

# Impact of the first world war on the rise of arab nationalism



In what ways did the First World War create an atmosphere favourable to the rise of Arab nationalism? Answer with reference to two case studies.

In most of the times, isms lead to the creation of wars. Nationalist conflicts often have a tendency which is inbuilt and directly affect racism, self-righteousness, extremism, and sometimes to demonize the adversary. History is often changed, counterfeited, and falsified for the purpose of serving the political agendas of various nationals. Somehow, it is interesting to see how often the “ forging of a state” phrase is used since most of the nations are constructed. Indeed, some countries’ origins are based on opinions and views that happened many years ago and the hatred from their adversaries. The rising of the Arab nationalism is not an exceptional case. The Arab nationalism shares some of these views of the undesirable traits with movements from other nationalists. However, the difference in the case of Arab nationalism it is influenced by the ideology of not a single state but of the whole region.

The collapse of the First World War led to the end of the Ottoman Empire, surpassing a decline that had started many years back (Mather, 2014). Most of the conflicts, such as civil and regional wars in the Middle East allowed the imposition of new borders and the formation of new states such as the division of the Ottoman’s territorial boundaries between Britain and France after the Sykes-Picot contract. This essay analyses the ways in which the First World War created an environment that favored the rise of the Arab nationalism by using the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the conflicts in the Middle East as case studies.

The Ottoman Empire, as declared by the Mehmet II was established in 1443 (Mather, 2014). The Territories of the Empire had been expanded during the 15th and the 16th eras and allowed them control of most of the trade routes between Europe and Asia. This gave the Ottoman Empire power and economic propensity over other nations.

According to Mather (2014), the Ottoman Empire had used an official authority over the territories of Arab trade routes from the beginning of the late 15th and the 16th century. During most of these times, the Ottoman Empire had ruled with a fairly hands-off approach, taking control of central trading ports while maintaining a formal existence in the holy cities of the Islamic state like Medina and Mecca. However, the Ottoman did not interfere with Islamic culture and according to Mather (2014), left the area along with the nomadic ethnic clans alone with their own policies.

However, by contrast, the Arab rural areas such as the people of Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Mesopotamia (which is currently referred to as Iraq) had settled more compared with their Arabian counterparts. These rural populations were also more subjected to direct power by the Imperial government of the Ottoman Empire. During this time, people in these regions were comfortable with this arrangement. The Arabs (Commonly the Sunni) did not face much discrimination from the Ottoman Empire and most of them, in fact, rose to control the local imperial government of the Ottoman Empire (Cleveland, 2018). By using these different strategies, the Ottoman Turks were able to maintain the devotion and loyalty of their Muslim Arab population.

However, the Empire started to weaken towards the end of the 18th century. According to Mather (2014), the revolution by the young Ottoman Turks changed the political structure of the Ottoman Empire in 1908. The Abdul Hamid Empire which had been operating for more than 35 years together with his autocratic system of rule was destroyed at this time. These religions and the ethnic struggles left the falling Empire with no time to deal with its problems.

Due to the implementation of the constitutional system, little progress was experienced towards democracy. There was a lot of dissatisfaction with the newly formed regime and there was a lot of local revolutions towards the Empire. The Empire's war with over who would control Tripoli in 1911 and the Balkan conflicts from 1912-1913 further weakened the powers of the Empire (Cleveland, 2018). The Empire lost most of its territories and by the time the First World War started in 1914, the Ottoman Empire was very weak both politically and financially. Cleveland (2015, P. 23) argues that the Ottomans have supported Germany during the First World War and its defeat contributed its collapse and subsequently the end of the Empire.

When the Ottoman Empire began World War One in 1914, loyalty was no longer taken for granted. This is due to a few reasons. First, the development of the Arab nationalism started to draw a lot of inspiration starting from the nineteenth century of the Western ideas. During this time, some Arabs sought for the nationalist emergencies of the Slavic (who were mostly Christians) minority groups of the Ottoman Balkan regions, which had, by the collapse of 1912, all became independent. This Arab loyalty was majorly nurtured by educated modern groups comprising of the intellectuals, former <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-the-first-world-war-on-the-rise-of-arab-nationalism/>

officers of the Ottoman officers, civil servants, and the officers in charge of the Ottoman Empire's soldiers. The majority of these elites lived in great Arab cities such as Baghdad and Damascus.

According to Cleveland (2015, P. 23), the debates by the intellectuals and officials in the Ottoman Empire were ineffective but after the War, the intellectuals were now free to air their debates in public places. This led to the formation of a number of secret societies even though all of them did not succeed in the role of spreading their views to the greater Arab people prior the start of the World War One.

Secondly, the conclusion of the Hejaz Railways in 1908 gave a clear and direct connection between Damascus and Medina during the World War I. This greatly helped in facilitating Ottoman's access to the Interior of Arabia. By the time it was opened, authorities of the Ottoman placed an emphasis on the value of the Muslims undertaking the Hajj's religious duties, a yearly pilgrimage to Mecca.

However, once the old leaders of the Arab clan in the Hejaz area realized that one train could transport one thousand pilgrims in a night from Damascus, they figured it was also possible that a train could be transporting large numbers of imperial customs inspectors, tax collectors, and other bureaucrats or even Ottoman soldiers who would be heavily armed. But the Hashemite group, who controlled this area, disliked this imposition and claimed hereditary rights from the clan of Prophet Muhammed. The clan's leader during the beginning of the First World War was Shariff Hussein ibn

Ali, who was by a regional figure of morality and political wisdom (Cleveland, 2015).

The start of the World War brought about a large number of unrests amongst the various tribes of the interior of central Arabia. This is where Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, in collaboration with the movement by the Wahabi Islamist, publicly convicted the Young Turks' Ottoman Order as being anti-Islamic (Cleveland, 2015). Also, the act of implementing the Ottoman Order's pan-Turkic nationalist plan concealed a lot of the Empire's formerly loyal Arab subjects throughout Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia (Present Iraq) (Cleveland, 2015). The various groups in the city of the Arabs quickly exploited the seeds of the Arab backlash in revenge of the Young Turks and the Enver Pasha for self-interests.

The entrance of the Ottoman government into World War One at the end of 1914 gave the final spark for outright rebellion. By the use of their power and control of the port of Aden at the entry to the Red Sea and Egypt, the British had a clear and a reasonably informed knowledge regarding the conflicts that were happening in Ottoman Arabia (Mather, 2014). Even before the start of the War, the leader, Sharif Hussein ibn Ali had commanded his son by the name Emir Abdullah ibn Hussein secretly to go to Egypt to meet Lord Kitchener, who was then the British military commander-in-chief there (Mather, 2014). From the views, it was clear that Sharif Hussein ibn Ali could not gain any support from the British leaders if he did not back his Ottoman leaders. Though this feedback brought some setbacks, it was not very discouraging. When the First World War began, the British soldiers were

quick to position themselves as the main support of the Hashemite cause (Mather, 2014).

The World War One led to the secret British shipping of the weapons and cash from Egypt to the Arab nations. This shipping continued till the end of 1915. This helped the Empire's Sharif Hussein ibn Ali to expand territories, his tribal associations, and to form strong forces while giving time and waiting for the most apt time to attack. According to Mather (2014), Sharif Hussein ibn Ali also cooperated with the principle Arab nationalist campaigns in Syria, the al-Fatat group, which was located in the urban centers and they largely grew his impending opportunity for the rebellion. Hussein ibn Ali combined the nomadic Arabian group's capability to get huge numbers of fighters with the pan-Arab nationalist plan of al-Fatat to ensure that the revolution he started to ensure success (Mather, 2014).

The aftermath of the World War One led the Arab nation emerging as a relatable concept and it was during this time that Arab nationalism progressively assumed the form of a political campaign (Cleveland, 2018). Education contributed majorly in exalting the history, raising political awareness, and in developing a nationalist spirit for the population of the young Arabs. The Intellectuals played a larger role compared to the politicians regarding the Arabs nationalist movement. The Intellectuals had copied the nationalist agenda from Europe and were using it to try and bring a new way of doing things in the Arab nation.

According to Cleveland (2018), the First World War accelerated the transformation of the social order of the Ottoman. Large numbers of men

<https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-the-first-world-war-on-the-rise-of-arab-nationalism/>

were mobilized to join the military service, more women started to join the civil service and became professionals. Even though the war brought the division of the Ottoman Empire, Anatolia turned out to be an Independent Turkish republic by successfully persevering through the damage and war brought by the Ottoman. This helped to recruit a large number of trained officers, civil servants, and soldiers. This newly formed republic also helped in creating an environment in which the public was used to the social change and, thus, more accepting of the 1920s reforms (Cleveland, 2018).

The Arab independence promised by the British officials to Sharif Hussein of Mecca at the event of 1915 in favor for his power against the Ottoman powers and the Sykes-Picot alliance in 1916 influenced the reformation of the region upon the revealing of the division that was to befall the Middle East (Beckerman, 2017).

Following the failure of the military in the Balkan conflicts from 1912 to 1913, the CUP government became more determined to improve its armed forces. In 1914, the CUP government granted the German military mission more powers and together with CUP's willingness to improve its armed forces, the mission's efforts began to show fruits of labor during World War One. Cleveland (2018) argues that even though the German officials and von Sanders controlled the Ottoman soldiers at some cases, the overall direction of the War was majorly controlled by the Ottoman. This power allowed the Ottoman to attack and control a number of territories.

The First World War in the Middle East created an environment for modernization and development resulting from the external colonial



competition. According to Milton-Edwards (2018), when the British soldiers came to Baghdad, on the event of the First World War, the citizens were poor, there were no schools, no healthcare services, or even clean water but their arrival sparked the modernization of Mesopotamia (Iraq).

Milton-Edwards (2018) emphasizes that the arrival of foreign intervention in the wake of the First World War created an impact on the emerging map. States began forming and government systems were imposed as new states in Paris and London. At that time, the Iraqis called themselves Muslims of Sultan in Istanbul. The country at this time was divided into three provinces independent of each other and therefore, there was no nationhood in Mesopotamia.

The British Intervention in the Middle East was then a necessity, which reduced the influence of the French in the Middle East which was then replaced by the competition from the superpower countries like the Soviet Union and the USA resulting to more organization of the region (Milton-Edwards, 2018). Beckerman (2017) notes that the Imperial competition in the Middle East during the twentieth century helped shape the region during the break out of the First World War and beyond. Also, Al Quntar (2017) notes that even after the First World War till the present, these powerful states like the USA and Britain are still competing for the Alliances and resources from the Gulf.

However, the movement of the Arab nations during the First World War had formidable challenges. There were a lot of conflicting identities and competition of the loyalties, sects, religion, regions, and tribe. There were

also conflicts between Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria, and other surrounding regions enclosing the Arab nationality. Although linguistic differences presented a lot of obstacles in the Arabian lands, the Unity of the Muslim Ummah presented a powerful competing alternative to the secular Arab Nationalism. The other great universal ideology was Islam which had a claim to the loyalty and commitment of the majority of the Arabs. Also, during the First World War, Iraq spearheaded the movement to unite Arabia. The believer of pan-Arabism, such as Sati' al-Husri believed in turning Iraq into the Prussia of the Middle East, and to a symbol of nationalism in Arabia.

In conclusion, the attempts to establish new systems in the Middle East on personal identity and loyalty were a result of long-term struggles, movements, and controversial debates during the Ottoman Empire and the Arab history. The First World War contributed a lot to the shaping of Arab nationalism by influencing modernization and development resulting from external colonial competition. Moreover, the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the following movement and conflicts in the Middle East created an environment that led to the strengthening of the Arab nations.

Furthermore, the CUP government led to the improvement of the region's armed forces, along with uniting the believers of different religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and the different tribes, sects, and regions in the Middle East. Before World War One, there was a lot of division in this region, but these events brought evolution and growth to the region.

## Bibliography

<https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-the-first-world-war-on-the-rise-of-arab-nationalism/>

- Al Quntar, S., 'Repatriation and the Legacy of Colonialism in the Middle East', *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies*, Vol. 5, Issue 1, (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), pp. 19-26.
- Carly Beckerman, 'Beyond Balfour and Sykes-Picot', *History Today*, Vol. 67, Issue 9, (2017), pp. 100-101.
- Cleveland, W. L., *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (Routledge, 2018).
- Cleveland, W. L., *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati'al-Husri*, (Princeton University Press, 2015).
- Mather, Y., 'The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and Current Conflict in the Middle East', *Critique*, Vol. 42, Issue 3, (Taylor & Francis, 2014), pp. 471-485.
- Milton-Edwards, B., *Contemporary politics in the Middle East*, (Polity Press, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2018).
- Ovendale, R., *The Longman Companion to The Middle East since 1914*, (London: Longman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1998).