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Erik Jan Zürcher

What was different
about the Ottoman war?

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What was different about the Ottoman war?

We can approach the immense historical phenomenon of World War I on different levels: Global, national, regional and even local.

On one level World War I, or the “Great War” as it was known until 1939, certainly was a world war in the sense of a global conflict. The war in the Middle East shows this very clearly, with Englishmen, Scotsmen, Australians, New Zealanders, Indians, Frenchmen and French Africans, Russians, Cossacks, Arabs and Armenians fighting Prussians, Bavarians, Austrians, Turks, Kurds, Circassians and Arabs.

On the other extreme, the war also had a very strong local or regional character: the war in Flanders’ fields was very similar for soldiers on either side of the front line, be they German, British or Belgian, but very different from the fighting between Austrians and Italians in the Alps or even from the war experienced by French and German soldiers in the Vosges. In terms of logistics, equipment, intensity, food and health the Mesopotamian front was vastly different from that in Gallipoli.

Between the global and the regional is the level of the single state, and it is with that that I should like to concentrate on. The question I should like to ask is this: In which respects did the Ottoman war experience differ substantially from the experience of the other belligerent states in Europe and their societies? My argument will be that indeed the way the people of the Ottoman Empire experienced World War I and its immediate aftermath differs considerably from the way the war was experienced in Europe. The differences, I think, can be summed up under five headings: 1. The outbreak of war; 2. Total or industrial warfare 3. The effects of the war on the population; 4. The end and 5. the political legacy of the war.

1. The outbreak of war

The way the outbreak of war is remembered, and in fact: has been remembered since 1918, in Europe is primarily as the very sudden and ultimately traumatic end to a golden age, a summer that suddenly turned into winter, the crumbling of Barbara Tuchman's Edwardian "Proud Tower".¹ Lord Grey's famous dictum that 'the lamps are going out all over Europe and we will not see them lit again in our lifetime' has summarized the feeling that retrospectively defined the experience of August 1914 for a generation.² The outbreak of war is seen as sudden, unexpected, unprecedented and on the individual level as life-changing. This view goes back, of course, to the actual experience of those who took part, particularly the officers. Although great power rivalry had created a climate of almost continuous tension in Europe, few people expected a general European war and when it broke out, ending a period of over forty years of peace in Western and Central Europe, even fewer people expected it to last for more than three or four months. The reality of a long drawn-out conflict fought in the trenches therefore came as a great shock. This is reflected in all of the memorable works of literature that came out of the war, from Sassoon and Graves to Celine, Hemingway and Remarque. The image of the sharp contrast is persistent and also informs a relatively recent novel like *Birdsong* of Sebastian Faulks.³

This memory contrasts sharply with the way the proclamation of war was actually experienced in Europe in July-August 1914: the famous "spirit of 1914" or war enthusiasm. For a long time, the idea that this war enthusiasm was universal, dominated historiography. It is still part of the collective memory of the war and is part of every popular historical narrative on the war. However, since the 1990s, quite a lot of revisionist historical research has been done that has

1 Barbara Tuchman, *The Proud Tower. The World Before the War 1890–1914* (London 1966).

2 The remark may actually be part of that retrospection itself, as it was first mentioned in Grey's memoirs, published in 1925.

3 Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong. A Novel of Love and War* (London 1993).

substantially altered the picture of universal joy at the outbreak of war. Now that the dust has settled over the debate, the new consensus seems to be that war enthusiasm was largely an urban middle class phenomenon and that its strength has been overrated because of the strength of nationalist propaganda, but that it was nevertheless a reality in August 1914. There is after all ample pictorial evidence, both in photographs and on film that war was celebrated by masses of people in the capitals of Europe.⁴

Neither the later perception of the sudden ending of a “golden” era of peace and prosperity nor the contemporary one of enthusiasm for war, is relevant to an understanding of the Ottoman Empire experience of the outbreak of war.

For the Ottomans the outbreak of war in 1914 was experienced in a completely different manner. In the first place it did not end a period of peace and prosperity, quite the contrary. It came hard upon the heels of a series of small but bloody conflicts (Yemen, Albania, Crete) and two major wars, that with Italy in 1911-1912 and the Balkan War, or wars, in 1912-1913. The Italian war led to the loss of the empire’s African possessions and ultimately also to the loss of the Dodecanese (although under the peace treaty of Ouchy these were to be returned by Italy to the Ottomans – something which, due to World War I, never happened). It was a serious setback, but in no way can be compared to the traumatic effect of the Balkan War.

The outcome of the Balkan War that broke out in October 1912 was a tremendous shock for the Ottoman Muslim population. Of course, nationalist agitation supported by Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia had been going on for decades and in fact the threat that the Ottomans might lose Macedonia had been the strongest motivation for the Young Turk revolution of 1908. The Ottoman army was continuously engaged in counterinsurgency operations sanctioned by the 1909 law against brigandage and the idea that this situation might lead to war with the neighbouring states in the Balkan was not, of

4 For a survey of the debate, see: Mehmet Beşikçi, *The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War. Between Volunteerism and Resistance* (Leiden 2012), 34-37.

course, far-fetched. But any such conflict was seen in terms of one between a huge and powerful empire and a couple of small states.

Just before the war optimism reigned. There was great confidence in the army that had been reformed with German help in the preceding years. The military manoeuvres and parades of 1911 had been reported on very favourably by European observers. When war was declared, a famous cartoon of the period shows Nazım Pasha, the Ottoman war minister, ordering 800.000 tickets to Sofia, Belgrade, Athens and Cetinje at the ticket office.⁵ It was therefore a tremendous shock when the Ottoman armies were defeated within a month and all of European Turkey was lost, with the exception of a few fortified towns. When the war finally ended with the Treaty of Constantinople in September 1913, the Ottomans had lost the vast majority of their European possessions. This was particularly traumatic for three reasons: Firstly, the lost territories had been a core area of the empire since the fifteenth century; Secondly, the majority of the political, military and cultural elite hailed from the area (this was particularly true for the Committee of Union and Progress, which “carried a Macedonian birth certificate” as Tarik Zafer Tunaya has noted)⁶ and thirdly, the conquest of European Turkey caused up to 400.000 Muslims to become refugees.

After the peace treaty differences between the Ottoman Empire and Greece over the possession of the Aegean islands adjacent to the Anatolian coast (Lemnos, Lesbos, Chios) persisted and there was widespread fear that war would break out again.

So, where for most of Europe, war was something that had not been experienced for more than a generation (if one does not count the many colonial wars), in the Ottoman Empire it was already a reality. The Balkan Wars had directly confronted the Ottoman public with the hardships of war: mobilization, defeat, and also: hunger, a cholera epidemic and a mass of displaced persons. In the spring of

5 Tobias Heinzelmann, *Die Balkankrise in der Osmanischen Karikatur* (Stuttgart 1999), 221.

6 Tarik Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler. Cilt 3 İttihat ve Terakki Bir Çağın, bir Kuşağın, bir Partinin Tarihi* (Istanbul 1989), 13.

1914, as Mustafa Aksakal has shown, the expectation that war might resume between Greece and the empire was still widespread.⁷ When World War I came, it was therefore the third war in quick succession. For the Ottomans, therefore, the outbreak of war in 1914 could not be seen retrospectively as a sudden end to a glorious summer and the war-peace dichotomy that characterizes the “Great War in modern memory” (to paraphrase Paul Fussell)⁸ in Europe could never work.

Neither was the “Spirit of 1914” much in evidence. With two military defeats in quick succession behind it, there was no perceptible war enthusiasm in the Ottoman Empire. The urban population expressed genuine patriotic feeling on two occasions in 1914. The first was when the British government impounded the two battleships that were being built for the Ottomans on British yards. This was a very sensitive issue because part of the cost of the battleships had been covered by voluntary contributions to the Ottoman Fleet Society from the public, which therefore had followed the construction of the ships with great interest. The ships were urgently needed to counter-balance the dominance of the Greek navy that had been demonstrated in the Balkan Wars. So the British decision in early August gave rise to widespread anger and demonstrations.

The decision by the Ottoman government in September to abolish unilaterally the 350-year old system of the Capitulations, which granted fiscal and legal privileges to foreign subjects and by the early twentieth century had created a semi-colonial situation in the empire, was apparently also greeted with genuine and spontaneous joy on the part of the Muslim population.

This was in sharp contrast with the public reaction to the declaration of war (and of Jihad) at the end of October 1914. Public demonstrations in favour of war took place, but, as Mehmet Beşikçi has shown, they were all organized by the ruling Committee of Union and Progress and its affiliated organizations, like the Turkish Hearths, the National Defence Committee or the Fleet Society. At-

7 Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914. The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge 2008), 42-56.

8 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford 1975).

tendance was small and in some cases street vendors, porters and beggars were paid to take part. The Ottoman population knew no “war enthusiasm” in 1914.⁹ It accepted the inevitable.

2. Industrial and total war

There is some debate whether World War I was the first “industrial war” in the sense that it was waged with industrial means and that industrial production capacity ultimately decided the outcome. Some give this doubtful honour to the American civil war fifty years earlier, but however that may be, there can be no doubt that World War I was waged with industrial means. Whether we look at arms production, the need to feed and clothe the troops, the provision of medical supplies or the transport needs of armies of millions, all of this demanded the involvement of industry. Industrial development in the Ottoman Empire was still minimal, however and we can therefore characterize the empire as an agricultural society involved in an industrial war.

A few statistics make this abundantly clear. Industry in 1914 was of course still largely dependent on coal as energy source. Now let us look at the coal production of the belligerents in the early 20th century. The numbers for 1900 (millions of metric tons in this case) tell their own story. Coal production of the United Kingdom was 381 times that of the Ottoman Empire and Russia’s coal production was 27 times bigger. There was no steel production on an industrial scale in the Ottoman Empire at all.¹⁰

The result of the lack of industrialization was that almost all armaments and certainly all railway engines, trucks, cars, artillery guns and shells, airplanes and wireless equipment had to be imported from Germany or Austria. Rail transport thus was crucial, both for moving the troops and for supplying them. Here too, the Ottoman Empire was at a great disadvantage. The United Kingdom had 5.6 times the

9 Beşikçi, Op. Cit, 63-92.

10 These and following data are taken from Brian Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics. Europe 1750–1988* (New York ³1992).

mileage of the Ottoman Empire, in spite of having a surface area twenty times smaller. Russia had a railway network eleven times the size of the Ottoman one. In terms of density (km of track per square km of surface, even colonial India had five times the density the Ottoman Empire.

In addition the entire Ottoman rail network was single-track, some crucial passages like the Taurus tunnels had not yet been completed and part of the network was narrow gauge. The result was that material coming from Germany had to be loaded and unloaded a total of eight times before it reached the Palestine front and that divisions on average spent six weeks on the road (four of them marching) before they reached the front. Lack of transport also meant that it was very difficult to feed the troops and the population in general. Syria and Lebanon went through the worst famine in their history while Anatolia had a wheat surplus.¹¹

While it is of course true that Austro-Hungary and Russia also lagged far behind France, Britain, the United States and Germany in terms of industrialization, the situation of the Ottoman Empire in this respect was incomparable. Where its main enemies (France, Britain and Russia) together accounted for 26 percent of world industrial output in 1913 (and the USA for 35 percent), the Ottoman Empire accounted for under one percent.¹² So, industrial warfare from the start was a game the empire was very ill-positioned to play.

Next to the term “industrial war” the term “total war” is also often used to describe World War I. The concept of “total war” involving the mobilization of all human and material resources of a country for the war effort was popularized by Colmar von der Goltz in his 1883 *Das Volk in Waffen*, which not only glorifies war, but also basically denies the fundamental difference between army and civilians in modern war. Apart from a huge logistical and administrative effort, waging “total war” also necessitated an effective and pervasive propaganda effort to involve and motivate society at large. Germany,

11 Erik Jan Zürcher, „Between Death and Desertion. The Experience of Ottoman Soldier in World War I”, *Turcica* 28 (1996), 235-258.

12 <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/indrevtabs1.asp> (accessed 21.09.2014).

France and Britain were very effective at this by making use of the press, posters, and film. The invention of the term “home front” by the British government was itself a propagandist masterstroke and perhaps the ultimate vindication of von der Goltz’s ideas on total war. As Erol Köroğlu has shown, the Ottoman Empire with an illiteracy of over ninety percent was not able to sustain such a propaganda effort.¹³ The use of religion to mobilize the population could compensate for this to a certain extent, but not enough.¹⁴

So in terms of the industrial or total nature of the war the experience of the Ottoman Empire was significantly different from that of the European belligerents. This is also true for the scale of the war. In relative terms (as percentage of the population) the number of war casualties was high. The percentage of those who lost their lives was second highest after that of Serbia in World War I, mainly due to the large number of soldiers who died of disease. But in absolute terms the campaigns fought by the Ottoman army were of a different order of magnitude from those fought on the Western front. The only campaign that came close was that of Gallipoli, but even that was three times smaller than the Sommes-campaign in the summer of 1916 in terms of numbers of soldiers committed. At the time of the Third battle of Gaza the Ottoman army had less than 35.000 soldiers on the Palestine front.¹⁵ In the same year 1917 Nivelle put 1.2 million French troops in the field for his ill-fated offensive. – over thirty times as many!

13 Erol Köroğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı (1914-1918). Propagandanadan Milli Kimlik İnşasına* (Istanbul 2004).

14 Beşikçi, Op. Cit, 72-80.

15 M. Larcher, *La guerre turque dans la guerre mondiale* (Paris 1926), appendix 48.

3. Demographic engineering

The policies of the Ottoman towards its own citizens also distinguish it from its European counterparts. All belligerent countries took measures against communities and individuals whose loyalty was doubted. There were internment camps and prisons for “enemy aliens” (even if they had lived in the country all their lives) and for conscientious objectors. Deportations of tens of thousands occurred in German-occupied Belgium and France as well as in Russian-occupied Galicia. Russia also expelled national minorities from their own territories.¹⁶ But the Ottoman policies were on a different scale altogether. In no other belligerent country was the war employed to fundamentally re-engineer the demographic make-up.

The Balkan War defeat and the subsequent forced removal of a large part of the Muslim population from the Balkans convinced the Young Turk leadership in Istanbul that Anatolia now was the “Turk’s last stand” and that it needed to be secured.

Even before the outbreak of war, in May-June 1914, the Young Turks organized a campaign to expel about 160.000 Greek Orthodox citizens from Thrace and the western shore of Anatolia. This campaign was partly inspired by fear that war with Greece might restart and that the west coast would prove vulnerable. Successive Young Turk delegations had toured the area in previous years and already pointed out that the Greek orthodox communities had a dominant position in the economy. They were accused of disloyalty and qualified as a “tumor that needed to be removed.” When that removal took place in June 1914 refugees from the Balkans who had been brought to the area by the government played a leading role in the

16 Alan Kramer, “Martial Law and War Crimes,” in: Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, *Brill’s Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Leiden 2012), 220-230.

violence. When the Greek orthodox had been forced to flee, their properties were given over to the refugees.¹⁷

In 1914 the hands of the government were still tied in the east because in February it had been forced by the European powers, under a great deal of Russian pressure, to agree to a far-reaching programme of reform in the “Armenian” provinces, which were intended to improve law and order and in particular to solve the conflicts over Armenian-owned real estate that had been seized by Kurdish tribes and immigrants from the Caucasus and Bulgaria who had been resettled in the East. In August the government suspended this programme and after war broke out in October it was fully repudiated.

What happened next was a combination of planning and event-driven improvisation. Young Turk leaders such as Talât had clear ideas about the way Anatolia should be restructured in demographic terms. From the nationalist agitation in the Balkans they had learned the importance of statistics and as minister of the interior, Talât, gave instructions that Armenians should be relocated so that they would nowhere constitute more than five percent of the population. After the defeat against the Russians at Sarıkamış (December 1914) and especially when the British and French attacked the Dardanelles (from March 1915) the Young Turks started a programme of deportations of Armenians to the Syrian desert, first from the areas close to the eastern front, then all over Anatolia. The deportations were accompanied by mass executions of Armenian males and ultimately may have cost some 800.000 civilians their lives.

There is an abundant literature on many aspects of the Armenian genocide, but for the purposes of this paper the important thing is to note that as a result of the demographic policies of the Committee of Union and Progress Anatolia was turned into a solidly Muslim land with a completely different ethnic make-up than it had only a few years earlier. This laid the basis for the Turkish nation-state as it would emerge after the war. The process through which a state starts

17 Emre Erol, “Organised Chaos as Diplomatic Ruse and Demographic Weapon,” *TSEG The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 10/4 (2013), 66-96.

to see a sizeable part of its own citizens as enemy aliens and then uses its powers to destroy them is not mirrored in any of the other belligerent countries, although, of course, the colonial powers had sometimes used similar means on their subject populations in the colonies, albeit on a smaller scale.¹⁸

4. The peace treaty

All post-World War I treaties left a traumatic imprint on the defeated countries that were affected. In Germany, the Treaty of Versailles right from the start was understood as a “Diktat”, a term much used by German nationalists in the Nineteen Twenties. And they were right, of course: it was a dictated arrangement imposed on the defeated Germans without any serious negotiation between victors and losers. The Sèvres treaty fits into the series of imposed treaties concluded in Paris.

The treaty also resembled the other products of the Paris peace conference in that it was a vengeful treaty. The treaties were not just attempts to bring about a lasting peace in the postwar world, they were also instruments of retaliation and retribution. The most famous instance of this, of course, are the war guilt clause and the enormous war indemnities included in the Versailles treaty, but the proceedings of the London and San Remo conferences of 1920 as well as the memoirs of participants make it abundantly clear that “punishing the Turk” was also a consideration in the case of the Sèvres treaty.

It can also be questioned to what extent the post-war treaties really adhered to the ideal of self-determination of nations that had been enshrined in President Wilson’s 14 Points and in the charter of the League of Nations. Clearly, blocking the preference of the Austrians for unification with Germany, expressed in a legitimate referendum, was in direct contravention of this principle. Decisions on the “national” borders favoured the claims of the former “subject peoples”

18 Even the German suppression of the Herero and Nama in Southwest Africa, recognized by the United Nations as the first genocide of the 20th century, made 80.000 victims at most.

in every case: Poles, Slovaks, Romanians and Serbs. This is also true for the Ottoman Empire. The awarding to Greek administration of the whole area from Scalanova (Kuşadası) in the south to Kemer on the Gulf of Edremit in the north, including the city of İzmir rested on recognition of the Greek claim that in this whole area Greek Orthodox had formed a majority before expulsions of 1914. The same is true for the handover of Thrace to Greece. Historical statistics indicate that this claim was exaggerated and that Greek Orthodox formed a majority or plurality only in parts of the sancak of İzmir (Ayvalık, Foça, the Eritrea peninsula) as well as in some coastal areas of Thrace. Both the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, De Robeck, and Foreign Minister Curzon recognized that the decisions on Thrace and Izmir clearly contravened the principle of self-determination.¹⁹

In the east, the treaty left the establishment of the exact borders between the Ottoman Empire and Armenia to the mediation of President Wilson, but essentially the size of the new Armenia (which was to include large parts of the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Bitlis and Van) was based on claims of a pre-war Armenian majority, although it is clear that even before the deportations and mass killings of Armenians in 1915 they had formed a majority in only very few rural districts (kazas) as well as in the city of Van. So, inasmuch as these new borders of the Ottoman Empire were legitimized on the basis of self-determination, they were very questionable, but in that respect they were not fundamentally different from, say, the new Polish, Czech, Hungarian or Romanian borders.

To sum up: all of these treaties were unilaterally imposed, they were vengeful and the borders they drew were unjust. What makes the Sèvres Treaty different is its semi-colonial character. The treaty not only took away large territories from the empire and limited its future armed forces, it also placed what remained of the empire under tutelage.

After much debate, the allies had decided to leave Constantinople and the straits in Ottoman hands, but Ottoman authority was severely

19 Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres. The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920* (Columbus 1974), 268-269.

impaired. The straits were fully demilitarized and placed under an international commission with full authority over anything to do with shipping through the straits. On this commission Britain, France, Italy, Russia, the United States and Japan were represented by a commissioner each with two votes, Greece and Romania had one vote and the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria would have one vote only if and when they would have become members of the League of Nations. The sultan and his government would remain in Istanbul, but the city was held hostage as well. The allies reserved the right to take it away if the Ottomans did not faithfully execute the treaty (article 36).

Then there were the exclusive rights of economic exploitation of the economic resources in Ottoman Anatolia that were granted to Italy in the southwest and to France in the south. These were not a part of the Sèvres treaty, but France and Italy signed an agreement to respect each other's rights in these areas on May, 11th, 1920. The agreement, which had been kept out of the text of the treaty itself for fear that the Ottomans might refuse to sign, was only made public three months later at the signing of the treaty in Sèvres on August, 10th.²⁰

The capitulations were explicitly restored and would in due course be replaced with a judicial regime drawn up by European legal specialists. All of these articles combined meant that the Ottoman Empire would not only be much reduced but would also revert to a semi-colonial status much worse than had been the case before the war.

Finally, the treaty also endeavoured to undo the demographic and economic changes that the regime of the Young Turks had brought about during the war. Not only did it stipulate protection for the minorities. The Ottoman government also promised resettlement of all those who had been removed since the first of January 1914 and full restitution of all possessions that had been taken over from Greeks

20 The agreement was originally known as the Tripartite Agreement as Britain was meant to be a co-signatory. In the end, Curzon decided not to involve Britain in the agreement, which it had helped to shape. (Helmreich, *Op. Cit.*, 293.

and Armenians that had been deported or had left. These possessions also had to be restored to the condition they had been in before the occupants left.²¹

So, while the treaty in many ways is an instrument similar to the other Paris treaties – the codification of a “victor’s peace” – here are two elements that definitely distinguish the Sèvres treaty from its sisters: the semi-colonial elements that clearly relegated the Ottoman Empire to a subjugated status, and the effort to redress the internal ethnic and economic policies of the empire.

5. The end and the aftermath

The fifth aspect of the Ottoman war experience that differs drastically from that of the European belligerents concerns the way the war ended.

The effects of enormous loss of human life, economic dislocation, inflation, hunger and loss of morale that were felt in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Russia were very much in evidence in the Ottoman Empire too. By 1918 the empire’s capacity to wage war was waning fast. However, the popular reaction was very different from that in the other countries. Strikes and mutinies played a key role in forcing the other European states out of the war as well as to the downfall of the monarchist regimes. In February 1917 in Russia, in January 1918 in Germany and Austria-Hungary and again in October 1918 in Germany factory workers staged mass protests and went on strike. These strikes played an important part in the collapse of the imperial regimes and in undermining the war effort. Over a million workers took part in the German strike wave of January 1918 and in Austria and Hungary participation was also very high, with some 700.000 workers striking. In the Ottoman Empire, however, with its low industrialization and small industrial workforce, nothing along these lines occurred. Organized industrial workers in the major urban centers, capable of taking collective action, were a key factor enforcing

21 According to article 144 of the treaty. Cf: <http://treaties.fco.gov.uk/docs/pdf/1920/TS0011.pdf> (accessed 22.9.2014)

regime change and were almost completely absent in the Ottoman Empire.

A special case of mass protest closely akin to industrial strikes occurred in 1917-1918 in the form of mutinies by the armies of the central powers and Russia. Mutinies seem to have become widespread in Russian front line units during the winter of 1916-1917 after the Brusilov offensive. In February and March mutinies spread through the Petrograd garrison, men shooting their officers, and the failed Kerenskij offensive of June 1917 encouraged further mutiny. In September 1917, the French suppressed a mutiny by the Russian division on the base of La Courtine behind the western front, and in February 1918 a mutiny affecting the crews of forty ships in the Austrian naval base at Cattaro (Kotor) caused panic in Vienna. The mutiny of the German navy in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven in October 1918 triggered the widespread unrest that brought down the imperial regime in Germany. Within days the sailors had joined forces with striking workers in cities as distant as Cologne, Hannover and Berlin. Mutinies and strikes thus merged into one major movement.

The Ottoman army suffered no major mutinies, although the conditions under which the Ottoman soldier had to fight were probably the most atrocious of all, certainly in terms of provisioning. Ottoman soldiers did not resist in the form of mutinies, but in the form of desertion. At the end of the war the Ottoman army had four deserters for every soldier on the front, a proportion far higher than even the Russian army suffered. Desertion became an enormous problem, forcing the Ottoman government to increase its rural gendarmerie eightfold as armed deserters roamed the countryside.

When the end came, the social unrest and agitation in Russia, Germany, Austria and Hungary led to a radical regime change. The monarchies fell and political power was taken over by well-established political organizations of the Left. In Germany, the Majority Social Democrats together with the more radical Independent Social Democrats dominated the post-war interim government until December 1918. The moderate Majority Social Democrats emerged as the most powerful force in the January 1919 elections with nearly

38 percent of votes. In German Austria the Social Democrat Karl Renner was elected head of the first republican government, while in Hungary the liberal Károlyi governed with Social Democrats and Communists. The provisional government of Russia was dominated by liberals (the Kadets), and increasingly by different socialist parties. It shared power with the Boshevik-dominated workers' and soldiers' councils. In each of these cases, in other words, experienced socialist or social-democrat mass movements with a developed programme and established leadership and cadre structure were immediately available as alternatives to the monarchy and the discredited wartime regimes. In each case there were close – though not always unproblematic – links between these parties and the workers' movements that had triggered the downfall of the imperial regimes through their industrial action.

This was certainly not the case in the Ottoman Empire. The empire's most important socialist movements in the empire had been Jewish, Bulgarian, Greek and Armenian and they had not survived the Balkan War and the deportations and massacres of World War I in the empire. The Ottoman Muslim socialist movement (the Ottoman Socialist Party formed in 1910) was very weak. The party had no real mass following or stable organization, and the same is true for the other socialist splinter groups in the capital. Fundamentally, the weakness of socialist and social democrat currents in the Ottoman Empire was of course linked to a lack of an industrial workforce.

The so-called Ottoman Liberals were not in any position to take over effectively. The Entente Libérale was an amalgam of individuals and groups who shared little but their hatred for the Committee of Union and Progress and who had not been active politically inside the country since the Unionist coup d'état of January 1913. After a period of transition, the "Liberals" did come to power in Istanbul in March 1919, but they depended on the support of the palace and the British for their hold on power. From March 1920 they operated under formal British occupation. They hardly had a power base of their own and certainly none outside the capital, Istanbul. This was

evidenced in the results of the 1919 general election, in which the Liberals failed to gain a single seat in Anatolia.

In the absence of political alternatives, power in the country at large, outside the capital, remained in the hands of the ruling coalition of the war years: Unionist party bosses and army officers, allied to Muslim trading interests in the provincial centers of Anatolia that had profited from the transfer of Greek and Armenian property. The backbone of the nationalist resistance movement in Anatolia was formed by the remains of the imperial Ottoman army led by Young Turk officers. In other words: unlike the other defeated empires the Ottoman Empire did not undergo a regime change, even if the top names of the Young Turk regime of the war years (Enver, Talat, Cemal) were no longer there and even though this regime replaced the monarchy with a republic in 1923. Even during the first decades of republican rule, people – very often with a military background – who had been part of the ruling elite of the years 1913-1918 continued to run the country. One reason that it was able to do so, was that it did not have to shoulder the blame for the defeat. That blame was put on the Unionist leaders that had been in charge in 1918 and fled the country and ironically also on their enemies: the sultan's liberal government in Istanbul that had signed the treaty of Sèvres. The members of the delegation that signed the treaty were all banned from Turkey forever.

As we know, alone among the defeated countries, the Young Turks led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha managed to undo the postwar settlement imposed by the Entente by taking up arms again. In 1914 the outbreak of war had not meant a sharp division between the end of an era and the beginning of a new one as it had in Europe. In the same way, the armistice did not mean the end of war. War continued in Anatolia for another four years and by the time it ended the victory in this “national struggle” had erased the memory of defeat. The generals that ruled the early republic were not so much the losers of 1918 as the national heroes of 1922.

Thus, like the outbreak of war and the war itself, the aftermath of the war too had a very different character in the Ottoman Empire

when compared to the other defeated continental empires of Europe. The Ottoman war really was decidedly different from that of the other countries of Europe.

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