

Southern New Hampshire University

Tangled Loyalties

A Study of Kurdish Nationalism and the Partition of the Ottoman Empire

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By

Shannon King Utu

Fort Collins, Colorado

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Student: Shannon King Utu

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Abstract

This essay analyzes the theoretical concept of nationalism in the post WWI era through the lens of the Kurds and the partition of the Ottoman Empire. The rhetoric of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points are analyzed and how they are applied to the Middle East, especially the idea of self-determination. The concept of nationalism is broken down to be understood as an arbitrary way to group people into sub-groups of race in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By studying nationalism and the partition of the Ottoman Empire, it is determined that a nation-state must be founded on both global support and solidarity. If global support does not exist, a nation-state can be founded by force, as was the case for the Turks under Mustafa Kemal. Solidarity can be rooted in nationalism, but it does not have to. It can be rooted in many things, including religion, which was the case of many Kurds who choose to unite with the Turks in their fight for self-determination. The Kurds ultimately did not unite, despite British aid, and the nation-state of Kurdistan was never created.

Dedication

To my best friend and the love of my life

Bjorn Utu

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Important People

David Lloyd George: Prime Minister of Great Britain

Woodrow Wilson: American President

Georges Clemenceau: French Prime Minister

Lord Curzon: British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Sir Arnold Wilson: British Civil Commissioner of Mesopotamia

Major Noel: British Political Officer

Gertrude Bell: British Political Officer

Shaykh Mahmud: Rebellious tribal Kurdish nationalist leader

Sharif Pasha: Exiled Kurdish nationalist leader, represented the Kurds at Paris Peace Conference

Mustafa Kemal: Turkish nationalist leader

Damad Ferid: Turkish Prime Minister

Sultan Hemed IV: Last Ottoman Sultan

Eleftherios Venizelos: Greek Prime Minister

Vittorio Emanuele Orlando: Italian Prime Minister

Glossary

The Great War: Because all of the events in this paper occur prior to World War II, I will be utilizing “The Great War” rather than WWI

Constantinople: The city was renamed Istanbul in 1930, so in the context of this paper, the contemporary name will be utilized.

Vilayet: A major administrative district or province in the former Ottoman Empire.¹ (This is sometimes spelled as “wilayet”).

Millet: A autonomous religious community with a religious leader in the Ottoman Empire.²

Caliph: The “successor of the Messenger of God,” the civil and religious head of the Muslim State.³

Caliphate: The political-religious Islamic state⁴

Jihad: A religious duty imposed on Muslims to spread Islam by waging war, colloquially known as a “holy war.”⁵

CUP: Committee for Union and Progress. A secret society founded in the 1890 with the intention of overthrowing Sultan Abdulhamit II. The Committee lasted through the Great War, though lost its secrecy with the 1908 revolution.⁶

¹ "Vilayet: Definition of vilayet in English by Oxford Dictionaries," Oxford Dictionaries: English, accessed January 26, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/vilayet>.

² "Millet." Encyclopædia Britannica. September 07, 2010. Accessed January 10, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/millet-religious-group>.

³ "Caliph." Encyclopædia Britannica. November 02, 2017. Accessed January 09, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/caliph>.

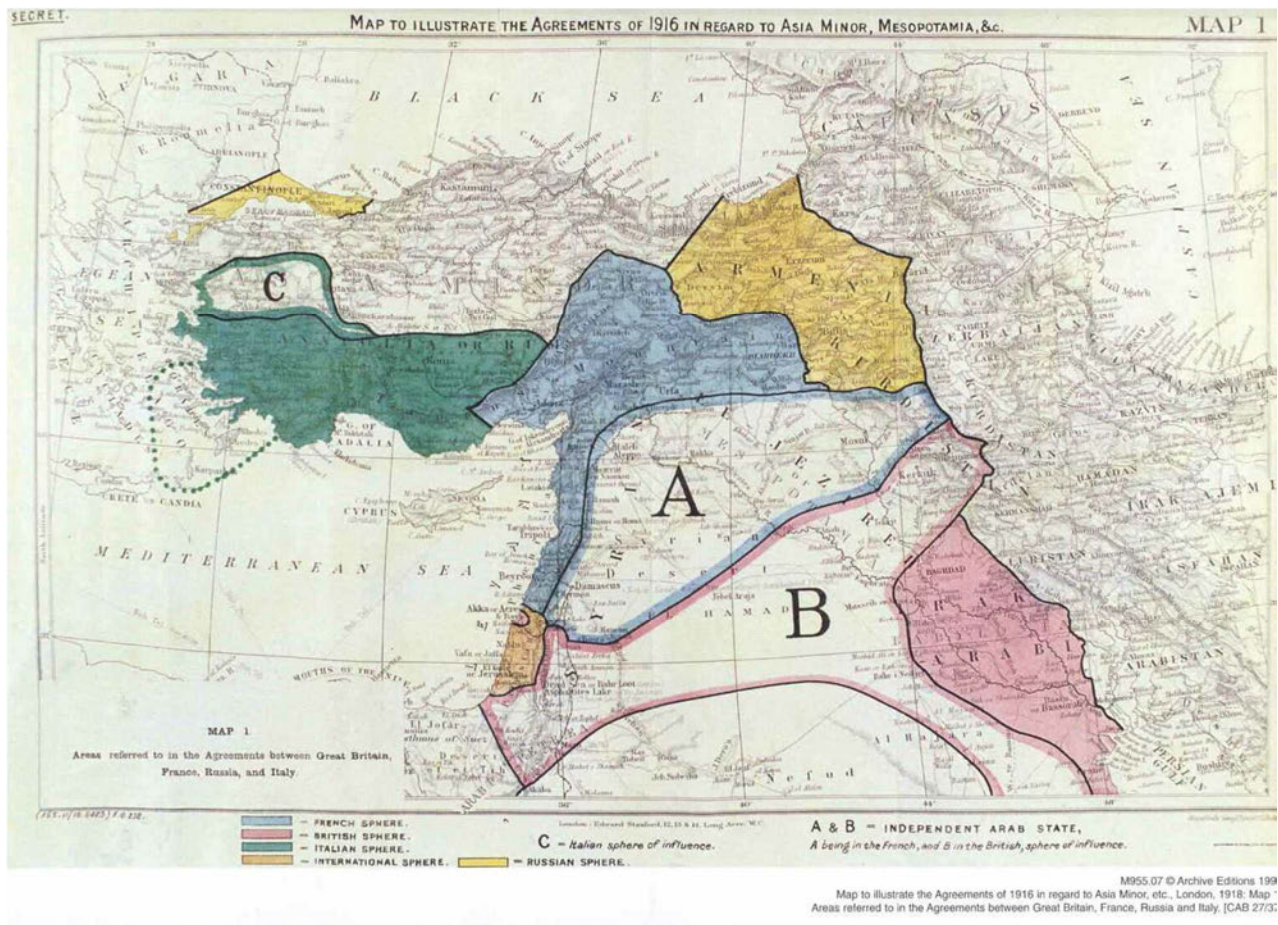
⁴ "Caliphate," Encyclopædia Britannica, October 03, 2017, accessed January 26, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Caliphate#ref135893>.

⁵ "Jihad." Encyclopædia Britannica. October 04, 2017. Accessed January 26, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad>.

⁶ "Committee for Union and Progress." Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa. Accessed January 26, 2018. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/committee-union-and-progress>.

Maps

Sykes-Picot Agreement⁷



⁷ Robert Fisk, "The Old Partition of The Middle East is Dead." NenaNews. June 14, 2014. Accessed January 22, 2018. <http://nena-news.it/robert-fisk-old-partition-middle-east-dead/>.

Kurdish Claims at the Paris Peace Conference⁸



Proposed Kurdistan in the Treaty of Sèvres⁹



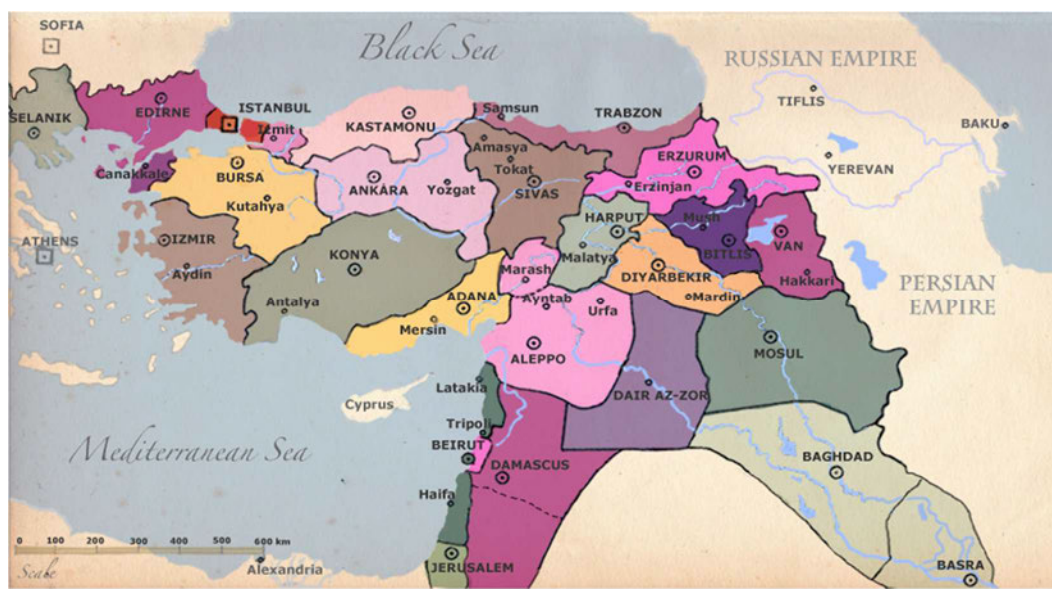
⁸ Cristian Ionita, "The Kurdish Question: Kurdistan in Seven Maps," accessed January 22, 2018, https://www.edmaps.com/html/kurdistan_in_seven_maps.html.

⁹ Ionita, "The Kurdish Question."

Treaty of Lausanne¹⁰



The vilayets of the Ottoman Empire¹¹



¹⁰ "List of rump states," Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://enacademic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/468335>.

¹¹ Houshamadyan, "How to use this website," Maps: Houshamadyan - a project to reconstruct Ottoman Armenian town and village life, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire.html>.

Introduction

In today's world, national lines are often taken for granted as concrete, fixed, and unmoving. These lines seem to be a constant in an ever-changing world. People are grouped into nations and are identified by that nation if and when they leave. In the year 2017 two nationalist movements arose that question this notion. From these movements, the world has been reminded that nations are not fixed, rather, they are constructed. In September 2017, the Kurds of Iraq overwhelmingly voted for independence from Iraq.¹ Only a few weeks later voters in Catalonia voted for independence from Spain.² Both of these votes were crushed by their respective ruling governments. Thus, the nationalist movements of the Kurds and the Catalans were tabled, but the world was reminded that the national lines that we assume to be concrete are fluid and can change depending on political will.

The concept of nationality arose in Europe the late 19th century and continued into the 20th century through Great War.³ Prior to the Great War, many groups of people were placed under one rule in vast Empires. These peoples often spoke different languages, practiced different religions and developed different cultures. The Great War brought the end of the age of Empires and the beginning of the system of Nation-States as we know them today. To explore this shift, the scope of this paper will be narrowed to the Kurds in the time frame of 1918-1926. At the end of the Great

¹ "92.7% 'yes' for Independence: Preliminary Official Results," *Rudaw: Kurdistan*, September 27, 2017, accessed December 16, 2017, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/270920174>.

² Domonoske, Camila, and Scott Neuman. "Catalonia Declares Independence; Spain Approves Central Takeover of Region." *The Two-Way: International*, October 27, 2017. Accessed December 16, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/10/27/560357561/spains-prime-minister-asks-for-direct-rule-authority-over-catalonia>.

³ Paul Gilbert. *The Philosophy of Nationalism*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 8.

War, the Ottoman Empire, who had ruled the Middle East for centuries, was divided up into the nations that we know today. The Kurds were one of the peoples who had lived under Ottoman rule, however, when the national lines were drawn, the Kurds remained nationless.

This paper will analyze the larger questions of nationalism and what it means to build a nation-state through the lens of the Kurds. By analyzing the struggle to partition the Ottoman Empire and create new nation-states, it is clear that nationalism is an arbitrary construct. In some cases, it can be utilized as a powerful tool if accepted, or it could be a false shadow of unity if not accepted. When founding a nation-state, nationalism is not required, however both solidarity and global support are. If global support is not present and a nation cannot be formed diplomatically, a nation can be formed by force, as was the case with the Turks. Solidarity, however, must be present to form a nation either diplomatically or by force. Solidarity can be in the form of nationalism but does not need to be. It can be solidarity based on loyalty to a leader, religion, geography, economics or, in fact, many other things. As long as the people can unite around a common cause, there can be hope of founding a nation-state. The Kurds in the post-war era did not have either of these components, global support or solidarity, and therefore did not create their own nation-state.

Exploring Nationalism

The concept of nationalism in the 21st century may seem elementary, or even obvious. Those who share a nation will share a nationality. If people need to be divided into smaller groups within that nation they will often be divided by ethnicity. The term “ethnicity,” however, did not exist in the context that it is used today, until 1941, when it was first published in *The Social Life*

of a *Modern Community* by W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt.⁴ The word “ethnicity” had existed since the 1400s, however, but before Warner and Lunt, it meant “a heathen, pagan, one who is not a Christian or Jew.”⁵ With “ethnicity,” not existing in the context that it does today in the early 20th century, the word “nationalism” was utilized to group peoples.

Before the theory of nationalism emerged, it was common practice in the Western world to group people into races. Throughout the 19th century this grouping by race became a scientific practice. Theories of racial inferiority of non-whites, developed by scientists like Dr. Samuel George Morton and Josiah Nott, were widely accepted. These men studied the skulls of various races to “determine” that there were anatomic differences between races, and this led to their conclusion of the superiority of the white man.⁶ The implications of scientific racism continue to reach far and wide and could and should be an entire study in itself. For the purpose of this paper, however, scientific racism is mentioned to illustrate that the western world was attempting to organize the world by grouping and categorizing people in the generations leading up to the Great War. This need to categorize the world can be attributed to the growing influence of science in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the move to classify the natural world.⁷ “In anthropological classification of peoples, a theory is needed to determine what is to count as a nation.”⁸ The concept of scientific racism was accepted as a way to classify peoples while nationalism became a way to further divide people. When it came to dividing old empires after The Great War, both nationalism

⁴ "Obo." Ethnicity - Atlantic History - Oxford Bibliographies. November 20, 2017. Accessed December 16, 2017. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0022.xml>.

⁵ "Ethnic (adj.)." Index. Accessed January 17, 2018. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/ethnic>.

⁶ "Scientific Racism, History of." Encyclopedia of Race and Racism. Accessed December 16, 2017. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/scientific-racism-history>.

⁷ Gilbert, *Philosophy of Nationalism*, 10.

⁸ Gilbert, 10.

and racism would help structure the decisions that were made. This paper will focus on nationalism rather than racism and its implications in the construction of nation-states after the Great War.

The root term “Nation” is integral to the understanding of nationalism. Before “nation” was used in the context of a nation-state as is used today, it was used to describe a people that was foreign, of a different “descent.” In the time of Shakespeare, the word “nation” was often used to describe people of Jewish descent, as they were “other” than their Christian neighbors.⁹ The meaning behind the term “nation” evolved with the development of the modern state in the 19th century.¹⁰ The modern state was a new way to structure the world, however, this concept was almost entirely theoretical and interpreted differently by different peoples. Contemporary German sociologist, Max Weber stated: “[I]f the concept of ‘nation’ can in any way be defined unambiguously, it certainly cannot be stated in terms of empirical qualities common to those who count as members of the nation [because] the reasons for the belief that one represents a nation vary greatly.”¹¹ What classified as a nation was difficult to define, as it was dependent on the people. Here, United States then President Woodrow Wilson’s concept of self-determination came into play. If a people identify as a nation, and self-determine, then in theory, they are a nation.

One of the most important factors of defining national identity in the early 1900s was language.¹² Linguistic solidarity and linguistic difference from one’s neighbors was a key way to measure whether a people could be grouped as a nation. Based on the concept that a nation and state are not synonymous; a people could be classified as a nation without their own autonomous state. This would simply mean a group of people who shared a common language would be

⁹ Gilbert, *Philosophy of Nationalism*, 8.

¹⁰ Gilbert, 9.

¹¹ Gilbert, 14.

¹² Gilbert, 10.

grouped as a “nation.” But was this enough to identify a people as distinct from another people? Does the formation of a state require nationality? Certainly, other components were just as important to found a nation-state on. People could unite around a shared religion, a shared history, a shared culture, a shared loyalty to a leader or a shared geography. But if people shared these components and not a language, could they still be considered a nationalist group?

The Great War in Context

To properly understand the issue with the Kurds in the post-war era, an understanding of the global context at this time is crucial. The Great War was a war like no one had ever seen. Globally, 10 million soldiers were killed, 20 million were wounded, and just under 8.5 million civilians were killed.¹³ To better understand the weight of these numbers: the estimated death toll for the United States in all major wars that it has fought in and since the start of the American Revolution is 1.2 million.¹⁴ ¹⁵ That means that The Great War killed nearly 10 times the amount of soldiers than have ever died in American history.¹⁶ The civilian deaths as a result of the Atomic bombs dropped by the U.S. on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was 225,000.¹⁷ Roughly 38 times more civilians were killed as a result of the Great War than were killed by the atomic bombs. The Allied Powers lost more men in action, thus suffering greater losses to their military, while Russia and

¹³ Antoine Prost, "War Losses." New Articles RSS. Accessed January 17, 2018. https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/war_losses.

¹⁴ This statistic includes The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Iraq-Afghanistan.

¹⁵ "Civil War Facts." Civil War Trust. Accessed January 18, 2018. <https://www.civilwar.org/learn/articles/civil-war-facts>.

¹⁶ By American, I mean citizens of the United States of America. I am not referring to residents of all of the American continents.

¹⁷ "Hiroshima and Nagasaki Death Toll." Hiroshima and Nagasaki Death Toll. Accessed January 18, 2018. <http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/cab/200708230009.html>.

the Central Powers lost more civilians.¹⁸ Not only were there logistical implications of this high death toll, like depleted militaries, but there was a huge emotional toll felt on a global level. Loss like this, on such a grand scale, was a new phenomenon. Though the Allied powers were victorious on paper, they suffered from this war just as much as the Central Powers. This must be remembered when considering the actions of the Allied Leaders throughout the peace negotiations.

The United States emerged after the Great War as a world power, gaining a seat among the global leaders. This was primarily due to the fact that the U.S. stayed out of the war until 1917. In the first three years of the Great War, the U.S. remained neutral, but also seized the economic opportunity that inevitably comes with war. In the decades before the Great War, the U.S. had been primarily a “debtor nation,” borrowing from primarily the British Empire to build its industry.¹⁹ By the time the war broke out, they were slowly closing the gap with the British. With the war of attrition and the neutral stance of the U.S., they seized the economic opportunity and began producing and selling weapons and munitions to the Allied forces, specifically Great Britain. By the time they entered the war in 1917, Britain owed them a great debt, as did the French.²⁰ The fighting forces of both sides were depleted by 1917, and the entrance of the U.S. enabled the Allies to end the war effectively and swiftly. The U.S. and thus, President Woodrow Wilson, had a very different place in the international political hierarchy after the war than before the war. This shift in the power structure endowed Wilson a strong leading position at the peace conference, which gave influential weight to his ideas expressed in his “Fourteen Points.”

¹⁸ Prost, “War Losses.”

¹⁹ Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers INC., 2000) 10.

²⁰ Zieger, *America's Great War*. 49.

President Wilson arrived in Paris for the Paris Peace Conference equipped with his Fourteen Points, with the idea of “self-determination” with the League of Nations being the most important for the study of nationalism. These ideas would help to create a new world order, one ideally not grouped by vast empires, but one where groups of peoples could and would “self-determine” their own nation-states out of the ashes of the defeated empires. Throughout the Paris Peace Conference, and the subsequent peace conferences to partition the Ottoman Empire, these concepts were widely debated. Chapter one will analyze Wilson’s ideas and how they were received by the other leaders at the peace conferences. Chapter two will analyze the Kurds following the Great War. Chapter three will analyze the chaos and shifting loyalties in the Middle East. Chapter four will analyze how the ideas established at the Paris Peace Conference changed after much struggle in the Middle East. Chapter five will analyze the final partition of the Middle East. Ultimately the idea of self-determination would be utilized to form a new Turkey by force but would not be accepted by the Kurds leaving them nationless.

Historiography

The narrative of the Paris Peace Conference has largely been one of failure. This narrative has generally focused on how the failures of the conference led to WWII; specifically, on how the reparations and the intensity of the Treaty of Versailles decimated Germany, making room for radicalism to grow. Chapter one and chapter four are greatly indebted to Margaret MacMillan’s comprehensive book, *Paris 1919*, which has taken a wider view of the Paris Peace Conference, analyzing how the decisions made there touched every corner of the globe.

Though the Kurdish history is largely left out of mainstream historical analysis about the repercussions of the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference, there are several historians that have made profound contributions to the historiography of this era. Several of the British Political officers who were stationed in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan have written about their experience there. The British Civil Commissioner of Mesopotamia, Sir Arnold Wilson, defended both his and British actions in his book *Mesopotamia 1917-1921: A Clash of Loyalties*. Though the information from Wilson's book must be recognized for its bias, it is incredibly helpful, because he sheds light on the role and the opinions of the British Officers who were actually on the ground in the Middle East; a perspective that turns out to be very different than the British politicians working at the Paris Peace Conference and subsequent conferences in Europe.

Another British Political Officer, Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, also wrote about the region that he spent over 16 years in. Longrigg, however, took a more scholarly approach than Sir Wilson, thus providing an in depth and less biased version of the history following the Great War in the Middle East. A selection of letters, notes and telegrams from the *Records of the Kurds*, an extensive archive housed at Cambridge, were analyzed to gain the perspective of political officers who did not write books. One officer, Major Noel, seemed to be incredibly influential, however he never published a book or memoir. The archive provides an insight into his thoughts through a few letters. He was likened to T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) for his enthusiasm and support of a foreign people and worked closely with the Kurds.²¹ He is a somewhat elusive figure that appears in historical scholarship at important moments, though there is little written about him. Despite the inclusion of several letters and notes in this paper, future study would greatly benefit from

²¹ David McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*. 128.

analyzing his diary. His diary is published in Turkish, thus creating a language barrier. Noel had a very different opinion than Sir Wilson, and that will be considered in chapter two and chapter three.

The events in the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st century in the Middle East has led to a renewed interest in this region. The most profound contribution has been David McDowall's book, *Modern History of the Kurds*. McDowall places heavy blame on the British for how things turned out in the Middle East, specifically the political officers who were previously mentioned. This paper, however, will argue that it was far too complicated to place the blame on one single group of people. True, the British Political Officers are entitled to some blame, however, not all of it.

Though it has been difficult to find non-western opinions due to a language gap and geographic barrier, two Turkish scholarly articles that have been translated into English have aided to the breadth of perspective. Suat Zeyrek's "The Role of the Kurds in the Struggle for the Foundation of Turkish Republic" and Serif Kaymaz's "Britain's Policy towards Kurdistan at the End of the First World War," both analyze this era, though their arguments are different. Zeyrek illuminates the pan-Islamic movement and the Kurds who supported this, and Kaymaz blames the lack of an independent Kurdistan on the inability of the Kurds to unite as one. These articles not only add a Turkish perspective, but also reiterate the complexity of this situation.

To understand the emergence of Mustafa Kemal, the Turkish War for Independence and the end of the Ottoman Empire, Andrew Mango's book, *From the Sultan to Ataturk: Turkey* provided a perspective not included in much of the historiography about the Kurds. In historical scholarship following the Great War, the rise of Kemal is largely left out, however, this had a huge

impact on the way the lines in the Middle East were ultimately drawn. Mango's book analyzes this movement and the complexity of the subsequent peace conferences following the Paris Peace Conference.

The historians mentioned, provide the most influential works used for this paper, however, many other historical writings were consulted. Ultimately, this paper aims to add to the growing discussion on the historiographical gap of the Kurds following the Great War. This gap comes from a need to analyze how the emergence of the concept of nationalism and self-determination changed the world order and how this in turn influenced the Middle East. The partition of the Middle East was incredibly complicated and there is a need to analyze how the larger world context played a role in how the lines were drawn. Many historians have focused on this region through a wide lens, with the Kurds briefly mentioned as a pawn in a larger political game. Other historians focus too narrowly on the Kurds and lose the significant implications of the global context to their fate. This paper aims at combining both the wide scope and the narrow scope. The subsequent chapters will provide a larger analysis of the greater global events and how these impacted the fate of the Kurds.

Summary

The central argument of this paper is that nationalism alone is not enough to found a nation-state on. To found a nation-state, two components must exist: global support and solidarity. If there is no global support, a nation-state can be built by force, as the Turks ultimately did. Solidarity can be rooted in nationalism, but it can also be rooted in religion, or culture, or geography, or economics, or loyalty to a leader. The concept of nationalism is an arbitrary one and does not

necessarily lead to the formation of a nation-state. For the Kurds, a national identity was pushed on them by the British. The Kurds following the Great War did not yet want to be identified together as one united group under the guise of nationalism. Their loyalty to their tribal leaders and traditional lifestyle of nomadism was not congruent with the notion of nationalism. They were pawns in the power play between the British and the Nationalist Turks, but they also were players of the game. Their loyalties shifted between the two powers to try and find who would give them what they wanted: the ability to continue their traditional lifestyle. The Kurds initially rejected nationalism in favor of tribalism.

Chapter 1: The Changing World

1918-1919

We are journeying to Paris, not merely to liquidate the war, but to found a new order in Europe. We are preparing not for Peace only, but for Eternal Peace. There was about us the halo of some divine mission. We must be alert, stern, righteous and ascetic. For we were bent on doing great, permanent and noble things.¹

~Harold Nicolson

A heavily furnished study with my huge map on the carpet. Bending over it (bubble, bubble toil and trouble) are Clemenceau, Lloyd George and PW. They have pulled up armchairs and crouch over the map... They are cutting the Baghdad railway.... It is appalling that these ignorant and irresponsible men should be cutting Asia Minor to bits as if they were dividing a cake... Isn't it terrible, the happiness of millions being discarded in that way? Their decisions are immoral and impractical... These three ignorant men with a child to lead them... that child, I suppose, is me. Anyhow, it is an anxious child.²

~Harold Nicolson

The end of the Great War in November 1918 brought the exhausted, victorious leaders together in Paris to discuss the chilling peace that had come at great expense. The war had been brutal and had left death and devastation in its wake. The people of the world were ready to move on, though the memory of loss and hardship of the war loomed over all. Secret alliances between empires was often blamed for propelling the world into the Great War, and the survivors of the clash were ready for a new diplomatic structure. The Allies and the representatives of these countries, known as the “Big Four,” had great power after the Great War. To fully understand how the Middle East was partitioned after the war, this chapter will analyze the leaders of the Paris Peace Conference and how their decisions helped shape the world. It is

¹ Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001). 86.

² David A. Andelman, *A Shattered Peace: Versailles 1919 and the Price We Pay Today* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2008) 1-2.

important to mention that many decisions were made at the Paris Peace Conference regarding peoples not mentioned in this chapter. This chapter only includes analysis of discussion regarding the Ottoman Empire and the Kurds and does not delve into decisions made surrounding the defeated German Empire or Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The Big Four

The representative from the United States, President Woodrow Wilson, had long been a champion of peace, as he had kept the U.S. out of the war for several years, only finally entering the American troops in 1917. This timely entrance in the war entitled the American President a leading seat at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and his ideas were at the forefront of many of the negotiations. Wilson's famous Fourteen Points were filled with idealistic, and often undefined, notions of open diplomacy, self-determination and international cooperation. Wilson's ideas, especially the concept of self-determination, were idealistic and forward thinking, however, were largely undefined. Wilson did little to help the constituents at the conference understand what he meant. Throughout the peace conference, the head of the American mission in Vienna continuously requested a definition and explanation of "self-determination," requests that never received answers.³ The fact that this term went largely undefined by its creator, is significant, as this term was adopted by many peoples around the world and helped set in motion many nationalist movements throughout the rest of the 20th century. The other Allied leaders also took advantage of the ambiguity of Wilson's words throughout the many peace conferences after the war, as will be discussed in later chapters.

³ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 11.

The British representative was Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Lloyd George arrived at the Paris Peace Conference confident, with the powerful navy and the global network of the colonies to back him. The British Empire was run on the economic and military power gained from its colonies and was very much interested in gaining strategic territory from the defeated empires of the Great War. Lloyd George, himself, was a stubborn man, who relied heavily on his trusted advisors, specifically his private secretary Philip Kerr, who would often screen correspondence with the Foreign office.⁴ This, and the fact Lloyd George was known to ignore the advice of the Foreign Office in favor of the advice from his personal staff, greatly frustrated the men stationed in the Middle East, and had a profound impact on Lloyd George's decisions in the peace conferences following the Paris Peace Conference.⁵ Though Lloyd George was stubborn, he also recognized that the world was changing, and that the British Empire would have to change if it wanted to remain on top. He suggested allowing more self-government in the Empire's colonies, meaning the empire would only weigh in on important issues like ensuring a common foreign policy and matters of defense.⁶ This would not only be more economically sound, he surmised, but would appease the changing world.

The French representative was Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau. Though the French and British Prime Ministers often worked together throughout the conference, they did not trust each other. They were both strong-willed and by the end of the conference, after discussions about the partition of the Ottoman Empire, Clemenceau supposedly was so angered that in a confrontation with Lloyd George asked him to decide between pistols or swords.⁷ Clemenceau

⁴ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 42.

⁵ MacMillan, 42.

⁶ MacMillan, 43.

⁷ MacMillan, 436.

was very much a 19th century gentlemen, who had a hard time letting go of the old way of concluding a war: dividing the spoils of war and making the enemy pay. Much of the fighting between the Allies and Germany had been done on French soil and the country was left in ruins. This fact, and the French public opinion shaped Clemenceau's main agenda at the Paris Peace Conference: revenge on Germany.

In discussion of the Paris Peace Conference the "Big Three," Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau, are often analyzed, as they made most of the decisions regarding the most famous post-Great War treaty, the Treaty of Versailles. Italy's exclusion as one of the "Big Four" was due to Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando's resignation nine days before the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 19, 1919.⁸ Orlando had supported Italian entrance since the beginning and had been elected Prime Minister in October 1917. At the Paris Peace Conference, Orlando's main agenda was to claim the land promised to Italy before entering the war.⁹ His refusal to negotiate pushed Orlando into Wilson's bad side and he ultimately lost the support of the other Allies.

Wartime Agreements

Before the war ended, the ideas of self-determination and international cooperation had not yet come into effect and secret agreements were still common practice. Throughout the war the French and British were already planning for a victory. In the old world, after a large-scale war between empires, the victors would split the spoils of war amongst themselves, gaining land,

⁸ Andrew Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk: Turkey* (London: Haus Publishing, 2009) eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), 50.

⁹ "Vittorio Orlando," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. October 4, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vittorio-Orlando>

resources and subjects. As early as 1915, the Allies discussed the division of the Ottoman Empire in the Treaty of London. Clemenceau and Lloyd George promised Italy “a just share” when they divided up the Ottoman Empire if Italy joined the war on their side.¹⁰ By May 1916, two long and bloody years before the war concluded, the French and British created a secret treaty that would effectively split up the Ottoman Empire mostly between the two of them, but also allotting land to Russia and Italy, as promised in the Treaty of London.¹¹ This agreement was known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement and divided Mesopotamia between France and Britain, with France controlling Northern Mesopotamia and the vilayet of Mosul. Both of these wartime agreements ultimately ended up creating friction between the Allies post war and complicating the peace negotiations.

The British and the French had a history of presence in the Ottoman Empire and had long had their eyes on strategic territory. Connection to the British colony India was a large motivation for the British in the Sykes-Picot agreement. By gaining land in Mesopotamia, the British could also gain several strategic land and water routes between Europe and their colonies in the East.¹² France had connections in sections of the Ottoman Empire dating back to the crusades, and had committed vast resources already to this region in hopes of obtaining it as a colony.¹³ France also saw itself as the “protector of Catholics,” thus adding a religious agenda to their pursuit for land in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴

To put this agreement into the context of this paper, the Sykes-Picot Agreement would have divided the Kurds up between three different spheres of influence: British, French and

¹⁰ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 427.

¹¹ "Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1916." Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450.
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sykes-picot-agreement-1916>.

¹² Andelman, *A Shattered Peace*, 49.

¹³ Andelman, 49-50.

¹⁴ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 40-41.

Russian.¹⁵ Dividing peoples was of no concern to this agreement, as it was about dividing the spoils of war like had always been done. The concern about peoples nationalism was what was so profound about the Paris Peace Conference. This was a revolutionary idea that did not yet dictate international politics. The Sykes-Picot Agreement remained secret until revealed by the Russian Bolsheviks after they toppled Tsarist Russia in the October Revolution, 1917. The revolution in Russia catapulted Russia into the modern world with the creation of a new type of state system. The new leaders wanted nothing to do with the imperialistic nature of the old regime, therefore they revealed the secret agreement on a global scale. Despite this reveal, and due to rudimentary communication systems, not many Kurds were knowledgeable of this treaty and thus unaware of the Allied initial intentions.¹⁶

The wartime agreements were swept away at the Paris Peace Conference by Wilson's rhetoric of a new world order: one of self-determination and open-diplomacy. The time had passed when Empires could simply split the spoils of war and annex far off places and peoples as they saw fit. This is what was truly revolutionary about Wilson's ideas, international politics was now concerned with listening to the people of conquered territory, rather than just taking it into their empires. The wartime agreements, though by 1919 regarded as invalid and out of date, would remain on the minds of the European Allies, especially Italy, and would come back into play in later peace conferences.

The Mandate System

¹⁵ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 117.

¹⁶ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 117.

Woodrow Wilson's main objective at the Paris Peace Conference was creating a new world of self-determination and open diplomacy, and his vehicle to enforce that this would happen was the League of Nations. This league, theoretically, would be an international league that would ensure that the new world order ran properly without having to resort to secret alliances and eventually warfare. The League of Nations was commissioned on January 25, 1919, very early on in the Paris Peace Conference and was seen as a great victory by leaders of the conference.¹⁷ The details of the League, how it would look, what its role would be and who would be included were hotly debated. Ultimately, it was decided that members of the Principle Allies (U.S., France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan) would have two seats each on the League and all of the other countries could vote to see who would have the final four seats. The Principle Allies justified this position by arguing that they had paid for their seats with the millions of casualties of their citizens.¹⁸ This monopoly is significant because it illustrates how much power the victors of the Great War had in shaping the new world order. They were the ones who would, after the Peace Conference came to a conclusion, continue to make the decisions of how the world would be run on a global scale. Though the old system of empires and dividing the spoils of war was out, with the power of the League of Nations, the victors would continue to utilize their immense influence on a global scale.

When it came to dividing the defeated empires, the concept of self-determination was put to use. The leaders at the conference, however, did not believe that all peoples were yet fit for self-rule. For those nations that were not ready the mandate system was developed. Rather than colonizing or annexing land of the defeated, as was the norm before the Great War, the victors

¹⁷ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 90-91.

¹⁸ MacMillan, 90-91.

and the League of Nation would guide young, “self-determined” nations until they were ready to assume full self-rule and independence. It is here that the concepts of scientific racism were incorporated by the new leaders of the world. Peoples of European descent were considered ready to self-determine: peoples like the Poles, or the Finns. People in the Middle East were deemed not quite ready, but with the potential to be fully independent in the future with assistance, guidance and aid from the world leaders. Those in Africa and the Pacific were deemed too barbarous for any sort of self-determination and would likely never be able to self-govern without the aid of the Principle Allies and the League of Nations.¹⁹ So the League of Nations and the mandate system, effectively furthered the concepts of scientific racism and formed a new world order placing themselves at the top.

Woodrow Wilson, who had named himself the head of the League committee, was firm on the implementation of the mandate system as opposed to the traditional annexation system of the old world. Recognizing this and seeing opportunity in utilizing the mandate system to gain influence in far corners of the defeated world, Lloyd George did not fight Wilson, and instead embraced the mandate system.²⁰ Even Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, who often disagreed with Lloyd George, agreed with playing along with Wilson. He is quoted saying:

If we cannot get out of our difficulties in any other way we ought to play self-determination for all its worth, wherever we are involved in difficulties with the French, the Arabs, or anybody else, and leave the case to be settled by that final argument knowing in the bottom of our hearts that we are more likely to benefit from it than is anybody else.²¹

¹⁹ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 99.

²⁰ MacMillan, 99.

²¹ MacMillan, 386.

The British saw the potential in the mandate system as a way to gain strategic and economic influence in the very same places they had aimed at annexing during the war. They understood the growing influence of Wilson and his rhetoric on the global scale and knew that if they wanted to stay in power, would have to play their same old game under the guise of a new name.

Clemenceau, on the other hand, furiously disputed this system, as it was a threat to the French perception, and indeed the old world's perception, of power. Colonies equaled power: strategic power, economic power and most importantly for the French, manpower. After the Great War, the French population had suffered great loss, and in fear of another German uprising, the French sought more men, men ideally gained from new colonies, to replenish their military strength.²² Under the new mandate system, the global powers would offer aid and resources to territories that in return were not obligated to provide military assistance. The French did not understand providing resources, especially when their country was in ruins, without the guarantee of any obvious return.

Greek Claims

Though not one of the "Big Four," Greece emerged during the Paris Peace Conference as a contender for parts of the Ottoman Empire under the guise of self-determination and would prove to be a major player in the fate of the Middle East. Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos pleaded the case of Greek self-determination in many coastal regions under Ottoman rule at the Paris Peace Conference. He utilized photos of happy Greek fishermen, cultural antiquity (explaining that the birth places of Greek historical icons, Herodotus and Hippocrates

²² MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 99-100.

were in those lands) and statistics (claiming that 2 million Greeks lived under Ottoman rule).²³ Greece also had the public support of citizens across both the United States and Europe, for they represented the mythology and legacy of classical Greece that had helped shape the Western world.²⁴ The fact that the Greeks were Christian rather than Muslim like the Ottoman Turks gained them favor in the Western world. Not only did Venizelos have the support of the Western public, but he had the support of Lloyd George.

Lloyd George had supported the Greek Nationalist movement since the Balkan War in 1912, but after the Great War he had even more motivation to support them.²⁵ The British military was completely drained after the Great War, and British troops stationed in the Ottoman Empire would be returning soon. Lloyd George recognized the Greeks as an ally (that wasn't competition, like the French) that would provide force in the Middle East and also ensure that British shipping routes remained open.²⁶ While the Greeks had the support of the British, they did not have it of the United States or Italy. Wilson was hesitant of Greek claims to Thrace and Albania. Orlando opposed a stronger Greece, as they both saw them as a threat to their control of the Adriatic Sea.²⁷ The Greek emergence during the Paris Peace Conference had profound consequences on the fate of the Ottoman Empire that will be discussed in later chapters.

Arab Claims

The Arabs, (who had lived under Ottoman rule, but had fought alongside the British during the Arab Revolt in 1916), also sent a representative to the Paris Peace Conference: Emir

²³ MacMillan, 349-350.

²⁴ MacMillan, 353.

²⁵ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 43.

²⁶ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 354.

²⁷ MacMillan, 357.

Feisal bin al-Hussein. Equipped with the knowledge that his people had aided in the defeat of one of the Central Powers, the Ottoman Turks, and the rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson, Feisal expected to be rewarded with an all-encompassing, self-determined Arabia.²⁸ Feisal had gained the respect of T.E. Lawrence, (Lawrence of Arabia), during the Arab Revolt. This friendship ensured Lawrence's support at the Paris Peace Conference. Lawrence argued that a unified Arab nation would be beneficial to the British Empire, as it would eliminate the threat of the French gaining control of strategic geography.²⁹ Lawrence, along with fellow Arab sympathizer and political officer Gertrude Bell, fought hard for Arab self-determination at the Paris Peace Conference.

The problem was, however, that a united, self-determined Arabia would not do for the Allied powers. The Allies still believed that they lay claim to sections of this geographic region, if not under the name of colonies, then under the name of "mandates," as compensation for the losses suffered from the war. Sir Arnold Wilson, the British Civil Commissioner in Baghdad, suggested grouping three vilayets together: Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, to form the nation of Iraq, a suggestion that in 1919 seemed bizarre. At this time, the population of Iraq was religiously divided, with the majority of Shia Muslims, as well as "nationally" divided between a mix of Arabs, Kurds, Persians and Assyrians.³⁰ Ultimately this suggestion would be the final decision, one that went against the concept of self-determination, but that conclusion was not finalized in Paris.³¹ At the Paris Peace Conference, the pretension of creating nations by the principle of self-determination still dominated the decisions.

²⁸ Andelman, *A Shattered Peace*, 43.

²⁹ Andelman, *A Shattered Peace*, 56.

³⁰ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 397.

³¹ MacMillan, 405-406.

Kurdish Claims

General Sharif Pasha, a Kurdish General forced into exile after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, which will be discussed next chapter, represented the Kurds at the Paris Peace Conference. Pasha claimed to speak for the Kurds at the conference, however he had long been estranged from Kurdish tribal life.³² Pasha was an educated man, accustomed to the Western world, as he had resided in Paris the entirety of his exile, roughly a decade. At the conference Pasha's main agenda was to appeal for a self-determined Kurdistan. He stated: "In the virtue of the Wilsonian principle everything pleads in favour of the Kurds for the creation of a Kurd state, entirely free and independent."³³ Pasha's other goal was to illustrate the national difference between the Kurds and the Armenians and to beg that they are not incorporated into the same territory. He addressed the council:

...I would ask your permission to point out empathetically, that if those districts where the Kurds are in a majority are to be included in the New Armenia, regardless of their warlike spirit and jealousy of independence, there cannot be the slightest doubt that a chronic state of disorder will reign in Armenia, unless the Allies are prepared to occupy the country indefinitely with a strong army, and even then they would be subject to all attacks of guerilla warfare.³⁴

The long and complicated history between the Kurds and the Armenians will be discussed in detail next chapter. What is important here, however, is that an educated Kurd was present at the Paris Peace Conference, and he was fighting for an independent Kurdistan on the grounds of national solidarity and self-determination.

³² McDowall, 121.

³³ Sherif Pasha, "Memorandum on the Claims of the Kurd People" (Paris: Imprimerie A.-G. L'Hoir, 1919) in *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies* vol. 15, Issue ½, p131-136. (2001) 14, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89089959548;view=1up;seq=1>

³⁴ Pasha, "Memorandum on the Claims of the Kurd People" 4-5.

Ottoman Claims

At the very end of the Paris Peace Conference Damad Ferid, the Turkish Prime Minister, was allowed to make an unprecedented appearance. He was the only defeated empire allowed to send a delegate to plea their case: neither Germany or Austria-Hungary were permitted to send delegates to the conference until after their respective treaties were drawn up. Ferid took advantage of the opportunity and blamed the liberal Young Turks, who had gained much power in the 1908 revolution, for getting the Ottoman Empire involved in the Great War and for the Armenian Genocide. He argued that these decisions had not been at the command of the Sultan, and therefore the Sultan should not be blamed, but rather, be regarded as a self-determined national group who aimed at being a friend to the Allies and a member of the League of Nations.³⁵ Ferid's desperate plea was scoffed at by the "Big Four" as out of touch and unsophisticated.

By the end of the Paris Peace Conference the power wielded by the "Big Three" had gone to their heads. Both Wilson and Lloyd George saw the Ottoman Turks complete desperation as a pathetic and ignorant sign of just how unfit the Turks were for self-rule.³⁶ If anything, Ferid's presence at the peace conference bolstered the "Big Three's" confidence in the partition of the Ottoman Empire and their assessment that they needed the guidance under the mandate system until they could better understand the concepts of nationalism, diplomacy and western governance.

³⁵ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 437.

³⁶ MacMillan, 437.

The Paris Peace Conference ended shortly after Ferid's plea. The "Big Three" found it best to decide what to do with the Ottoman Empire at a later meeting. Before sailing back to the United States, President Wilson showed interest in being the mandate for Armenia, and after hearing the pleas from Ferid, perhaps even Constantinople.³⁷ Wilson had proposed a "fact finding" mission mid-way through the conference to find out if the people of the Middle East wanted to be under British or French mandate, especially in Syria and Mesopotamia.³⁸ The pending results of this mission, as well as the need for Wilson to discuss with the U.S. Congress about the decisions made at the Paris Peace Conference, made putting off decisions about the Middle East appealing. Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George decided that they would reconvene at a later date to discuss what would become of the Ottoman Empire. It was simple for them to pause these discussions, as treaties still needed to be drawn up for Eastern Europe. What they overlooked, however, was that while they took a break from discussing the Middle East, the peoples of the Middle East continued to live in the confused rubble of the aftermath of war.

Italian Tension

In the end, no real decisions were made at the Paris Peace Conference about what to do with the Ottoman Empire, though tensions on the subject were raising. In May 1919, Italy moved on regions promised to them during wartime agreements: settling troops in the ports of Adalia (Antalya), and sending a battleship to the port of Smyrna (Izmir).³⁹ Italy's actions illuminates frustrations between the leaders that were stoked throughout the peace conference. The Greeks claims of self-determination had appealed to Lloyd George and Clemenceau, but the Italians had

³⁷ MacMillan, 437.

³⁸ Andelman, *A Shattered Peace*, 69-70.

³⁹ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 427.

no claims of self-determination to the regions that had been promised to them. Orlando felt that he was being out maneuvered by Lloyd George and Clemenceau, who by this point had learned to play the game of Wilsonian rhetoric, making claims for mandates that really appeared to be colonies by a new name. Orlando was fed up and wanted what had been promised to Italy before they joined the war, they wanted their spheres of influence and they wanted the old-world policy of annexation.⁴⁰

The Italians moving on Smyrna was not only aggressive, but controversial. Smyrna was the very heart of Greece's claim for a self-determined region. Venizelos argued that Smyrna was a Greek city, as more Greeks lived there than actually lived in Athens.⁴¹ In Paris, with an absence of Orlando, Lloyd George urged his colleagues to take action against the Italian land-grab. Lloyd George utilized the rhetoric of the conference to further his agenda at bolstering a powerful Greece in the region. He explained that Greek troops could land "wherever there was a danger of disturbances or massacres."⁴² Both Clemenceau and Wilson agreed that landing the Greeks to oppose the Italians was the right decision.⁴³ So, ultimately Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Wilson went behind the back of their fellow ally, Orlando, to secretly support the Greeks in opposition to the Italians.

The decision about Smyrna set in motion a series of events that would ultimately shape the Middle East over the course of the next four years. Smyrna was also a large part of the Ottoman economy, and the Ottoman Turks were deeply impacted by the allied decision. When the Greeks landed in Smyrna, the Turks regarded this as the beginning of the division of their

⁴⁰ MacMillan, 428.

⁴¹ MacMillan, 430.

⁴² MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 431.

⁴³ MacMillan, 431.

empire. The Sultan was said to have wept in his palace with defeat.⁴⁴ Others across the empire took this as a reason to fight, not for the Sultan, but for Turkish nationalism. This action would have profound implications that ended up dictating the ultimate peace treaty in 1923, which will be discussed in chapters four and five.

Conclusion

Ultimately the Paris Peace Conference dictated what the new world order would look like with the creation of the League of Nations, and the concepts of the mandate system and self-determination. These decisions, however, took over a year to manifest. The rest of the world was not frozen in time while the “Big Four” were negotiating and debating what the world should look like; they were trying desperately to recover from the devastation of war and figure out what the future held for them. In the Middle East, no real decisions were even come to at the end of the Paris Peace Conference in regard to how the Ottoman Empire would be divided. The people there were living in limbo, unsure of the future. Despite claims of self-determination from Sharif Pasha and Feisal bin al-Hussein, the decision was made to send out a “fact finding mission” in the Middle East to see what the people there thought and who they would want as their “mandate.”⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in the Middle East the defeated Turks were regaining strength and the various Kurdish tribes were chafing under the uncertainty of the future.

The secret agreement of Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau behind the backs of Italy marks a shift in the Allies. The beginning of the conference saw the romantic ideas of self-determination and open diplomacy, but by the end, even Woodrow Wilson was making secret

⁴⁴ MacMillan, 433.

⁴⁵ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 69-70.

agreements and claiming strategic territories under the guise of “mandates.” It is clear from this chapter that, though the world was changing, and new concepts were shaping it, the powerful players were not completely adhering to this shift. Lloyd George, Clemenceau and indeed Wilson, were still very much stuck between the old world of splitting the spoils of war and the new world of self-determination and the League of Nations. A shift like this cannot take place overnight and takes time. So, while the ideas of modernity were there, the practices were slow to follow. The growing pains of this process greatly impacted the Kurds as they were pulled in many different directions by the British, the Turks, the Greeks, and themselves. The following chapter will explore how the Kurds fit into this changing world, how some embraced it, and others resisted it.

Chapter 2: East Meets West

1918-1919

...It must be looked upon as a surprising phenomenon that this people, who unlike the Bulgarians, the Czechs and others have had neither Kings or Emperors, neither iron or tin crown as a national emblem, to boast of, should have always remained Kurds in spite of all....¹

~Frederick Millingen

Throughout this chapter the movements of nationalism and self-determination will be analyzed in the context of the Middle East. This chapter will provide context to who the Kurds were in the early 20th century before the Great War and how this identity helped shape both their war and post-war experience. This chapter will also shed light on the British Political Officers stationed in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, and the varying opinions of these men, and how they viewed Kurdish nationalism. In the first year after the war, the British Political Officers and the Kurds lived and worked closely together, sometimes harmoniously and sometimes not. In this beginning stage, the Kurds had the global support of the British, but did not have the solidarity to constitute a nationalist group. Ultimately, in this first year the Kurds lost the support of the British.

¹ “Note on the Kurdish Situation: A Report on Aspects of the Kurdish Situation,” E-Text. Edited by A.L.P. Burdett. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge Archive Editions, 2015. *Records of the Kurds: Territory, Revolt and Nationalism, 1831-1979, Volume 5: 1914-1920*. 432.

The Kurds Under Ottoman Rule

The Kurds had long lived a nomadic lifestyle in the mountainous region at the heart of the Ottoman Empire, extending into Persia which was controlled by the Qajar Dynasty (modern day Iran).² The Kurds were historically divided into three different groups. The Badinan Kurds, who lived between the Greater Zab and Van; the Suran Kurds who lived between the two Zabs, and the Baban Kurds who lived between the Lesser Zab and Sirwan.³ Aside from geographic differences, the main difference between these groups of Kurds, was that the Badinan Kurds spoke a different dialect of Kurdish than the other two groups.^{4 5} It is important to note this discrepancy when national identity in this era was largely founded on a shared language. The Kurds did all speak Kurdish, but there were different dialects that were true to their tribes, thus further demonstrating the lack of solidarity in the Kurds as a whole.

Despite living under Ottoman rule for centuries, the Kurds lived a tribal life and were fiercely loyal to both their tribes and their religion. Due to the tribal loyalties, there were clashes and deep-seated rivalries between Kurdish tribes. Before the rise of nationalism, Kurds had lived as Ottoman citizens, but also as members of a larger religious community. The Ottoman Empire was the center of Islam, as the Sultan also served as the Caliph (the “successor of the Messenger of God” or the head of the Islamic state).⁶ Religious identity came first, before linguistic identity. According to an official Ottoman census of the pre-war empire, there were 18.5 million citizens,

² McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 7-8.

³ Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950: A Political, Social and Economic History* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, Second ed 1956) 8.

⁴ The language is known both as Kurdi and Kurdish

⁵ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 8.

⁶ "Caliph." Encyclopædia Britannica. November 02, 2017. Accessed January 09, 2018.
<https://www.britanica.com/topic/caliph>.

with 15 million deemed Muslim.⁷ The classification of “Muslim” included Turks, Kurds, and Arabs alike and did not separate out into linguistic or nationalist groups, thus illustrating how important religious identity was. It follows, then, that Kurds were first a citizen of the Ottoman Empire, and second a member of the Caliphate. The Ottoman Empire was then broken down utilizing the millet system, which allowed each millet to be ruled by an elected religious leader who would rule in accordance to the appropriate religious law: Islamic Sharia law, Christian Canon law or Jewish Halakha.⁸ Due to the millet system utilized in the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds and other religious groups of people, Christians and Jews, enjoyed a relative sense of freedom. Over time, the freedom of the millet system decreased, especially after the 1908 Young Turk revolution.⁹

The Ottoman Empire had a long-standing history of religious violence, and the Kurds were no exception. The Kurds were serious in their devotion to their religion of Islam of the Sunni sect. Under Sultan Abd al Hamid in 1891 a special Kurdish cavalry was created, known as the Hamidiya Cavalry.¹⁰ This Cavalry promoted both tribal life and religious devotion. The commanding officer of each regiment was a tribal chief who was sent to Constantinople to be educated and outfitted in Cossack-style uniforms.¹¹ The official purpose of this cavalry was to act as a wall between the Ottomans and the Russians, however many cavalry leaders disregarded this mission and pursued personal missions, ie. the pillage of Christian Armenian villages.¹² Though these events are outside the original time frame designated for this paper, they are

⁷ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 13.

⁸ "Millet." Encyclopædia Britannica.

⁹ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 92.

¹⁰ McDowall, 56.

¹¹ McDowall, 59.

¹² McDowall, 59-60.

significant because they point to a time when the Kurds did act in solidarity. Though the Kurds were under Ottoman Rule, they were given the freedom to live their traditional nomadic tribal lifestyle. They were given authority under the millet system and the Hamidaya Cavalry. This authority was partially wielded in unsavory ways, but it was a time when the Kurds had something in common other than their language: a longstanding hatred for their Christian Armenian neighbors.

The tide of global change was felt in the Middle East and reached the Ottoman Empire with the overthrow of the Sultan Abdul-Hamid II in 1908. The Young Turks moved the Ottoman Empire in a more modern direction, while the Kurds clutched tightly to their traditions in resistance to change. The Kurds disliked the new terms that the Young Turks brought with them: “nation” and “society” to replace their traditional structure of millet and Caliphate.¹³ One Kurd, Mufti of Karput stated in reaction to the revolution: “This is the end of Islam.”¹⁴ The Kurds clung to the old ways of the Sultan/Caliph, and a time when they had experienced much autonomy.¹⁵ Even before the Great War in the Ottoman Empire, like elsewhere in the world, friction was arising between the old and the new, between modern and traditional. In this case, the Kurds represented those who were resistant to change, and who had a nostalgia for their traditional way of life.

Not all Kurds, however, continued to live the tribal and traditional lifestyle, there were Kurdish elites who lived in Constantinople. These Kurds were educated and well aware of the nationalist movement that was sweeping the globe. They created several societies and groups to

¹³ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 96.

¹⁴ McDowall, 96.

¹⁵ McDowall, 88.

help promote Kurdish nationalism, one of them being “The Society for the Rise and Progress of Kurdistan.”¹⁶ The 1908 Young Turk Revolution brought a stop to many of these Kurdish societies. The Young Turks had their own nationalist movement, known as the Committee of Union and Progress, (The CUP), whose purpose was to promote modernity.¹⁷ The idea of Ottoman brotherhood and solidarity among Muslims in the caliphate were pushed aside, and Turkish identity was seen as superior to all else. Many Kurdish societies were forcibly shut down and their leaders exiled, like Sharif Pasha who represented the Kurds at the Paris Peace Conference. It is important to note that these educated Kurds fostered nationalist ideals and societies even before the Great War, however, it is also important to understand that they did not represent the general sentiments of the Kurds. The Kurdish leaders in Constantinople, and then in exile were few in number, and had abandoned the tribal lifestyle that the majority of the Kurds practiced. The Kurds that resided in Constantinople were regarded by the Kurds in Kurdistan as foreign and as culturally different as the Turks.¹⁸

The Kurds and the Armenian Genocide

The Great War brought back the idea of Muslim brotherhood between the Turks and the Kurds; and brought even more conflict between the Kurds and the Armenians. At the outset of the war, the Armenians sided with the Russians. Religious cleansing became a dark reality of the Great War in the Middle East, as the Sultan/Caliph declared a jihad (holy war) on the Christian

¹⁶ McDowall, 93.

¹⁷ McDowall, 94.

¹⁸ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 8-9.

infidel.¹⁹ The Council of Ministers in Constantinople gave the order to deport anyone suspected of “treason and espionage,” an order directed at the Armenians who had been working with the Russians.²⁰ The Kurds, however, had already taken measures into their own hands by this time. Violence erupted: fueled by a long history of religious conflict between the two populations who had lived side by side in tension for generations.

One account states that by April 1915 Kurdish tribesmen were: “sweeping the countryside, massacring men, women, and children and burning their homes. Babies were shot in their mother’s arms, small children were horribly mutilated, women were stripped and beaten.”²¹ Kurdish acts like this, along with the atrocities committed by the Turks, led to the death of one million Armenians over the next year. It should be noted that there were cases when Kurds sheltered Armenians from the brutality, however, this was the exception not the rule.²² The Armenians were not innocent victims though. In one case in 1914, when Russian and Armenian forces went through an area mostly populated by Kurds, only one tenth of the population survived.²³ An American missionary, Dr. Usher, recalled how “the Turks when they evacuated the town, left one of their hospitals behind, and how an Armenian lad of 15 succeeded in breaking in before the Russians arrived, and proceeded to blow out the brains of the sick, and helpless men as they lay in their beds.”²⁴

¹⁹ "The First World War and the Dissolution of the Caliphate." History of Islam. November 22, 2015. Accessed January 09, 2018. <https://historyofislam.com/contents/resistance-and-reform/the-first-world-war-and-the-dissolution-of-the-caliphate/>.

²⁰ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 103.

²¹ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 104.

²² “Note on the Kurdish Situation,” 435.

²³ McDowall, 103.

²⁴ “Note on the Kurdish Situation,” 436-437.

This brutal and indiscriminate killing in the mountainous region of the Ottoman Empire was felt on all sides. Entire Kurdish villages were wiped out. One Kurdish tribe made up of 1000 families before the war, the Bardust tribe, had only 157 families survive the war.²⁵ Not only had extreme violence decimated the population, but also the starvation that usually accompanies war due to destroyed resources continued to wreak havoc. “By November 1918 [Sulaymaniya] had dropped from its pre-war population of 20,000 to 2,500 and ‘dead bodies were collected in the bazaar every morning, and in some cases people were eating their dead babies.’”²⁶ This was the situation that the British arrived at in Kurdistan after the war. They brought with them resources and aid to nurse the starving and injured Kurds back to health. Immediately after the war the Kurds welcomed the British with open arms, as no one else was there to provide help in this severely desperate time.²⁷

The British Political Officers

The British had a long-standing interest in the Ottoman Empire and had a presence there even before the war. A wide array of personalities were stationed there, and when it came to the post-war era, there were many different opinions on what should be done. The men who lived and worked among the Kurds are less known in popular culture than some of the people who worked alongside the Arabs, such as T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) or Gertrude Bell, who both have feature films made about them, but they were just as influential. Major Edward Noel worked closely with the Kurds and greatly believed in their independence. Major Noel was

²⁵ McDowall, 108.

²⁶ McDowall, 108.

²⁷ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 108-109.

described by J.B. Hohler, a British political adviser in Constantinople, as “a nice fellow, but he is another fanatic...I am afraid Noel may turn out a Kurdish Col. [T.E.] Lawrence.”²⁸ Whether this discredits Noel or gives him more credit is a matter of opinion.

What is clear is that Major Noel knew the Kurds and believed desperately in their right to self-determination, while also recognizing that there were profound differences between the Kurdish tribes. To remedy these differences, Noel argued that three different independent Kurdistans should be created: Southern, Central and Western. These three different Kurdistans would utilize natural geographic borders and would ease tribal tensions among the Kurds and Arabs alike.²⁹ Noel’s plan would keep the Kurds independent from the Arabs, a people that the Kurds believed they were superior to. Noel aimed at creating a system where the traditional tribal lifestyle could be met with British tutelage and modernity in Kurdistan. He hoped to create a system where “laws will be modified to conform with local custom and usage,” allowing tribal leaders autonomy, but still under British tutelage stationed in Baghdad.³⁰ Noel had both the interests of the Kurds and of the British in mind and hoped to marry the two cultures peacefully in a way that would benefit all.

In an extensive note regarding the situation of Kurdistan, now a part of the archive housed at Cambridge, *Records of the Kurds*, several aspects of Kurdish culture and history are described. There is no author given, however the collectors of the archive believe that this note was written by Noel. Under this assumption, in this note, Noel built a case that the Kurds were

²⁸ McDowall, 128.

²⁹ Ihsan Serif Kaymaz, "Britain's Policy toward Kurdistan at the End of the First World War." *Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Summer-Fall 2011, 10, no. 2-3 (2011): 101-25. Accessed November 20, 2016. www.alternativejournal.net. 104.

³⁰ Major E.W.C. Noel, “Circular Memo. No 43/ dated December 8th 1918” E-Text. Edited by A.L.P. Burdett. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge Archive Editions, 2015. *Records of the Kurds: Territory, Revolt and Nationalism, 1831-1979, Volume 5: 1914-1920*. 191.

their own nationalist group on grounds of a shared language, a shared history, and other “national characteristics.” He illustrated that there was a distinct Kurdish language, one with several different dialects, but distinct all the same.³¹ Throughout this note, Noel compared the Kurds to the Armenians several times, pointing to the long standing shared history of the Kurds, which was much larger than the Armenians. It is clear that Noel believed the Kurds to be a more distinct nationalist group than the Armenians, arguing that if only one should self-determine it ought to be the Kurds. Noel accused the Western world of painting the Kurds unjustly as barbarians and feared this would taint the Kurds in the eyes of the politicians in Paris. He stated:

Unfortunately, the Kurd is regarded in Europe as a wild and barbarous individual, whose chief business in life is to massacre Armenians. It is difficult to understand how this very false impression has become current, since every foreign traveller of note in Kurdistan has always come away with a very favourable impression of the Kurd. However, owing to the activities of the Missionary Press and the very strong pro-Armenian Party in England, a general opinion unfavourable to the Kurds is current.³²

This is the opinion of a man who lived among the Kurds, a man who was accused of being a fanatic. But, perhaps, this accusation was due to an unpopular belief that a people deemed barbarous were fit for self-rule and self-determination. The bias of the Western World against the Kurds can obviously be attributed to their part in the Armenian Genocide, but it is clear that there was great violence on both sides. More Muslims were killed than Armenians in Anatolia, but the deaths of the Armenians equaled over one third of their population, while the deaths of the Muslims equaled one fifth of their population.³³ Noel illuminated the post-war world in his note:

³¹ “Note on the Kurdish Situation,” 430.

³² “Note on the Kurdish Situation,” 431.

³³ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 18.

one dominated by Christian nations that painted the Armenians as innocent victims, with little mention of the atrocities that they committed on their Muslim neighbors.

Sir Arnold Wilson was the British Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia and essentially oversaw all the Political Officers stationed in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, including Major Noel. He was usually the one corresponding with the politicians in London and at the Paris Peace Conference. Sir Wilson's main loyalty was to the British Empire and to the creation of Mesopotamia as a British protectorate, or mandate once the new rhetoric was agreed upon at the Paris Peace Conference. Unlike Noel, who believed in the Kurds ability and right to self-determine, Sir Wilson regarded the Kurds as a strategic barrier between Mesopotamia and potential northern enemies: the Turks and the now Bolshevik Russians. This does not mean that Sir Wilson did not recognize the Kurds as a distinct people. He described them as:

...Their language is perhaps the most ancient tongue in western Asia, with affinities to Avestic and Pahlawi; the numerous dialects differ so much that men of Sulaimani are scarcely understood in 'Amadiya.... They are separated from their neighbors by lofty mountains, and until quite recently almost entirely independent of the outside world, with which they had few dealings and no acquaintance. They were until recently almost wholly devoid of racial solidarity: the only law they knew was that of the tribe; the only loyalty, and that readily transferable, was to their tribal leaders.³⁴

Sir Wilson did believe that the Kurds were a distinct people, however he recognized that the Kurds were also a tribal people with many tribal rivalries that were both complex and long standing. He explained in this quotation that the Kurds had little dealings with the outside world,

³⁴ Sir Arnold Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1921: A Clash of Loyalties*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1931) 127.

which was not entirely true. The Hamidaya Chiefs had been sent to Constantinople for training and education, which they took back to their people. This misunderstanding points to a disparity between Sir Wilson and Noel. Noel had lived among the Kurds, while Sir Wilson spent most of his time in the Middle East in the city of Baghdad. Sir Wilson proposed the creation of a single Kurdistan, one that disregarded tribal differences, and would include the vilayets of Kharput, Bitlis, Van and Diyarbekir.³⁵ Despite his recognition that the Kurds had tribal rivalries and spoke different dialects, Sir Wilson was unconcerned with creating more conflict between the Kurds and was more concerned with grouping people in the manner that best fit the British Empire's agenda. This was very much an "old-world" solution.

Sir Arnold Wilson and Major Edward Noel both played a pivotal role in the future of the Kurds, and though they were both active members of the British Imperial Military, they understood the situation in the Middle East differently. Major Noel believed in the Kurds and in their distinct nationalist identity. He hoped to create three independent nations for them. Sir Wilson, though believing in their distinct national identity, had the priorities of the British Empire at the forefront of his mind. Sir Wilson's ideas, though may seem heartless, or unconcerned with what was best for the Kurds, was practical. He was well aware of the weakness of the British military after the war and hoped to find a compromise between Kurdish independence and what was rationally possible for the diminished British military. There were many other influential British Political Officers in the Middle East that will not be analyzed in this paper because these two were the most instrumental in the future of the Kurds.

³⁵ Kaymaz, "Britain's Policy toward Kurdistan," 105.

Creating Kurdistan

Sir Wilson sent Major Noel to work with the Kurdish chiefs to try and appoint a singular leader, as this would be the first step towards self-determination. At this meeting, Noel was instructed by Wilson: “You are authorized to appoint Shaikh Mahmud as our representative in Sulaimani, should you consider this expedient, and to make other appointments of this nature at Chamchamal, Halebja, &c., at your discretion.”³⁶ Shaykh Mahmud was identified by the British as a potential leader “with his personal following and prestige, [as] the only candidate for south Kurdish Government; but he was unbalanced, violent-tempered, and childish.”³⁷ There were other leaders who resided in Constantinople, men who were educated and accustomed to the Western ways that would have made suitable leaders, however these men had long been out of touch with the tribal lifestyle of the Kurds still residing in Kurdistan.³⁸ They would never have been accepted by the Kurds as their leader. Sharif Pasha, in Paris, even offered to “shoulder the burden” of being the leader of Kurdistan, but the political officers in the Middle East recognized that he was out of touch with the tribal leaders.³⁹

Upon arrival in Sulaymaniaya, Noel met with Shaykh Mahmud to determine if he would be fit as a leader for Southern Kurdistan. Noel was hesitant about Shaykh Mahmud’s ability to lead and his motivation. He noted that the district of Sulaymaniaya had been one of the most chaotic before the Great War, and that much of this chaos was caused by Shaykh Mahmud and

³⁶ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1921*, 128.

³⁷ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 104.

³⁸ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 123

³⁹ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 121.

his followers.⁴⁰ Despite this recognition, Noel speculated that perhaps his behavior was that of “the natural expression of revolt on the part of an oppressed people,” and that Shaykh Mahmud might act better under the British than the Turks.⁴¹ In recognition of the amount of influence that the Shaykh had in this area, and an understanding of the weakened British military, Noel grappled with the situation in a letter:

.... the problem which faces us here is primarily one of practical politics. The influence of Shaikh Mahmud exists...without the full measure of co-operation and assistance which he is giving us now, it would probably be necessary to bring in a strong garrison, a course to which I understand H.B.M.'s Government is very much opposed. From the political point of view it is also of importance that the peace should be kept in this area without the assistance of British troops.⁴²

It is clear from this letter that Major Noel did not necessarily believe in the motivations of Shaykh Mahmud, but did not see a better way. He even asked: “whether it is to the real interests of Kurdistan [or] ourselves to magnify the power and authority of Shaikh Mahmud.”⁴³ Noel recognized the lack of manpower due to the post-war weakness of the British military, and he acknowledged that no other Kurd held as much support as Shaykh Mahmud. Because of these two factors, Major Noel supported the appointment of Shaykh Mahmud, mainly for lack of a better option.

Sir Wilson arrived in Sulaymaniya in December 1918 after Noel had met with the Kurdish chiefs. Ultimately at this meeting the Kurdish chiefs agreed to Shaykh Mahmud as their leader, though many did so reluctantly. The meeting did not go smoothly and dissention among

⁴⁰ Noel, “Circular Memo. No 43,” 189.

⁴¹ Noel, 189.

⁴² Noel, 189.

⁴³ Noel, 193.

the chiefs was clear. Some of the Kurds proposed being a British protectorate that was ruled from London not Baghdad, as this would give them much of the same freedom that they had had under the Ottoman Turks.⁴⁴ In the end, Shaykh Mahmud was elected leader. He presented Sir Wilson a document that had been signed by 40⁴⁵ Kurdish chiefs:

His Majesty's Government having announced that their intention to liberate the Eastern peoples from Turkish oppression and to grant assistance to them in the establishment of their independence, the chiefs, as the representatives of the people of Kurdistan, beg [the] Government to accept them as also under British protection and to attach them to 'Iraq so that they may not be deprived of the benefits of that association. They request the Civil Commissioner of Mesopotamia to send them a representative with the necessary assistance to enable the Kurdish people under British auspices to progress peacefully on civilized lines. If Government extends its assistance and protection to them, they [will] undertake [to] accept its orders and advice.⁴⁶

In this initial phase, the Kurdish leaders expressed the desire to be attached to Mesopotamia, (Iraq) under British Protection. In this system Shaykh Mahmud would act as Governor, while there would be subdivisions with appointed Kurdish officials that would work under the guidance of British Political Officers.⁴⁷ This would allow the Kurds to maintain some level of their tribal system, while also practicing a Western political system.

Conclusion

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1921*, 129.

⁴⁵ This figure is disputed. While Sir Arnold Wilson says 40 chiefs in his book *Mesopotamia 1917-1921* on page 129, Serif claims it was 60 chiefs on page 107 of "Britain's Policy toward Kurdistan."

⁴⁶ Wilson, 129.

⁴⁷ Wilson, 128.

It is clear from this chapter that there was dissention among the Kurds, but initially a willingness to work with the British. The British, after all, had arrived first with aid and assistance. The Kurds were aware of the changing world, as they had felt the changes even before the Great War with the 1908 Young Turk revolution. The British were trying hard to find a way to create an independent Kurdistan, a way that did not involve extensive British military or economic support. When the British proposed the idea of having one Governor, Shaykh Mahmud, who would rule over several divisions with appointed Kurdish leaders, a connection to the power structures of the old world was recognized. This system would allow the Kurds to live a lifestyle similar to the one they had under the millet system.

At this stage, the potential for an independent Kurdistan was real. The British stationed in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan recognized the nationalist identity of the Kurds and, despite differing motivations, believed in the creation of an independent Kurdistan. The Kurds had the support of one of the leading powers in the post-war era, and for a small sliver of time, they acted with solidarity. The next chapter will explain how both components needed to create an independent nation-state, global support and solidarity, slipped out of existence for the Kurds and the potential for an autonomous Kurdistan was lost.

Chapter 3: Descent into Chaos

1919-1920

*...there was nothing to be done by us in 'Iraq but to stand and wait, in the Miltonian sense, and to do what we could to meet the rising storm.'*¹

~Sir Arnold Wilson

*To so many, independence merely means independence from all restraints and laws... which conclusively show[s] that national movements, unless kept in check and controlled, lead to disaster.*²

~Major Edward Noel

After the initial state of desperation that had first welcomed the British aid subsided, it became clear that the British were not as welcome as they first believed. The year of 1919 saw the end of the Paris Peace Conference, with a few potential solutions considered, but no real decisions made about what to do in the Middle East. This lack of a direction led to chaos, as loyalties shifted among the Kurds between the British, Turkish and Kurdish leaders. This chapter explores the changes in these relationships as the Middle East remained waiting in suspension about what the future held. During this long wait, the power vacuum that had been left by the end of the Great War, was beginning to turn back to the former balance of power as the Turks regained strength. The Turkish momentum came not from the traditions of the Sultan or the Ottoman Empire, but from a new sense of Turkish nationalism fostered by Mustafa Kemal. This

¹ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1921*, 251

² Noel, "Circular Memo. No 43," 191.

shift in power vied for Kurdish support on a pan-Islamic platform that proved to be incredibly effective.

Tension Between the Kurds and the British

Shortly after the meeting of the Kurdish chiefs and Sir Arnold Wilson in December of 1918, when Shaykh Mahmud was established as the acting Governor, things took a turn for the worse. Within a few weeks of the signing, the support for Shaykh Mahmud quickly unraveled. Sir Wilson recalled that the chiefs had first accepted Shaykh Mahmud “not from any liking or desire for his rule, but from fear of his power and because he had led them to understand that the British were ready to establish his Governorship, if necessary, by force.”³ When it became clear, however, that Britain would not support an all-encompassing Kurdistan that included the Kurds across the Persian border, many of the mountain chiefs retracted their support for Shaykh Mahmud.⁴ They knew that with the exclusion of the Persian Kurds, Shaykh Mahmud’s power was crippled, as this was the area that most supported him. The more educated Kurds of the cities had never supported him and were insulted at the prospect of being ruled by a tribal chief from the mountains.⁵ The loss of Shaykh Mahmud’s support illustrates how torn the Kurds truly were.

With the facade of Kurdish solidarity crumbling, Shaykh Mahmud moved away from cooperation with the British. By the Spring of 1919 an all-encompassing Kurdistan was off the

³ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1921*, 134-135.

⁴ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 119.

⁵ Kaymaz, "Britain's Policy toward Kurdistan," 108.

table. The Persian border would stand, and the Kurds on the other side of it were not given the opportunity to self-determine. This did not sit well with Shaykh Mahmud who was a descendant of the Kurds across the Persian border, and had many supporters there who were both loyal and influential to him. Major Noel commented on Shaykh Mahmud:

By nature he is of an expansive and exuberant disposition, influenced by the person who has the last word with him. Unfortunately he is surrounded by a class of busybodies who fill his head with extravagant and silly notions. These take the form of styling himself the ruler of all of Kurdistan.⁶

It was across the border, away from the British eye, that Shaykh Mahmud secretly raised a rebellious force from his kinsmen, men who were willing to fight for him to become the leader of all of Kurdistan. With this force of 300 men, Shaykh Mahmud successfully took control of Sulaymaniya from the local Kurdish chiefs and proclaimed himself the chief of an independent, united, and free Kurdistan. Sir Wilson recollected that “[Shaykh Mahmud] raised his own flag, issued his own postage stamps, and appointed his own retainers to take control of every district.”⁷ Theoretically this movement by Shaykh Mahmud was the embodiment of the “self-determined” ideal, however without the support of the majority of the Kurdish tribes, it failed. Due to the weakened British military it took weeks to gather enough forces to put down Shaykh Mahmud.⁸ Forces had to be consolidated from far corners of Mesopotamia, but the British eventually put down the rebellion on June 17, 1919 through a harrowing ambush in the mountains led by British General Fraser.⁹

⁶ Noel, “Circular Memo. No 43,” 192.

⁷ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1921*, 136-137.

⁸ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 104-105.

⁹ Wilson, 137-138.

Shaykh Mahmud was suppressed for the time being. He was wounded, captured and sentenced to death (a sentence that was overturned in favor of long term imprisonment.)¹⁰ The end of this rebellion brought a calm to nationalistic feelings of the Kurds, if at least temporarily. By the end of the year, Political Officer Longrigg recalled that the year of 1919 was “in spite of incidents of violence, one of restoration in most districts to social and economic normality, and fair hopes of progress.”¹¹ This sense of tranquility, however, was not shared by all British Political officers, as Sir Arnold Wilson felt an underlying tension that Longrigg did not. Because all of the British Political Officers in the Mesopotamia and Kurdistan reported to Sir Wilson, he was privy to a wider understanding of the situation than Longrigg. Sir Wilson got the impression that other Kurdish tribes were simply waiting for the right time to rise up against the foreign and infidel British Empire.

In August 1919, a series of telegrams were exchanged between the India Office and Sir Arnold Wilson. The India Office expressed in their telegram that the British had offered to help the Kurds due to the belief that they would welcome it, but after the Shaykh Mahmud uprising earlier that year, that sentiment had changed, and the British Foreign Office was hesitant to aid the Kurds.¹² In response, Wilson warned against leaving the Kurds to their own devices. He recognized that, though Shaykh Mahmud’s uprising was fought strongly, it only consisted of 300 men. If the Kurds were to unite, it would be more difficult to put down a larger force, for they not only knew the terrain, but the post-war British military was severely weakened and were slowly pulling out of Mesopotamia.¹³ In the year of 1919, the British military shrank to one third

¹⁰ Longrigg, 105.

¹¹ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 105.

¹² Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1921*, 142

¹³ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 129.

of its war time size, and was spread thinner than ever, as it was taking on more territory on a global scale, not just in Mesopotamia.¹⁴ Sir Wilson called for continued British influence in a telegram, on grounds of a rumor of anti-British propaganda from the Turks. This dialogue between Sir Wilson and the India Office illustrates two things. First, after the Shaykh Mahmud uprising, the British government was losing faith in the idea of an independent Kurdistan, and second, that there were more players than just the Kurds and the British. The Turks were also vying for Kurdish support with the usage of propaganda.

After the Shaykh Mahmud rebellion, Major Noel was replaced in Sulaymaniya, and was sent on a mission throughout the region to gather information about Kurdish nationalist sentiment and the Turko-Kurdish relationship. Noel reported “anti-British agitation was due to the fear of a policy of retaliation against Muslims for their massacre of Christians [during the war].”¹⁵ Noel suggested that a “general amnesty” be granted to Kurds for acts done during the war either on their own accord or at the orders of the Turks. The British diplomats in Europe didn’t approve of this plan because it would be a “radical shift” in their policy, while the British Political Officers in Constantinople and Baghdad did, including Sir Arnold Wilson.¹⁶ This exchange is important, as it demonstrates the lack of a common understanding between the British about what should be done with the Kurds.

As explained in the previous chapters, the Western world had a long-standing history of defending their Christian brothers in the Middle East: the Armenians. In 1895, delegates from Britain, France and Russia had pushed for reforms in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman

¹⁴ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 42.

¹⁵ Kaymaz, "Britain's Policy toward Kurdistan," 110.

¹⁶ Kaymaz, 110.

Empire, calling for an end of the Kurdish Hamidiya cavalry.¹⁷ This long-standing support from the Western world, which was often in opposition to the Kurds, as was the case in 1895, built a level of Kurdish distrust for the British. The imminent threat of being ruled by them struck fear and discomfort into the hearts of the most traditional Kurdish leaders. Not only were the British Christians, but they had also been allies with the Russians, the very people who had brought death and destruction to Kurdistan throughout the war.¹⁸ The Kurds feared that the British would aid their Christian brothers, the Armenians and bring them back to the homes that they were driven from. They feared living again “amid the hated sound of church bells and [under] the rule of bishops.”¹⁹ The Kurds were devout Muslims, and most were unwilling to give up their traditional religious ways.

The Kurds had reason to mistrust the British agenda besides divergent religious beliefs. While the political officers were trying to help the Kurds unite to form an independent Kurdistan, the western powers in Europe were debating what would work best for them in regard to Kurdistan. Taking on a mandate would give the Allied powers strategic influence, but it would also require resources and military might. With the status of the British military, the thought of taking on an all-encompassing Kurdistan as a mandate was daunting, especially when they were taking on other areas as mandates as well. They were stretched thin, and so the solution of splitting Kurdistan between the French and the British arose. This possibility of an Anglo-French partition did not sit well with the Kurds. In Paris, Sharif Pasha kicked off a campaign to fight this solution. He argued that the Kurds would rather remain under Turkish rule with the semi-autonomous status that they had known before the war than be partitioned

¹⁷ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 61.

¹⁸ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 101.

¹⁹ Longrigg, 101-102.

between mandated powers.²⁰ Sharif Pasha believed in the Kurdish nationalist movement and was still fighting in Paris at this time for Kurdish self-determination. Pasha did not want any Kurds under the French, who were Catholic and had been clear about their religious agenda in the Middle East.²¹

The Rise of Turkey

The Ottoman Empire, more specifically the Turkish people who ruled the Ottoman Empire, was experiencing a shift of power that would ultimately impact the fate of the Kurds. Before the Great War had even ended, Sultan Mehmed V who had lived through the 1908 revolution and the beginning of the Great War, passed away. He was succeeded by his younger brother, Vahdettin, who took the title Sultan Mehmed VI.²² The authority of the Sultan had been weakened after the 1908 revolution, and the Sultan recognized the potential to gain back power by building a friendship with the Allies and blaming the war on the Young Turks. As noted in chapter one, Sultan Mehmed VI sent a representative to the Paris Peace Conference to plea for Ottoman self-determination. While the Sultan was grasping at lost territory and lost power, a true Turkish nationalist movement was growing.

The growing Turkish nationalist movement was born out of the Young Turk movement of the 1908 revolution that was centered around Turkish pride and modernity. Many of the leaders that emerged had been members of the CUP and had also served in the military during

²⁰ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 132-133.

²¹ Longrigg, 4.

²² Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 20.

the Great War. These men were young and vivacious due to a purge of senior command of the Ottoman military following the loss of the Balkan Wars, prior to the Great War. Commanders who had been promoted in rank during the Great War had done so on merit and ability, rather than on connections and corruption as was previously standard.²³ When the Ottoman Empire was defeated at the end of the Great War, many of the Turkish nationalist leaders in the military had moved troops and weapons to the interior of Anatolia to wait until the time was right to rise up again against the Allies. Turkish defeat was not an option for the nationalist leaders. Three of these young generals emerged as leaders in the Turkish nationalist movement, Mustafa Kemal, Kazim Karabekir and Ali Fuad.²⁴ Due to his ambition, tactical capacity, and political savvy, Mustafa Kemal proved to be the most influential and ultimately rose to be the leader.

Mustafa Kemal's ambition enabled him to gain the trust of the Sultan early on, with the hope of exploiting this trust.²⁵ This opportunity arose in May 1919, when Kemal was appointed the new inspector-general of the Ninth Army by the Allied powers. Rather than advocating for obedience to the Allied powers in Constantinople, as he was instructed, he fostered local support for resistance to them.²⁶ The Allies instructed the Sultan to recall Kemal, however, Kemal took this new found strength to break away from the Sultan and the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ Kemal continued to pursue the nationalist movement, and on April 23, 1920, helped found the Grand National Assembly in Ankara.²⁸ The creation of this assembly, pushed by the British occupation

²³ Mango, 53.

²⁴ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 54.

²⁵ Mango, 20.

²⁶ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 127.

²⁷ Mango, 61.

²⁸ Gavin D. Brockett, "When Ottomans Become Turks: Commemorating the Conquest of Constantinople and Its Contribution to World History." *American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (n.d.): 399-433. *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 18, 2018). 410.

of Constantinople in March 1920, marked the beginning of the end of the Ottoman Empire. During this occupation, the British rounded up leading nationalists in Constantinople, but many were able to flee to Ankara to join the Assembly.²⁹ The founding of the Assembly proved to have profound implications that will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Mustafa Kemal believed in Turkish superiority, but he also was a realist who recognized that the Turks no longer had any allies. To gain allies against the foreign and imperialistic British, Kemal courted both the Muslim community (Kurds included) and the newly Bolshevik Russians. Kemal had no intention of allowing the Turkey that he was creating to become Communist, however, he did recognize the fear that revolved around the new political idea on a global level. Kemal hoped to use this fear to his advantage. “He went along with the argument that the Muslim world and Bolshevism had a common enemy in imperialism, and they were, at least to some extent, compatible.”³⁰ Kemal understood that it was better to have an alliance that was grounded only on a mutual enemy than no alliances at all. This same kind of self-interested and false friendship was also extended to the Kurds.

Despite Kemal’s long-term agenda of moving away from the Islamic connection to the Ottoman Empire, Kemal appealed to Kurdish leaders on a religious platform. The Turkish nationalist movement recognized the potential in the Kurds as a force against the Allies and at the beginning of 1919 established the “Committee for Turko-Kurdish Independence,” throughout Kurdistan. These committees were well organized: they armed Kurds and encouraged them to move against the foreign infidels.³¹ Kemal even wrote personal letters to Kurdish chiefs in

²⁹ Mango, 64.

³⁰ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 67.

³¹ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 124

Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Van and Bayazid asking for their support in the Turkish nationalist movement against the Allied powers.³² Kemal kept up the pretense of Islamic devotion at this point to gain the favor of the Kurds, a pretense that turned many Kurdish leaders away from the British and towards Kemal. When the Grand National Assembly was first opened, it was done so with an extensive and extravagant Islamic ritual, thus sending a clear message to their Muslim brothers that they intended to stand in solidarity against the infidels.³³

The summer of 1919, and the advances of the Greeks and the Italians as discussed in chapter one, fueled anti-Christian sentiment. Both the Greeks and the Italians had become impatient by the end of the Paris Peace Conference and in May 1919 the Greeks landed at Smyrna and the Italians landed at Antalya.³⁴ Kemal was able to utilize these landings as propaganda, arguing that the Christian threat was real, and that the Allies had a different agenda than the one they had originally expressed. The only way forward, Kemal argued, was to join together in a pan-Islamic movement. By the end of the summer, this idea was taking root, and on September 23, 1919 Colonel Meinertzhagen sent a telegram to Lord Curzon: "Mustafa Kemal is trying to expel the aliens from his nation by uniting the Turks, Arabs and Kurds."³⁵ Kemal intended to unite all Muslims, Arabs included, and draw on the former brotherhood that they had shared while under Ottoman Rule. This would enable him to remove the foreign, infidel threat of the Western World, and regain the land and the people lost at the end of The Great War.

³² McDowall, 127-128.

³³ Mango, 66.

³⁴ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 125.

³⁵ Suat Zeyrek, "The Role of Kurds in the Struggle for the Foundation of Turkish Republic." *Journal Of History, Culture & Art Research / Tarih Kültür Ve Sanat Arastirmalari Dergisi* 2, no. 1 (March 2013): 20-32. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 9, 2016) 3.

The Kurdish Reaction

Both the French and the British were aware of the rise of Mustafa Kemal and the instability in the Middle East. On the ground, Kurds and Armenians were still fighting over territory. To keep the rising Turkish national movement at bay, the French and the British recognized the need for support from the peoples of the Middle East against the Turks to bolster their weakened military. In Paris, Sharif Pasha, representing the Kurds, and Boghos Nubar, representing the Armenians, encouraged by the Western powers, negotiated peace between the two people and declared together:

We are in complete agreement in jointly seeking from the [Peace] Conference the constitution, in accordance with the principals of nationalities of a united and independent Armenia and an independent Kurdistan, with the assistance of a Great power...We confirm moreover our complete agreement to respect the legitimate rights of the minorities in the two states.³⁶

This joint declaration by representatives of two peoples who had shared a long and violent history could have been a great victory of peace, however these two men were out of touch with their people due to an extended stay in Europe, (Sharif Pasha had been exiled there for 10 years). In Kurdistan, chiefs and urban leaders denounced Sharif Pasha, arguing that he did not represent them. Many were still actively fighting Armenians, and many were also in the process of negotiating with the Turkish nationalists, therefore this sentiment of unity and peace clearly did not accurately represent their beliefs.³⁷

Loyalties among the Kurds were now more divided than ever. Now, rather than simply having religious loyalties or tribal loyalties, the Kurds were drawn into four different directions.

³⁶ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 131.

³⁷ McDowall, 133.

Due partially to the wave of pan-Islamic propaganda, there were around 70 tribes and many prominent urban elites who were loyal to Kemal and the Turkish nationalist party by the fall of 1919.³⁸ The rest of the Kurds were split into three groups, those who still aligned with the British, those who sought autonomy under Turkish rule, and those who sought complete Kurdish independence without a mandate.³⁹ Major Noel noted that only the “more enlightened members of the community” who recognized the need to attach Kurdistan to a British mandate, and that the British political officers had the “none too easy task in persuading the leaders of the people as a whole to accept a long period of tutelage and probation.”⁴⁰

To further complicate Kurdish loyalties, the Turkish government was fracturing. The divide between the Turks, on the one side the Sultan and on the other side Mustafa Kemal, forced the Kurds to be pulled in both directions. Ottoman representative at the Paris Peace Conference, Damad Ferid, now recognized the growing power of Kemal. He reached out to the Kurds, hoping to gain their support against Kemal. He promised the Kurds autonomy under the Ottoman Empire if they joined the fight against Kemal.⁴¹ A group of Young Kurds, visited Sharif Pasha in Europe with an offer from the Sultan for an autonomous status for Kurdistan if they remained under Ottoman rule.⁴² This option seemed to be a better option than the Anglo-French partition. Ferid’s attempt at gaining Kurdish support, however, was far less effective than Kemal’s, as the Kurds recognized the changing order for the Turks.

³⁸ McDowall, 130.

³⁹ McDowall, 129.

⁴⁰ Noel, “Circular Memo. No 43,” 190.

⁴¹ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 132.

⁴² McDowall, 132.

Major Noel was still unwavering in his belief that the Kurds deserved independence and self-determination. The “Society for Advancement in Kurdistan” was created by a group of Kurds in Constantinople with nationalist ambitions, but they believed that this was not possible without British support. Major Noel was their champion and while Kemal was establishing the Grand National Congress, Noel made a desperate attempt to mobilize Kurds in Malatya against the Turks.⁴³ Noel’s mission ultimately failed, and he and his Kurdish comrades were forced to flee to Syria. Because the Kurds of Malatya had been notable for their protection of Armenians during the Great War, many of the Kurds further east did not trust them, or necessarily even identify with them.⁴⁴ Kemal was able to utilize Noel’s enthusiasm for an independent Kurdistan and his friendship with the Malatya Kurds against him, spinning the mission in propaganda to suggest the corrupt and secretive nature of the British Empire.⁴⁵ Kemal’s propaganda gained traction and many Kurds declared loyalty to his movement.

Conclusion

This chapter saw the facade of Kurdish solidarity crumble almost as quickly as it was developed. The exclusion of the Persian Kurds led many chiefs to turn away from Shaykh Mahmud, which led to his uprising. This uprising was short lived but shook the confidence of the British in their quest to support Kurdish self-determination. The possible solutions devised by

⁴³ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 61-62.

⁴⁴ McDowall, 129.

⁴⁵ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 129.

European diplomats of an Anglo-French partition and peace between the Armenians and Kurds illustrated how different the agendas of those in Europe were from those in the Middle East.

By 1920 the Middle East was completely split between loyalties. Some Kurdish tribes sided with the British and wanted to become a British Mandate, others sided with the Turks and hoped for a pan-Islamic state, while others still wanted Kurdish independence without a mandate. Not only had loyalties shifted among the Kurds, but the entire situation in the Middle East had shifted. Within a year and a half of the end of the Great War, the defeated Ottomans were not so defeated anymore. The foundation of the Grand National Assembly and the rise of Mustafa Kemal on his wave of Turkish Nationalism inevitably shifted the direction of the partition of the Ottoman Empire.

The British, who were financially and militarily strapped, were pulling out the Middle East just as a new force was emerging. The Allied delegates in Europe were preoccupied with the other treaties and by the time they met in the spring of 1920 to discuss the partition of the Ottoman Empire, the defeated Ottoman Empire that had previously been in ruins, was rebuilding itself to be stronger and more modern, making the ambitions of the Allies impossible.

Chapter 4: A Shift in Power

1920-1922

Sovereignty and the right to rule cannot be conferred on anyone no matter who...as a result of an academic discussion. Sovereignty is acquired by force and power and violence.¹

~Mustafa Kemal

O my dear they are making such a horrible muddle of the Near East, I confidently anticipate that it will be much worse than it was before the war... It's like a nightmare in which you foresee all the horrible things which are going to happen and can't stretch out your hand to prevent them.²

~Gertrude Bell

This chapter zooms out of the Middle East again to consider the Allied powers in Europe. While the Kurdish loyalties were shifting, and the Turkish Nationalist movement was gaining strength, the loyalties were also shifting among the Allies. This chapter will analyze the decisions and negotiations that led to the Treaty of Sèvres among the Allies, decisions that ultimately were out of touch with the movements that were occurring simultaneously in the Middle East. Later, zooming back in to the Middle East, this chapter will analyze the Turkish Nationalist reaction to the Treaty of Sèvres which ultimately led to the outbreak of the Turkish War for Independence. This chapter will also consider Arab nationalism and an anti-foreign sentiment that was growing in groups of Arabs, Kurds, and Turks. Through all of these

¹ "Mustafa Kemal Ataturk Quote." A-Z Quotes. Accessed January 12, 2018.
<http://www.azquotes.com/quote/952282>.

² MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 400.

movements, the prospect of an independent Kurdistan went from a potential, based on the development of Kurdish solidarity, to a faint and distant memory. This chapter will analyze the shift in priorities for the Allied powers from the Paris Peace Conference to the Treaty of Sèvres, the Turkish fight for independence, a summer of violence, and where the Kurds fit into all of this.

The Treaty of Sèvres

Since the end of the Paris Peace Conference and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, the Allied powers had been busy. It is easy to argue that part of the reason chaos emerged in the Middle East is because decisions as to what the future held took so long, and indeed this is a sound argument. However, it must be remembered that the Allies were dealing with the destruction of multiple empires and the decisions of what to do with many different peoples. They were not only trying to solve the issue of what would become of the Kurds and the rest of the peoples belonging to the former Ottoman Empire, but they were attempting to create a new world order, with the destruction of multiple empires and the construction of many new nation-states across the globe. By the time the Treaty of Sèvres was presented in August 1920, the Allies had drafted and signed four other major treaties to bring an official end to the war in many corners of the world. These treaties included the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, which divided up the German Empire, the treaty with Austria on September 10, 1919, the treaty with Bulgaria on November 27, 1919 and the treaty with Hungary on June 4, 1920.³ Each one of these treaties took weeks of negotiating, debating, and drafting. While all these lengthy treaties

³ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 67.

were being manifested, not only were loyalties shifting in the Middle East, but loyalties were shifting among the Allied powers.

U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, whose ideas had been instrumental during the Paris Peace Conference, became less of a player in the later conferences, and was not involved in the negotiations about the partition of the Ottoman Empire at all. Wilson's health played a large role in this, as he suffered from a debilitating stroke after returning from the Paris Peace Conference in October 1919.⁴ For many reasons that will not be discussed in this paper, the United States Senate refused to endorse the Covenant of the League of Nations, thus plunging the U.S. into a state of isolationism.⁵ This decision had monumental consequences on the global scale. It can be argued that the absence of Woodrow Wilson and the United States had a great effect on the direction the League of Nations went and the way the ideas of the "mandate system" were interpreted. At the close of the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson had alluded to taking on not only the Armenian state as a mandate, but also Constantinople, but with the decision of the Senate this would no longer be.⁶ Now the League of Nations was without the direction of Woodrow Wilson, and the ideas of self-determination and mandatory power were open to even wider interpretation, a liberty that was taken by the other Allies.

Both the French and Italian governments also saw a change in the midst of the many peace conferences. The Italian Prime Minister, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, resigned nine days before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, on June 19, 1919 due to pressure from the labor party and the nationalist party in Italy.⁷ France also saw the resignation of their representative at

⁴ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 50.

⁵ Mango, 50.

⁶ Mango, 46.

⁷ Mango, 50.

the Paris Peace Conference, Clemenceau, in January 1920. He was replaced by Alexandre Millerand.⁸

Due to these changes in leadership among the Allied powers, the conferences leading up to the Treaty of Sevres looked very different than the Paris Peace Conference. While the Paris Peace Conference at least held up the pretense of self-determination and changing the old world of imperialism and secret alliances, the conferences in 1920 seemed to completely forget these concepts. The Allied powers, now the “Big Three,” of Britain, France, and Italy, met in London February 1920 to discuss what would be done with the Ottoman Empire. By this point, the three delegates had opposing agendas and no longer trusted each other. The French had two main aims that drove their negotiations at the London Conference. First, they hoped to preserve Turkish integrity, for they stood to lose influence if the Ottoman Empire was partitioned due to a large debt the Ottomans owed the French; and second was “the imposition of stringent controls which would guarantee the security of French investments.”⁹ The main objective of the British entering the conference was the opening of the Straits, which would have profound economic and military implications.¹⁰ Lloyd George also personally aimed to build the Greeks up in the Middle East in the hopes of building a new ally. As discussed in chapter one, Italy still wanted the land that had been promised to them before even entering the Great War.

Rather than having influence in the Middle East under the mandate system, the Allied leaders now wanted an influence in the more traditional and imperialistic way: as a sphere of influence. Though the U.S. was no longer included in the conferences about the partition of the

⁸ Mango, 50.

⁹ A. E. Montgomery, "The Making of the Treaty of Sevres of 10 August 1920." *The Historical Journal* 15, no. 4 (1972): 775-87. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/stable/2638042>. 779-780

¹⁰ Montgomery, 779-780.

Ottoman Empire, their wishes were still considered, due to the U.S.'s new position as a world power after the Great War. Lord Curzon strongly advised against the sphere of influence partition and instead, advised utilizing the "Open Door" policy in the partitioned Turkey, with each of the Allies adhering to a "self-denying" policy: i.e. recognizing the primacy of influence in each sphere.¹¹ This would allow each country to have a monopoly in their respective sphere, without upsetting the United States, who despite their isolationist position, was still an economic competitor on a global scale. The Allies, especially the Italians, disagreed with Curzon's plan, preferring the security a legitimate sphere of influence would provide them against not only the other allies, but also countries not included in the agreement, such as Russia, Germany and the United States.¹² Through these negotiations it is clear that the Allies did not trust each other, and that they were now more concerned with gaining economic and strategic territory than ensuring the ideas laid out in Wilson's Fourteen Points that they were "obligated" to uphold as the leaders of the League of Nations.

Ultimately, a Tripartite Agreement was settled on in London that looked very similar to the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Each of the Allies would have priority rights in their respective areas. Curzon remained the only anchor to the ideas laid down by Wilson, at least in some respect. Besides priority of rights in these areas, the Allied powers, Curzon insisted, would have to take responsibility for ensuring the safety of the minorities that fell in the area of each sphere of influence.¹³ Curzon also insisted that this tripartite treaty would remain separate from the ultimate peace treaty with Turkey, therefore making it a treaty just between the three Allies.¹⁴ By

¹¹ Montgomery, "The Making of the Treaty of Sèvres," 783.

¹² Montgomery, 783.

¹³ Montgomery, 783.

¹⁴ Montgomery, 783.

doing this, however, Curzon and the Allies moved back towards the old world of secret diplomacy. Moving even further from the idea of self-determination, the Allies at this time also decided that Greece would gain Smyrna under the guise of protecting Christian minorities from Turkish barbarism.¹⁵ The inclusion of Greece in the partition of the Ottoman Empire was largely driven by Lloyd George's vision "of an anglophile Greece standing guard over the Aegean and the Dardanelles."¹⁶ The Greeks had landed at Smyrna in May of 1919 and this treaty would ensure them this land when the Ottoman Empire was officially partitioned.

The London Conference laid the foundation for the Treaty of Sèvres, however the Allies finalized their claims in April in San Remo, Italy.¹⁷ The Allies permitted the Ottoman Empire to send representation to negotiate the terms for the Treaty of Sèvres. The delegate sent by the Ottoman Sultan, Tevfik Pasha, argued that the decisions made by the Allies would completely cripple the Ottomans, making it impossible to remain independent: especially since the Allies insisted on dividing up Constantinople into eight separate jurisdictions.¹⁸ The Allies, still riding the wave of confidence from their victory almost two years prior, issued an ultimatum to the Ottomans in response: "If the Ottoman government did not sign the treaty, or if it was unable to impose its authority in Anatolia, the Allies reserved the right to review their terms and drive the Turks out of Europe forever."¹⁹

They had only ten days to respond, with the Allies demanding an answer by July 27, 1920. Within these ten days, the Greek army occupied the entire coastal region of Anatolia,

¹⁵ Montgomery, "The Making of the Treaty of Sèvres," 784.

¹⁶ Montgomery, 783-784.

¹⁷ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 70.

¹⁸ Mango, 70.

¹⁹ Mango, 71.

minus the shores of the Black Sea. The Ottoman army was weak, but the Sultan did not initially want to submit to the Allies. His advisor and brother-in-law, Grand Vizier Damad Ferid advised: “to reject the terms would be equivalent to committing the sin of suicide. The Ottoman dynasty was like an ancient tree. So long as its roots remained in its native soil, it was capable of new growth”²⁰ The Sultan, therefore, reluctantly agreed to the Allies terms, with the hope of continuing the tradition and legacy of the Ottoman Empire until they could regain strength and rise again. The Ottoman delegation signed the peace Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920.²¹

Regarding the Kurds

Through the clashes of empires, and the rise and fall of leaders, the question of what to do with the Kurds continued to be a difficult problem to solve. In San Remo Lord Curzon refreshed the delegates present of the various stages of how the Allies had tried to solve the Kurdish problem:

First, to form a fringe of autonomous Kurdish states around the borders of the Mosul vilayet; then to divide Kurdistan into French and British spheres of influence; at the last meeting they had decided to cut Britain free from all of Kurdistan, but found themselves ‘in a position where we desired to cut Kurdistan off from Turkey, but were unable to find anyone to set up an autonomous State in that Country.’ Now they found themselves modifying this position to retain southern Kurdistan *pro tem*...²²

²⁰ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 71-72.

²¹ Mango, 73.

²² McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 135.

The Allies had gone through various stages of solutions depending on the situation in the Middle East. The shifting loyalties of the Kurds, the rise of Turkish Nationalism, and the stretched British military complicated potential remedies. Ultimately Lord Curzon recognized Sir Arnold Wilson's plan to incorporate southern Kurdistan into Mesopotamia as the best option at this point. This plan would provide a buffer zone between Britain's new mandate and the growing power of the Turks and the Bolsheviks: plus, with the dwindling British military, it would be easier to defend due to the natural geographic features.²³

Despite Curzon still trying to figure out what to do with the Kurds, the agenda had now shifted from helping them to self-determine, to how to best ensure British interests. In San Remo, though the Allies still aimed at helping the Kurds, but they agreed that they needed the Kurds themselves to prove that they were ready for self-determination. The Allies felt that they needed to first deal with the partition of Turkey before creating an independent Kurdistan, therefore the treaty included a potential, but not an actual, Kurdish solution. Section III, Article 62 of the Treaty of Sevres stated:

A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27....If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the Commission to their respective Governments.²⁴

²³ McDowall, 135.

²⁴ "The Treaty of Sèvres." The Treaty of Sèvres. May 20, 2009. Accessed December 9, 2016. https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I_Articles_1_-_260.

The Allies did not grant the Kurds independence at this point, but they did recognize the potential for an independent Kurdistan. Within 6 months of the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres the “Big Three” would draft a “scheme” to give the Kurds an autonomous state. In order for this Kurdistan to be created, the Kurds, however, would have to show that they were ready and could act with solidarity. This treaty put the power in the Kurds hands, if they could unite they would receive assistance from the Western world.

The Summer of 1920

The Treaty of Sèvres was signed by the Ottoman representatives, under duress of the ultimatum, on August 10, 1920, and on the same day the “Big Three” signed an agreement designating where their spheres of interest would be.²⁵ The Treaty, however, did not consider the changing political climate of the Middle East. Much had changed since they had negotiated terms back in London and again in San Remo. The summer of 1920 had seen an eruption of nationalist demonstrations, not only Turkish, but also Arab. As discussed in the first chapter, the Arab people wanted to create an all-encompassing Arab nation. Throughout the spring of 1920, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon were partitioned out under the guise of “mandates” for both the French and the British, thus crushing the Arab dream. When it was declared in the summer of 1920 that Mesopotamia would be put under British mandatory power, over a third of the region erupted into rebellion, including the Kurds in Mosul.²⁶

²⁵ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 73.

²⁶ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 408.

Violence broke out on all sides. The Kurds and Arabs destroyed railway lines, took towns in the name of nationalism and murdered several British political officers. On the British side, they burned villages, and utilized machine guns mounted to airplanes to put down the rebellions.²⁷ Sir Wilson admitted to utilizing these tactics:

I had taken part in bombing certain Kurdish villages whose occupants had murdered Political officers, and in machine gunning Shaikh Mahmud's insurgents, and had thus learnt something of the possibilities latent in this new arm [airplanes]; the idea of controlling 'Iraq from the air with the assistance of local forces had from the first greatly commended itself to me, and I strongly recommend the scheme.²⁸

Ultimately, Sir Arnold Wilson was replaced in Mesopotamia by Sir Percy Cox, while the diplomats in Europe began to question if Mesopotamia was worth all the effort. Curzon, Churchill and Lloyd George all hoped to keep Mesopotamia if possible, however Churchill was quoted saying: "We are at our wits' end" after the summer of 1920.²⁹ The appointment of Feisal, who had appeared at the Paris Peace Conference with T.E. Lawrence, as the leader of 'Iraq at the suggestion of Cox and Gertrude Bell appeased many of the Arabs, and a general sense of peace was reached in 'Iraq.³⁰

Turkish War for Independence

²⁷ MacMillan, 408.

²⁸ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1921*, 238

²⁹ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 408.

³⁰ MacMillan, 408.

Despite the Ottoman delegates signing the Treaty of Sèvres, the Sultan no longer held much power in the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Kemal had spent the spring of 1920 extending his influence and control. In February his troops attacked the French in Cilicia, which set in motion the Allied occupation of Constantinople.³¹ This move strengthened Kemal's position and enabled him to move the Turkish Nationalist party to Ankara, and establish Grand National Assembly, as discussed in the previous chapter. All of this had been underway while the "Big Three" had been negotiating in London and then in San Remo. Nine days after the Ottoman delegation signed the Treaty of Sèvres, on August 19, 1920, Kemal declared the Ottoman Government guilty of high treason therefore discrediting the Sultan.³² This act began the Turkish War for Independence under Mustafa Kemal and the Grand National Assembly.

The Turkish War for Independence was brutal and was fought by many peoples. The Allied forces fought the war as a proxy war, with the Big Three backing the Greeks and the Armenians and the Bolshevik Russians backing the Turks.³³ This war brought more death and human rights violations to the Middle East, with hundreds of thousands of Greek and Armenian civilian deaths and about 3 million people forced to leave their homes.³⁴ Many of the Kurds who had sided with the Turks joined in the fight. In areas such as Diyarbakir, Mosul and Bitlis regional press publicly announced Kurdish support for the Turks, an example being the heading in one newspaper: "Turkishness and Kurdishness is an inseparable family."³⁵ Another paper noted that: "thousands of Kurdish volunteers fight against the Greeks."³⁶

³¹ Montgomery, "The Making of the Treaty of Sevres," 785.

³² Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 76.

³³ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 138.

³⁴ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 78.

³⁵ Zeyrek, "The Role of Kurds," 8.

³⁶ Zeyrek, 8.

The Turkish War for Independence lasted until August 1922 with the Turks successfully pushing the Greeks out of their country.³⁷ With the Greeks out of Turkey, Kemal directed his troops towards Chanak, where the British were stationed to keep the Dardanelles Strait open, thus ensuring that the trade route remained open.³⁸ The prospect of losing the strait would not only impede economic prosperity for the British, but it was a matter of pride. They Allied powers, specifically the British Empire, had won control of the Straits during the Great War at great cost, and had lost many men there.³⁹ The British military was severely weakened by 1922 and could not send reinforcements to the Straits. Lloyd George called for reinforcements from the British Dominions: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Newfoundland.⁴⁰ To the embarrassment of Lloyd George, the Dominions refused. In desperation, Lord Curzon pleaded with the French to send support. He was denied and reportedly burst into tears in realization that the British had lost to the Turks.⁴¹ The events surrounding the British-Turkish standoff at Chanak would come to be known as the Chanak crisis and inevitably led to the end of the Turkish War for Independence.

With this victory for the Turks, it was clear that the hierarchy of power in the Middle East had shifted. The Allied Powers were now brought back to the negotiating table, only this time not as the victors, but as the defeated. The terms of the Treaty of Sèvres were never ratified and the idea of an independent Kurdistan was now officially off the table. The next chapter will analyze the treaty that brought peace after the Turkish War for Independence.

³⁷ Brockett, "When Ottomans Become Turk," 410.

³⁸ Norman Hillmer, "Chanak Affair," The Canadian Encyclopedia, accessed January 24, 2018, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chanak-affair/>.

³⁹ Mango, 101.

⁴⁰ "Dominion," Encyclopædia Britannica, December 07, 2011, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dominion-British-Commonwealth>.

⁴¹ Mango, 101

Conclusion

The Allied powers were suspended in a state of false power due to the victory of the Great War. From this chapter, it is clear that their ignorance of the movements in the Middle East, along the fallout of trust between them, led to their downfall. The British Empire realized that they were not as powerful as they believed when their Dominions refused to send reinforcements. The Greeks were defeated, and the Western powers lost the last battles of the Great War.

From this chapter a lesson about solidarity and nationalism can be learned. To create a new nation-state solidarity, in some cases, is more important than global support. The Turks joined together and were able to gain the support of many Kurds, to help them “self-determine” as a new nation-state. The Kurds who joined the Turks did so by uniting not from a sense of “nationalism,” but from a shared religion and a shared history. The history of Ottoman brotherhood was called upon here, as well as devotion to the religion of Islam, to create a sense of solidarity that was strong enough to fight for. In this case, the Turks did not have global support. They were supported by the Russians, but they were not supported by the League of Nations, who were supposed to represent global power. Despite these odds, the Turks were able to self-determine by force.

This chapter illuminated how split the Kurds were. The Treaty of Sèvres had given them a chance for an independent Kurdistan. This treaty was never ratified, but even if it had been, there would likely not have been enough Kurdish solidarity to convince the Allies that they were “ready” for self-rule. This is clear from the decision of many Kurds to fight alongside the Turks

against the people who had written into the treaty a plan for their independence. In this sense, the Kurds lost their chance to build a nation because they chose to identify not with Kurdish “nationalism” but with religion and with the shared history of their Ottoman neighbors.

Chapter 5: The New Middle East

1922-1926

The problems discussed round the peace table at Lausanne had not arisen during the last three or four years. Centuries-old scores had to be settled.¹

~Mustafa Kemal

The sympathy which unites Moslem peoples is generally recognised; it is a matter of religion; but it is difficult to appreciate what unit of race can link together Semitic Arabs, Iranian Kurds and Ural-Altaic Turks, or why the fact that they have once been forced to submit to Ottoman rule should bind them to remain in the Ottoman Empire for all time.²

~Lord Curzon

The Turkish War for Independence ended with the Mudanya Armistice in October 1922 and ultimately the Treaty of Lausanne in the summer of 1923. It took five years of negotiating, conferencing, arguing and fighting to make peace after the Great War in the Middle East. The Turks had fought to “self-determine” under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, and the Ottoman Empire no longer existed. The Treaty of Lausanne did not bring peace to the Kurds. They were not included in this treaty as they had been the Treaty of Sèvres, and the Turkish boundary with Iraq was left undeclared. The Mosul vilayet and the Kurds became the new focus of attention for the Turks, the British and ultimately, the League of Nations. This chapter will analyze the Treaty

¹ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 125.

² Lord Curzon. “The Marquess Curzon of Kedleston to Ismet Pasha: [E 14103/13003/44]” E-Text. Edited by A.L.P Burdett. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge Archive Editions, 2015. *Records of the Kurds: Territory, Revolt and Nationalism, 1831-1979, Volume 6: 1921-1926*. 223.

of Lausanne and eventually how the border disputes were settled, leaving the Kurds nationless to this day.

The Treaty of Lausanne

After two years of fighting, the Turkish War for Independence came to an end with the Chanak crisis leading to the Mudanya Armistice, signed on October 11, 1922 by Kemal's government in Ankara and the Allied powers.³ At the signing of this armistice, the parties decided that the official conference to discuss a peace treaty would be held in Lausanne, Switzerland. The Allies extended an invitation to both Turkish governments: The Sultan in Constantinople and Kemal in Ankara. This decision to invite the Sultan to the peace conference led Kemal to officially abolish the sultanate on November 1, 1922, thus effectively ending the 600-year reign of the Ottoman Empire.⁴ It was decided by Kemal and the other leaders of the Grand National Assembly at this point, that the position of the Sultan and the Caliph would be separated, allowing the religious authority of the Caliphate to continue. Sultan Mehmed VI, however, abandoned this duty and fled Constantinople on November 17, 1922.⁵ A new Caliph was selected, Caliph Abdulmecid, but he was little more than a figurehead with little power.⁶ Moving forward there would only be one Turkish government, the nationalist government under Kemal in Ankara.

³ "The National War of Independence." Turkish War of Independence 1919-1923. Accessed January 14, 2018. <http://historyofturkey.com/independence/>.

⁴ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 142.

⁵ "The National War of Independence."

⁶ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 131.

Changes in the British and Greek governments also followed the signing of the Mudanya Armistice. After the embarrassment of the Chanak Crisis, Lloyd George resigned on October 20 and was replaced as British Prime Minister by a conservative, Bonar Law. Lord Curzon, who had long disagreed with Lloyd George, stayed on with Law and remained in charge of the Foreign Office through the upcoming peace conference at Lausanne.⁷ In Greece the leaders who had led them to defeat in Turkey were court martialed, put through a sham of a trial and 6 of them, including the Prime Minister and Commander in Chief, were sentenced to death. They were shot on 28th of November 1922, leaving room for Venizelos (who was the Greek representative at the Paris Peace Conference) to return to power.⁸

On neutral ground in Switzerland, the Lausanne Peace Conference was opened by a speech from Swiss President Robert Haab. In a play for position, Lord Curzon decided to give an impromptu speech defending the Allies, which prompted Turkish representative, Ismet Pasha, to also give an impromptu speech. His speech would set the tone for the differences between the Lausanne Conference and the Sèvres Conference: this conference was one between equals, not between a panel of victors and one defeated nation as before.⁹ Lord Curzon, after the opening of the conference telegraphed the British Political Officers in Iraq with the strong suggestion of giving up some Kurdish areas to Turkey to ensure a successful peace treaty.¹⁰ From these two instances, it is clear that Lord Curzon feared the Turks and was willing to surrender areas that had been previously promised to the Kurds. The Political Officers stationed in Iraq disagreed with Curzon and argued that those areas were crucial for the defense of Iraq, not to mention they

⁷ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 106.

⁸ Mango, 106.

⁹ Mango, 115.

¹⁰ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 142.

had been promised to King Feisal.¹¹ It was clear that the idea of an independent Kurdistan was essentially all but forgotten by this point and was regarded as either a bargaining chip between powers or a strategic defensive possession.

The border with Iraq became a hot topic at the Lausanne conference. The Turks argued that Mosul should be included in their borders on racial, political, strategic and historic grounds. Lord Curzon refuted each one of these claims in a memorandum sent to Ismet Pasha on December 16, 1922. The Turks argued that there were few Arabs in Mosul and that the area was mostly populated by both Turks and Kurds, who Ismet argued were bound together in brotherhood. Curzon disputes this claim by sharing statistics of the population obtained by “British officers employed in the vilayet, who, partly on horseback, and partly with the aid of the roads made and the motor transport introduced since the British occupation, visited most of the corners of the vilayet.”¹² These statistics concluded that there were 179,820 Kurds, 170,663 Arabs and only 14,895 Turks living in Mosul in 1921.¹³ To dispute political claims, that the majority of the population wanted to be a part of Turkey, Curzon pointed to the Arab population of Mosul that were “enthusiastic supporters” of both the new state of Iraq and of King Feisal.¹⁴ Curzon explained that the Kurds of the Mosul vilayet had not supported the Turks and even challenges the Turkish delegation to “produce any evidence that the Turkish forces in Ira[q] ever received any assistance from the Kurds against the British.”¹⁵

¹¹ McDowall, 142.

¹² Curzon. “The Marquess Curzon,” 218.

¹³ Curzon, 220.

¹⁴ Curzon, 220.

¹⁵ Curzon, 221.

Ismet Pasha also declared that the Mosul vilayet belonged to Turkey due to both historical and economic reasons. To dispute the historical reason Curzon stated:

The argument from history is therefore not one to which importance can properly be attached. It could equally be applied to a demand from Turkey for the return of all territories and States which she has lost. It would justify the demand by any country for any city or province of which it had been deprived as the consequence of defeat in war.¹⁶

Curzon's point holds truth. To request a region based on shared history could be made by any power that has ever lost a war. It is simply not a valid reason to claim a land. To dispute economic claims, Curzon explained that not only was the "trade of Mosul almost entirely down river with Baghdad and across the desert with Syria," but, also that the goods produced in Mosul were produced at a higher rate in Turkey itself.¹⁷ This is another rational argument, meaning that Turkey had no economic need for the materials that were produced in Mosul, because they already produced them, at a greater rate.

Curzon finally disputed the Turks claim to Mosul on grounds of the National Pact, that the Turkish Chamber of Deputies had signed in February 1920. This pact essentially claimed all land that had previously been a part of the Ottoman Empire that was not populated by a majority of Arabs. Curzon refuted this claim as ridiculous:

In the first place it is both a novel and a startling pretension that a Power which has been vanquished in war should dictate to the victors the manner in which they are to dispose of the territories which they have wrested from the former.¹⁸

¹⁶ Curzon, "The Marquess Curzon," 221

¹⁷ Curzon, 221-222.

¹⁸ Curzon, 222.

The irony here, is that Curzon wrote this memorandum after the Turkish War for Independence. By 1922, the British were the defeated power, but Curzon still acted as a victor. He defended the territory of Iraq that they had “won” after the Great War. Rather than treating this like one continuous conflict that the Turks ultimately won. Curzon’s dispute of Ismet’s claims illustrates how important Mosul was to the British mandate of Iraq, and how much the Turks also wanted this land.

Ultimately, the Mosul question was not solved at the Lausanne Conference, and Article 3 of the Treaty stipulated that the border between Turkey and Iraq would be established within the next nine months through peaceful negotiations between the British and the Turks.¹⁹ As a decision regarding Mosul could not be reached at the conference, more pressing issues arose, like what would become of the Turkish Straits or of Ottoman debt to the French or what would happen to the Greeks still in Turkey. The Greeks and Turks signed two revolutionary agreements on January 30, 1923. The first was a prisoner exchange, the second was a population exchange of Greeks of the Orthodox faith in Turkey with Muslims in Greece.²⁰ This people exchange is significant because it illustrates that the concepts of nationalism and religion were often closely linked and that this “exchange of people” became a viable solution at this time.

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923 recognized the Turkish Grand National Assembly as Turkey’s official government, set Turkey’s borders (except with Iraq), restructured Ottoman debts with France, and granted official sovereignty to Turkey.²¹ The Great War was

¹⁹ August Thiry, "The Brussels Line," Shlama - Home, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://www.shlama.be/shlama/content/view/164/140/>.

²⁰ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 120-121.

²¹ "The National War of Independence."

officially over with the conclusion of the final peace treaty. The borders that were drawn at this peace conference were the only borders created in any of the post-Great War conferences that still remain in effect today.²²

The Mosul Issue

For the Kurds of Mosul, the Turks and the British, the struggle was not yet over despite the peace treaty. The signing of the Treaty of Lausanne left the Mosul question unanswered: the border between Iraq and Turkey was set on a deadline of nine months to be agreed upon peacefully between the two nation-states. If a decision could not be made within the timeline then it would be handed over to the League of Nations to decide.²³ Ultimately a decision was made three years after the Treaty of Lausanne was signed on what to do with Mosul. Those three years saw more negotiating, bribing, violence, and chaos.

In the 21st century, oil is often associated with Mosul, but oil was not the main issue following the Treaty of Lausanne. The first oil gusher in Kirkuk wasn't even struck until 1927, a year after the border was drawn.²⁴ Britain wanted to include the Mosul vilayet in their mandate of Iraq for primarily strategic reasons. The mountainous region created a natural border with Turkey and would be easily defensible for the depleted British military. For Turkey, the primary motivation for pursuing Mosul was one of pride. There was also an underlying level of fear for the Turks that Kurds, if split between Turkey and Iraq, might create a national security issue for

²² Mango, 125.

²³ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 146.

²⁴ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 143.

them. In negotiations with each other, both Britain and Turkey attempted to bribe the other with shares of oil found in the region if they would give up Mosul. Neither was interested, illustrating that oil was not the main concern.²⁵ What was clear from these negotiations, however, was that an independent Kurdistan was no longer an option.

The chaos of uncertainty allowed for Shaykh Mahmud to resurface for a brief moment. Shaykh Mahmud recognized an opportunity in the border disputes between the British and the Turks and welcomed the Turk in Sulaymaniya, a city that was not his to give.²⁶ Shaykh Mahmud still had a group of committed followers but, because they supported themselves by stealing from fellow Kurds. The tribes surrounding Sulaymaniya did not support him. With the help of the bombs dropped by the British Air Force and opposing tribes, Shaykh Mahmud and his followers were run out of Sulaymaniya.²⁷ Loyalties were still split among the Kurds, but support for the Turks was beginning to dwindle. The blurry border between Iraq and Turkey exposed the harsh treatment of the Kurds under the new Turkish rule.²⁸ Kemal's promises of Kurdish autonomy under his rule proved to be false.

The Kurds were pushed even further from the Turkish loyalty that had grown during the Turkish War for Independence when Mustafa Kemal abolished the Caliphate in March 1924, thus completely crushing the sense of Muslim brotherhood that had been fostered under the pan-Islamic movement.²⁹ At this point, the Kurds that remained in Sulaymaniya (no longer under Shaykh Mahmud) asked to be a part of the British mandate of Iraq with measures put in place to

²⁵ McDowall, 143

²⁶ Longrigg, 146.

²⁷ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 146.

²⁸ Longrigg, 146.

²⁹ Mango, *From the Sultan to Atatürk*, 131.

ensure they had some autonomy.³⁰ The Turks could no longer be trusted. The abolishment of the Caliphate was crushing to some Kurds and proved to them that any sense of brotherhood they felt with the Turks was gone. The British, they believed, could at least help them maintain some level of freedom.

Tensions continued to rise between the Turks and the British on the border dispute in Mosul and frequently erupted into violence. On August 6, 1924, the British formally requested that the League of Nations step in to mediate the border conflict. The British requested again on September 29 and October 5, when the Turks refused to withdraw their troops from territory claimed by the British.³¹ The two nations were on the brink of war when the League of Nations met in Belgium in October 1924. At this conference, other issues were discussed, but to appease the border issue, the Council created a provisional border known as the “Brussels Line,” and created a commission to investigate Mosul to better determine how to handle the dispute.³²

The Commission was made up of Carl Einar af Wiersen, as president of the Commission, Albert Paulis and Count Pal Teleki. Gertrude Bell described them to her father in a letter: “The President is Mr. de Wiersen, a Swede, honest, fat and unintelligent. That live wire is Count Teleki, a Hungarian- he is also the danger. The third is Col. Paulis, a Belgian, half way between the two others in intelligence and well meaning.”³³ These three men investigated the Brussels Line for three months, from January until March 1925, and reported back to the League of Nations that

³⁰ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 145,

³¹ McDowall, 144.

³² Thiry, “The Brussels Line.”

³³ Thiry.

following July.³⁴ The League of Nations decided to send a second commission, this time only General Johan Laidoner of Estonia who reported back in November 1925.³⁵

Ultimately both commissions determined that the city of Mosul itself was mostly Arab, but the population of the entire vilayet was primarily Kurdish, and the smaller towns and villages spoke mostly Turkish.³⁶ The recommendation of the first commission was to keep the Brussels Line as the permanent border.³⁷ Despite the majority of Kurds in the region, they did not advise creating an independent Kurdistan. They stated in their report: “Among the Kurds we find a growing consciousness, which is definitely Kurdish and not for Iraq; it is more strongly developed in the south and decreases as one goes northward to die entirely in the plain of Mosul and the Mountains of Aqra.”³⁸ They found that the basis of Kurdish nationalism was primarily founded on the desire to not be under foreign rule, rather than a common identity. The Kurds were still primarily loyal to their tribal leader, and the council recognized that many tribal rivalries still existed. The League of Nations decided on December 16, 1925 that the Brussels Line would be the permanent border (the border that still stands today) between Turkey and Iraq.³⁹

The Brussels Line was finalized in the Anglo-Turkish-’Iraqi tripartite treaty signed on July 18, 1926.⁴⁰ The land south of the line was granted to the British mandate of Iraq with two conditions from the League of Nations:

³⁴ Thiry.

³⁵ Thiry.

³⁶ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 144.

³⁷ Thiry.

³⁸ Thiry.

³⁹ Thiry, “The Brussels Line”.

⁴⁰ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, 156

1. The Territory must remain under effective mandate of the League of Nations for a period which may be put at twenty five years
2. Regard must be paid to the desires expressed by the Kurds that official Kurdish race should be appointed for the administration of their country, the dispensation of justice, and teaching in the schools, and that Kurdish should be the official language of all these services⁴¹

Though being incorporated into the Kingdom of Iraq and placed under Arab rule was not the first choice for many Kurds, they did gain a level of autonomy. The Commission also recommended that in Iraq, “Kurds should be recognized by the official use of their own language and by the employment of Kurds in the Kurdish qadhas as administrators, judges and teachers.”⁴² The Prime Minister of Iraq, who was half Kurd, went one step further and made a policy of distinguishing Arab and Kurd regions by appointing only Arabs in the Arab regions and Kurds in the Kurdish regions.⁴³ The Kurds in Iraq, though they didn’t get their own “self-determined” state, did gain semi-autonomous status and a certain level of freedom and independence in Iraq.

The Kurds that were incorporated into Turkey, north of the Brussels Line did not have this same level of freedom. The Turks, with the abolishment of the Caliphate and a strict resettlement program aimed at “Turkifying” the Kurds that fell into their newly established borders denied the Kurds freedoms that they had enjoyed even before the Great War. Under the resettlement program, Kurdish tribes were not only separated from their religious leaders and chiefs, but were also separated out into different resettlement zones, with Kurds never equaling more than 5% of the general population.⁴⁴ The main aim of this resettlement program was to

⁴¹ McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 145- 146

⁴² Longrigg, 154.

⁴³ Longrigg, 156.

⁴⁴ Serhat Bozhurt, “The Kurds and Settlement Policies from the Late Ottoman Empire to Early Turkey: Continuities and Discontinuities (1916-1934).” Translated by Djene Bjalan and Ezgi Ulusoy-Aranyosi. *The*

effectively kill tribal life and Kurdish culture and to force them to assimilate in a process of “Turkification.”⁴⁵ Despite Mustafa Kemal’s appeals of Muslim brotherhood for all those years, his real agenda was to gain Kurdish support to help win the war, but then to “Turkify” them. Kemal effectively committed cultural genocide on the people who stood beside him.

Conclusion

The final line that was drawn in the Middle East, the Brussels Line, was not done so based on even the pretense of “self-determination,” it was drawn strategically and to prevent another war between the Turks and the British. Though self-determination was achieved by the Turks, they forced Turkishness on the residents that remained in their borders. By the time the final lines were drawn, the Kurds were spread across borders and did not gain a level of unity that was enough for “self-determination” or even nationalist identity. The side of the line that the Kurds ended up on would determine the way they were treated. In Iraq they experienced freedom of religion, language and a semblance of their tribal lifestyles. In Turkey their lifestyle and culture was fiercely suppressed. The Brussels Line would ultimately determine the lives of the Kurds for the rest of the 20th century. But the fight of the Kurds was not over, and in some sense, it was just beginning. Throughout the rest of the century, the border of Iraq and Turkey has remained, but the sense of Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish identity has grow

International Society for Iranian Studies 47, no. 5 (2014): 823-37. Accessed November 20, 2016. Doi: Routledge. 832.

⁴⁵ Bozhurt, 832.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the Kurds never really had total global support or solidarity in the post-war era and therefore never formed an independent Kurdistan. In the beginning when the British were willing to help them form their own nation, the Kurds held stronger to tribal loyalties than to national loyalties. A few leaders emerged, tribal Shaykh Mahmud, and urban Sharif Pasha, but they were never able to represent all the Kurds. To complicate matters, the Kurds were pulled by the strings of religious loyalties that, for many, trumped Kurdish “national” loyalty. The pan-Islamic movement, though it proved to be a manipulation by Kemal, pulled many Kurds away from the British political officers, and the prospect of an independent Kurdistan was lost.

The study of Kurdish nationalism after the Great War is only one piece in the larger movement of nationalism and of the changing world. To narrow the study to only the Kurds leaves out much of the story and the complications that arose after the Great War that affected the Kurds. The post-war era was an elaborate tangle of loyalties and competition for power. By breaking down the intricacies and complexities of the leaders of the Allied powers, and the shift of government in Turkey, a better understanding of why the Kurds ended up spread across borders can be grasped. This break down enables a move past the simplistic arguments that the Kurds lost their chance, or that the British misled the Kurds, or that the Turks misled the Kurds. In reality, the truth is a complicated combination of all of these arguments.

What to do with the Kurds in the post-war era was a difficult question and no easy solution existed. The Kurds grasped for their traditional ways in the changing world, and in reality, were not ready for nationalism or self-rule. There is often a perception in the post-

colonial world that all peoples deserve autonomy and the imperial west robbed their opportunity from them, however, from this in-depth study of the Kurds, it is clear that that was not true, at least in this case. The tribal Kurds in the mountainous regions of modern day Turkey and Iraq were content living in their traditional nomadic lifestyle and had resisted the spread of modernity since the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. Even Shaykh Mahmud, who emerged as potential leader, desired Kurdish Nationalism in the traditional sense. He aimed more at being a war-lord than at being the leader of a nation-state in the western sense of the word. The urban Kurds who lived in Constantinople and were exiled to Paris, Sharif Pasha, desired nationalism in the western definition, however they had been separated from their people for too long to really represent them. No Kurdish sentiment of national identity existed on the whole in the post-war era. Without a united national identity, self-determination is impossible.

It is easy to blame the Allies for the result of the Middle East, and the benefit of hindsight makes it even easier to demonize them. But it is important to keep the global context of the time in mind when accusing the Allied powers with destroying the Middle East. True the Allied powers had an agenda of their own in the Middle East that was far from the noble notion of aiding wounded people to find self-determination, but this was the way of the time. Had the outcome of the Great War been reversed, the defeated empires most certainly would have been divided, perhaps not under the guise of the “mandate” system, but under the old-world policy of annexation. Though the decisions made by the Allies eventually led to more war, the ideas and rhetoric that would shape the rest of the 20th century were born in that post-war era. The League of Nations was eventually dissolved, but the United Nations was born out of its ashes. The idea of self-determination, though indeed noble, was not clearly defined and could not be pushed on peoples who were not yet ready, however this idea was used by many peoples around the globe

who were ready. Throughout the rest of the 20th century many peoples fought for their right to “self-determine” as a nation-state. The way of the world was changing, and the methodology of global politics was evolving, but such an evolution takes time.

Part of understanding this evolution, is understanding the history behind it. The Middle East had a long-standing history of hatred, violence and tension that ultimately helped to draw the new borders. These tensions between people did not arise with the nationalist movement, and though peoples did not necessarily always identify themselves as “nationalist,” these tensions between peoples cannot be denied. There was a deep hatred between Armenians, Turks and Kurds, and putting this in context helps to shed light on why the Armenian Genocide occurred and that the violence was not a random eruption, but rather, a continuation of tension felt on all sides for generations. This same history of tension was felt between the Turks and the Greeks, and though it was not analyzed as in depth in this paper, it absolutely helped to shape the borders of modern day Turkey.

By studying Kurdish nationalism in the post-war era, the study of Turkish nationalism inevitably arose. Too often these studies are separated, but the study of them together enables a larger study of the concept of nationalism in the Middle East. Kemal pulled many Kurds to unite with the Turkish Nationalist movement on grounds of religious solidarity. This union helps to demonstrate that the founding of a nation-state is done so on the grounds of solidarity, though not always nationalist solidarity. The Turkish Nationalist movement lacked global support at the beginning, and so, was taken by force. In the study of nationalism in the post-war Middle East, the founding the modern nation-state of Turkey embodied the “self-determined” idea; an idea that many Kurds joined rather than their movement of “self-determination.”

After the lines were decided upon in 1926, the Kurds were divided among different nations-states, with the majority living within Turkish and Iraqi borders. The Kurds in Iraq were allowed to continue speaking Kurdish, they were given positions in the government and they lived, at least for a time being, in relative peace with the Arabs whom they now shared a nation-state. In Iraq the Kurds voted for independence in 2017, and perhaps this is due to the freedom that Kurds were given during those early years in Iraq. Their Kurdish identity was allowed to grow, they were allowed to continue living their tribal lifestyle, were encouraged to create a written Kurdish language and to educate their children in Kurdish. The Kurds found solidarity in Iraq and were able to develop a Kurdish nationalist identity that had not existed in the post-war era.

Despite the initial peace, this did not last throughout the twentieth century. Many instances of violence toward the Kurds occurred in Iraq. One example is the Anfal genocide in 1988 where an estimated 70,000-80,000 Kurds were killed by their countrymen, led by Saddam Hussein.¹ Such instances of violence helped push the Kurds to pursue full autonomy from the Arabs of Iraq. When the Iraqi Kurds did vote for freedom in 2017, they certainly had the solidarity that is necessary for the creation of a nation-state. What they didn't have, however, was global support. The immediate neighbors, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, were not supportive. What's more, the longtime allies of the Kurds in the war on terror, the U.S., also did not support Kurdish independence. So now the Kurds had solidarity, but not the other factor for building a nation-state: global support.

Life for the Kurds in Turkey was not peaceful at the beginning. The cultural genocide committed on the Kurds in Turkey through forced assimilation and the process of "Turkification"

¹ Lorenzo Kamel, "Kurdish independence vote: A historical perspective," Iraq: Al Jazeera, September 22, 2017, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/kurdish-independence-vote-historical-perspective-170922093133193.html>

crushed any potential for a Kurdish nationalist movement. They were divided up so that they never equaled more than 5% of the population, while tribes were separated from chiefs and religious leaders, and the speaking of Kurdish was prohibited.² The repression of the Kurds in Turkey continued to worsen in the twentieth century. Between 1925-1939 an estimated 1.5 million Kurds were deported from Turkey or killed.³ The cultural genocide turned into movement of ethnic cleansing, as the Turks aimed at a “pure” Turkey. The Turkish Minister of Justice stated in 1930: “I won’t hide my feelings. The Turk is the only lord, the only master of this country. Those who are not of pure Turkish origin will have only one right in Turkey: the right to be servants and slaves.”⁴ Cultural and intellectual subjugation continued throughout the twentieth century, thus ensuring that no Kurdish Nationalist sentiment could ever take root. It is no wonder that the Kurds of Turkey did not pursue freedom as the Iraqi Kurds did in 2017.

To study the history of the Kurds is to study a history of violence: violence done by them, and violence done to them. The Kurds share a history, a language, a religion and a culture, but all of these commonalities were not and still are not enough to found an independent Kurdistan on. To found a nation-state more is needed than a common identity, even if it is a national identity. Global support and solidarity are absolutely necessary for the foundation of a nation-state and the Kurds have yet to gain both of these. In the post-war era they did not unite as one, and their loyalties were spread between tribal leaders, the British and the Turks. Inevitably they were divided among separate nation-states. This division, plus the ethnic and cultural genocide experienced by the Kurds in Turkey in the first half of the 20th century, prohibited the Kurds from gaining an all-

² Bozhurt, “The Kurds and Settlement Policies,” 832.

³ Callimanopulos Dominique, "Kurdish Repression in Turkey," *Cultural Survival*, June 1982, , accessed January 26, 2018, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/kurdish-repression-turkey>.

⁴ Dominique.

encompassing Kurdish solidarity to push for independence. The quest for an independent Kurdistan is ongoing and may never be realized.

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