At the end of the Great War, in November 1918, the British army occupied the Arab provinces and the capital of the defeated Ottoman State. British and French politicians partitioned the region and envisioned a variety of new states under direct rule or indirect rule of what were planned to be reliable colonial client regimes. For Britain these plans included Zionist Jews in Palestine, Orthodox Christians in western Anatolia and the sons of Sharif Husayn in the Arab regions. For France, Armenian and Maronite Christians in South Eastern Anatolia and Lebanon were the favoured groups.

Long-term consequences notwithstanding, the post-war settlement was a hasty improvisation, and a messy attempt at reconciling various promises issued during the war, while preserving the closely guarded imperatives that had led to the war in the first place. For Britain the overriding concern was to prevent the re-emergence of the shockingly formidable Ottoman State as well as to permanently humble Germany and keep it away from Middle Eastern oil fields, the Suez Canal and the overland route to India. French goals were more hazy and centred on a nationalist reassertion of French prestige and self-image in the wake of the disaster of the war. The settlement came to receive the legalistic imprint of the new League of Nations, which insisted the colonial states be called mandates. «Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.»

Revolts involving thousands of inhabitants challenged the imposition of the post-war settlement and the prerogatives of the new states. Despite the dismissive claims of the colonial governments, there were unifying themes between all of the

uprisings. The powers had been forced to accept League of Nations mandates pledging to establish and maintain relationships of tutelage over the new states including fostering good government, legal structures, education and development, but there were early armed insurgencies in Anatolia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan. The rebellions often shared participants from region to region and the public in each of the new states followed events eagerly, whether local or in the neighbouring regions.

The mandate authorities answered the uprisings with military repression. Colonial armies brought techniques of industrialised violence innovated during the First World War and in the suppression of earlier colonial rebellions including mass expulsions, collective punishment, aerial bombardment of cities, towns, and villages, summary mass executions, tanks and artillery in villages and urban neighbourhoods. Each revolt has been woven seamlessly into the national histories of the post-colonial nation-states. There is, for example, the Iraqi revolt of 1920, the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925–1927 and the Great Palestine Revolt, and even the Turkish war of independence, to mention only the best known. In Palestine the Islamist political party, Hamas, has named its military wing the ‘Izz al-Dīn Qassām brigade after a rebel killed in 1935. The famous symbol of the Palestinian national movement, the checkered headscarf or kūfiyya, became a symbol commemorating the mostly rural and subaltern resistance of 1936. Rebels in Syria and Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s demanded townspeople stop wearing the elite fez in favour of the peasant. Iraqi insurgent groups against the 2003 US invasion actively sought to appropriate the mantle of the 1920 revolt against Britain in naming their groups. In Turkey, the War of Independence remains the seminal national experience. Each of the various revolts figure prominently in the primary and secondary school curriculum in the post-colonial states where they took place.

Colonial and nationalist historiography has considered each revolt separately. Colonial civil servants and chroniclers sought to undermine the legitimacy of resistance by emphasising its unrepresentative and fragmentary character. In common with colonial regimes in India, Africa and elsewhere, the imperial power characterised resistance as spontaneous and irrational religious fanaticism, criminality and banditry. The colonial governments often blamed «foreign fighters» for local disturbances, particularly in intelligence and press dispatches intended for consumption in the métropole. The French mandatory power dubbed its insurgents Sharifian extremists, presumed to be followers of British client, wartime Arab revolt leader, and short-term king of Syria and British mandatory Iraq, Faysal bin Sharīf al-Husayn of the Hāshimite family. Others were called Muslim fanatics. The British

3 R. Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, Delhi 1983.
blamed their disturbances on Kemalist extremists, allegedly inspired by the Ottoman officer, insurgent leader and eventual President of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal. Colonial intelligence officers also blamed Bolsheviks and the Zionist movement for inciting rebellion among colonial populations.

Colonial functionaries claimed good intentions and benevolence. The self-image of selfless colonial sacrifice in the service of civilisation, freedom and mankind required a specific image of the colonised society as supine, passive and undeveloped. The motives and agency of armed opponents were thus beyond contemplation, and most passive or active resistance was ascribed to un-representative fringe elements of the colonised society. The revolts involved tens of thousands of colonial citizens and created an acute atmosphere of cognitive dissonance for colonial functionaries. Such dissonance led inexorably to more intense violence on the part of colonial forces.

Post-colonial nationalist historians have portrayed the revolts as early and immature stirrings of national consciousness on the path to the post-colonial nation-state. Evidence, including popular memory, however suggests rebel participants viewed the revolts not as separate movements of national liberation, but rather as locally conditioned elements of a single, undifferentiated struggle. The uprisings shared more in common than they differed in detail. The rebels in each of the regions rejected the European imposed colonial settlement of the former Ottoman realms, most particularly the imposition of borders and foreign military occupation. They generally articulated some form of nationalist ideology, albeit with little intellectual consistency or careful delineation. Intellectuals were rarely the operative leaders of the revolts, and the secular intellectuals and civil elites of the various former Ottoman urban centres had an ambivalent attitude toward armed revolt, which moreover, usually originated in the countryside.

Insurgent leaders in each of the revolts furthermore shared a series of experiences, including Ottoman education, usually in military preparatory schools and often the Ottoman Imperial Military College, wartime Ottoman service in the far-flung former Ottoman realms, and the shock and trauma of defeat, occupation, and frequently, subsequent unemployment after the Great War. Most were of modest provincial background and received fully subsidised education in the Ottoman military system. Most of the active insurgents during the mandates were born in the 1890s and many of them fought in several territories under European rule. They paid scant attention to borders, ruling arrangements, or the claims of the colonial regimes. The revolts they led were subaltern in both the sense of Gramsci’s Italian subalterno in that they subverted the hegemony of Ottoman civil and later colonial

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elite politics, and in the English sense that they were junior military officers formerly of the Ottoman army. The replacement of the fez for the küfiyya is just one example of the symbolic inversion.

1. Ottoman Military Education

Ottoman military education has been little studied. By the final decades of the nineteenth century the Ottoman state had built a comprehensive system of military and civil schools from elementary to the post-graduate levels. Much of the late nineteenth-century Ottoman military education system was modelled on the Prussian cadet system, which has been well-studied, but Ottoman institutional modernisation has only begun to be taken seriously by scholars involved in debates about Oriental society and western modernity. It is certain, however, that Ottoman state education preceded and surpassed such efforts in most modernising states. The abortive 1876 Ottoman constitution likewise preceded such efforts in many European countries.

Ottoman reformers systematised state education over the middle decades of the nineteenth century. After the education law of 1869, the military and civil educational systems both came to be based around a similar set of assumptions and goals. The military system, despite the minimal attention of historians, seems to have always been better funded and more carefully organised. The law called for an elementary school or Ibtidâ’îyya school in each village, a lower secondary school or Rushidiyya school in each town, and an I’âdâdiyya or Sultâniyya preparatory or higher secondary school in each provincial capital. At the Rushidiyya level and above, the schools were divided into either military (’askariyya) or civil (mulkiyya) systems. The primary and lower secondary or Ibtidâ’îyya and Rushidiyya schools were often combined to provide a total of six years of instruction. The next step, the I’âdâdiyya, provided an additional three years. The higher I’âdâdiyya schools, which boarded students in the important cities like the Damascus military school, Baghdad military school, Beirut Sultâniyya, Maktab ʿAnbar, and Galatasaray schools, provided up to seven years of instruction. The most promising students would continue their studies in an imperial service academy, either the military college or Mekteb-i Harbiye, civil service academy, Mekteb-i Mulkiye, medical school, or law.

The civil schools were prestigious and drew their students from the families of established Ottoman elites. Tuition was expensive and the schools existed in direct

7 I have been usefully guided by the work of Ute Frevert on German conscription and citizenship; see A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society, trans. A. Boreham, New York 2004.
8 Somel, Apendices 4–6, curricula of İbîdâl, Rûşdiye and İddâl schools, 1904, 297–309. Tahsin ʿAlî, Madhakkirât Tahsin ʿAlî 1890–1980, Beirut 2003, 15. I have used Arabic transliteration for the local schools and modern Turkish for the academies in the imperial capital.
competition to foreign missionary schools, which the state and its elites often saw as a threat. Military education, by contrast, was designed to draw the sons of notable rural and provincial families into the state system. State educational bureaucrats saw rural security and revenue collection as a key to modernisation. State elites considered the rural and nomadic areas as perennially rebellious, uncivilised and in need of constant state supervision and discipline. While military suppression was necessary to insure security and tax remissions, indoctrination into the Ottoman system also became an important tool of state integration. While Ottoman government functionaries worried about internal security, they also worried about external threats posed by Russia, the Balkan States and the European powers. A strong military, cohesive population and reliable revenue flows were critical concerns.

In 1884 Prussian General Colmar von der Goltz, author of the seminal book on the militarised nation, *Das Volk in Waffen (The Nation in Arms)*, became the leader of the new German military mission to the Ottoman State. Three years earlier Sultan Abdül-Hamid II had made a personal request to Bismarck to send a military mission. Bismarck proceeded slowly and informed both British and Austrian embassies of the request. When Bismarck finally sent several officers, followed by von der Goltz, he insured they would be under formal contract to the Ottoman staff command and be on leave as serving German officers. Von der Goltz stayed in Istanbul for twelve years until 1896. He retired an honoured Prussian general in the early years of the new century, but he stayed in touch with his admiring former students among the Ottoman general staff, who wrote frequent letters to their old teacher and friend.\(^9\)

Baghdad born Mehmet Şevket Paşa was Goltz Paşa’s closest friend among Ottoman staff officers, and spent several years in Germany in the 1890s. When the second constitutional revolution took place in 1908, its young officer leaders considered Mehmet Şevket Paşa their intellectual godfather, and he served as Grand Vezir between 1909 and his assassination in 1913. Kaiser Wilhelm II recalled von der Goltz from retirement in 1914 and he returned to Ottoman service soon after. Goltz Paşa died of typhus near Baghdad in April 1916 at the age of 72, a week before General Townsend’s surrender of the British Indian Army’s 6th Poona division to the Ottoman force that had been under Goltz’s command, at nearby al-Kut. The surrender is sometimes considered the gravest British defeat of the Great War. Goltz Paşa was buried in Istanbul.

The Ottoman modernisation project long predated von der Goltz’s mission and owed far more to processes of nineteenth-century transformation common to all the great powers of Europe, than to the actions of any one individual. Indeed, there was nothing unusual about military missions and consultation between powers in the

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\(^9\) These connections have been most usefully explored in H. Nezir-Akmese, *The Birth of Modern Turkey: The Ottoman Military and the March to WWI*, London, New York 2005.
period, and while von der Goltz’s book was immediately translated to Ottoman Turkish and became a basic textbook in the rapidly expanding Ottoman state school system, it was widely influential in France, Britain and America – where it was translated and read somewhat later than in Istanbul. The Prussian military example and Bismarck’s unification of Germany gained admirers far and wide in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Like many state elites in Europe and America, Sultan Abdül-Hamid himself likely read von der Goltz’s book and sought to fashion a strong and authoritarian Ottoman-Islamic «nation in arms».

Ottoman modernity was part of a universal discourse of nineteenth-century modernisation, militarism and progress, and was fully integrated into and inseparable from wider European trends and processes. Indeed, the Ottoman project could be denounced as intervention, imperial annexation or partition, justified for domestic political gain in Britain and Russia by Czarist invocation of the «Sick Man of Europe», but not apparently as the sick man of Asia. The Ottoman State was always formidable and was always part of the story of Europe. The features of nineteenth-century modernity were similar in all the eventual belligerents of the Great War of 1914: mass standing armies, conscription, state education, census taking, state networks of communication and mobilisation, mass collective ritual and participation, the notion of popular sovereignty and more-or-less willing, sometimes temporarily eager, collective sacrifice for God, king and country and the living body of the nation.

Ottoman and Middle Eastern modernisation is usually characterised as a failed project. It has usually been styled as «westernisation», secularisation and defensive modernisation. Lost in this story is both the universal character of nineteenth-century modernisation and the culturally unique elements of the Ottoman modernisation project. Just as French, Prussian and Russian nineteenth-century modernisation efforts borrowed heavily from one another, each had many features that were unique and often culturally specific «invented traditions», in Eric Hobsbawm’s evocative phrase. For the Ottoman State, these elements of common state culture and invented traditions focused on Islam, the sultan and caliph, the glories of the Ottoman and Islamic past, and the anxiously hoped for return to splendour and worldly power.

Boys entered state military schools in towns and villages from Bosnia to Yemen, to the borders with Iran. Central and local officials actively sought boys from rural regions where the role of the state had traditionally been unpopular and intermittent. Late Ottoman education policy placed a value in drawing the people of the

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11 See in this regard especially the works of Deringil and B. Fortna, Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire, Oxford 2002.
fringes and frontiers into the state system. Since the state’s officials continually failed to convince rural people of the value of paying taxes and conscripting their children for distant and possibly fatal military campaigns, by the final decade of the twentieth century the emphasis shifted to a contract between state and village in which the state offered services, schools, education, and the selective promise of state employment presumed to follow.

Many rural and pastoral regions had opposed by arms the demands of the state for revenue, registration, census taking, and conscription, but schools were almost immediately popular and oversubscribed. The policy of attracting the children of influential local families enjoyed immediate success, and by 1897, there were 28 provincial military preparatory schools (iḍādiyya), with 7433 students. A somewhat larger number of boys would have been simultaneously enrolled in the lower preparatory (rushiyya) schools throughout the empire. By 1899 over 25 per cent of the Ottoman Officer corps of 18,000 had been educated and commissioned through the military educational system.

The Imperial Military Academy in Istanbul was the final educational destination for young men from the provinces. But the military preparatory schools were not the only path to the imperial academies. There was also the Aşiret Mektebi Hümayan, or the Tribal School in Istanbul, which boarded boys from the provinces and provided a more highly structured curriculum than the provincial schools. The larger provincial schools boarded some students, but most lived with their families. The Tribal School, by contrast, operated in the imperial capital and virtually imprisoned students within the school compound. Boys from the ungoverned frontier regions would attend by nomination and once at the school they would undergo a «civilising» process to turn them into loyal Ottomans. The journey from Iraq, Yemen, the Syrian desert, Hijāz, or Libya to the Tribal School might take more than a month, by land and steamship, after which boys were normally greeted in a special ceremony attended by imperial dignitaries. Tribal School students received a much heavier dosage of religion and various types of behavioural conditioning than students in the regular preparatory schools.

Both graduates of the provincial preparatory schools and the Tribal School usually matriculated to the Imperial Military Academy in Istanbul. By the time students arrived at the military academy they had spent up to nine years in the Ottoman military education system. Boys six to eight years old would first attend a primary type school in their town or village for a period of three years. They would have been

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taught to read and to write in their native language, perhaps Arabic, Kurdish, Greek, or Turkish, followed, where necessary, by instruction in Ottoman Turkish. All students would have been taught the rudiments of Arabic grammar. They would receive Islamic religious instruction as well as learn basic math skills, and they would be taught physical fitness drills and basic hygiene.

The next level of the lower secondary or Rushdiyya schools were located in larger provincial towns and all provincial capitals. The majority of students lived with their extended families, but there were always facilities for boarding students and some percentage of students lived at the school in each region. The instructional curriculum changed at the Rushdiyya level. Pupils studied Arabic and Ottoman Turkish grammar, reading, writing, and math, but they also received instruction in engineering, record keeping, geography, Islamic history, spoken Turkish, and French. They only received a limited amount of religious instruction at the beginning of the first year. At higher levels the curriculum became increasingly secular and scientific. In 1901 there were 507 students enrolled in the Damascus Rushdiyya school, 740 in Baghdad and hundreds more in provincial towns throughout the empire.

Ottoman Ministry of Education documents did not differentiate military school students by religion. Civil school statistics listed students by religion and obviously enrolled non-Muslim students. Civil school students paid high tuition and were exempted from legally required military service. Christians were also exempt until the time of the re-introduction of the Ottoman Constitution in 1909. Sultan Abdul-Hamid vetoed a recommendation made by Goltz Paşa in his role as military advisor in the 1880s to conscript non-Muslims into the Ottoman military. In practice, military schools seem to have enrolled a small number of non-Muslim students, particularly in regions where there were significant non-Muslim populations like Damascus, Baghdad and Beirut.

Higher military secondary or İcādiyya schools were open in every provincial capital by the 1880s. Students attended three years, after which they would normally attend the imperial military academy in Istanbul. Students could also continue at other university level institutions like the civil service academy Mekteb-i Mülkiye in Istanbul, or missionary colleges like Robert College (later to become Bosphorus University), or the Syrian Protestant College (later to become the American Univer-

16 IU, Mekātibi Askeriyye Şakirdanınım, 1318 (1901).
17 IU, Maarif Nazoreti Salnāmesi, Istanbul 1318 (1901), 1180–1184.
19 IU, Mekātibi Askeriyye Şakirdanınım Umumi, İmtilâhnamelerim neticelerini, Istanbul, 1318 (1901). I base the argument that non-Muslim students may have been enrolled on an analysis of names, which are listed, complete with course grades, class standing, and town or region of origin, in the cadet books. At least a few of the listed students have names typically associated with Arab Christians.
sity of Beirut). In the nineteenth and early twentieth century higher secondary school graduates were considered highly educated in most countries, including the Ottoman realms, and many went on to notable careers without additional schooling.

Those who continued in the military system made the journey to Istanbul. For Ja’far al-Askari, later to be Iraqi Prime Minister, the journey from Mosul to the provincial capital of Baghdad took days sailing downriver on the Euphrates on a large raft made from inflated animal skins. The journey from Baghdad to Istanbul took weeks, first by land to Aleppo and Alexandretta, and by steam ship to Istanbul. Students from other distant Ottoman provinces travelled still farther. By the first decade of the twentieth century, student cadets travelled by train. They arrived at the military academy where all cadets lived and studied together, whether from the Balkans, the Turkish regions, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, or Kurdistan.

Cadets began an intensive three-year education culminating in their commission as Ottoman military officers. The academy curriculum followed and refined the secular and practical scientific character of the İdādiyya and Rushdiyya schools. Military drills, field medicine, surveying, fortifications, reconnaissance, and communications were added to the study of French, German and Russian, geography, and math. History was taught, and students prayed together daily, but there were no traditional Islamic religious sciences offered. 60 to 70 per cent of the students came from the Anatolian and Turkish regions, but Sultan Abdül-Hamid was anxious to increase representation of the provinces outside Anatolia and actively recruited young men from the Arab and Kurdish regions. Retired Turkish Army Staff Colonel Fehmi Doğrusöz described the policy as part of the Sultan’s efforts to «draw the people closer to himself».

Colonel Fehmi was typical of the new beneficiaries of Ottoman military reform and subsidised education. He was born in 1884, the son of a Libyan merchant of apparently modest circumstances, attended the Rusdiyya school in Tripoli for four years and then travelled to Istanbul where he attended the İdādiyya schools for three additional years. After his preparatory school graduation, Fehmi Bey attended the Mekteb-i Harbiye for three years. Based presumably on his class standing in the top ten per cent, he was selected to continue his studies in the General Staff school for three more years, finally concluding his studies in 1905 at the age of 21 or 22 after more than thirteen years of increasingly rigorous schooling. By the first decade of the twentieth century some officers were selected for further training in Germany. Based on Colonel Fehmi’s brief biography, we may assume that he fought in

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22 Mekātibi Askeriyye Şakirdanınım Umumi, İmtihanlarının nihayetini, Istanbul, 1318 (1901).
Libya against the Italian invasion of his home province in 1911, in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, throughout the Great War of 1914–1918, and during the Turkish War of Independence of 1919–1923. Despite his origin in Arabic speaking Libya, he served as a general staff officer of the post-independence Turkish Army and retired in Istanbul.24

Students like Fehmi, from the Arab and Kurdish regions were posted to their original provinces as a matter of policy. Once returned, they served as active duty officers and often as instructors at the same preparatory schools they had graduated from years earlier. Fehmi returned to Libya to fight the Italian invasion of his home province, and while officers from Libya were few in number, many shared Fehmi’s experience of fighting British forces as serving Ottoman officers in their home regions of Iraq, Palestine or Syria. After the war Britain and France occupied much of the Ottoman realms and thousands of veteran Ottoman officers chose to go on fighting against the partition and occupation, either in their Turkish, Arab or Kurdish home provinces, or in the places they had last served, or in some cases, in many regions, one after another, through the 1920s, 1930s and even later. Hundreds of thousands of former Ottoman conscripts joined them. They invoked the bonds developed through schooling, collective experience and the struggles of the final Ottoman decades, in their conceptions of what could and should emerge from the ruins of the Ottoman realms and the defeat of the colonial occupation of their homelands.

The last pre-war Ottoman military academy class graduated in summer 1914. The class of 1914 had been an unusually small group of 295 cadets. Of these, 25 per cent hailed from Arabic speaking regions and nearly half of these «Arab» officers (32 officers) fought in the Turkish war of independence after the 1918 armistice and eventually served as officers in the army of the Turkish Republic. The half who did not fight in the Anatolian insurgency included all who perished in the war, all who deserted or joined Faysal and all who resigned their commissions at the end of the war. This means that the majority of the «Arab» Ottoman officers who survived the war from the class of 1914 fought in the Anatolian war, and became citizens of the Turkish Republic.25 Certainly the same was true of older officers and those who hailed from Crete, Bulgaria or other parts of the Balkans. In their case, however, the Treaty of Lausanne, the League of Nations and the new national governments had already declared them «Turks», based on their religious identity. It seems likely that no more than a plurality of the Ottoman officer heroes of the War of Independence could have hailed from nominally «Turkish» regions of Anatolia. For those who did

24 This information comes from interviews Merwin Griffiths conducted with Fehmi Doğrusöz in the 1950s.
25 This information comes from data compiled by Dr. Mesut Uyar, from the records of the Ottoman military academy and the Army of the Turkish Republic.
not or could not become Turkish citizens, exile in Hashemite Iraq or Transjordan was usually the best choice among limited options.

2. Post-War Insurgency

The Great War brought the end of the Ottoman Empire after more than six centuries. Ottoman statesmen, many of whom were products of the military educational system, entered the war hoping to reverse the defeats of the recent past. The Ottoman state aligned itself with Germany and Austro-Hungary in the Central Alliance against perennial enemy Russia, along with its allies France and Britain in the Triple Entente. Few in Britain or France expected to encounter serious resistance from the Ottoman forces and the public of each country, conditioned by at least a century of racist propaganda aimed at justifying colonial expansion all over Asia and Africa, took the Ottoman entry into the war as something of a joke. Newspapers and cartoons mocked the alleged backwardness and disorganisation of the Ottomans.

The Ottoman state mobilised over two million men between 1914 and 1918. Contrary to the expectation of the French and British high command, the Ottoman military proved a formidable opponent. Early in 1916 an entire British Army surrendered to an Ottoman general in Ottoman Iraq. Ottoman forces nearly succeeded in crossing the Suez Canal and challenging British rule in the former Ottoman province of Egypt, under British occupation since 1882. In 1915 Winston Churchill decided to besiege the Dardanelles Straits and march on Istanbul to open maritime supply lines to Czarist Russia, and bring a quick end to the Ottoman war effort. Churchill had planned a naval assault and a small, fast-moving land invasion, but after Ottoman coastal artillery destroyed three battleships, Churchill ordered a land assault and thousands of British and colonial soldiers landed on the Gallipoli peninsula. After eight months and 210,000 allied casualties, the British forces left in defeat.

The British army and their allies of the Arab Revolt finally captured Damascus in October 1918 after an eighteen-month march from Egypt. Mustafa Kemal, Ottoman general, product of the military education system and hero of the defence of Gallipoli, commanded an orderly retreat from Syria to Anatolia. The Sultan’s government signed the Armistice and the Allied partition of the Ottoman realms proceeded immediately. British forces occupied Istanbul, Iraq and Greater Syria including Palestine. French forces and their allies of the Armenian Legion occupied south-eastern Anatolia and the Syrian coastal strip, soon to be called Greater Lebanon. Forces of the Arab Revolt began to set up a British supported government in Damascus. Italian forces moved into south central coastal Anatolia and Greek forces landed at Izmir and marched east.

I owe this revisionist insight to the recent work of M. Aksakal, The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War, Cambridge 2008.  

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The Armistice and Allied partition was the end for the Ottoman Empire, but it was also the beginning for the various resistance movements. The first «Societies for the Defence of National Rights» (Mudāfa‘a al-Huqūq) formed in those parts of Anatolia most under threat of partition or attachment to some other entity. Renegade Ottoman officers immediately convened a series of congresses to organise resistance to the Allied occupation. The congresses and the successful armed resistance movement they fostered have been written into the official history of the Turkish Republic as both the birth place of the Turkish nation-state and the site of the final break with the Ottoman past. Yet the proclamations, contemporary writings and actions of the participants suggest nothing of the kind: the rights to be defended and the nation to be saved was a vaguely defined nation of Ottoman Muslims under continuous threat from local and international forces of European imperialism.27

Organised opposition movements and armed resistance emerged in all the former Ottoman provinces by 1920. In October 1918 the Ottoman governor of Damascus had surrendered to the forces of the British Army and the Arab Revolt led by Faysal. The vast majority of Arab Ottoman officers had remained in Ottoman service through the war, but a contingent of former Ottoman officers had joined Faysal’s revolt.28 Many Ottoman soldiers deserted during the war but very few joined the Arab Revolt. Most ex-Ottoman officers in the Arab Revolt were recruited from prisoner of war camps, and none seem to have deserted for the purpose of joining the Revolt.29 These officers, in all some 40 or so, had been the central component in creating an effective guerrilla force. But once the war ended and Faysal arrived in Damascus with his staff of Arab officers, he immediately began attracting other defeated and suddenly unemployed veterans. They undoubtedly hoped that Faysal would be the person to salvage something from the disaster and wreckage of the war, as Mustafa Kemal and other former officers were beginning to do in Anatolia.

The bonds formed by education and service overcame any lingering bitterness over who had joined the Revolt and who had remained in Ottoman service through the war. Many war veterans of modest origin joined Faysal and were welcomed despite having fought against the Arab Revolt only months earlier. Faisal’s Arab government and its veteran officer supporters, most recruited from among the rural and urban labouring classes, posed a threat and challenge to the big landowners and members of the former Ottoman civic elite in Damascus. The ascendance of Faisal’s officers in Damascus aroused suspicion and mistrust immediately, and at least

28 Mesut Uyar, in his yet unpublished work, has demonstrated definitively that officers of Arab origin served with loyalty and distinction in the Ottoman Army, and that many fought in the first insurgency of the era, the so-called «Turkish War of Independence».
29 The centrality of prisoner recruitment is also demonstrated in E. Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I*, Abingdon, New York 1993, 110.
a few leading Damascenes welcomed the French who came to end Faysal’s short-lived government eighteen months later.  

Faysal’s «independent» government, supported first by British subsidy and second by ex-Ottoman junior officers and nationalist activists, immediately attracted the hostile scrutiny of France. As Faysal scrambled desperately during 1919 to insure continued British support and to mollify French government officials, his followers in Damascus and the region generally began to organise on the model of the resistance emerging in Anatolia. The French government considered the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 with Britain to be binding on the post-war Middle East and deemed British promises to Faysal and his father of no consequence. Threatened by a breach of Anglo-French relations, the British government removed the subsidy and British military force supporting Faysal’s government in November 1919. Government functionaries claimed fiscal strain in its correspondence with Faysal, but the actual cause was French pressure. Six months later, after sporadic guerrilla fighting on the border with the French occupied coastal region newly named Greater Lebanon, a French army marched east to Damascus and defeated a ragtag army on the plain of Maysalūn, just east of Damascus. The quarters of Damascus had been emptied of young men as crowds walked west, some armed only with swords or sticks, to meet the mechanised French column.

Minister of War and former Ottoman officer Yusuf al-‘Azma was killed during the battle. ‘Azma became the first martyr of the Syrian nation and is one of only three heroes besides members of the Asad family to have a statue in Damascus. He is widely claimed to have been a participant in the Arab Revolt fighting the «Turks» alongside Faysal, but his legend is mostly fiction. He ended the war an Ottoman staff general on the Palestine front. He was educated in the Ottoman system and spent most of his life in the Ottoman army far from his birthplace in Damascus, including long periods in advanced training in Germany. He was a graduate of both the Harbiye Academy and the Ottoman staff college, and was the translator of at least one book of Prussian military theory into Ottoman Turkish. In education, culture, politics, and language, Yusuf al-‘Azma died as he had lived: a highly educated Ottoman elite.

Months before, Faysal had begun to lose the support of his officer comrades. Some later ridiculed Faysal and the Hashimites as fools to abandon the Ottoman
State and join the British, because Ottoman rule, for all its iniquities and injustices, had been far better than partition and domination by the European imperialists. In March of 1920 the Syrian National Congress met in Damascus and proclaimed Faysal King almost in spite of himself. Iraqi activists simultaneously held a meeting in Damascus calling for an independent Iraq under the rule of Faysal’s brother Abdallah. Faysal had briefly returned to the city to attend the congress after petitioning one European capital after another for help against increasingly truculent French demands. The Congress, with a clear view of events in Anatolia and Iraq, proclaimed a unified Syria, including Palestine, rejecting the claims of the Zionists and calling for an end to the government of military occupation. Their actions were more radical than Faysal desired or than the French would tolerate. Guerrilla conflicts against France had already emerged in the northern coastal region and the area around Aleppo near the eventual border with Turkey. Both the coastal movement led by rural shaykh Sālīh al-Ṣālih Alī and the Aleppo insurgency, led by Ottoman officer Ibrāhīm al-Hanānū drew material support and inspiration from the nearby Anatolian resistance. In late 1919 Mustafa Kemal addressed a proclamation to the Syrians:

Respected Brothers,

I speak to you with a beseeching voice, emanating from a heart full of sorrows, caused by the oppression, torment and treachery of the enemy, and the divisions between the sons of one religion [...]. Let us put an end to this misunderstanding, and point our arms towards the traitors who wish to tear up Islam [...]. Our mujahidin [Muslim warriors] will very soon be the guests of their Arab brothers, and by their union they will conquer and destroy their enemies. Long live our brothers in religion and may the enemy be conquered.

Mustafa Kemal came to be the father of the Turkish Republic and paragon of militantly secular Turkish nationalism, and yet the proclamation of 1919 subverts the official story of the emergence of the Turkish nation-state. His appeals reveal much about the durable appeal of liberation movements led by former Ottoman officers.

As France prepared to occupy Syria and claim the mandate promised by Britain and agreed in the peace conference, a massive armed revolt had erupted in British occupied Iraq. Bedouin shaykh, former Ottoman army officer and Tribal School alumnus, Ramadān Shallašh left to the east from Aleppo in late 1919. Shallašh met with Hanānū in the countryside of Aleppo and then proceeded to defeat a British
garrison and occupy the upper Euphrates town of Dayr al-Zur in January 1920. When Faysal, then travelling in Europe, was informed that the town had been captured in the name of the Arab government, he disavowed the action and instructed his brother Zayd in Damascus to repudiate the action and initiate arrests against the «rebels».  

In Baghdad news of the capture of Dayr al-Zur barely preceded news of the Syrian and Iraqi National Congresses in Damascus. The people of Baghdad were wildly excited by both events; while the city was fully secured by British forces in the months that followed, a revolt, inspired by events in other former Ottoman lands, led by officers, veterans and rural people, spread along the river towns from the north to the south of the country, significantly challenging British rule. British forces of the Government of India and the Royal Air Force eventually suppressed the insurgency and recaptured the rebellious towns. Air power served as the principal tool of suppression and villages along the rivers were bombed, gassed and strafed from the air. The rebellion and costly suppression led to an effort to draft Faysal as British supported King of Iraq, a job he evidently welcomed after his expulsion from Syria.

The Syrian National Congress had declared the Zionist colonisation of Palestine illegitimate and Palestine (southern Syria) an indivisible part of Syria in March 1920. On Easter Sunday, April 1920, battles broke out between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem. Armed citizens of Jerusalem, certainly veterans of the Ottoman army among them, attacked and killed five and wounded 211 Jewish inhabitants of the city. British soldiers intervened, killing and wounding a similar number of Arabs. A British military commission of inquiry found that the causes of the violence were

a) Arab disappointment at the non-fulfilment of the promises of independence which they claim had been given to them during the war.

b) Arab belief that the Balfour Declaration implied a denial of the right of self-determination and their fear that the establishment of a National Home would mean a great increase in Jewish immigration and would lead to their economic and political subjection to the Jews.

c) The aggravation of these sentiments on the one hand by propaganda from outside Palestine associated with the proclamation of Emir Feisal as King of a reunited Syria and the growth of Pan-Arab and Pan-Moslem ideas, and on the other hand by the activities of the Zionist Commission supported by the resources and influence of Jews throughout the world.

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40 TNA, WO 33/969, «An Examination of the Causes of the Outbreak in Mesopotamia», October 1920, 25, marked SECRET. Much of the report is a fanciful reconstruction of the Bolshevik tendrils alleged to be behind all the threats to Britain’s Middle East policy.
The struggles of 1920 continued in all the former Ottoman realms under colonial rule. The Anatolian resistance emerged victorious, but in the process it was forced to limit the support for former comrades in the British and French mandates. Despite the many erasures of colonial and post-colonial nationalist historiography, the Anatolian insurgency provided a model that remained potent for decades. In Palestine, major uprisings took place in 1921, 1929 and between 1935 and 1937. In Syria and Lebanon simmering guerrilla war continued until the Great Revolt of 1925–1927 nearly forced the expulsion of France. In Iraq, Faysal imposed a certain resignation on the officers and nationalists, but after his death in 1933 conflict between the colonial power and its opponents re-emerged. The 1947–1948 war for Palestine was the final battle of the last Ottoman generation and the veterans of the Great War. Everywhere Ottoman army officers of modest origin, war veterans and ordinary people challenged the colonial settlement of the Middle East until the 1940s. The story of their common struggle is still remembered and still mostly unwritten.

42 The main Damascus nationalist daily, al-Muqtabas, had features like «Who is Mustafa Kemal?» In April and May 1926 al-Muqtabas ran an eight-part, serialised front page feature titled «Mudhakkirât Mustafa Kamâl». In 1926 during the Syrian Revolt, Ramadân Shallâsh rode into Christian villages admonishing the villagers to «make your village like Ankara in 1920 with Ghazi Mustafa Kemal!» See my The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism, Texas 2005, 116.
Stateless Revolutionaries and the Aftermath of the Ottoman Great War

Commonplace European and American impressions of the Middle East focus on disorder and violence. But the Ottoman nineteenth century was less violent than in much of Europe or America. People everywhere experienced the emergence of the modern state and its claims on their resources, bodies, and consciousness. The story was similar in most of the eventual Great War belligerents: mass conscription, citizenship, education and indoctrination into the state, and its collective narratives characterised the long nineteenth century. After 1918 Britain and France partitioned the Ottoman State into more than a dozen new colonial and quasi-colonial states. This event is the origin point of Middle Eastern disorder of the past century. Former citizens of the defeated Ottoman Empire did not accept partition and colonialism. The post-war Middle Eastern settlement was everywhere greeted with revolts and revolutions. But lost in the details of both colonial and post-colonial nationalist historiography of these movements, is the legacy of nineteenth-century Ottoman modernity that both bound them together and facilitated their emergence.

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ABSTRACT