

Introduction

The First World War drew not only much of Europe into conflict but parts of the Islamic world as well. A major Middle Eastern power—the Ottoman empire—fought on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary (the three forming the “Central Powers” alliance). As Chapter III showed, the Ottomans backed the losing coalition mainly because of the history of prewar territorial encroachments against it by Great Britain, France, and czarist Russia (who made up the Allied, or *Entente*, side in the war). The European countries embroiled in war drafted and recruited soldiers and replacements from their colonies for their own workers fighting on the front. Many of these colonial peoples were Muslims who came to the battlefields and cities of Europe from India and Africa. Large numbers of Central Asian Muslims also fought in the czarist armies. One national group particularly affected by the war, the Christian Armenians, lived in the path of these Russian armies. Seen as favoring the czarist coalition, uprooted from their homes by Ottoman troops, and sent on forced marches out of the war zone, this population found itself subjected to severe hardship. Turks carried out massacres of Armenians throughout the empire. Those who could do so escaped abroad (see Reading 14).

On whatever side, few Europeans could conceive of “Orientals” or “natives” in any commanding role in wartime, or as citizens of independent states afterward. For example, when facing the Turkish-led Ottoman forces in the Middle East, the British expected to triumph easily. But the Ottoman armies mounted well-planned and -executed (if unsuccessful) offensives against the British stronghold in Suez. Under a young army colonel, Mustafa Kemal (mentioned in Chapter III as a rising figure in the Young Turk movement), Ottoman forces decisively repulsed the 1915 Allied attack on the strategic Dardanelles Straits. Elsewhere, Middle Easterners, North Africans, Central Asian Muslims, and both Hindu and Muslim Indians played important roles in the eventual Allied victory, and, as we shall mention, in the postwar struggles as well.

The German state’s location in central Europe dictated the necessity of fighting a two-front war. On the eastern front the Germans trounced czarist Russia, initially a member of the coalition whose other members—Great Britain and France—fought more than three years of static trench warfare in western Europe. The defeated Russians made a humiliating separate peace with the Germans and withdrew from the fighting in March 1918, four months after the revolutionary Bolsheviks took power. The United States in April 1917 had belatedly joined the *Entente* forces fighting on the western European front, contributed supplies and food staples, and helped inflict the decisive defeats on the Central Powers that compelled their surrender in November 1918.

Postwar Realities and the Imposed Peace Settlements

The war's impending end brought into play secret agreements negotiated a few years earlier by Britain, France, and czarist Russia to carve up and annex Ottoman territory. With Russia embroiled in a civil war that followed its Bolshevik revolution, Britain and France carried through as much of the expansionist program as they could manage to do in face of a new postwar reality: the unexpected resurgence of Turkish power, which we discuss later in this Introduction. The Europeans encouraged Arabs to join them in the war against the Ottomans (see Readings 13a and b), and, for reasons that we mention later, Arab troops fought alongside British forces in Syria, Palestine, and Iraq.

On the eve of the war, Arabs within the Ottoman empire had become restive under Turkish rule—especially after the Young Turks created the centralized state we discussed in Chapter III and those leaders favored a version of nationalism that discriminated against Arab subjects. When war broke out, British officials, aware of this discontent, sought Arab allies to help defeat the Ottomans. The main British official in the region, Sir Henry McMahon (1882–1969), high commissioner for Egypt, conducted negotiations on behalf of his country. He contacted the Hashemite leader in Arabia, Husayn ibn Ali (1853–1931), whose title, *sharif*, marked his descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Husayn had served as Ottoman-appointed governor of Muslim holy sites in Arabia, but as his correspondence with McMahon shows (see Readings 13a and b), he agreed to join the British for a suitable reward: an extensive kingdom for himself and his descendants where Britain would have significant economic and military privileges. Despite the vagueness of McMahon's assurances, Husayn, his sons, and their Arabian soldiers fought alongside Western troops.

The Hashemites did receive rewards: confirmation of Husayn's control of central Arabia; creation of a state to the east of the Jordan River for one of Husayn's sons, Abdullah; and a state in Syria for Faysal, another son. Except for Jordan, a Hashemite state to this day (see Reading 26a), all the other territorial gains won by the Arabs proved fleeting: Husayn soon lost Arabia to the Saudis; the French took Syria and deposed Faysal. Soon afterward the British placed Faysal on Iraq's newly created throne, where he reigned for the rest of his lifetime. Iraqi nationalists eventually overthrew the dynasty.

While the World War I victors made these concessions to traditional Arab leaders, expectations arose widely among Arabs in former Ottoman territories for genuine independence. These hopes came in part from the worldwide emergence of nationalism, now heightened by wartime rhetoric of freedom and the stirring message of self-government promoted by the U.S. president, Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924). But the earlier Sykes-Picot agreement on dividing up former Ottoman possessions among Britain and France (see Reading 13c and Map p. 117) took precedence. We know about the secret British, French, and Russian plans to divide the Ottoman empire among themselves

because the Bolshevik revolutionaries found them among the papers of the czarist regime they ousted and, defying diplomatic tradition, published them.

The Americans backed their wartime allies and supported the transfer of Iraq and Palestine to British control and Syria and Lebanon to the French. More Ottoman territory would have been taken (see Map p. 108) had not a strong Turkish state arisen after the war to protect Anatolia from Greek, Italian, and French territorial designs. The League of Nations' "mandate" system provided the fiction that these colonies would be prepared for self-government by their European overlords. Even so, and without considering the special prize awarded to the Jews—a "national home" in Palestine (see Reading 19a)—most of the Arab populations of the regions affected came away from World War I disillusioned and unwilling to accept the new colonial realities imposed on them.

These complex interacting events also defined an important, if fleeting, moment in Central Asian history. On taking power in Russia, the Bolsheviks repudiated the 1907 Russo-British agreement establishing spheres of influence in Persia and, with revolutionary and rhetorical zeal, declared the vast expanse of the old czarist empire freed from all imperial domination. In a bid to win over the mostly Muslim population of Central Asia and to undermine British rule in India, they backed a pan-Islamic program echoing back to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani a half century earlier (see Reading 12), but this whole effort soon collapsed. By the mid-1920s the Bolsheviks had defeated their internal enemies, thwarted external invasions, and began to assert control over the vast expanse of Central Asia.

The Arab Middle East Under the Mandate System

The British and French holders of the Middle Eastern mandates immediately discovered that they ruled over hostile populations. Only Transjordan (later renamed Jordan) remained quiescent. In Iraq, before Faysal's appointment as king, the British had pieced together a mandate state out of incompatible Kurdish, and Arab *Shiite* and *Sunni* regions. Iraqi nationalists objected, including some army officers who had served under Faysal in the war against the Ottomans. The Iraqis began to organize an armed opposition. Only after a bitter and costly struggle did the British defeat them. Faysal's accession to the throne served for a time to prevent further uprisings (see Reading 17).

The French got Syria, from which they created the separate state of Lebanon. Designed to favor the Maronite Christians over other Lebanese—the *Shiite* and *Sunni* Muslims, the Druze community (whose beliefs incorporate Islamic symbols along with gnostic and neo-Platonic tenets), and other Christians—mandate Lebanon encompassed more territory than the old Mount Lebanon district of Ottoman Syria. Faysal's ouster in 1920 from the territory adjoining Lebanon (which soon became the mandate state of Syria) caused revolts, which

the French brutally suppressed. Ruled afterward by a small core of French bureaucrats and indigenous collaborators, Lebanon and Syria gained complete independence only after World War II.

In that war, having surrendered to the German invaders in 1940, France became a client state of the Third Reich. This greatly weakened France's hold over her colonies, and when British and American wartime forces later took over these territories, they stirred hopes for their eventual independence. However, General Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970), leader of the French anti-Nazi armed forces, had different ideas. He wanted to restore French imperial control everywhere, but pressure from Britain and the United States forced him to withdraw from Syria and Lebanon. Remnants of colonial practices persisting in postindependence Syria and especially Lebanon in the 1940s would create future problems.

The United States

The United States sought no Middle Eastern territory after World War I, but it did back the imperial ambitions of its British and French allies at the postwar peace conferences. When the Senate refused to ratify the World War I peace treaty in 1919, the United States temporarily withdrew from the formal arena of international diplomacy, and never joined the League of Nations. But this withdrawal did not really imply isolationism, as the country greatly extended its global economic power in the interwar years. By its participation in the 1928 “Red Line” petroleum agreement, the United States participated in developing the Middle East's oil fields. After World War II weakened French and British power, the United States became a member of the United Nations (successor to the failed League of Nations), and assumed during the Cold War years a dominant role in global affairs. Later chapters will explore these matters.

Changes in Turkey

Independence, crushed in the Arab territories, reasserted itself in Turkish domains directly after World War I. Under the leadership of Ottoman military commander Mustafa Kemal, the Turks repulsed a British invasion early in the war, then, defying the sultan's defeatism, they fought successfully to hold on to their Anatolian territories. Yet another invading force had arrived—Greeks seeking (with British and French backing) to conquer a substantial amount of Turkish territory. Armed peasants under Mustafa Kemal's leadership defended lands granted to their ancestors in the *Tanzimat* reforms six decades earlier (see the Introduction to Chapter III). By winning a resounding military victory over the Greeks, the Turks convinced the Allies to renegotiate a new settlement (the Treaty of Lausanne, 1923), which gave Turkey far more favorable terms than did the humiliating 1920 Treaty of Sèvres.