europeans, but also to keep their newly chosen corrupt and unpopular puppet on the throne, and to press ahead toward France's ultimate goal, which was to turn Morocco into a protectorate, and thus give France control over a wide expanse of North Africa, from Tunisia to the Atlantic.

What France was doing here was a violation of both the letter and the spirit of the Algeiras agreement. As you may recall, that Algeiras agreement basically gave the French wide latitude in Morocco, but it did also provide for some token international consultation and some infrastructure contracts for German companies. These were meant as a bone thrown to Germany, so she wouldn't have to leave the conference empty-handed. But now France was disregarding even these token concessions. France forced the Sultan to sign an agreement accepting French "protection," cancelled a German-Moroccan rail project, and sent troops to occupy Fez. That's Fez, the then-capital of Morocco, not Fez, the foreign exchange student portrayed by Wilmer Valderrama on *That 70s Show*. Let's be clear about that.

So Germany had a legitimate grievance and they might have made good advantage of it, were it not for the usual Imperial German foreign policy missteps: overplaying a weak hand, needlessly antagonizing other powers, and not paying any attention whatsoever to world opinion.

I mentioned Germany's new Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg. I mentioned his wish for some kind of détente with Britain. Because Germany is involved in a naval race with Britain, and Germany is losing. Also, following the disaster of the Russo-Japanese War, Russia is rebuilding

her army, constructing new rail lines toward the German frontier, and getting pretty chummy with Great Britain. And now France is flexing her muscles.

All this is making the Kaiser's government feel increasingly boxed in. You might expect the Kaiser's reaction to be, let's build more ships, let's raise more divisions, let's build more rail lines. But although we call Germany an Empire and Wilhelm a Kaiser, or Emperor, and although Germany is indeed more autocratic than Britain or France, neither does the German Kaiser have the kind of powers that the Russian Emperor has or the Ottoman Sultan, well, had until recently. Germany has a parliament, the Reichstag, and there is universal male suffrage in Germany, and, as we have seen, the German Social Democratic Party has been increasing its numbers in the Reichstag with every election. The Reichstag had to approve the budget and the taxes, and it has no stomach for the kind of military spending the Kaiser's government is now considering.

Bethmann-Hollweg saw an opportunity to provoke another confrontation with France over Morocco. This time, surely, France's behavior is so egregious, that world opinion can't help but be on Germany's side. I mean, it's exactly like the Morocco crisis of 1906, except that this time, instead of blowing up in Germany's face, it's going to be a huge German triumph because, it's exactly the same except it's totally different.

Yeah, and beyond that, a confrontation with the French might be just the thing to rouse the patriotic spirit of the German people, and when I say "rouse the patriotic spirit of the German people," I mean, of course, make it possible to squeeze more money for the military out of the Reichstag.

And so, on July 1, 1911, this German gunboat, *Panther*, or "panther," surprised the world by steaming into the Moroccan port of Agadir, on the Atlantic coast. Because if you are a great power and you want the rest of the world to think you are an innocent victim reacting to an unlawful aggression by another great power, the perfect way to do that is by undertaking a surprise naval deployment without advance notice to anyone. Not.

Panther was a gunboat—hey, that's why they call it gunboat diplomacy. To this day, the deployment of this ship is referred to in Germany as *der Panthersprung*, or the panther leap. A few days later, *Panther* was joined by a larger German ship, the cruiser *Berlin*. Since the German government could hardly say the ships were there to send a warning to the French, they said instead the ships were needed to guarantee the safety of German citizens in Morocco, a story which was believed by approximately nobody.

The German government did have the foresight to pass a petition around among the dozen or so German firms that were doing work in Morocco. This petition claimed that their workers and investments in Morocco were at risk, and asked the German government to intervene to protect them. The German firms, which were, you know, reliant on the good will of the German government to get international contracts like the ones they had gotten in Morocco, compliantly signed off on this petition.

Funny thing, though. There are no German citizens in Agadir. So what are the ships really doing there? It was widely believed in France and Britain that Germany was primarily interested in securing a naval base on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, as a way of evading a possible British blockade of German ports. It's not clear that this was actually true, but France and Britain believed it to be true.

There was one German citizen about 70 miles north of Agadir, who assisted in the government's propaganda effort by riding a horse for three days through the Moroccan countryside so that he could turn up in Agadir on July 4 and announce that he was in fear of his life.

And while this was going on, Montenegro mobilized its 7,000 man army in support of the Albanians. The Ottoman Empire and the Albanian dissidents would eventually agree to a compromise that would prevent bloodshed, at least for a while, but it added to the rising tensions in Europe. Stock markets in London, Paris, and especially Berlin experienced huge selloffs. This was partly due to the economic recession Europe was experiencing in 1911, but it was also partly due to war fears inducing European investors to pull their investment money back to their home countries as a hedge against a possible war. Rumors of impending war multiplied. In Washington, the President of the United States, William Howard Taft, offered his services as a mediator.

As in the first Moroccan crisis, Germany's intent was to isolate France from her allies and intimidate her. Both France and Germany have allies, Britain and Russia, Austria and Italy, but the idea here is that none of these alliance partners are going to want to get involved in a Moroccan crisis, because they have no national interests at stake. So that brings the confrontation down to France versus Germany, and France is clearly the weaker country, and they will have to give in. Right?

As the Germans expected, the Russian government informed Paris that they did not feel any vital Russian interests were being threatened by the Germans in Morocco, and in any case, it would take two more years before Russia finished rebuilding its military from the war with Japan. Not to mention that the French were not exactly supportive of Russia when the Austrians annexed Bosnia in an incident that involved few French interests, so hey, what do you expect? It must have been very gratifying for the Russian ambassador in Paris to deliver that message. He was, of course, Alexander Izvolsky, the same former foreign minister who had been demoted after the Russian government was humiliated in the Bosnia crisis.

France's rookie Prime Minister, Joseph Caillaux, having been informed by French military commanders that France was not ready for a war with Germany, began sounding out the Germans privately about what they would accept as compensation in exchange for conceding to France a protectorate in Morocco. Germany's initial demand was the French Congo. This was far more than France was willing to concede. In truth, no one in the German government really

cared all that much about the French Congo. What they cared about was forcing a concession out of France, and making a show that Germany was too big and too strong to be trifled with.

But the German government did not foresee that all this pressure on France would again draw Britain closer to her. We've already seen the British fear that Germany is angling for a naval base, and the British government fully believes that a weakened France and an emboldened Germany is bad news for Britain.

The British government was much distracted by domestic politics during this time. There was the political fight going on between the Commons and the Lords over the Lords' veto, there was an increasingly militant women's suffrage movement, and there was the thorny question of Home Rule for Ireland. These questions would continue to preoccupy the new and weaker Liberal government in Britain, forcing foreign policy onto the back burner at an unfortunate time. Europe could really use Britain's stabilizing influence just now, but the British government doesn't have much political capital to spare.

But Britain did publicly support France during this crisis. The British public continued to be hostile to Germany, and there was a wide consensus in the country that a weaker France was no good for Britain. Behind the scenes, with the encouragement of the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, but without the knowledge of the British public, parliament, or even most of the British Cabinet, British Army commanders began again to discuss with their French counterparts contingency plans for deploying the standing British Army in Britain, about six divisions, to France in the event of a war with Germany, in order to bolster the French defense. As rumors flew of German mobilizations, of the German fleet setting sail, of the German government stockpiling wheat against a possible British blockade, tensions in Britain and France kept rising.

On July 21, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, one of the most prominent politicians in Britain, gave a speech at the Mansion House, the official residence of the Lord Mayor of London. In this speech, he argued that while peace has always been Britain's primary foreign policy goal, peace at the expense of national honor was too high a price to pay.

This speech made many in Germany sit up and take notice. Lloyd George was regarded in Germany as one of her best friends in the British government, one who previously had been dismissive of talk about the threat Germany supposedly posed to Britain.

Meanwhile, just as Russia had quietly informed France that it was not prepared to go to war over Morocco, now the Austrian government was privately telling the Germans that they wouldn't, either. Kaiser Wilhelm, who was off on summer vacation, cruising the coast of Norway as tensions were escalating, sent word to his government that he was also unwilling to agree to a war, and cut short his cruise to return to Germany and take charge of the situation.

As in 1906, it became apparent once again that Britain was not going to abandon France, and France was not going to back down, and so the Germans were forced again to settle for some

limited, face-saving concessions. The French agreed to transfer to German control some inland tracts of land in French Equatorial Africa that no one really cared about. Apart from the people who lived there, of course, but no one in Berlin or Paris cares about *them*. And again, as in 1906, few people were fooled by this fig leaf of a concession.

One disappointed figure in the German government was Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke, who wrote, “If we once again emerge from this affair with our tail between our legs, if we cannot bring ourselves to make energetic demands which we would be ready to force through with the sword, then I despair of the future of the German Empire. In that case, I will leave. But before that I will make a request to get rid of the army and have us placed under a Japanese protectorate; then we can make money without being disturbed and we can turn completely simpleminded.”

As for the French Prime Minister, Joseph Caillaux, in a few months it would be revealed that he had engaged in secret diplomacy with Germany without consulting the President, and he would be forced from office and gain a reputation as a squishy left-wing German-loving hippie peacenik that would dog him for the rest of his political career.

[music: Moroccan folk music]

Another European crisis had passed, and on the surface, things returned to normal. But we’ve seen a string of crises like this, in Morocco and in the Balkans, over the past five years. Every new crisis raises new tensions and suspicions, and face-saving diplomatic resolutions that paper over the fundamental divide that is now emerging in Europe, but cannot fully undo the damage to European peace that these continual crises are wreaking.

In Paris, Alexander Izvolsky wrote presciently to his successor, the new Russian foreign minister Sergei Sazonov, that Europe had now reached a state where every small dispute between two powers had the potential to trigger a general European war, and it was no longer a question of if, but when. “With God’s help, the onset of this conflict can be delayed...but we have to prepare ourselves.”

In Germany, the navy chief, Admiral von Tirpitz, must have been thinking the same thing. He took advantage of Germans’ patriotic anger to push yet another naval bill through the Reichstag, funding even more dreadnoughts for the ever expanding German Navy.

But as national tensions rose across Europe, the biggest consequence of the Agadir crisis was to incite Italy. Italian nationalists watched with anger and alarm as the last little bit of North Africa other than Libya, was swallowed up by France, and then watched France and Germany dicker over African colonies. The message the Italian government and public were getting out of all of this was that it was time to stop messing around and take full control of Libya before the French or the Germans get their hands on it.

And so, as war fever eased in Western Europe, a new war broke out in the Mediterranean, and Europe slid further down the slope to a general war.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening, and I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we move on to the war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire. It has been general policy in Europe for over a half century now, to prop up the Ottoman Empire, lest its collapse lead to an ugly war. Now, as the sick man of Europe continues tottering along, Italy is about to kick his crutches out from under him. That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In Britain, the following October, Winston Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty. Churchill was an enthusiastic proponent of modernizing the navy, including use of naval air forces to augment the surface fleet, and of using oil instead of coal to fuel the next generation of battleships. This was a controversial move in Britain, a country with tremendous coal reserves, but no petroleum. An oil-powered navy would need to use imported fuel, making the navy, and Britain, less self-reliant. But oil powered ships offered superior performance, and to Churchill, that's what really mattered.

At first, the Royal Navy bought its oil from America's Standard Oil Company, or from Royal Dutch Shell, which was developing oil resources in Sumatra, in the Dutch East Indies. So, at Churchill's insistence, the British government invested in the fledgling Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which was producing oil in Persia. That company would later become the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, then British Petroleum, and finally BP.

[music: Closing Theme]