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The Decline of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and the 'Arab Awakening' before 1914

There were two historic developments that had to take place before the Arab Middle East took its post-1914 shape. The first was the decline of the power of the Ottoman empire that had ruled this area from varying dates in the sixteenth century. So long as Istanbul retained its imperial control no new state system in the region was possible. In 1914 there seemed no prospect of loss of Ottoman control in this part of the empire, whatever happened in the Balkans and North Africa. By 1918 the empire was in process of destruction. The first question, therefore, is how far this dissolution of empire was due to imperial decay and how far to extraneous forces.

The second and closely related question is how far hostility to Ottoman rule by the subject peoples contributed to this process. In modern historical analysis of decolonization in other parts of the world there is always tension between, on the one hand, growing weakness of will or capacity to rule on the part of the imperial power and, on the other, growing demand for independence of the part of the dependencies. In the mid-twentieth century, historians and commentators placed greater emphasis on colonial resistance and 'nationalism'. Later interpretations have tended to underline either imperial decline or imperial choice. For the Middle East the critical question is how far the dissolution of empire was due to a new and explosive awakening of Arab nationalism, a desire to caste off Turkish rule and form new nation states. In short, was there an 'Arab Awakening' (a phrase associated with George Antonius, as will be seen) before 1914 and between then and 1918, how strong was it, and could it, by itself, have brought about the dissolution of the Ottoman Arab empire? The function of this chapter is to survey evidence on these two points. Chapter 2 will then examine the 'extraneous' factors from November 1914 that changed the whole pattern.

1. OTTOMAN 'DECLINE'

There should, in fact, also be a question mark against the phrase 'Ottoman decline'. It is not at all certain that such a thing existed. It is equally possible to argue that by 1914 the Ottoman empire was in full revival, although in a much reduced form.

The fact that it had by then lost most of the Balkans and effective control over North Africa might simply have been the result of defeat by militarily superior European forces, not of less capacity at the centre of the empire. In short, what had for nearly a century been described as 'the sick man of Europe'[1] may well have been on the mend by 1914 and due for a further lease of life. The function of this section is to summarize the evidence for Ottoman reform and recovery before 1914.[2]

In the later eighteenth century the empire may loosely be described as a typical 'traditional' autocracy of a type common throughout Asia. Its heyday had been in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Europe was too concerned with its internal conflicts to challenge its power. A symbolic turning point had been the failure of the siege of Vienna in 1683, but that marked the high-water mark of Ottoman ambitions, not the decline of the empire. It was only during the eighteenth century, with the growth of a centralized Russian state and the rise in the effective military power of Austria, that Ottoman power in the Balkan region was first seriously threatened.

In common with other comparable states, such as that of the Mughal emperors in India before the British conquest, the Ottoman governmental and administrative system was a palimpsest of archaic practices. The Sultan in his palace claimed absolute authority subject only to the laws of Islam. He ruled through bureaucrats headed by the Grand Vizier, based in the Sublime Porte. Imperial edicts were called *irade*. There was no representative body. Law for all Muslims was Islamic, in the hands of the ulama, experts in canon law. The empire was necessarily highly decentralized. In some areas government was in the hands of feudal lords, in others of governors appointed by the Porte. Taxation was for the most part farmed out, as it was in most of Europe, with the invariable result that the heavy burden on the peasantry did not result in large transfers to Istanbul. The army consisted mainly of the Janissaries, a professional force that had been the scourge of Europe in the sixteenth century but by the end of the eighteenth was hopelessly inefficient and, moreover, largely a law to itself. In time of crisis the Porte had to rely on levies raised by its greater subjects. One great virtue of the Ottoman system, and a significant reason for its long survival, was that it provided religious tolerance for non-Muslims. From early days the system of millets allowed each of the very many religious groups to practise its own confession. These groups were also left the responsibility of education, welfare, and civil law. Non-Muslims were not subject to military conscription, but had to pay additional taxes in lieu. A major

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[1] The description was first made by Tsar Nicholas I in 1853.

[2] This account is based mainly on the following: A. Hourani, 'The Ottoman Background of the Modern Middle East', in K. H. Karpat (ed.), *The Ottoman State and its Place in World History* (Leiden, 1974); J. McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire* (London, 2001); A. L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1923* (London and New York, 1998); A. Palmer, *The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1992); S. J. and E. K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey.* Vol. 2: *Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808–1970* (Cambridge, 1977).

inconvenience in the imperial structure was the system of 'Capitulations' or agreements between the Sultan and foreign states. These had started in the Middle Ages with arrangements made with Italian city states for trade and the protection of their nationals, but had since the sixteenth century been widely extended to most western powers. The effect was that Istanbul could not fix import duties beyond certain agreed levels, and that expatriates in Ottoman territories were subject only to special courts and had other special privileges.

In retrospect all this gives the impression of an imperial structure in serious decline. But taken in isolation it was probably quite viable. Had the Ottoman territories lain as far from a resurgent Europe as China, the empire might, as did the Chinese empire, have remained largely intact and safely unreformed until late in the nineteenth century.

In fact, however, Istanbul was aware of the dangers long before then. The main external threat during the later eighteenth century had been from Russia. The external danger was then greatly increased by the aggression of Austria and the threat from other western powers, particularly after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. It remained the chief concern and motive for radical domestic reform until 1914. But there was another serious threat to the imperial system, from within its frontiers, which provided a parallel stimulus to innovation. This can best be seen in the broader context of the three main Islamic agricultural empires of the period: the Ottomans, the Safavids, replaced by the Qajars, of Iran, and the Mughals of India. In his seminal overview of these three empires, as a preliminary to explaining the expansion of British imperialism in the period before 1830, C. A. Bayly suggests that all three empires faced comparable problems, many of them domestic, during the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was to deal with these internal threats as much as with external dangers that the Ottomans began the process commonly called 'reform' early in the nineteenth century.[3]

Bayly starts with the proposition that at their peak in the sixteenth century all three empires had 'rested on three great pillars'. First, they were able, by diplomacy or the use of force, to subordinate their internal magnates and protect their territories from attacks by external forces, particularly armed tribesmen. Second, the emperors were able to offer provincial elites and some of these outer 'barbarians' rewards in the form of service and a share in the culture of the great cities. Third, by protecting and tolerating minorities of other religious and ethnic groups, they laid the basis for international and sea-borne commercial systems, which irrigated the imperial economies. 'It was the slow erosion of these three pillars which was to bring down the house of the Muslim empires.'[4]

In the Ottoman empire the first of these 'pillars' was being eroded during the eighteenth century by the growing strength of provincial elites. Increasingly, local magnates acquired something approaching freehold in land previously held as

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[3] C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780–1830* (London, 1989), esp. chs. 1 and 2. [4] Ibid. 19.

part of a bargain with the central government, that is as prebends. Large noble estates sprang up throughout the empire, held by men who no longer felt bound to provide any service or loyalty in return. This not only reduced imperial authority, leading to a quasi-feudal social and land-holding structure, but also reduced the military resources of the Sultan and made him more dependent on the Janissaries or other professional (and expensive) troops.[5] Parallel with this was the increasing use of the tax farm rather than collection of taxes by imperial officers. Since many of these tax-farmers were also the rising landed notables, they were able to increase their power and wealth at the expense both of the peasantry and the imperial treasury. The general effect of these trends, probably increased by the expanding role of western European trade and finance, was to 'hollow out' these empires, and certainly the Ottoman empire, by the later eighteenth century.

While this process of internal weakening was proceeding, and largely as a result of it, the third 'pillar' also was cracking. 'Tribal break-outs', or attacks by groups outside the imperial frontiers, became more common. The most significant in the eighteenth century were those by the 'Franks' in the Balkans and in Arabia those of Ibn Saud of Najd, who adopted the fundamentalist Islamic doctrines of Abd al-Wahhab and whose dynasty was to become increasingly active over the next century and a half. In the later eighteenth century the Wahhabis and other tribes conquered the three important Islamic shrines of Mecca, Medina, and Karbala, with immense destruction and massacre. Weakened by threats in the north and the low quality of the army, Istanbul proved unable for long to reassert authority in this area. It was a pattern which, under different circumstances, was to be repeated endlessly during the nineteenth century, starting with the virtual secession of Muhammad Ali in Egypt.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that there was any significant trend towards secession from the Ottoman empire, at least in Arabia and the Levant, before the early nineteenth century. While notables in most parts of the empire were establishing quasi-principalities, and some groups began to define themselves in terms of religion (Sunni, Shia, Alawite, etc.) and even as 'Arabs', the principle of allegiance to the Sultan survived, as did the attractions of appointment to imperial offices and the culture of the metropolis, Bayly's second 'pillar'.[6] In short, while the Ottoman empire at the start of the nineteenth century looked increasingly like a collection of partly autonomous fiefdoms, owing allegiance and paying taxes to Istanbul, and not effectively under its control, neither was it in any sense in dissolution.

It was largely to counter this process of imperial disintegration that the successive waves of reforms were undertaken by Ottoman Sultans and their agents from the early nineteenth century. The process was slow, piecemeal, and spasmodic. The question to be considered here is how far 'reform' had gone by 1914 and

[5] There were, of course, comparable trends in medieval England and western Europe.
[6] As, indeed, it did to the Emperor in India until 1857.

whether, without the disasters of the First World War, the Ottoman system stood a fair chance of surviving as an empire, at least for the time being.

The process that is generally called 'reform' proceeded over a long period and spasmodically. It is conventionally thought to have begun during the reign of Sultan Selim III (ruled 1789–1807), who concentrated on improving the military and financial position. He was successful in that his new European-type force was able to stand against the French army at Acre in 1799. But the existence of this force was correctly seen by the Janissary Corps as a threat to its existence, and they were supported by many traditionalists in Istanbul. In 1807 these rebelled in Istanbul, Selim was deposed, and the new army disbanded. His successor Mustafa IV lasted only two years. In 1808 ayans (local notables) from the Balkans marched to restore Selim. In the process both Selim and Mustafa were killed, and Mustafa's brother, Mahmud, was installed as Sultan Mahmud II. Although a reformer, he understood that he could only act once he had built up a power-base in the traditional way: by infiltrating supporters into the bureaucracy and manipulating provincial notables. He also propitiated Islamic dignitaries. Instead of creating a new army that was obviously a threat to the Janissaries, he built up the artillery corps.[7] In 1826 he told the Janissaries that they would be reformed. Predictably they revolted, but this time the Istanbul mobs did not support them. The Janissaries in Istanbul retreated to their barracks, and were there bombarded and most killed. The process of disbandment was then taken to the provinces, and the corps eventually ceased to exist. Free from their obstruction, Mahmud was then able to launch a process of modernization that was to be carried on along much the same lines by his successors. A new model army based on western examples was at last established, including conscription for Islamic subjects: a major stimulus for this was the defeat of the army in Syria in 1832 by Ibraham Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali. A postal service was started, some secondary schools along western lines were built for army officers. In the central government ministers amd departments with defined functions were set up for the first time. By Mahmud's death in 1839, change had not gone very far, but it was clearly under way.

The era of modern reform, commonly known as the *Tanzimat* (reordering or reform), is conventionally related to the period 1839 to 1876 under the Sultans Abdulmejid I (1839–61) and Abdulaziz (1861–76). The main architect of the reforming period was Mustafa Resid Pasha, but he had important allies and agents in Mehmed Emin Pasha, Ali Pasha, Kececizade Mehmet Fuat Pasha, Ahmet Cevdet, and Midhat Pasha. Over an extended period major changes took place in both central and local government, but symbolically reform began with a rather grandiose statement of intent by the Sultan in 1839 in the Hatt-i Humayun of Gulhane. In this he declared that his subjects had rights to 'life, honour, and

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[7] There is an interesting parallel here with European, especially English, monarchical strategy in the sixteenth century.

fortune' and that their property was inviolate. Evils would be remedied. These promises were easier to make than to carry out, but the significance of the declaration was that, for the first time, the Sultan conceded formally that his subjects had secular rights and that these applied to non-Muslims as well as Muslims.

So far as government was concerned, in Istanbul the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances, which combined the functions of a privy council and the supreme judiciary, gradually lost most of its administrative functions and became primarily judicial. Meantime the Council of Ministers took over administrative co-ordination. Its membership varied over time, but it included the heads of the main departments and also some Palace officials. The Sultan retained his ultimate power virtually unchanged.

Provincial civil and military administration was radically overhauled. The 1864 Provincial Reform Law established a new universal structure of administrative units—in descending order, vilayets, sanjaqs (Arabic liwas), kazas, and nahiyas—which was to last as long as the empire and was retained in most of the later Middle Eastern mandates. Limited forms of representation were created in some provinces (vilayets) and sanjaqs in the 1840s. Initially these had a majority of officials with some elected local notables; but from 1864 there were to be elected assemblies at local and provincial levels. By 1876 these were obligatory in all parts of the empire except for Egypt. Municipal government also was reformed. From the 1870s municipal councils were set up with between six and twelve members, half of them elected for two years on a property franchise. Mayors, with effective control, were, however, appointed by the Minister of Interior. Overall this was in no sense a democratic structure. Officials controlled work at all levels and were able to influence the electoral choice made by notables who depended on government for patronage. But it was probably well suited to hierarchical societies that had no experience of self-rule and were largely illiterate.

The main failure of the *Tanzimat* lay in taxation. The empire had evolved a wide range of forms of taxation, much as *ancien régime* states had done in Europe. To replace these created the danger of losing income. Urban taxes were collected quite efficiently but rural taxes, essentially a tithe on produce, were not. Again, as in early modern Europe, this and other taxes were farmed out. In the Hatt-i Humayun the Sultan had promised that tax-farming would be replaced by collection by officials. But this took a very long time to happen, due mainly to the shortage of competent officials. In an agricultural empire with limited wealth the result was a totally inadequate tax base. In common with other contemporary Mediterranean Islamic states, and faced with increasing war expenditure during the mid and later nineteenth century, the Ottomans turned to loans from Europe. By 1874–5, nearly 50 per cent of all revenues were required to service the bonded debt. By 1877–8, after renewed warfare, the bonded debt was nearly equal to the whole annual revenue. Much of this was caused by the increasing cost of warfare in the Balkans and the attempt by the Ottomans to adopt modern weapons and strategies, but also by the usurious practices of the European lenders. In 1881 the climax came with the

imposition of a Public Debt Commission run by Europeans which collected and took the proceeds of a range of taxes on goods and stamps on official documents and also the entire tribute paid by Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, and Montenegro. Even after consolidation of the debt in the later 1880s, service of the debt was still taking 30 per cent of revenues in 1905–6. Finance was thus the Achilles' heel of the Ottoman empire, as it was of many other contemporary and later states.

Poverty did not, however, prevent substantial achievements in many fields during and after the *Tanzimat* era. Education became a major state enterprise, by contrast with the previous dominance of Islamic schools. From the 1840s, a three-level structure of state schools and colleges was created, with a range of teacher and technical colleges at its apex, though a long-projected university in Istanbul did not finally open until 1906. By 1898 some 21 per cent of all in the age-group 5–25 were in some form of education and 90 per cent of boys and 33 per cent of girls had some elementary school education. In 1913 about 300,000 were enrolled in state elementary and secondary schools. Moreover, a similar number were in millet (denominational) schools, and 23,000 in American Missionary schools, which the government approved, despite the fact that they mainly benefited Christians.

Education went hand-in-hand with the growth of a new middle class. Many of these were professionals in the towns and government administration. But there also emerged a new middling landed class of notables. These bought land from the now suppressed feudal estates. In this they were helped by the Land Law of 1858. Its primary purpose was to reassert state ownership and tax rights over imperial (miri) land. The law defined five types of land-ownership: mulk (private, equivalent to freehold in the west), miri (state), vakif (religious endowments), metruk (communal or public), and mevat (idle or barren). A cadastral survey was to be undertaken to provide a full register of all land in the empire, leading to the issue of certificates of owership, tapu senedi. This was to lead to a new land tax of 10 per cent on all crops and livestock. In practice, however, the survey was never completed, and the incoming mandatory governments after 1918 found that land-ownership was extremely uncertain. But for the local notables, registration, coupled with a venal officialdom, enabled many to claim miri land as mulk, and other occupants were able to sell tenanted miri land as if it was mulk. There thus evolved a new class of substantial land-owners, often also closely associated with urban commerce and the professions, who became the dominant ruling class in many parts of the empire, particularly in the Arabian territories.

Related to land and tax reform were legal reforms which provided a more secure environment for trade and investment and, after 1867, allowed non-Ottomans to own real estate for the first time. Communications were another main objective. The telegraph was gradually extended after 1854 and postal services improved. The first railways were built, mostly by European firms operating under guarantee, as in many other parts of the world. Some main roads were improved, but in general roads remained unsealed and many areas had poor communications.

These were substantial achievements for a 'sick man', though they left the empire still far behind western Europe in organizational efficiency and further still in industrialization. In any case the great age of the *Tanzimat* was over by the later 1860s. The Sultan Abdulaziz (1861–76) was less interested in reforms than in the power of the Palace, which had been significantly reduced by the rise of the ministerial system and reformed bureaucracy. So long as Fuat and Ali survived (they died in 1869 and 1871 respectively), the momentum of change was maintained, but governmental efficiency declined as the Sultan constantly changed his ministers to prevent their becoming too powerful. Meantime, Ottoman debts piled up and internal discontent was made worse by revolts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria, leading to intervention by the European powers. In 1876 Abdulaziz was deposed in a military coup, backed by a wide spectrum of reformers, conservative clerics, and students, and was later found dead. He was replaced by his brother Murad V, but he was deemed to be mentally unstable and was confined in comfortable retirement. Yet another brother, Abdulhamid II, became Sultan and reigned until 1909.

Abdulhamid presided over the empire during the last thirty years of its existence in its traditional form. He was, during his lifetime, and remains, the subject of deep disagreements. For long, he was denounced by liberals, democrats, and reformers on the ground that he was deeply conservative, paranoid about his own authority, brutal to minorities such as the Armenians, and dependent on a huge network of spies and secret agents. He agreed to a new representative constitution in 1876, only to suspend it two years later. On the other hand there can be no doubt that during his reign much of the constructive work of the *Tanzimat* was continued and extended. To devout Muslims he was the man who protected their faith and prevented the secularization of the empire. His great misfortune was that his reign coincided with the major Balkan wars of the 1870s, which put impossible pressures on finance and flooded the remaining Ottoman territories with refugees. In 1878, at the Berlin Congress, the Ottomans had to give up two-fifths of the empire's territory and one-fifth of its population, with disastrous effects on their tax revenues.

The reign, however, started with a spurt of liberalism. Under pressure from men aware of western models, and also in response to the threat in the Balkans, Abdulhamid issued a new constitution, largely the work of Midhat. The constitution provided for a western-style departmental executive headed by a cabinet of ministers, though these were appointed by the Sultan rather than chosen by parliament, an elected parliament, extended personal legal rights for all, and improved justice and regional administration. The timing of the announcement was largely to impress the western powers and the Istanbul conference on the future of the Balkans. Conversely, the Balkan crisis enabled the Sultan largely to ignore the principles of parliamentary government. In 1877 he dismissed Midhat as Grand Vizier and dispatched him to exile. The new parliament met in March 1877. It was elected by notables on a limited franchise, operating in two-stage

elections, but it was in a sense genuinely representative of the nature of Ottoman society. It proved far too interventionist for Abdulhamid's taste. He suspended it in February 1878 and it did not meet again until 1908. Thereafter government was run from the Palace rather than the Sublime Porte. The leading ministers were all unqualified supporters of the Sultan, who tended to rotate them in the top jobs to prevent any of them becoming too powerful. Apart from the complex bureaucratic structure,[8] most power remained with the Privy Council, the Ministry of Police, the Civil Service Commission, and Press Department, whose collective function was to check criticism and deal with potential troublemakers. Yet there was much progress in many directions. In particular, communications were expanded rapidly, with very extensive construction of railways, telegraph facilities, and roads. By 1908 the state for the first time had the capacity to impose control over quite distant parts of the empire, which became critical during and after the First World War. It was a facility that cut both ways, however: centralization generated provincial demand for local autonomy. This was one seed from which Arabism was to develop.

Despite its physical achievements, the Sultanate could not indefinitely evade the effects of liberal ideas at the centre. There was a lineal descent here from the Young Ottomans, a society founded in 1865. These were mainly sons of the wealthy, some of whom had been educated in Europe and who admired many aspects of European life, particularly representative government and the rule of law. They remained, however, good Muslims who believed that both Islam and a powerful Sultan-Caliph were compatible with democracy. They propagated their ideas partly by sending newspapers through the independent European post offices (protected by the Capitulations) to evade the censorship. By themselves such men could never have created a revolution, but their achievement was to establish a current of reformist thinking in Istanbul. The conditions of 1876, with the Balkan crisis and the installation of a new Sultan, provided their chance. The 1876 constitution was their achievement. This, as has been seen, proved short-lived, but the concept of a constitution in suspension survived and the idea of radical reform gave birth to the so-called Young Turks.

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 was a major turning point in Ottoman history.[9] On the face of it the Revolution occurred in July 1908 when the Sultan, faced with the threat of a mutinous section of his army in Macedonia, notably at Monastir, announced that the suspended constitution of 1876 would be brought to life with the summoning of parliament. In this sense, therefore, there was no

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[8] There is a detailed account of the administrative and judicial structure in Shaw and Shaw, *Reform, Revolution and Republic*, 216–21.

[9] A standard detailed account of the revolution and its consequences to 1914 is in F. Ahmad, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics 1908–1914* (Oxford, 1969). Oddly, in a very careful book based on a wide range of sources, on p. 99 Ahmad resurrects King Edward VII, who died in 1910, to meet Mehmed Kamil at Port Said in November 1911. He presumably meant King George V, then on his way to India for the durbar.

'revolution', merely what the Sultan hoped would be a gesture for defusing army discontent. But in fact there was a lot more behind this than mere concession to mutinous troops. It can best be seen as the product of a longer process of alienation from the Istanbul regime which was brought to a head by army action. This alienation expressed itself in two main forms: the growth of secret societies and an increasing more general alienation from aspects of the regime.

It was typical of the Ottoman empire, as it had been of many European countries during the later nineteenth century, that close governmental control over all forms of publication and collective action should result in the formation of secret societies pledged to reform or even revolution. As will be seen later in this chapter, such societies became common in the Arab provinces before 1914, ironically often in reaction against the policies of the Young Turks. One of these earlier societies, the Ottoman Freedom Society (OFC), renamed Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1907 after a merger with the Young Turk organization, was set up in the military medical school in 1889. In common with other later societies, it was organized in cells, so that if any member was caught and interrogated he could not betray many others. This was a hierarchical society with complicated initiation ceremonies. In the early years, members often met in Masonic lodges (one reason why European commentators and some later Arab critics of the CUP claimed that it was predominantly Masonic or Jewish). Their strategy was to infiltrate all levels of the military and civil administration, but the society was particularly popular among the officer corps of the Second and Third Armies, based in Salonika and Edirne: by 1908 the Salonika branch had 505 members, of whom 319 were army officers and 186 civilians. Early members included those who were to control Istanbul after 1908, such as Mehmet Talat and the then Captain Enver. The CUP's stated aims in 1908 were to remove the allegedly corrupt regime installed by the Sultan and to restore the constitution. This would pave the way for a union of the peoples and social and economic progress. All ethnic groups were to be equal as Ottomans. Meantime there were a number of dispersed reformist and ideological *émigré* groups in Europe and the empire who were in contact with each other and were generically called the Young Turks. These collectively joined with the OFC in 1907, though there was limited contact since the OFC feared that the Young Turks had been infiltrated by government agents.

On this interpretation the 1908 revolution was the work of a relatively small underground revolutionary organization which acted in 1908 because it feared disclosure and also foreign intervention in Macedonia. But this is clearly too narrow an approach. Macfie suggests that, so far as the army was concerned, it was rather the climax of a long series of relatively local military mutinies and discontents, largely due to lack of pay by an imperial Treasury permanently short of funds because of the prior claims of the international debt control. In addition in the early 1900s there were a number of civilian outbreaks, especially tax revolts and major demonstrations, many of which were not suppressed because the military was itself alienated and in sympathy with the rioters. In short, while it was

the army's action in 1908 that brought about the notional Young Turk Revolution it seems likely the Abdulhamid recognized the serious growth of widespread hostility to his regime and decided that, by at least going through the motions of reviving the constitution, he would be able to re-establish confidence in himself and his government.[10]

But once this step had been taken, it was not at all clear what would happen next. It was important that it was a threat of action by the army in Macedonia, not an actual military descent on Istanbul, that had sparked things off. The CUP was not, therefore, in physical control of Istanbul. Nor was it technically a political party. Since there had never been a period of constitutional government, the relative roles of Sultan, parliament, and the ministers were uncertain. It was unclear how much support the CUP had in the capital or in the provinces, and there were strong counter forces, led by the Ottoman Liberal Union Party and the Muhammadan Union, which aimed to protect traditional Islamic values and institutions. Thus it was uncertain until 1913 whether the CUP movement would consolidate its power or whether it would seem in retrospect no more than a Fronde or palace revolution. Although nominal supporters of the CUP won a huge majority in elections to the Chamber of Deputies in November–December 1908 (the Senate was appointed by the Sultan) these soon split into factions. Since there was no convention that the Sultan should appoint his Grand Vizier or other ministers in line with the parliamentary majority, these crucial appointments were made by the Sultan according to changing pressures on the Palace. Thus, whereas Kamil Pasha was appointed Grand Vizier in August 1908, under strong CUP pressure, he was forced to resign in February 1909 after a vote of no confidence in the Chamber that was orchestrated and in effect forced by CUP intimidation.

Two months later the instability of politics was demonstrated by the so-called counter-revolution. This was in fact an army mutiny of a type very familiar in Ottoman history. On 13 April 1909, a battalion of disaffected soldiers in the Taskishla barracks in Istanbul, roused by fundamentalist ideas preached by the Muhammadan Union, locked up their officers and marched into the city. As they were joined by other army groups their demands escalated from restoration of the Shariat and dismissal of college-trained officers (as opposed to those promoted from the ranks) to dismissal of the pro-CUP Vizier and senior ministers. The government could easily have suppressed the mutiny. In fact it resigned and its successor quickly restored order. But similar mutinies broke out in eastern Anatolia, Damascus, Mosul, Aleppo, Beirut, and elsewhere. This suggests that, while the rising in Istanbul was essentially a mutiny, partly brought about by the failure of the CUP officers to keep in close contact with their troops, there was a wider backlash against the alleged CUP conspiracy to subvert the traditional Islamic order. In some provinces the counter-revolution gained support from those whose positions seemed threatened by innovations. There is no evidence

[10] Macfie, *The End*, 20–7.

that the 'revolution' was engineered by the Sultan, though he probably remained sympathetic to the conservative aims of the Muhammadan Union. According to the dismissed Grand Vizier, Kamil Pasha, 'He was a broken man . . . and I knew that he could not have engineered this Mutiny, as he was in extreme fear for his life, and would have been very well satisfied if allowed to remain on the throne, no matter how much his power was circumscribed . . . . The Sultan was more frightened than anybody else when the revolt broke out . . .'.[11]

The 'revolution' was in any case short-lived. The CUP central committee in Salonika organized an army, and on 23–24 April occupied Istanbul. The two houses of the parliament assembled in San Stefano, outside Istanbul, passed a resolution approving the army's actions and the punishment of rebels. They declared their intention to obtain the deposition of the Sultan. On 27 April a CUP delegation, led by Talat, armed with a fatwa, went to the palace to inform the Sultan that he had been deposed. He was sent into exile in Salonika, the CUP stronghold, and replaced by his brother, Mehmet V, who ruled until 1918. Meantime a pogrom of supporters of the mutiny and political opponents of the CUP took place under martial law. On 5 May, Huseyin Hilmi Pasha was reappointed Grand Vizier. It seemed that the CUP was now firmly back in the saddle.

But this also proved to some extent an illusion. True, effective power now lay with Mahmud Shevket Pasha, commander of the Action Army that had occupied Istanbul, and he was a CUP man. In the next three years a number of important changes were made along CUP lines. The army was reorganized, and most officers excluded from politics. Non-Muslims were for the first time made liable to conscription to the army, a measure that had important consequences in parts of the Arab world. Government obtained power to control the press and to ban groups or organizations based on ethnic or 'national' groups. At the centre, amendments to the 1876 constitution enabled the Grand Vizier, though still appointed by the Sultan, to appoint to senior ministerial posts, thus creating something like a united cabinet; and ministers were now responsible for both their departments and overall government policy. Cabinets should submit or resign if in conflict with the Chamber of Deputies, whose president, previously appointed by the Sultan, would now be elected by the Deputies. The Sultan himself was forced to swear an oath to respect the constitution. In short, after 1909 the Ottoman constitution, at least superficially, took on the image of a western European model. Many of the CUP's objectives were achieved.

This did not, however, necessarily empower the CUP: it had no monopoly of government posts. Although now for the first time acting as a political party it still lacked cohesion. In February 1910 a splinter group of about 40 CUP supporters broke off and formed the People's Party. The following January another group split off and formed the New Party. In February 1911 both Talat and Javid, the

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[11] Quoted ibid. 53 from F. McCullagh, *The Fall of Abdul Hamid* (London, 1910), 48–9.

Ministers of Interior and Finance, resigned after disagreements with Shevket. Later that year, after serious defeats by the Italians in Tripolitania, which were deemed to reflect badly on the CUP, the various opposition parties joined in the Liberal Party of Freedom and Understanding, commonly called the Liberal Union or Entente Libérale. In December a Liberal Union candidate defeated a CUP candidate in a by-election in Istanbul. The reaction of the CUP was to organize a dissolution of the Chamber. By intensive and often brutal electioneering methods it obtained all but six of the 275 seats in the 1912 elections. This, however, sparked a last resistance movement. In mid-1912 a group of conservative officers in Istanbul formed a secret society, the Saviour Officers, which was committed to restoring constitutional government and the end of radical policies. They got support among sections of the army in Macedonia, thus replicating the events of 1908, and demanded changes in the government. Under this threat, Shevket resigned followed by the Grand Vizier. The Sultan duly appointed a new cabinet of long-serving Ottoman officials. It was supported by the Liberal Union and many of the more conservative officials and clearly intended to destroy the CUP. On 5 August the Sultan accepted ministerial advice to dissolve the Chamber, and called new elections. Martial law was proclaimed and the CUP's official paper suspended. But before the elections could take place and this scheme carried through, war broke out in the Balkans.

The details of this are not relevant here. Essentially, the one-time Ottoman provinces of Montenegro, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia decided that the moment had come, with the Ottoman defeat in Tripolitania by Italy in 1911, following the earlier loss of Tunis and control of Egypt, to share out Macedonia, the last relic of the once great Ottoman empire in Europe. Between October 1912 and January 1913 the Ottoman armies were decisively defeated on all fronts. The reasons are fairly clear. The Porte could muster only about 25,000 men for this front, so they were heavily outnumbered. More significant was their low fighting ability. According to the German Lieutenant-General Imhoff, who had been re-organizing the Ottoman artillery as a result of an agreement dating from the 1880s that the Germans should advise on military reform, there were three main weaknesses in the quality of the army. Until 1908 only Muslims has served: now minorities also could serve or be conscripted. The old army had been largely untrained. Since 1908, attempts had been made to improve training, but frequent risings in Albania, Syria, and Arabia and the Tripoli war had disrupted this process. Moreover, the mixture of 'races' in the new army had been disastrous, since the army was no longer homogeneous. Then there was the state of the officer corps. This has been seriously politicized since 1908. It was riven by secret societies. Discipline was weak. Finally there was no confidence in the central government, which was constantly changing, and there was serious friction between senior ministers. Imhoff concluded that the reserve troops were 'not acquainted with the handling of their weapons; the artillery did not know how to use their guns. . . . There was a great shortage of officers; the placing of men in position,

and their ability when in position, were defective; and finally, the influence of foreign instructors . . . was suppressed.'[12] The most surprising thing is that this was the army that three years later was to defeat the Allies in the Dardanelles, hold British forces for several years in Iraq, and finally eject the French, Greeks, and Italians from Anatolia after 1920. That they could do so reflected the intensive activities of the CUP after 1913 and the efficiency of the German officers who trained and after 1914 led most of the Ottoman troops.

In 1913, however, the immediate effect of the disasters was that they upset the political plans of the Liberal Union and gave the CUP the opportunity to regain power. In December 1912 the Ottomans arranged an armistice, intended to lead to peace talks under the supervision of the powers. This left their enemies a mere 64 km from Istanbul, though the key fortress of Edirne held out until March 1913. Nothing came of the peace talks, and there were accusations that the Porte was ready to concede Edirne as part of a peace deal. This was held to justify the political coup that occurred in Istanbul on 23 January. Indeed, the Treaty of London, concluded on 30 May 1913, did include the cession of most of Macedonia to the Balkan states, including Edirne to Bulgaria; though the subseqent war between Bulgaria and Serbia enabled Ottoman troops, under Enver, to retake Edirne.

Edirne was a critical factor in Ottoman politics because the CUP were able to allege that the government was ready to surrender it to Bulgaria, though still in Ottoman hands, as part of the peace process. This, at least, was the propaganda version put out by the CUP. It was alleged that the Grand Vizier, then Kamil Pasha, inveterate enemy of the CUP, was proposing to send a delegation to London for the peace talks and that Istanbul would cede not only the conquered territories in Europe, but also Edirne. This account suggested that on 23 January a number of disgruntled officers, led by Enver, on the spur of the moment broke into the cabinet room and compelled Kamil to resign. In the process Nazim Pasha, the minister for war, was shot by a CUP member, along with a number of guards.

It is, however, now clear that this was not a spontaneous reaction to concern about Edirne.[13] The so-called Bab-i Ali coup had in fact been planned. As Grand Vizier from October 1912, Kamil had refused to appoint Shevket as Inspector General of the army (which had been the basis of his and CUP power since 1909) after which Nazim as Minister of War had also refused to appoint senior and pro-CUP officers to organize the campaign to save Edirne. Initially the CUP rejected the possibility of a coup to reverse these decisions. But when Kamil summoned a grand council of important people who might be persuaded to accept responsibility for ceding Edirne, the CUP decided to act. They made their move as the cabinet met to decide its response to a note from the powers concerning the peace settlement. In a sense, then, this was a response to circumstances rather than a deliberate political coup.

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[12] Imhoff Pasha, 'A German View of the Turkish Defeat', *Fortnightly Review*, 93 (1913), quoted Macfie, *The End*, 74–6.   [13] Based on Macfie, *The End*, 78–9.

Perhaps surprisingly, the CUP still did not attempt overtly to take over the government. Shevket became Grand Vizier, but although some CUP men took ministries, they remained in a minority in the cabinet. The aim was to create a sense of national unity in the face of military disaster. But the Liberal Union and other opposition groups within and without the armed forces continued to plan for the downfall of the CUP and possibly the assassination of its leading members. These plots were discovered; but on 15 June 1913 Shevket was killed by assassins. This triggered a coup by the CUP. Many suspects were imprisoned, tried, some condemned to death, others to exile or long prison sentences. A new cabinet was formed with Said Halim as Vizier and Talat as Minister of Interior. In January 1914 Enver was made Minister of War, and in February 1914 Jemal was made Minister of Works, later Minister of Marine. This was the triumvirate that ruled the empire throughout the First World War, and the CUP constituted a single party political system.

The final victory of the CUP has been explained in various ways. It resulted primarily from its dominance in the army officers' corps. It had an efficient central organization, in contrast with other political parties, a large membership, and support from many of the professional and artisan organizations. A key element was the support of the *fedai* units of the army, men pledged to fight to the death. But, once established, CUP rule was enforced as ruthlessly as that of the Sultans before 1908. Parliamentary democracy continued in principle, but most legislation took the form or imperial *irades*, over which parliament had no control. This was, in fact, a virtually totalitarian government, though parliament, elected in 1912 and meeting infrequently, gave it a constitutional veneer. With a compliant Sultan and CUP Grand Vizier, the triumvirate of Talat, Enver, and Jemal took all important decisions.

Their grand strategy was to complete the modernization programme started in 1908, which had been continued thereafter by the bureaucracy despite the changes of government. The key elements of this programme, reflecting continuity from the *Tanzimat* days, were to improve the efficiency of the civil service and tax collection, reform both the educational and legal systems, create a secular state in which millets no longer constituted exceptions to the general rules, and impose effective central control over the remaining Ottoman provinces. Considerable progress was made in improving communications, themselves critical for effective provincial control, though the proposed Istanbul to Baghdad railway was nowhere near completion in 1914. Thus, despite chronic shortage of money, the post-1908 administration was extremely active: change was clearly on the way, whatever the results of palace politics in Istanbul.

There was also a strong element of Turkish, as opposed to generalized Ottoman, nationalism in the make-up of the new regime. This seems to have grown from nineteenth-century European research into the origins of the Turkish language and people and was taken up by a few Turkish intellectuals. To a large extent this was myth-making of the kind typical of nineteenth-century western

nationalism, but it fed on the rapid destruction of the Ottoman empire in Europe, with its large Christian population, leaving the question of what it meant to be an Ottoman without a European empire. The movement seems initially to have been strongest in Salonika, the headquarters of the CUP, and was transported to Istanbul. Among those most forcefully promulgating this new brand of Turkish, rather than Ottoman nationalism, Shaw and Shaw highlight Ziya Gokalp, a self-educated Turk who, though not a politician, became the ideologist of the CUP after 1909. He argued for the use of a refined Turkish language as the language of state, in place of Ottoman, which contained a mix of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. He regarded Islam as central to the Turkish nationality, but argued that it must be modernized and purified: among other things the status of women must be raised.[14] It would not be true to say that Turkish nationalism had replaced Ottomanism. Even Turkish nationalists such as Gokalp believed in the Ottoman empire. Most members of the CUP still remained committed to the idea that all Ottomans, regardless of race, religion, or nationality, were equally members of the same empire. Moreover, Turkish had not become the official language. But many in the Arab provinces of the empire were frightened that this was on the way: that the empire would become Turkish and that Turks would take over all the senior administrative positions. This certainly gave considerable support to the nascent anti-Turkish and pan-Islamic movements in Syria and other parts of the Ottoman Middle East. Conversely, Turkish nationalism was already available for Mustafa Kemal and his supporters after 1918 in their efforts to create a new state called Turkey out of the ruins of the Ottoman empire. Along with language, they inherited the determination to secularize the state, adopt progressive western practices, and throw off European control, particularly as exemplified in the Capitulations.

A key element in the general reform process was modernization of the army, whose limitations had been very obvious in the Balkan Wars. The Ottomans had used German military instructors since the 1880s, since they regarded Germany as the most efficient military power in the West. From 1913 this collaboration was intensified. Berlin was asked to send a military mission to supervise reform and modernization: it was led by General Liman von Sanders; though to balance this the British were invited to send a naval mission, and Istanbul ordered two battleships from British yards, partly paid for by street collections from the patriotic. A remarkable amount was achieved by the Germans in the year and a half before the Ottomans entered the war in November 1914. Moreover, once war had been declared, as an ally of the Central Powers, the German connection proved extremely valuable. Although Enver retained real control over all military matters, the army was effectively run by Germans. Von Sanders was in charge of the First Army, at Istanbul and later in Syria. General von Seeckt was chief of the Ottoman General Staff. General von der Goltz moved to the Sixth Army in Mesopotamia.

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[14] Shaw and Shaw, *Reform, Revolution and Republic*, 301–3.

General von Falkenhayn commanded very effectively in Palestine. German officers were put in charge of several departments of the Ministry of War, including intelligence, railways, supply, munitions, and fortresses. They appear to have co-operated well with most Ottoman officers, though there were inevitable frictions and disagreements over strategy. Backed by very substantial German financial loans, and helped by the abrogation after 1914 of all payments to Entente bankers, the Ottomans were able to put up a quite unpredictably effective resistance on most of the fronts.

In 1914 the Ottoman empire, despite its recent disasters, was therefore clearly an empire in course of reconstruction. One can even talk of Ottoman 'reconquest' of Arab lands and their reintegration. The dynamic of change was obviously stronger at the centre, in the residual part of Macedonia, western Anatolia, and perhaps in Syria than in more distant parts of the empire, such as the Hijaz. But it is at least arguable that, had there been no war for, say, a decade after 1913, the Ottoman empire might have done what neither of the other old Islamic empires had done: survive in some form into the mid-twentieth century. In terms of Bayly's three pillars of the sixteenth-century Islamic empires, the second and third were still standing. Provincial elites and others could still be bought by offers of office and a place in the larger cosmopolitan culture of empire. Indeed, as will be seen below, one suggested basis of division within Syrian society over relations with Istanbul was precisely the fault line between successful and unsuccessful seekers of Ottoman office. The great majority of Arab Ottoman subjects remained loyal and fought for the empire throughout the First World War. The third pillar also stood. Ottoman trade continued to expand and Ottoman territories were an integral part of the evolving global economy with internal cohesion as well. Thus it was the first of the three pillars that had partly fallen by 1914. While internal control over the Arab provinces was stricter in 1914 than it had ever been before, control had been lost in the Balkan provinces. This in turn was largely due to 'tribal break-outs', or, perhaps more correctly, tribal break-ins. Attacked by Russia and Austria, and faced with rebellion among Christian minorities in the Balkans, the empire had been unable to maintain its grip. In this sense the Russians had played much the same role in the Ottoman empire as had the British, Afghans, and Persians in the Mughal empire. The main difference, of course, was that the Russians and Austrians, while acquiring some Ottoman territories for themselves, had for the most part preferred to set up client states in the Balkans, as had the British in Egypt, whereas in India the British had taken direct control over all but the princely states.

The result was a much truncated Ottoman empire. It had lost its most economically developed areas in the Balkans. It had effectively lost control of Egypt and Cyprus, and Crete was now annexed to Greece. But the Islamic core remained, and this now much more centralized empire seemed likely to establish more effective control over parts of Arabia that were then in varying degrees independent. What Mustafa Kemal was able to achieve in Anatolia he or others might have

achieved on a much larger scale. Thus it can be argued that in 1914 what remained of the Ottoman empire was no longer 'sick'. Moreover, it then retained full power to suppress or emasculate any dissident movements, helped immensely by the improvements in communications. Thus, when in 1913 Sayyid Talib, Naqib and city boss of Basra, reacted against the new 1913 Vilayet Law, because it greatly increased the power of the vali, and threatened rebellion, he was eventually bought off by being confirmed in his control over Basra and became an overtly loyal supporter of the empire. How far that capacity to intimidate or persuade would survive during the next decades depended on three things: the continued improvement in imperial efficiency; whether local territorial groups developed a sense of 'national' (in fact mainly denominational) identity comparable to that in the Balkans and demanded autonomy or independence; and whether any of the powers played in the Middle East the role that Russia and Austria had played in the Balkans. Much also depended on the attitude of the remaining and predominantly Arab populations. Was there a powerful 'Arab nationalist movement' in 1914? Did these 'Arab nationalists' want independence or something short of that? How far was Arab 'nationalism' created or manipulated by the British and other interested European parties? These are the questions examined in the following section.

2. 'THE ARAB AWAKENING'

He did not coin the phrase, but George Antonius undoubtedly gave it much of its later significance in his book *The Arab Awakening*, published in 1938. Antonius was an interesting and a symbolically important man.[15] He was born a Greek Orthodox Christian, which underlines the fact that Arab nationalism was not exclusively Islamic. He was educated at Victoria College, Alexandria, and at King's College, Cambridge, where he graduated with a first-class degree in mechanical sciences. He then entered British service. During the First World War he acted as a press censor in Cairo, and was also connected with British Intelligence. He then looked for a career in Palestine and in 1924 was appointed deputy to Humphrey Bowman, Director of Education. In 1927 Antonius was sent on two important diplomatic missions to the Hijaz and Egypt, but on his return found that he had been leap-frogged in the department by a British subordinate. Although he was then given another post in the administration, he now had no faith in the British. He resigned in 1929 and spent the next decade as a researcher in the Chicago-based Institute of Current World Affairs, financed by the Chicago businessman Charles Crane, one-time member of the

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[15] There are useful short summaries of his life in N. Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine* (London, 1999), B. Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine* (1978; rev. edn. Oxford, 1991), 183–9, and M. Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick and London, 1996), ch. 6.

King–Crane commission of 1919.[16] While there he did the research for *The Arab Awakening*.

Antonius may therefore be seen as an example of the way in which able and initially pro-British non-Europeans might be alienated by insensitive and racially based treatment. In its context the book can now be seen as a denunciation of British bad faith in both Palestine and Arabia. It was based not only on published material but also on personal contact with leading actors in the partition of the Middle East, notably the ex-Sharif Husayn, from whom Antonius obtained hitherto unpublished copies of the original correspondence of 1915–16 concerning the future of Arabia, and members of the wartime Arab Bureau in Cairo, including the Oxford professor of archaeology and wartime Royal Naval Commander D. G. Hogarth and Colonel Gilbert Clayton, former Sudan Army officer. But for his information on the genesis of early Arab nationalism Antonius relied very heavily on the recollections of his father-in-law, Faris Nimr, who was the last surviving member of the Secret Society of Beirut, and this may have given a strong Lebanese slant to his treatment of early Arab nationalism.[17] Eliezer Tauber certainly thought that as a result Antonius overstated the importance of the Secret Society. He overlooked the fact that it was more Lebanese-Syrian than Arab, and that 'the idea of Arab nationalism had not even crossed the minds of its founders'.[18]

It is clear that Antonius had a political purpose in mind. He wished to demonstrate that the partition of Arabia into mandates after 1918 was the negation of a spirit of Arab nationalism and unity that had developed from the later nineteenth century and that, in particular, the British had reneged on clear promises made in 1915 that the whole of the Fertile Crescent, including Palestine, would be given to the Sharif Husayn. There were, therefore, two themes: the genesis of Arab nationalism and its subsequent betrayal. The first six chapters are devoted to the origins of Arabism. Antonius argues that it was sparked off by the occupation of Syria and Lebanon by Muhammad Ali and his son Ibrahim in 1830. This was followed by the arrival of Christian, mostly American, Protestant missions who used Arabic in the schools and colleges they established there. The use of classical Arabic was then taken up by some Islamic intellectuals, but more importantly by Christian Arabs, including Nasif Yazeji and Butrus Bustani. By the 1850s there was some sign of Lebanese patriotism, which was helped by Lebanon's new separate status after 1861. It was further stimulated by reaction against what Antonius called 'The Hamidian Despotism' of Abdulhamid II and his techniques of control.

According to Antonius, the origins of organized Arab nationalism lay in the formation in 1875 of the Secret Society of Beirut. Its initial technique was to

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[16] For Crane's anti-Semitism and the limitations of the commission's work see I. Friedman, *Palestine: A Twice-Promised Land? I. The British, the Arabs and Zionism, 1915–1920* (New Brunswick, 2000). 248–51.

[17] See S. Seikaly, 'Shukri al-Asali: A Case Study of a Political Activist', in R. Khalidi *et al.* (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York, 1991), 92 n. 1.

[18] E. Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements* (London, 1993), 336 n. 1.

distribute placards around the city denouncing Ottoman tyranny. Thus in December 1880 its stated demands were for the creation of an independent Lebanon united with Syria; recognition of Arabic as an official language in Syria; the removal of censorship and freedom of expression; and employment of locally recruited troops only in their locality. Although this campaign was short-lived, Antonius claims that it had helped to create an Arab consciousness: French visitors in the early 1880s spoke of 'a spirit of independence'. The growth of this movement was, however, kept in check by the official clamp-down on publications and secret societies, and also by the fact that Arab Christians educated in English or French tended to be isolated from Muslims who were not. One result was an exodus of Arab intellectuals, particularly Christians, to escape the censorship, some to Cairo, others to Paris.

Antonius then jumps a couple of decades to treat the Arab reaction to the Young Turk and CUP movements after 1908. The initial phase appeared to promise liberalism, and in 1908–9 two Arab parties were founded. Al-Ikha al-Arabi al-Uthmani, designed to have branches everywhere and promote Arab self-awareness, was suppressed in 1909. The following year al-Muntada al-Adabi, the Literary Club, was set up as a general meeting place for Arabs and got a large membership in Syria and Iraq. This seems to have survived. By 1912, however, the centralizing and Turkish nationalist tendencies of the CUP were becoming clear, and this produced a different type of society with more specifically political aims. In 1909 al-Qahtaniya, which aimed at adapting the Austro-Hungarian system of a dual monarchy to the Ottoman empire, was launched, under the leadership of Aziz Ali al-Masri. It was a secret society, but had to be wound up because a member leaked information about it. In 1912 the Decentralization Party was set up, in the safety of Cairo: Antonius said it became 'the best-organised and most authoritative spokesman of Arab aspirations'. As its name implied, its primary aim was autonomy for the Arab provinces. It organized the Paris Congress of 1913, at which an agent from the Porte promised concessions that were never realized. In 1911 another and very secret society was set up, initially in Paris, but moving to Beirut in 1913. This was al-Fatat, whose membership, exclusively Muslim by contrast with most of the earlier societies, was very carefully kept secret and was organized in cells so that disclosure would not implicate many members. It was to have an important future in Syria after 1918. Finally in 1914 al-Masri set up al-Ahd (the Covenant), with the same objectives as al-Qahtaniya, consisting mostly of army officers, many of them Iraqis. It may be regarded as the military equivalent of al-Fatat.

Having described these Arab societies, Antonius had then to demonstrate that they had a significant influence on events, particularly the Arab rising in the Hijaz. This was where his task became more difficult and where the historian has to consider whether his societies were in fact as influential as he makes out. Opinions on this will be considered later. But his link between the two lay in a mission made by Fauzi al-Bakri, a member of al-Fatat, to Mecca in January 1915. Fauzi told the Sharif Husayn that there was much Arab discontent in Syria and that the Arab

army officers there would back a revolt if Husayn would lead it. Husayn's third son, Faysal, was then sent to Istanbul via Damascus and there contacted al-Fatat. He was told that, while the society had voted to back an Arab rising, it would back the Ottomans if a foreign state (France was regarded as the most likely) intervened. In May 1915, al-Fatat and al-Ahd prepared a protocol for Faysal to take back to Mecca which suggested that Husayn should negotiate with Britain for support to gain the independence of the whole of Syria (including Iraq and Palestine), after which the Arab state would abolish the Capitulations and form an alliance with Britain. But there must be no foreign rule under any form: Arabia was to be truly independent.

There followed the first publication of details of the correspondence in 1915 between Husayn and Sir Henry McMahon, who had succeeded Lord Kitchener as High Commissioner of Egypt: the key letters were printed as an appendix, in Antonius's own translation from the Arabic. Antonius's central argument was that in these letters Britain had promised independence for the whole of Arabia under Husayn, and that this included Palestine, since it was not explicitly excluded. The argument suggests that it was on this basis that Husayn declared his independence and started the war in 1916. The desert campaign is described in three dramatic chapters which emphasized the importance of the Arab role in forcing the Ottomans to withdraw troops from other fronts: Antonius even claimed that Faysal's army, increasingly led by ex-Ottoman officers, faced more Turkish and German troops than did Allenby's army as it drove through Palestine; indeed, that it was the Arab army that made possible the advance to Damascus.

This section poses two initial questions that have engaged historians. First, how important were these Arab envoys from Damascus in persuading Husayn to declare war, and did he share their allegedly nationalistic objectives? Second, and less important, how significant was the desert campaign in the conquest of Palestine?

From the occupation of Damascus in 1918 Antonius went on to describe the complex negotiations for a Middle East settlement. These will be dealt with in the following chapter; but Antonius deployed the standard Arab argument that the mandate system was incompatible with the Husayn–McMahon correspondence and also with the 1918 Anglo-French declaration that the Arab countries would be allowed to make their own choice of regime. Both statements were later challenged, notably by Elie Kedourie, as will be seen in Chapter 2. Antonius also described the Iraq rebellion of 1920 and the 1921 Cairo conference at which the future of Iraq was decided. In the final two chapters he described events in Arabia, notably the success of Ibn Saud and the admirably puritan characteristics of the Wahhabi movement. He gave a favourable account of the Iraqi settlement and a damning account of events in Palestine.

For the purpose of my argument the three important questions to ask about Antonius's account are, first, how powerful Arab nationalism was before 1914; and second, how influential it was in persuading Husayn to enter the war in

alliance with Britain. These questions will be considered in the present chapter on the basis of changes in the historiography over time. The third question concerns the role of the Arabs in the war and whether the eventual territorial settlement was consistent with the McMahon promises. This will be examined in Chapter 2.

Some of the weaknesses and omissions in Antonius are obvious even from a cursory reading. He never really defines 'Arab' or 'Arab Awakening'. This is taken to mean the rediscovery of the virtues of Arabic as a language, and heavy emphasis is therefore placed on the early cultural movement in the most sophisticated of all Arab regions before 1914, Lebanon and Syria. But to leap from a linguistic revival among the literati to widespread desire for Arab independence is comparable to believing that, for example, the Irish nationalist movement of the same period stemmed from the desire of a very small minority to resurrect Gaelic as the national language. Again, the growth of secret societies, once more in Lebanon and Syria, is taken to reflect a widespread Arab consciousness, but no evidence is provided of this wider feeling, nor is there a real definition of what 'Arab nationalism' meant, for example to the beduin in general and Sharif Husayn of Mecca in particular. In short, there were grounds for an eventual revision of Antonius's whole thesis, and this began seriously after the Second World War.

One of the first serious attempts to revise Antonius's arguments was by C. E. Dawn in an essay first published in 1962 called 'The Rise of Arabism in Syria'.[19] After summarizing the standard list of Arab reform societies before 1914 Dawn argued that none spoke openly of possible independence, demanding only reform and greater Arab rights. On the other hand it is likely that some in the two most secret societies, al-Fatat and al-Ahd, did in fact hope for some form of independence from Istanbul. Assuming that membership of these societies was roughly the same as the roll-call of Arab nationalists, Dawn then proceeded to analyse their membership, which totalled 144. Of these 126 were known public advocates of some form of Arab nationalism: 51 Syrians, 1 Egyptian, 21 Lebanese, 18 Iraqis, 22 Palestinians, and 13 other notables. Thirty, however, were doubtful, and they may have had more supporters, as reflected in the Paris Congress of 1913. Nationalists were dominated by Syrians, who were more active than Lebanese or Palestinians. The commitment of these men was tested by later events. Of the 51 Syrians, only 15 were active in the Hashemite crusade. This may have been due to Ottoman repression in Syria: 16 members of the reform societies were sentenced and 13 executed in 1915–16, though it is uncertain how many of these had actually been engaged in anti-Ottoman activities. On the other hand, at least ten pre-war nationalists were either inactive during the war or collaborated with the Turks. So in fact very few Syrian nationalists were involved in the Hashemite rising. The Turks had exiled some of those suspected of anti-Ottoman

[19] It was reprinted as ch. 6 in a collection of his work in *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism* (Urbana, Ill., 1973). References are to this edition.

sympathies to distant areas, and in 1915 moved the predominantly Arab regiments then in Syria to other fronts, thus pre-empting the promised military rising in support of Husayn. Most Arab recruits to Husayn's army were prisoners taken from the Ottoman army who opted to serve the Allies rather than languish in prisoner-of-war camps.

In fact, Dawn argued, the Arab revolt had a far greater impact on Arab nationalism than the converse. It was the eventually successful war that rallied opinion to what looked like a winning cause. By 1919–20 there had been a huge increase in the membership of both al-Fatat and al-Ahd, and in 1920 the Syrian Congress adopted a full independence strategy for the first time, electing Faysal as king. It is important, however, that the pre-war nationalists played a minor part in the Damascus regime in 1918–20. Thirty-nine out of the 44 members of the Congress had not been nationalists before 1914, and of the five others only one had been actively anti-Ottoman during the war. On the other hand, three of the five army senior command had been pre-1914 nationalists and a number of junior officers had also been active against the Ottomans during the war. Two out of the twelve members of the Committee of National Defence were pre-1914 nationalists.

The conclusions suggested by these figures are, first, that the great majority of those dominant in the Syrian regime in 1918–20 were not pre-war nationalists, but had jumped on the band-wagon once the war swung against the Turks; and, second, that the nationalists were in no sense homogeneous. This in turn led Dawn to analyse the social background of the nationalists and what persuaded them to take up an anti-Ottoman position. In particular, were they predominantly members of a 'rising middle class', and what distinguished nationalists from Ottomanists?

On the first question it is clear that the great majority of both pre- and post-1914 nationalists were members of the land-owning and land-owner/scholar class, that mix of roles which characterized most members of the ruling classes in Ottoman provinces. There were few members of the merchant or banking class, though these were in fact more likely to be nationalist than Ottoman in their sympathies. Above all, holders of government offices, especially religious dignitaries, were predominantly pro-Ottoman. In the army, senior officers also were mainly loyal Ottomans, though there was considerable nationalist influence among junior officers, from whom most members of al-Ahd were drawn. Hence 'the principal distinction between Arabist and Ottomanist was holding of office. . . . The conflict between Arab nationalists and Ottomanists in pre-1914 Syria was a conflict between rival members of the Arab elite. . . . The conflict . . . was essentially of the type that was traditional in Near Eastern society. The new element was the ideological definition of the conflict.'[20] But they had a common aim. This was 'defending and justifying the Islamic East in the face of the Christian West. In this, Ottomanism and Arabism were identical. They differed only in the means proposed for the pursuit of the desired goal. In Syria those

[20] Ibid. 170, 173.

members of the Arab elite who had a vested interest in the Ottoman state were Ottomanists. Those who were without such a stake were Arabists. This was a traditional intra-elite conflict defined in terms of the new ideology.'[21] Dawn concluded that

Neither Arabism, the Arab Revolt, nor the Turkish collapse . . . brought about any far-reaching changes in the Arab personnel who ruled Syria. Nor did the growth of Arabism and the Arab Revolt break the allegiance of the dominant faction of the Arab elite to Ottomanism. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the Turkish defeat was different however. Although the political position of the Ottomanist Arabs survived the debacle, their ideology, Ottomanism, could not survive the end of the Ottoman Empire.

Arab nationalism as a political force, then, began as a movement within the dissident faction of the Arab elite of the Ottoman Empire. Arabism was its first success, and a complete success, when the failure of the Ottoman Empire in World War I left the dominant faction of the Arab elite with no alternative to Arabism.[22]

Dawn had thus demolished the concept of a dominant and ideologically based Arab nationalist movement before 1914 and reduced ideology to the level of conventional faction politics. His arguments had a huge impact, by no means all favourable. In 1991 he took the opportunity to revisit his argument and make additions to it.[23] He stuck to his basic argument: 'Arab nationalism arose as the result of intra-Arab elite conflict.' 'Arab nationalism remained a minority opposition position until the end of World War I. The majority of Arab notables remained loyal Ottomanists.'[24] The impression that this nationalism grew fast in reaction against CUP strategies was mainly created by foreign commentators and was probably wrong. On the other hand the CUP did have some effect on Arab opinion. The relative liberalism of the new regime may have led to an increase in Arab pressures for change. Arabs moreover attacked the CUP on specific grounds. It was suspected, particularly by Palestinians, of being favourable to Zionism. It was accused of promoting the use of the Turkish language in administration, justice, and education. Dawn considered these charges to be mainly false. The CUP was not making any radical changes in these fields. Nor was Arab resistance to Istanbul policies new. 'The Arab nationalists were not reacting to Young Turk innovations. Indeed, they were continuing a campaign against a system that was established long before the Young Turks.'[25]

Dawn's critique of Antonius and the concept of an Arab Awakening had a dynamic effect on the subject, comparable, in a British context, with that made by Sir Lewis Namier's *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* in 1929. In both cases, detailed analysis of men and their motivations demonstrated that generalized assumptions that politics were based on ideology were over-simplified. In the British case, other historians responded by attempting to reinstate principle

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[21] *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism,* 173.   [22] Ibid.
[23] In Khalidi *et al.* (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism,* 3–30.   [24] Ibid. 11–12, 16.
[25] Ibid. 21.

and party rather than individual ambition and patronage as the basis of politics. How far did the same thing happen to Dawn's model?

One of the earlier responses was by B. Tibi in 1971.[26] Most of his book is devoted to an account of the rise of cultural and literary expressions of an Arab consciousness, with the major emphasis on the career and writings of the pan-Arabist Sati al-Husri, particularly after 1920. Tibi does not really engage with Dawn's central argument, though neither does he reject it. For the early period he suggests that 'the early Arab nationalists confined themselves to emphasising the existence of an independent Arab cultural nation without demanding a national state'. Most saw no contradiction between being culturally Arab and being Ottoman subjects, even though the Secret Society of the 1870s put up posters demanding a unified Arab state to include all religions.[27] Much the same was true of the multiple societies founded in and after 1911. They wanted liberalization and decentralization within the Ottoman empire and their aims were increasingly secular rather than Islamic. Conversely the Hijaz revolt in and after 1916 was ultra-conservative with no social or humanitarian perspectives, 'monopolized by traditional politicians who were either rich feudalists or their agents'.[28]

Probably the first really considered and widely influential post-Dawn analysis of the Antonius argument was published by Albert Hourani in his book *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (London, 1981).[29] In the chapter called 'The Arab Awakening after Forty Years', he first summarized Antonius's career, then underlined the book's virtues. It was written very lucidly and contained excellent sketches of people such as Mark Sykes, the Sharif Husayn, and T. E. Lawrence, all of whom he had known, and was based on sources not then generally available. Its tone was conditioned by its context: the 1936 Arab rising in Palestine, the 1937 Peel Commission recommendation for partition, and the forthcoming conference. It was the first book of its kind and had a huge influence then and later. Hourani suggested that the book raised three main issues: the nature of Arab nationalism before 1914; the role of nationalism during the First World War; and the evolution of Arab thought and action during the mandate period.

On the first of these issues Hourani broadly agreed with Dawn. Asking who were the nationalists and were they men imbued with so great a love of the Arab language and literature that they were determined 'to create a society in which Arabs could live together and rule themselves', he followed Dawn's argument. Most of the early Arab nationalists were members of the elite and integral to

[26] B. Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry* (1971; Eng. trans. M. and P. Sluglett, London, 1981).   [27] Ibid. 78–9.

[28] Ibid. 89–90. As this quotation suggests, Tibi seems to have written from a Marxist perspective.

[29] But in *British Policy towards Syria and Palestine, 1906–1914* (London, 1980), R. I. Khalidi had argued, in chs. 4 and 5, that Arab nationalism in Syria was more widespread than Dawn had suggested and that it was based mainly on hostility to the CUP's centralizing policies. See also A. Hourani's earlier study, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (1962; rev. edn. Cambridge, 1983), ch. 11.

the Ottoman system. Disagreement between nationalists and Ottomanists constituted an inter-elite conflict defined in terms of ideologies. The real basis was personal or factional struggles to get or keep power within the Ottoman system. Most nationalists mixed some Arab sentiment with concern for local power and position, which was thought to be threatened by the increasing centralizaton of the Ottoman system. Disagreement stemmed from dispute over the relative value of the traditional Ottoman and Islamic system as contrasted with a constitutional and liberal state.

Hence Antonius had been wrong to place his main emphasis on the origin of Arabist ideas among the Syrian and Lebanese intelligentsia of the later nineteenth century. Most of the ideas impregnated into Arabism before 1914 were a mix of Islamic modernism of the Salafi School, based on an idealized conception of the early Arab society and the Arab Caliphate, with ideas picked up by Arab students in the professional schools of Istanbul. These in turn were often drawn from French books and German military instructors which were restated in an Arab idiom. These emphasized the sense of exclusion felt by many Arabs from the benefits of the Ottoman state. Such ideas were absorbed by the Arab elite, but were mixed with the traditional Islamic concept of the 'just Muslim Sultan'. It was this source of Arabist ideas that Antonius failed to perceive. Hourani summed up his argument on the relative importance of Arabist ideology as follows:

A few individuals apart, the idea that the Arabs should break away from the [Ottoman] Empire scarcely arose until two events brought it to the surface: the entry of the Empire into the War in 1914, at a moment when Arab–Turkish relations were strained: and the collapse of the Empire in 1918, which faced everyone, and in particular the members of the ruling elite, with an inescapable choice.[30]

Hourani's argument therefore incorporates that of Dawn, while placing more weight on the various ideological influences on the attitudes of the Arab nationalists. Hourani then turned to Antonius's account of how such ideas influenced the Hashemites and their entry into the war in 1916. In Hourani's view Antonius endowed Husayn's cause and strategy in the war with 'a unity and solidity which it did not possess'. There was no unity of aims between the beduins and urban supporters of the revolt in Syria and Lebanon. The Hashemite position in fact went through three phases in and after 1914. During the first phase, from 1914 to 1915, Husayn was tempted by the fact that there was a large Arab element in the Ottoman army in Syria, which al-Faruqi alleged was ready to rebel, and by the prospect of a British naval landing at Alexandretta, to consider lining up with the British in the hope of making gains for himself. In the second phase, however, from 1915 to 1916, the failure of the Dardanelles campaign and the danger of an Ottoman and German attack on Suez put the boot on the other foot. It was now the British who wanted a Hashemite alliance while Husayn became afraid of

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[30] Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*, 203.

direct Ottoman control of the Hijaz. Husayn eventually came down on the British side because it seemed his best defence against this. In the final phase, from 1917 to 1918, the British drive through Palestine left Husayn dependent on the British, but hopeful that his interpretation of the promises made by McMahon of an Arab kingdom would be honoured. Thus Husayn's entry into the war was not the result of his conversion to the concept of Arab identity but of his and his son Abdullah's assessment of how the situation could best be turned to the advantage of the Hashemites. As to the McMahon–Husayn correspondence, Antonius was wrong to regard promises made in October 1915 as incompatible with the Sykes–Picot Agreement (see Chapter 2). 'It seems clear now that the intention of the British government, when it made the Sykes–Picot agreement, was to reconcile the interests of France with the pledge given to the Sharif Husayn', though, since that Agreement was negotiated under stress of war, it could be interpreted otherwise, as it was later by Antonius.[31]

Hourani, therefore, supported recent revisions of the Antonius thesis. Elsewhere in the same book he argued that 'The nationalist movement was led by the urban aristocracy and moulded in their image: the change did not begin until after 1945.' These notables, including Husayn, did not expect or want full independence from Istanbul but an improvement in their status through a shift of power from the centre to the localities. Those who supported the Allies wanted the best terms for themselves that the British and French could obtain for them. They were therefore later shattered to find that foreign rule did not, in most cases, give the notables the status they had hoped for.[32]

The debate over the nature and extent of Arab nationalism before 1914 nevertheless continued. In 1991 a useful collection of essays, edited by R. Khalidi, appeared which surveyed changing assessments since Antonius.[33] These are reflected in the arguments of three of the contributors.

First, Khalidi himself, in an essay called 'Ottomanism and Arabism in Syria before 1914', defined three stages in the debate since Antonius. The first he called the traditional view, as defined by Antonius and other involved contemporaries, including Asad Daghar and Muhammed Izzat Darwazza. The second phase saw the first serious academic analysis of Antonius, by Dawn, Hourani, Tibawi, Khoury, and others. The third phase, then in process, involved the revision of these second-stage revisionists. It is on this third stage that Khalidi's book concentrates.

It was now accepted that Dawn's basic proposition was correct. As Khoury put it in his seminal study *Urban Notables*, Arabism was 'a humble minority position in Damascus and elsewhere, unable to erode the loyalty of the dominant faction of the public political elite in Syria to Ottomanism'.[34] But more now needed to be said. Although the earlier revisions had downplayed the force of Arab national

[31] Ibid. 209–10.   [32] Ibid. 62, 71–2.
[33] Khalidi *et al.* (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism.*
[34] P. S. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1880–1920* (Cambridge, 1983), 74.

feeling, in diplomatic reports, the foreign and local press, and the recollections of contemporaries, it was 'a major tendency' before 1914. Certainly the majority of the Arab press in Beirut, Damascus, and Cairo was Arabist in tone. Why was this fact ignored or played down by earlier historians? Khalidi suggests that the Turkification aspect of the CUP had a major impact on many Arabs who were displaced, or feared they would be displaced, from offices traditionally held by members of the provincial elite. Another factor was that Khoury, Dawn, and others may have over-emphasized Damascus, ignoring attitudes elsewhere; so Arabism may have had a much wider impact, particularly in Beirut, Aleppo, and Jerusalem. Thus the paper *al-Mufid* in Beirut, the mouthpiece of the secret al-Fatat society, expressed strong demands for reform, equality between races, and notional self-expression, while still supporting Islam and the historic role of the empire. Lebanon was still more exposed to western ideas, with rapid population growth and a sophisticated elite and middle class. In Palestine, Jerusalem and Jaffa were also rapidly growing cities with widely read newspapers. There the apparently rapid spread of Zionism was a stimulus for debate over Arabism and Ottomanism. More important still were Cairo and Istanbul, the two dominant economic and intellectual centres of the Ottoman Middle East. Cairo was home to the most important Arabist society, the Ottoman Administrative Decentralization Party, and had many Arabic papers and Arab political refugees. Similarly, in Istanbul there was a very large number of Arabs who produced influential Arab newspapers. It was significant that only three of the Arab deputies elected to the first Ottoman parliament in 1908 were supporters of the CUP and that these were the only Arab deputies not re-elected to the parliament of 1912, despite strong CUP pressure on the electors. This suggested at least a strong and widely spread Arab hostility to the CUP's centralizing strategies.

Another weakness in the conventional discourse was the alleged dichotomy between 'Arabism' and 'Ottomanism'. Khalidi argues that Arabism did not necessarily imply a break with Ottomanism. Rather it meant opposing the perceived policies of centralization and Turkification of the CUP, in particular press censorship and manipulation of the electoral system. Most Arabists saw reform as a means of preserving and strengthening the Ottoman system. Thus the difference between Arabists and Ottomanists was one of method rather than over fundamentals. The problem facing Arabs after 1913–14 was that, once the CUP had crushed all opposition parties, there was no legitimate opposition for these reformers and dissidents to support.

Khalidi also questions whether the older definition of the Arab elite needs broadening from the landed notables of Dawn's Damascus model. There were, in fact, many regional differences. Particularly in the coastal regions such as Lebanon and Palestine, these older notables were being challenged by new arrivals and upwardly mobile groups of merchants, speculative landlords, the newly educated in the professions, and others, so the established groups were finding that they had to share power and place. In fact this period saw the genesis of modern mass politics. Older notables tended to side with the CUP, others with more liberal and

decentralizing parties. In competing with their rivals the older notables used mass meetings, street demonstrations, and other mobilizing techniques to retain their position. Khalidi's conclusion was that

Arab nationalism arose as an opposition movement in the Ottoman Empire. It was directed quite as much against Ottoman Arabs as against the Ottoman Turks themselves. The conflict was between elements of the Ottoman Arab elite who competed for office. . . . As in every society, the competitors offered themselves as the ones best qualified to realize the ideals of the society and ward off the dangers that threatened it. . . . The movement made progress before 1914, but it remained a minority movement until 1914, when the Arab revolt, the British agreement with the amir Husayn, and the British defeat of the Ottomans left the dominant faction of the Syrian and Iraqi Arab notables with no alternative to Arabism.[35]

In the same volume others dealt with the distinct issue of the connection between Arabism and the Arab revolt in the Hijaz. W. Ochsenwald's essay, 'Arab Nationalism in the Hijaz', supported earlier arguments that there was virtually no Arab nationalism in the Hijaz before 1916 and Husayn's entry into the war. The Hijaz was economically very undeveloped, depending almost entirely on the profits of the Haj and other subsidies from the faithful. There were very few Christians or educated Muslim Arabs. The main issues as seen from Mecca before 1914 related to the post-1908 CUP push for greater control, which involved extension of the railway to Medina and thence to Mecca and the imposition of the standard Ottoman law of the vilayets. This would have given the vali, as governor, dominant control, whereas by convention the vali had a parallel jurisdiction with the Sharif, who had been able to get over-interfering valis removed by appeal to Istanbul. In 1914, however, Husayn was a loyal Ottomanist, and hoped to use Ottoman military power to pursue his ambitions in the Yemen area. Such patriotism as existed was purely local and the concept of being an Arab scarcely existed. The revolt was possible and quite successful (though Medina was never captured) because many in the Hijaz saw it as a means of preserving their existing freedoms. Moreover Ottoman disasters in the Balkans and North Africa had suggested that Istanbul was no longer able to protect the Hijaz. In Britain Husayn believed he had found an alternative and more co-operative protector, who, moreover, could provide the money and guns that alone could make a revolt successful.[36]

Much the same view was taken by Mary Wilson, again in this book. In her essay 'The Hashemites, the Arab Revolt and Arab Nationalism', she argued that there was no Arab nationalism of the Syrian variety in the Hijaz before 1914, though there was much suspicion of the alleged secularism and centralizing tendencies of the CUP regime. The conventional genesis of links between Mecca and the British, Abdullah's talk with Kitchener in Cairo in February 1914, was caused by Abdullah's fear that Istanbul would replace Husayn as part of its centralizing drive. Abdullah's question was simply whether the British would provide support should Husayn be threatened

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[35] Khalidi *et al.* (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, 23.   [36] Ibid. ch. 9.

with deposition as Sharif. Istanbul heard of this and became conciliatory; they offered terms about the railway, the Sharif to share the profits, and promised Husayn the right of family succession to the position. Once war broke out these contacts became more significant, leading to the McMahon–Husayn correspondence of 1915–16. It was at this point only that Husayn began deliberately to adopt the terminology of Arab nationalism, probably to justify his position to the British. Hence 'The ideology of Arabism was not espoused by the Hashemites until it became of particular use to them with particular audiences'; that is, outside the Hijaz and in dialogue with Britain. This was made clear in the contrasting roles of Abdullah and Faysal. Abdullah did not use the Arabist discourse extensively, concentrating on his unsuccessful siege of Medina and his larger ambitions in southern Arabia. Faysal, however, did use it during the revolt and in the Paris conference of 1918–19. This contrast was reflected in their later roles. Faysal in Iraq became an avid pan-Arab nationalist, using this as the basis of his claim for an independent state. Abdullah, however, had to adjust to reduced status in Transjordan, while never giving up specifically Hashemite claims to Syria. Wilson concludes that

The Arab revolt first brought the Hashemites and Arab nationalism together. But what was decisive to their reputations as nationalists was the nature of their compromises with Britain after World War I. Hence the development of Arab nationalism rested less on the revolt itself than on the imposition of the mandates just afterwards.[37]

By the early 1990s something approaching a consensus had emerged among historians, though with different emphases. Thus in 1993 Eliezer Tauber, in perhaps the most exhaustive investigation so far of the character and membership of all the known Arab societies before 1914, came to the conclusion that there was then no such thing as a generalized Arab nationalism.[38] Parts I and II of the book are devoted to description and analysis of all the known Arab societies, open and secret, before 1908 and between then and 1914. Tauber argues that most of these had very small memberships and were seldom influential beyond their own circle. Most concentrated on the specific problems of their own territories and argued for amelioration. This implied a bigger and better role for Arabs and the Arabic language along with greater decentralization. There is no evidence that any of these societies would have been important had it not been for the war which gave some of them temporary foreign allies, the British and French. On the other hand, the sense of being Arabs was by 1914 well developed among a small intelligentsia and parts of the Ottoman official classes. It was particularly strong among officers who failed to the get the promotion they expected and blamed this on their being despised as non-Turks. Yet most army officers remained loyal to the Sultan throughout the war: those who fought on the British side, particularly Iraqis, did so for the most part because they had been taken prisoner and preferred to fight as officers rather than be interned. A number of these received their reward after

[37] Khalidi *et al.* (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ch. 10 and p. 219.
[38] Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements*.

1920 in Iraq, becoming members of its ruling elite that survived until 1958. Above all, these societies failed to obtain general support.

The societies with Arab tendencies did not gain the backing of the populace for which they worked. This populace was totally unaware of the existence of some of the societies and did not hasten to support those it was aware of. During this period these societies did not have a crystallized and defined ideology that could attract the masses. The pan-Arab societies, which did have such an ideology, were so small that they were practically unnoticed. On the other hand, the local movements attained at least relative success among the Arabs of the Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, because they had specific solutions to offer the local people, solutions which seemed sufficiently realistic that the populace could imagine them a practical alternative to their plight in the Ottoman Empire.

There was a ramifying, and at times very close, network of connections among the societies, even those of different and contradictory trends. This cooperation stemmed from the common cause of all the trends: the struggle against the common enemy, the Turks, and especially the CUP. The evolution in the societies' methods of action reveals a real turning point in the history of the Arab Middle East, as the activists and the ideologists went from speech to action in an attempt to realize in practice the ideologies they believed in.[39]

Three years after Tauber's book came out, M. Kramer expressed agreement with its general findings.[40] He saw the genesis of Arab nationalism in two factors. The first, as Antonius had argued, was the attempt by minority communities of Arabic-speaking people, many of them Christians, to transform Arabic into a medium of missionary work and modern learning. This led to greater interest in Arabic literature and its adaptation to modern literary forms, especially in the press. Centred in Beirut, this did not immediately produce Arab nationalism, but it argued for a secular Arab culture shared by both Christians and Muslims. This concept was used by Christians to erode the prejudice of the Muslim majority and to work for Christian equality.

But, as Dawn had argued, Arabism also rose from the struggles for power and position among the Muslim elite, which for some turned into demand for greater local autonomy or decentralization. This centred in Damascus, but had reverberations in many other major towns. While sharing the love of the Arabic language with the earlier Christian Arabists, these later movements were specifically Islamic. They appealed to Muslims by arguing that Arab greatness, past and present, stemmed from Islam. While these literary and nationalistic movements had a limited frame of reference they were able to shake the confidence of some people in the legitimacy of Ottoman rule. This was exacerbated after 1908 by the twin bugbears of Turkification and Zionism. Nevertheless, that keen observer of Arab society, Gertrude Bell, wrote in 1907:

Of what value are the pan-Arabic associations and inflammatory leaflets that they issue from foreign printing presses? The answer is easy: they are worth nothing at all. There is no

[39] Ibid. 331–2.
[40] Kramer, *Arab Awakening*, esp. ch. 1, 'Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity'.

nation of Arabs; the Syrian merchant is separated by a wider gulf from the Bedouin than he is from the Osmanli, the Syrian country is inhabited by Arabic speaking races all eager to be at each other's throats, and only prevented from fulfilling their natural desires by the ragged half fed soldier who draws at rare intervals the Sultan's pay.[41]

Kramer concludes:

Arabism thus arose from a growing unease about the pace and direction of change. Yet, while the Ottoman Empire lasted, this Arabism did not develop into full-fledged nationalism. Its adherents pleaded for administrative decentralization, not Arab independence, and they had no vision of a post-Ottoman order. . . . Above all, they were practical. They did not indulge in dreams of Arab power. Their grievances, in the words of a critic of later Arab nationalism, 'were local and specific; they related to the quality of government services or to the proper scope of local administration; and those who sought redress for such grievances were mostly men well known in their communities, able perhaps to conduct a sober constitutional opposition but not to entertain grandiose, limitless ambitions'. On the eve of World War I, they were probably still in the minority, outnumbered by Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians who raised no doubt about the legitimacy of Ottoman rule, and even stood prepared to defend it.[42]

The answers to the two questions posed at the start of this chapter now become clear. First, while the Ottoman empire, the 'sick man of Europe' for so long, had clearly declined from its glorious past and by 1914 had lost almost all of its European and Christian possessions, it was by no means dead. A continuous process of internal reconstruction over the past century left it with considerable potential for becoming, in some respects at least, a western-style state. It was still not economically or militarily competitive with the great states of western Europe, but it was certainly capable of dealing with dissidence within its Middle Eastern possessions. There was, however, one major proviso attached. In the Balkans, so-called nationalist movements for independence had largely been activated and supported by external powers, notably Russia and Austria. Russia remained a serious threat in the Caucasus; and if naval powers such as Britain or France chose to support breakaway or rebel movements, the Ottomans would find it difficult to respond successfully. Thus their best chance of maintaining their residual empire was a long period of external peace.

To the second question the answer has also become clear. By 1914 'nationalist' movements in the Middle East were still in their infancy. While certain aspects of the post-1908 Ottoman drive for greater efficiency through centralization were deeply distasteful to a minority, and although there was a strong ground swell of

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[41] Quoted ibid. 24. Bell retained her belief that Arabs could not govern themselves for another decade. Thus in 1915 she wrote: 'the Arabs can't govern themselves', and in 1918 [of Iraq]: 'They can't conceive an independent Arab government. Nor, I confess, can I. There is no one here who could run it.' Quoted E. Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell: From her Personal Papers, 1914–1926* (London, 1961), 31–2, 78. Bell changed her mind in 1919, possibly under persuasion by the Sharifian Yasin al-Hashimi, and then became an ardent supporter of an Iraqi state with Faysal as king.

[42] Kramer, *Arab Awakening*, 24–5.

Arab self-awareness which might eventually demand greater autonomy for the Arab provinces, these did not yet seriously threaten Ottoman rule. They could still have been accommodated by sensible concessions by Istanbul. Moreover, the region that was to become the focus of resistance to Ottoman rule, the Hijaz, paradoxically, was the least affected by nascent Arabist feeling.

Clearly, then, the ultimate destruction of the Ottoman empire in the Middle East was the outcome of factors not present early in 1914. It was war, not Ottoman decline or Arab nationalism, that broke the Ottoman Middle East into fragments under British and French mandates. These fragments then became the modern states of the contemporary Middle East. Chapter 2 will therefore concentrate on two main questions. First, why did the Ottomans join the war on the side of Germany and Austria, with such disastrous consequences? Second, why did the Middle East emerge from the war as a series of French and British 'mandates', in effect temporary colonies, despite promises allegedly made by the British to leading Arabs for one or more independent Arab kingdoms?