

# The Student Researcher: A Phi Alpha Theta Publication

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Volume 2 Volume 2, Issue 1 (2016) *The Student  
Researcher: A Phi Alpha Theta Publication*

Article 6

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2017

## The Committee of Union and Progress and World War I

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### Recommended Citation

Shipp, Ella (2017) "The Committee of Union and Progress and World War I," *The Student Researcher: A Phi Alpha Theta Publication*: Vol. 2 , Article 6.

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## The Committee of Union and Progress and World War I

Ella Shipp

The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which was born out of the Young Turks (founded in 1889), had the stated goal of restoring the 1876 Constitution and Parliament, and was inspired by Young Ottomans such as Namik Kemal.<sup>1</sup> However, the group also had a strong streak of nationalism and Social Darwinism influenced by strands of European thought. It became increasingly dominated by rigid thinking and unexperienced young officers who ultimately formed a triumvirate and brought the Ottoman Empire into WWI on the side of the Germans.

The CUP, led by this triumvirate, made a series of ill-advised and malevolent decisions, which shrunk the Ottoman Empire down to its core Turkish lands and caused the Armenian genocide. However, it was a yet younger generation of officers taught in the same schools and partaking in the same nationalist theories who saved Istanbul at the battle of Gallipoli and regained all of Anatolia for the new Turkish Republic after the Ottoman Empire was partitioned. Ever since its founding after World War I, Turkey has had to grapple with the effects of its strong military on national stability.

The Young Turks, and the Young Ottomans who preceded them, were the culmination of a trend of modernization that began in the 1800s. In the mid-1800s, Turkish liberals finally achieved the Sublime Porte's pronouncement of the Tanzimat/Hatt-i-Sherif, a series of liberalizing reforms.<sup>2</sup> These reforms modernized the military, the schools, and many other sectors. However, they ruffled too many feathers and were repealed one by one. The Ottoman Empire was also reaching its final decline. Balkan states started agitating for independence or more territory, depending on their status, and European governments began to hold even more

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<sup>1</sup> Hamdan Nezir Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey: The Ottoman Military and the March to World War I* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner Books, 1991), 272.

influence and were granted concession after concession.<sup>3</sup> Initially modernizers wanted to maintain both territorial integrity and the Ottoman nature of the regime but ultimately Turkism began to hold a stronger sway.

### **Military Reform**

The root of the Committee of Union and Progress was in the reform of the Ottoman military in the late 1800s and particularly in the early 1900s. There were multiple waves of leaders produced by these reforms: the first wave of Ottoman reformists including Mahmud Sevket and Ahmed Izzet, a second wave including the triumvirate in charge during the war composed of Enver, Talat, and Cemal, and a third wave of those who founded the republic such as Mustafa Kemal and Ismet (Inonu). In 1880, Sultan Abdulhamid appointed Marshal Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha in charge of a commission to consider possible reforms for the military.<sup>4</sup> It increased the strength of all three branches, infantry, cavalry, and artillery, and increased the reserves; it improved officer's pay and conditions; and it reorganized the system of military education.<sup>5</sup>

The Ottoman state decided that since Germany was perceived to have the strongest army and Great Britain to have the strongest navy, they would invite advisors and instructors from these respective nations and services to advise the Ottoman army and navy. The Ottoman navy never recovered its former strength but the army was greatly affected by German instructors. The first German military advisors requested by Sultan Abdulhamid arrived June 1882; however, they did not feel themselves to be experts on instruction.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, General Kaehler requested

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<sup>3</sup> Feroz Ahmed, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Akmese, *The Birth of Modern Turkey*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 21.

Major von der Goltz, who arrived in 1883.<sup>7</sup> Von der Goltz' influence on the late Ottoman military cannot be overstated. He taught a generation of officers and even after he returned to Germany, maintained contact with his former students and was partially responsible for furthering an admiration of the German military, which led to the Ottoman Empire's ultimate alliance with that nation. Some of the prominent students from this first generation include Mahmud Sevket, Ali Riza, Ahmed Izzet, and Pertev.

In addition to instituting German led instruction, the government increased the number of military academies and increased the number admitted to the prestigious War College. The military academies had always been one of the few pathways to success for a son of a poor family, since tuition was free. While that remained true, educated children of wealthy families also began to be recruited. In addition, the vast majority of officers, known as Alaylis, had risen from the ranks and were well trusted by the men but had little to no education or knowledge of military science. Thanks to the expansion of the military academies, the ranks of officers who had graduated from a military academy, known as Mekteplis, increased from 10% in 1884 to 25% in 1899.<sup>8</sup> Not only were there more Mektepli officers, but over time they purged the Alaylis through forced age limits and retirements and other measures so that they became an even greater percentage of the makeup of the officers.<sup>9</sup>

There were positives and negatives to this. On the one hand, a modernized, educated, and fully patriotic officer corps led to the successes in the Turkish War of Independence and the present strong Turkish army. The goal was effectively to inculcate patriotism and modern ideals in much the same manner as in Europe, which produced the militaries, which were much more

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 116.

effective than in the Middle East. On the other hand, the marginalization of officers who had risen from the ranks and the removal of the possibility of rising through the ranks, in favor of the promotion of arrogant young officers with little knowledge of their troops understandably led to considerable resentment and disaffection. Since the widespread changes took several years to reach their full effect and were disrupted by the advent of war, during WWI the Ottoman military was in a state of disarray and was unable to act effectively.

Unhappiness with the near-total failures of the Balkan wars only politicized the young CUP officers further and propelled them to seize power.<sup>10</sup> In July 1913, with the support of Cemal, who was military governor of Istanbul at the time, and after the assassination of Mahmud Sevket Pasha by a member of the anti-CUP opposition, Enver liberated Edirne.<sup>11</sup> This city in eastern Thrace, a bit to the west of Istanbul in the European territories, had been the ancient capital of the Ottoman Empire before the conquest of Constantinople, and as much as its loss was a source of unbearable shame, its liberation brought pride and legitimacy to the CUP and particularly to Enver.

The inculcation of Turkish ethnic nationalism as a result of military reform and the loss of the Balkans, while unifying Anatolia and promoting greater patriotism there, played a strong role in destroying the unity of the Ottoman Empire and military, which was a multiethnic empire of the peoples of the Balkans, the Turks, the Kurds, and the Arabs. Previously, most of the peoples of the empire had been proud Ottoman citizens, and the rise of nationalism and end to this unity had profound negative effects still felt in the Balkans and in the Arab nations today.

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<sup>10</sup> Akmese, *The Birth of Modern Turkey*, 124-132.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 139-140.

## Rise of the Committee of Union and Progress

In 1894, the Society of Ottoman Union, essentially the Young Turks, was renamed the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress, or *Ittihad-i Osmani Cemiyeti*.<sup>12</sup> In 1896, increasingly popular as a result of Balkan crises, it joined in a military coup plot against Sultan Abdulhamid.<sup>13</sup> The leaders were forced to flee and the CUP temporarily became an émigré organization led by Ahmed Riza. In 1906, in protest against revolutionary movements in Macedonia, a group of ten junior officers and civil servants in Salonika formed the Ottoman Freedom Society.<sup>14</sup> They included Major Mehmed Tahir, director of the military school at Salonika, and Talat. Within a few months, others such as Cemal and Enver joined.<sup>15</sup> By 1907, it spread throughout neighboring Thrace, and officers such as Captain Ismet, later a friend of Atatürk, joined. Later in the same year, the CUP and the Ottoman Freedom Society formally merged, with the stated goal of restoring Midhat Pasha's Constitution of 1876.<sup>16</sup>

This new secret organization grew rapidly in the military, with the rule that only officers with a rank from lieutenant to major could be admitted, and officers must be Mektepli rather than Alayli, who rose through the ranks rather than attending an academy.<sup>17</sup> Few civilians were admitted. Senior officers were not admitted because they were considered complicit with the Hamidian regime and less likely to share the CUP's reformist outlook. In the case of most senior officers, this was true. However, some, whether influenced by Young Ottoman thought or part of von der Goltz' early generation such as Mahmud Sevket Pasha, then governor of Kosovo, were sympathetic with the CUP and occasionally cooperated with them. Huseyin Hilmi Pasha, the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 51.

Inspector General of Macedonia, also paid a blind eye to their activities in his province. Due to their interest in preserving the normal military hierarchy and chain of command, they occasionally clashed with the junior officers of the CUP.

In 1908, the Sultan realized something was amiss and sought to quell the movement in Macedonia, which did not succeed but which led in the summer to a number of CUP-dominated units beginning a rebellion and some going into the mountains.<sup>18</sup> Soon after the Sultan was forced to declare the restoration of the Constitution, after scarcely a month of tensions.<sup>19</sup> However, with its primary goal achieved, the CUP did not dissolve and nor did it become a normal political party. Instead, it remained a military-dominated pressure group with a formal commitment to Ottomanism and reform and a practical bent towards Turkish nationalism and military authoritarianism.<sup>20</sup> Although they were committed to Ottomanism and supported some non-Muslim or non-Turkish candidates for Parliament, essentially all of the soldiers were Muslim and most aside from some Albanians were Turks, so when inculcated with nationalism they tended to focus on Turkish nationalism.<sup>21</sup>

The CUP had already ruled in conjunction with other liberals and sympathizers for several years but in 1913, the increasingly nationalist CUP seized complete power.<sup>22</sup> For the first few years, a cabinet and parliament of CUP members ruled together.<sup>23</sup> In the early years the CUP officers were simply too junior to credibly lead the nation, so they relied on older officers and officials such as Mahmud Sevket Pasha and Ahmed Izzet Pasha with similar ideals who would

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 117-124.

<sup>23</sup> Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Morgenthau, telegram to the Secretary of State, November 4, 1915 (Document 699), in *Foreign Relations of the United States*.



rule, as long as they held CUP-friendly policies. They had been part of the early generation of students taught by von der Goltz, and held a strong interest in military reform which sometimes coincided with that of the CUP but which was opposed in terms of chain of command and hierarchy.<sup>24</sup> It was only amidst World War I that power was centralized into a triumvirate of Cemal Pasha, Talat Pasha, and Enver Pasha.<sup>25</sup> It was under their rule that the Ottoman Empire would truly fall apart and genocide take place.

As mentioned, the CUP was initially more Ottoman in identity. However, after the Balkan provinces were lost, the policy of Turkism became more popular. It may have increased pride and patriotism in Anatolia and what was left of Turkish populated Europe, but Turkification implicitly left out the Arabs. The Arabs had always been loyal to the Ottoman Empire, since it was seen as legitimate of a Muslim ruler as any of the previous dynasties that ruled the region.<sup>26</sup> However, the elimination of Arab power and representation within the empire combined with rising Arab nationalism in general caused more Arabs to seek independence as well.<sup>27</sup> Egypt and most of North Africa were already effectively independent, although the Ottomans were sometimes reluctant to acknowledge this, but the other Arab provinces had previously been loyal. In 1911, Libya had invaded Tripoli and Cyrenaica and CUP members had organized Arab resistance even while denigrating the Arabs behind their backs.<sup>28</sup> It was not until the success of the Arab Revolt seemed relatively certain that any sizeable portion of the Arab portion joined the forces, with most either remaining neutral or supporting the Ottomans.

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<sup>24</sup> Akmese, *The Birth of Modern Turkey*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Elkus to the Secretary of State, November 17, 1916 (Document 705), in *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

<sup>27</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2009), 148.

<sup>28</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 101-109.

The increasing prominence of Muslim Turkish identity rather than Ottoman identity also had a seriously negative effect on Greeks, Armenians, and other minorities.<sup>29</sup> These minorities occasionally colluded with foreign powers to increase their power and in some cases to press for independence but the increased nationalism among the CUP caused it to respond to these struggles in a very dangerous way. Minorities had previously been safe within the millet system and even after that started to fall apart, they were tenuously safe because of the power of the European nations over a weak and corrupt Ottoman government. Once the CUP seized power and particularly after the start of WWI, the minorities were no longer safe and, especially in the case of the Christian minorities, were seen as disloyal.<sup>30</sup>

As the system of alliances fell into place, initially the Ottoman Empire was neutral. Due to a combination of capitulations and a desire to modernize the army which resulted in foreign commanders and consultants, there was a considerable amount of foreign influence but the influences were relatively balanced. After the humiliating losses of the Balkan Wars in which they barely managed to reconquer Edirne, the CUP sat down to analyze the reasons why they lost so badly.<sup>31</sup> Although some officers such as Major Ismet, of later fame, thought the CUP was at least partially to blame, the CUP leaders decided the loss was the fault of the holdover Ottoman generals.<sup>32</sup> Soon after, Enver, who was a supporter of Germany, was named war minister.<sup>33</sup> When war approached, it was mainly his influence which ended up carrying the Ottoman Empire for Germany. The Germans did help to modernize the army and ensure that it was better supplied

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<sup>29</sup> Ahmed, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities*

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 124.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 124.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 125.

and helped to lay the framework for the successful army later but not even they would be able to save the Ottoman Empire from collapsing.

In addition to officers like Enver's warmness towards Germany, the CUP leadership also did not want to join the Triple Entente because it included Russia, which was ever the enemy of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, Enver's pan-Turanian and North African projects could only be realized at the expense of Britain, France, and Russia.<sup>34</sup> Germany had no colonies or spheres of influence that would interfere with the Ottoman Empire's plans. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire began to be more closely allied with Germany. Several of the military instructors such as Von der Goltz had returned to Germany, but it sent officers to advise and command the Ottoman military, such as Falkenhayn and Liman von Sanders.

The alliance was secret so the Ottomans remained officially neutral and waited until they felt they were ready and the army was mobilized to declare war.<sup>35</sup> The neutrality quickly began to appear to be a pretense. Churchill ensured that the British did not deliver warships the Ottomans had already paid for and the Ottomans let two German ships, the *Goeben* and *Breslau* into the Black Sea to escape the British.<sup>36</sup> When protest erupted, the Ottomans simply changed them into Turkish ships while keeping the same crew.<sup>37</sup> By November, the Allies declared war as the Ottomans made more and more warlike actions and soon after the pronouncement of the Allies, gave up the pretense and declared war themselves.<sup>38</sup> Several cabinet members resigned over the issue.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 133.

<sup>35</sup> Kress von Kressenstein, quoted in *Ataturk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey*, by Andrew Mango (New York: Overlook Press, 1999), 134

<sup>36</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 134.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 136.

<sup>39</sup> Morgenthau to Secretary of State, November 7, 1914 (Document 258), in *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

The Ottomans intended to invade and cause uprisings in all of the territories on their borders but the major actions ended up being an invasion of Egypt, an invasion of the Balkans, and an invasion of the Caucasus.<sup>40</sup> The invasion of Egypt met the strong resistance of the British and Arabs, and the invasion of the Caucasus in which some Armenians aided the Russians and many Turkish soldiers died of the cold, was a disaster. The CUP was failing at its aims to recover territory it had lost in the past few decades and years but at this point it still held most of its core Arab territories. However, the twin forces of rising Arab nationalism and Turkish nationalism, which excluded the Arabs from Ottoman power, would lead to the Arab Revolt.

As the war progressed and these communications continued, it was increasingly clear that the Ottoman Empire was too weak to prevent any of their designs and would lose all of its territory. It was just a question of who would conquer the territory and when. However, much of the CUP's message was that previous Ottoman governments and armies had been corrupt and ineffective and the CUP would restore and protect Ottoman boundaries and restore it to greatness.<sup>41</sup> Without military success, the CUP platform didn't have a basis for support. The army and government had simply been too weak and inefficient for too long and Enver and his friends were not brilliant enough military strategists to make up for this. Mustafa Kemal was brilliant enough but he was still mid-level and Enver was never going to support and promote someone who could rival him.

### **Campaigns in Anatolia**

In February 1915, as the Turks were still reeling from the failure of their invasion of Egypt and the considerable loss of life from Enver's folly in the Caucasus, the British and French

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<sup>40</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 140-141.

<sup>41</sup> Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office, *Memorandum on the Present State of Mind in Turkey*, May 25, 1918.

landed at Gallipoli.<sup>42</sup> This peninsula was part of the Dardanelles, which opened on the Sea of Marmara, which led to the Bosphorus and Istanbul, the Ottoman capital. Virtually the only things playing in the Ottomans' favor were home field advantage and a desperation not to have the capital conquered. A combination of the courage and determination of ordinary soldiers with the brilliance of officers like Mustafa Kemal, Esat Pasha, Cevat Pasha, and Liman von Sanders would save the Ottoman Empire from a very quick end.<sup>43</sup> The success sapped the Turks because reinforcements had to be brought in and many soldiers died, but it saved the core Turkish territory.

More or less concurrent with the battle of Gallipoli was the Caucasus campaign. This campaign against the Russians would disarrange the Kurds but had particularly disastrous consequences for the Armenians. Some of the Armenians had chosen to side with Russia rather than the Ottomans and in doing so incurred the wrath of the CUP upon all of the Armenians despite the fact that most had remained loyal. By late March 1915 and April, there was international concern about the treatment of the Armenians and the threat of massacre.<sup>44</sup> By August, the American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau stated, "It is difficult for me to restrain myself from doing something to stop this attempt to exterminate a race."<sup>45</sup> One letter points out that while the crackdown began because some Armenians were fighting with the Russians against the Turks, most of the people who died and were oppressed were innocents.<sup>46</sup> Massive numbers of the elderly, women, and children were marched to the desert in what is today

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<sup>42</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 143.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 156.

<sup>44</sup> Secretary of State Bryan to Morgenthau, telegram, April 27, 1915 (Document 1294), in *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

<sup>45</sup> Morgenthau to Secretary of State, May 28, 1915, July 10, 1915, August 11, 1915 (Documents 1297, 1299, 1305), in *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

<sup>46</sup> Morgenthau to Secretary of State, July 10, 1915 (Document 1299), in *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

northern Iraq and Syria and were left without food or shelter.<sup>47</sup> Some people were outright killed and many more died on the forced march or once they reached their desert destination. This genocide lasted throughout much of the war. Enver Pasha insisted to international observers such as a German journalist, whose country was the Ottoman's main ally, that he was only punishing the rebels, that the Armenians should place their trust in him, and even insinuated that the only reason Ambassador Morgenthau was raising a fuss was because he was Jewish.<sup>48</sup> Rather than punishing the young Armenian men who actually rebelled and fought with the Russians, the CUP elected to commit genocide. The word did not yet exist but this was clearly a cold and calculated extermination of a race.

### **The Arab Revolt**

The British were already in control of Egypt and began to correspond with Sherif Hussein, who was the deputy of the Ottomans in the Hejaz and Protector of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina because his family descended from the Prophet. He was ambitious both for himself and for his sons Faisal and Abdullah and considered that with the help of British power he could create a pan-Arab empire. The Hashemites in Mecca were the focus of Arab nationalism because not only were they some of the only independent Arab leaders, but they were Sunnis descended from the Prophet unlike others who did not have the same legitimacy.<sup>49</sup> There were also important Arab nationalist philosophers in Egypt and the Levant and a group of Arab nationalists had formed the organization Al-Fatat in Damascus and had held an Arab Congress, but there was no figurehead for revolt.

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<sup>47</sup> Morgenthau to Secretary of State, August 11, 1915 (Document 1305), in *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

<sup>48</sup> Franz Werfel, "An Interview with Enver Pasha," in *An Anthology of World Prose*, ed. Carl van Doren (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935), 862-870.

<sup>49</sup> Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 1993), 66.

Abdullah had been in the Ottoman capital, and seeing the disdain with which the Turks treated the Arabs, was the first to call for revolution, although the British later favored Faisal over him.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the increasing Turkish control over the Hijaz due to the reforms of the Tanzimat was not at all to the Hashemite ruler Hussein's liking.<sup>51</sup> In addition to instituting direct control, the Ottomans pitted the Dhawi Aoun and Dhawi Zeid branches of the family against each other as an exemplar of the philosophy of "divide and rule."<sup>52</sup> Ottoman centralization, British encouragement, and CUP anti-Arab arrogance pushed the Hashemites into revolt and ensured support for the revolt.

The British encouraged revolt and ensured its success because they wished to isolate Ottoman forces in Arabia.<sup>53</sup> It was in their interest to distract the Ottomans as much as possible by revolt so that they could more easily defeat them. However, they could not allow an entirely independent Arab empire both for their own purposes and because they had made agreements with the French. The Hussein-McMahon letters essentially promised the Hashemites an independent state of Arabia, Jordan, and an ambiguous amount of Syria and Iraq.<sup>54</sup> This promise did not include Palestine since the British issued the Balfour Declaration allowing Jewish immigration and intended to control the territory.<sup>55</sup> The British already effectively controlled Egypt and, knowing of the oil reserves in the Mesopotamian vilayets, intended to control that region as well. In June 1916, the Arab Revolt officially began although correspondence had begun the preceding year.<sup>56</sup> The British sent aid and advisors such as T. E. Lawrence to Prince

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<sup>50</sup> Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan*, 77, 78.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>54</sup> Hussein-McMahon correspondence

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Rogan, *The Arabs*, 178.

Faisal to aid in his fight and facilitated his connections with the Syrian revolutionary organizations.<sup>57</sup>

The Ottoman Empire was so weak that everyone knew its provinces were up for grabs. Since the Western Front in Europe was in stalemate, everyone saw the Middle East as a place where actual advances could be made. The battle of Gallipoli, which lasted for a considerable portion of 1915 and ended in British and French retreat, forestalled a quick takeover of the Ottoman Empire. Thereafter, the Eastern Front would be mostly fought in the Arab provinces. This was the domain of Cemal Pasha, but the war was mostly a question of how long it would take the CUP to realize they had lost the whole empire.

The CUP had officers requisitioning as much foodstuffs and materials from Anatolia as they could but the government and war machine was in dire straits.<sup>58</sup> The Ottoman Empire was already bankrupt before the war and after killing most of the Armenians, frightening the Greeks and Jews, and declaring war on the people they were doing business with, the economy effectively collapsed.<sup>59</sup> The Turkish members of the military and government were highly motivated which got allowed them to hold off for longer than they probably should have, but the simple fact is that the success of the Ottoman Empire had always rested on its cosmopolitan nature. With little to no money, food, or clothes and all non-Turkish citizens and soldiers severely demoralized or in outright rebellion, it was impossible for the Turks to hold off the Arabs and British. The British were well equipped and the Arab tribesmen were motivated and fighting for their independence and honor. Virtually the only advantage the Turks still had aside from some motivated and clever Turkish soldiers was the fact that they already held a great deal

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<sup>57</sup> Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> British General Staff, *Economic and Political Review of Turkey*, Memorandum, October 24, 1917.

<sup>59</sup> General Staff, *Economic and Political Review of Turkey*.



of territory and forts. In contrast, the British and Arabs had to work outward from Egypt and the Hejaz.

During 1916 and much of 1917, Faisal's regular "Sherifian" Arab army fought with the Ottomans for cities like Yanbu and Wajh, which was the base for the railway attacks.<sup>60</sup> An Ottoman artillery attack on Mecca gave propaganda value to Faisal and the Arabs, who could now paint the Ottomans as desecrating Islam. Lawrence as well as several other British and French officers assisted the Hashemites in organizing the Arab tribes under Faisal's overall command to attack the recently built Hejaz Railway.<sup>61</sup> Blowing it up multiple times prevented Turkish reinforcements and munitions from reaching the soldiers in the western half of the peninsula and also occupied the Turks who had to keep trying to rebuild it.

Mecca and Jidda fell immediately to the Hashemites, and after a three month siege, Ta'if, where the Turkish forces had retreated for their summer billet, fell to Abdullah.<sup>62</sup> This was the first major victory of the revolt. He then laid siege to Medina, with its 7,000 Turkish troops under Fakhri Pasha, but he was unwilling to lose many Arab lives by ending the siege and taking the city quickly, so the siege continued until the end of the war.<sup>63</sup> He tied up a lot of Turkish troops and an important general but he lost the respect of the British by not acting faster. Thereafter Faisal replaced him as the main Arab intermediary with the British.<sup>64</sup>

After a series of attacks on the Hejaz Railway as well as some other skirmishes and setbacks at the hands of Turks who had managed to send reinforcements, T.E. Lawrence and Faisal decided on an attack on Aqaba. This was a minor town at the time but its strategic position

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<sup>60</sup> James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East: 1914-1948*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 37.

<sup>61</sup> Barr, *A Line in the Sand*, 37.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain, and the Making of Jordan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 28.

<sup>63</sup> Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain, and the Making of Jordan*, 33.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

had the potential to disrupt the ability of the British to transmit supplies. Lawrence and Auda ibn Tayi, a Huwaytat Bedouin sheikh, marched a small force through the Nafud Desert in the midst of the summer heat, and on July 6, 1917 attacked the town from behind and conquered it.<sup>65</sup> This was a good propaganda victory, which energized the Arabs and gave them and Lawrence credibility, leading to bigger victories later.

The British were not entirely disingenuous in their promises since Faisal and Abdullah both ended up with (mostly) independent kingdoms but they were certainly misleading. The British knew that the Arabs needed to believe in an independent state and future power to fight the way they did. Once the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917, they released the details to all the agreements the Russian government had been informed of or was a party to such as Sykes-Picot, wherein Sykes intended to draw a line from the E in Acre to the K in Kirkuk.<sup>66</sup> Of course, the boundaries ended up being slightly more complicated than that, thanks to people such as Gertrude Bell who helped delineate the new Iraqi borders, but they were certainly artificial.

It cost the British and French a good deal of gold to subsidize the tribal irregulars, but they had some successes, and their worrying of the Turkish troops prevented those forces in the Hejaz from being able to go elsewhere and attack the Suez Canal. Of course, everything was politics. The Ottomans had issued a fetva declaring their conflict a holy war and Sherif Hussein decided to support the allies partially because he thought the Ottomans might be about to depose him in favor of a rival of his. To this end, Allenby's British and Egyptian forces and Faisal's Arab forces with European advisors may have fought the more substantial battles but it was T.E. Lawrence's band of irregulars which gained most of the fame and acclaim.

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<sup>65</sup> Barr, *A Line in the Sand*, 38-40.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

In February 1917, after several defeats in the Hejaz, some of the CUP leaders including Mustafa Kemal, who had been appointed leader of the Hejaz expeditionary forces after a stint in the Caucasus, seriously considered withdrawing.<sup>67</sup> However, Talat Pasha argued that that for the Sultan to be the prestigious caliph, the Ottomans had to be in control of the holy cities.<sup>68</sup> On March 11, British forces invaded Baghdad. Around this time, Falkenhayn was transferred from the Western front to lead a reorganized Ottoman army to try to reconquer Baghdad and to lead a surge in the Sinai front.<sup>69</sup> Subsequently, Falkenhayn led the Sinai forces and Cemal Pasha was in charge of Syria and Western Arabia.<sup>70</sup> Mustafa Kemal was originally intended to work under Falkenhayn but as the war went worse and worse and he disagreed with CUP policy he effectively quit.<sup>71</sup>

In the second half of 1917 after the conquest of Aqaba, the Arabs both Faisal's regulars and Lawrence's Bedouin warriors, skirmished against the Ottomans in southern Jordan and ultimately linked up with Allenby's forces, which had advanced out of Egypt towards Palestine.<sup>72</sup> In late October and early November, Allenby broke through the Sinai line and marched on Palestine, and captured Jerusalem just before Christmas.<sup>73</sup> The Arabs keeping the Ottomans harried and distracted in the Jordan area helped to make this easy conquest possible. They were increasingly supported by the British and French and particularly by other Arabs as they achieved greater success, and soon would link together for the final campaign. The vast majority of Arabs had initially remained loyal to the Ottomans, but as the Arabs under Faisal achieved greater and greater successes, considerable numbers of Arabs began to support the

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<sup>67</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 165.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 165.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 165.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 169.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 169-170.

<sup>72</sup> Barr, *A Line in the Sand*, 47-49.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 47-49.

revolt. By December, a defeated Cemal Pasha returned to Istanbul and his theoretical duties as naval minister.<sup>74</sup> In February, Falkenhayn was replaced with Liman von Sanders.<sup>75</sup>

### **The End of the War**

When the Bolsheviks overthrew the tsarist state, as was their policy on all fronts, they asked for an armistice with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>76</sup> However, the treaty stipulated the populations of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum which had all been ceded to Russia in 1878 would be allowed to choose their fate, so the Turks advanced and conquered these provinces before the treaty was finalized so that their fate would be chosen for them.<sup>77</sup> On July 3, 1918, the old Sultan died and was replaced with another weak Sultan who allowed the CUP to continue.<sup>78</sup> Soon after, Mustafa Kemal rejoined the Syria army and Enver and his brother Nuri led a force which took Baku in Azerbaijan.<sup>79</sup> As the Americans entered the war and things heated up on the Western front the Germans partially lost interest in the Middle East and their Ottoman allies.

Throughout 1918, British and Arab forces continued to destroy the Hejaz railway and fought small battles in Jordan and Syria and helped facilitate Allenby's victory at the Battle of Megiddo. Soon after, Faisal and his Arab forces conquered Deraa in southern Syria in September. The Ottoman forces were now completely demoralized and there were roughly 300,000 deserters.<sup>80</sup> Allenby's and Faisal's forces then marched on Damascus. Some say

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<sup>74</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 171.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 171.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 172.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 178-179.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* 180.

Faisal's troops reached first and some say the Australians reached first, but either way Faisal was soon in control of Syria. Liman von Sanders gave the order for Mustafa Kemal and others to retreat to Aleppo but it was a formality because the Turkish troops were in full, panicky flight.<sup>81</sup> Outside of Aleppo, Mustafa Kemal led a conglomeration of troops in one of the final real battles.<sup>82</sup> By this point, Palestine, Jordan, much of the Arabian Peninsula, and southern Syria had been conquered by the British and Arabs.

Soon after, the armistice followed. Faisal wanted to be king of Syria and for a short period was in control, but Syria had been promised to the French so he was instead made king of the new state of Iraq. His brother Abdullah who had hoped to be King of Iraq was made king of the sparsely populated, newly delineated land of Transjordan.<sup>83</sup> Sherif Hussein remained leader of the Hejaz until it was conquered in 1925 by Ibn Saud.<sup>84</sup> While the situation in the Arab lands was being reorganized and promises were being made and broken, a newly powerful and more prestigious Mustafa Kemal rallied what was left of the troops and turned them and himself into a new force. This force turned around after brutal humiliation in the Treaty of Sevres to beat the Greeks, make the Europeans decide to give up on their planned division of Turkish lands, and establish a new Turkish Republic.

The Arab nations were not fully colonized, but instead were placed under a mandate system that involved Arab leaders and parliaments with implicit British or French control over foreign policy and other major decisions. For most Arab nations, it was a rejection of the independence they had been promised. A decade or so later, depending on the country, these nations were granted independence but it was still essentially theoretical since the British

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 181.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 181.

<sup>83</sup> Rogan, *The Arabs*, 157, 163, Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 318.

<sup>84</sup> Rogan, *The Arabs*, 182.

retained so much control. The British and French virtually destroyed the previous political system and created new boundaries and promoted certain groups at the expense of others. British rule over Transjordan was relatively light because it had few interests there, but British and French colonialism was heavy handed and deeply resented in Syria and Iraq. British policies in Palestine led to Jewish immigration, which led to Israeli initiative in taking over that land populated by Arab Palestinians. This led to a deep and continuing distrust of the British, French, and later the Americans among the Arabs.

The Hashemites got part of what they wanted in that their supremacy over the Hejaz was recognized (until the Saudis took over) and Faisal and Abdullah each got a kingdom which eventually became fully independent. The Hashemites still rule in Jordan. However, what they got was definitely not what they believed they had been promised and what they had worked so hard for. Faisal's Arab forces were essential to the success of sweeping the Ottomans out of the Arab nations. Through the British and French sole pursuit of national interests rather than granting independence and working with friendly and grateful states, they plunged the Middle East into a state of deep unresolved tension, which has only worsened in the century since.

Meanwhile, the Turks were not happy with the Treaty of Sevres. This gave large sections of the country such as Izmir/Smyrna to the Greeks, several other occupation zones to different countries, and divided Istanbul and its government among several occupying powers. The CUP had already suffered tremendous humiliation in losing all of its Arab territory. For the first time since the earliest Sultans, Turkey was Anatolia and a small patch of Eastern Thrace. In fact, it was not even really this since so much of it had been given away. The CUP government was in collapse and the main CUP leaders soon died in harebrained invasion schemes in the Caucasus. However, because the CUP had chosen Turkish nationalism and Turkish unity over Ottomanism,

a unified Turkish Anatolia was what they ended up with and what they deserved. Rather than a weak Ottoman state ruling Arab lands it barely controlled and resented but which it thought it wanted, it was free to become a nation-state. Now it was up to Mustafa Kemal and his friends like Rauf and Ismet to fight a civil war to create a unified and independent Turkey which would fulfil the ideals of Turkish nationalism and liberalism.

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