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Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books, 2015. Pp. xxvi, 485. ISBN 978-0-465-02307-3.

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The centenary of the Great War has opened the floodgates for books on every aspect of the conflict. Many focus on subjects that have been amply covered before—the origins of the conflict and the grim slaughter on the eastern and western fronts as well as the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign—and add little to our knowledge of the war. Eugene Rogan's latest work, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, is a rare exception in its concentration on a neglected and important period of the conflict. It is the only work of its kind that treats all the fronts in the Middle East, even the minor ones in Aden and western Egypt and the lesser known actions in the Caucasus and Persia (present-day Iran). Rogan¹ tells a complex story enriched by many revealing vignettes, drawing much of his information from Ottoman Turkish and Arab sources little known in the west. His judicious and detailed account, keen sense of drama, and fluid prose make this book a joy to read.

The opening chapter covers the years 1908–13, concentrating on the revolution that brought the Young Turks to power, the wars against foreign states that resulted in substantial loss of territory, and the Ottoman reformers' abandonment of liberal values in favor of a policy of forced integration of subject nationalities in a desperate bid to preserve the empire. The next section describes the events that drove the Ottomans to cast their lot with Germany. Rogan stresses that they had no desire to become involved in the European war sparked by the assassination of the Austrian Archduke. But fear of the imminent dismemberment of the Empire by the Entente Powers drove them into Germany's arms, thereby transforming the fighting in Europe into a truly worldwide conflict.

After Turkey's entry into the war, the sultan Mehmed V attempted to incite a global jihad among the Muslims in Allied territory, but his call, though initially causing anxiety among the British and French, in fact backfired and stirred the Arabs to revolt, demonstrating that nationalism trumped militant religious solidarity.

The Allies held the mistaken belief that taking the war to the enfeebled Ottoman Empire would bring a quick victory. Their low regard for the fighting qualities of the Turkish soldiers seemed to be confirmed by the near destruction of Enver Pasha's army when its flanking movement against the Russians at Sarikamis in the Caucasus broke down in December 1914, as well as by the almost effortless repulse of the Ottoman advance on the Suez Canal in February 1915. As stalemate gripped the western front, the British, assisted by the French, launched a naval attack to force the Dardanelles Straits in a bid to hasten the end of the war. If successful, it was assumed that Turkey would capitulate, the Balkan states would forsake their neutrality, Austria would be exposed to attacks from the east, and a warm-water route to Russia would be opened.

Visions of such putative strategic benefits, however, obscured the unsoundness of the plan. The naval attack was halted on 18 March after undiscovered mines in the Straits sank three battleships and disabled three cruisers. A landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula followed a month later. In defense of their homeland, the Turks showed an iron will and, brilliantly led by German officers and provided with adequate provisions and war supplies, kept the invaders pinned to the beaches. Rogan notes that, besides Turkish resistance and the rough terrain, British soldiers had to contend with hardships such as extreme heat, pestilential flies, lack of water, and dysentery. A second landing in August likewise failed to dislodge the Turks and in December the operation was aborted. Apart from the staggering casualties on both sides, the Dardanelles

1. An American of Scottish descent, he is the director of the Middle East Center at Oxford University. His previous work includes the much praised *The Arabs: A History* (NY: Basic Books: 2009).

campaign is remembered for the exceptional bravery of the Anzac troops² and the military exploits of a Turkish soldier named Mustafa Kemal, who was destined to be the postwar leader of his country.

The British found themselves in a similar quagmire in Mesopotamia owing to lack of manpower resources and logistical infrastructure. What began as a minor landing at the head of the Persian Gulf to protect British oil interests morphed into a full-fledged campaign to capture Baghdad. A British and Indian army under Gen. Charles Townshend advanced in stages up the Tigris and Euphrates, only to be halted at Ctesiphon and forced back to Kut al-Amara, where it was surrounded and forced to surrender after running out of food. Never before had so large a British force laid down its arms. The officers were separated from the common soldiers and were well treated, enjoying decent accommodation and certain privileges like servants to do the cooking. The brutality meted out to the men in the ranks was in stark contrast to the comfortable existence of the officers. Of the nearly ten thousand men who surrendered only about three thousand survived the war. The rest, beaten on the least pretext and deprived of the necessities to survive, died en route to prisoner of war camps or in Ottoman captivity. Rogan uses eyewitness testimony to show the type of savage treatment to which the prisoners were subjected. One such source, describing the death marches, wrote: "It was horrible sight to see our boys driven along by rifle-butt and whip. Some of them were beaten until they dropped. One naval brigade man never rose again. If you said anything you were whipped yourself" (271). Townshend's surrender, coming on the heels of the Dardanelles debacle, sent shock waves through the Island Kingdom.

Bent on promoting loyalty among their Empire's diverse ethnicities as they faced an invasion on three fronts, the Ottomans turned against the Armenians, whom they suspected of making common cause with the Entente Powers. A law passed in May 1915 authorizing the Ottoman government to deport anyone deemed a threat to national security was aimed at exterminating the Armenians. Throughout the summer and fall, Armenians were rounded up and barbarically slaughtered. Some were pushed over cliffs or drowned in rivers, while others were burned alive or taken outside their towns and shot. Most were sent on death marches through the desert without food or water, often forced to strip naked and walk under the scorching sun until they dropped dead from exhaustion and dehydration. As the Turks had no interest in burying their victims, the countryside was littered with decomposing corpses. No less than one million Armenians perished at the hands of the Turks. The women and children who somehow survived the ordeal were forced to give up their identity and convert to Islam.

Despite the irrefutable evidence, Turkish governments since 1919 have denied that their wartime leaders unleashed the first genocide of the twentieth century. Rogan approaches this emotional issue with laudable scholarly disinterest in a meticulous, well documented account free of anti-Turkish animus. He musters a wealth of eyewitness reports to rebut Turkish claims that such Armenian deaths as occurred were an unintended consequence of war rather than the result of deliberate government policies. Rogan admits that the Ottomans had reason to fear that Russia and its partners meant to carve out large chunks of their state in complicity with disaffected Christian minorities, especially Armenians. He insists, however, that such a justification in no way exonerates the Turkish authorities of crimes against humanity.

The British army's numerical and overwhelming artillery superiority, together with its improved generalship, allowed it to resume the initiative in the Ottoman theaters beginning in December 1916. Under Gen. Stanley Maude, an outstanding organizer, the British army in Mesopotamia moved up the Tigris, forced the Ottomans to abandon Kut, and captured Baghdad in March 1917.

In Palestine, Gen. Edmund Allenby, emulating Maude's careful preparations, advanced slowly and, after defeating the Ottomans at Beersheba and Gaza, entered Jerusalem early in December 1917. Pausing until late summer 1918, Allenby resumed his offensive northward, driving into Syria, capturing key positions along the way, and routing an Ottoman force at the battle of Megiddo before occupying Damascus in October. Facing little resistance, Allenby's men continued their sweep northward, reaching Aleppo on 26 October. The destruction of the Ottoman army in Syria ended the war in the Middle East.

2. Australian and New Zealand Corps.

Rogan's chapters on the second stage of operations in the Ottoman theaters, shifting seamlessly from one front to another, are arguably among the most effective in his long narrative. Particularly revealing is his treatment of Enver Pasha's efforts to secure and expand the Empire in the Caucasus while Russia was being torn apart by revolution and civil war. Turkish forces moved into territory lost to the Russians earlier in the conflict and reclaimed three provinces ceded to Russia in 1877. In the long run, Enver's initiative was a terrible mistake. By denuding his already insecure fronts of vital troops, he made it easier for Allenby to break through the Ottoman lines.

In his concluding chapter, Rogan examines two important issues in the immediate postwar period in the Middle East. The first was the settlement the Allies forced on the powerless Turkish central government, which called for, among other things, the partition of Anatolia. The draconian terms triggered a backlash across Turkey and led to the rise of Mustafa Kemal, the hero of Gallipoli, who created a movement aimed at renegotiating the peace treaty and overthrowing the Ottoman government that signed it. Kemal rallied his partisans, defeated each of the foreign armies on Turkish soil, and, as head of state, signed a new treaty under which the victorious powers essentially recognized the present boundaries of the Republic.

On the second matter, Rogan adds his voice to those of hundreds of other scholars regarding the British effort to reconcile the partition plans negotiated in the course of the war³ with the confusing and contradictory promises made to Sharif Husayn of the Hijaz for his military support. Husayn felt betrayed and refused to accept much of Britain's postwar settlement, thus forfeiting its protection. Left on his own, he was no match for the Saudis who invaded the Hijaz and completed its conquest in 1925.

The book has its shortcomings. There are not enough maps and those it does include are often insufficiently detailed. A discussion of the lasting social effects of the war on the Empire would have broken new ground without adding many pages. Then too, Rogan's unfortunate omission to consult and cite collections in the Ottoman archives⁴ precludes a more complete picture of the Young Turks' decision-making. Lastly, he is completely wrong to refute the standard interpretation of the origins of the Dardanelles campaign. He claims that the moving spirit behind the attack on the Dardanelles was Kitchener, not Churchill. He writes: "From the outset Kitchener advocated a naval operation against the Turks" (130). And again: "It is ironic that, to this day, Churchill takes the blame for Gallipoli when Kitchener was clearly the campaign's most influential decision maker" (189). It is true that Kitchener, in response to the Russian army commander's request for a demonstration to relieve pressure on his forces in the Caucasus, asked Churchill on 2 January 1915 whether the navy could offer assistance since he could spare no troops. But a few days later at Sarikamis, the Russians foiled Enver's maneuver in the midst of a blizzard and practically destroyed his eighty-thousand-man army. Kitchener was apprised of the Russian victory on 5 January and the event was announced in several London newspapers that evening.

As the reason for a naval demonstration had disappeared, Kitchener gave the matter no further thought. But Churchill, eager for some kind of success that would bolster his sagging reputation, hit on the idea of forcing the Straits with ships alone. He gave Kitchener the impression that the plan had the backing of the Admirals—which was not the case—and assured him that, if the attack proved too difficult, it could be treated as a demonstration and abandoned without loss of prestige. Kitchener went along, for, as he would tell one of his aides, "This is a Naval matter. I must take it from the Naval Experts." Backed by Kitchener, Churchill received the War Council's approval to carry out his plan. His action at the start of the naval operation was inexcusable and ranks as one of the most serious blunders of the war. Without the approval of either the Prime Minister or War Council, he issued a press communiqué announcing the success of the opening day's naval bombardment against the Turkish forts at the entrance of the Straits, with Constantinople as the ultimate objective. He made such a big show that there could be no turning back without serious loss of face in the event of a naval failure—which is what happened. Fearful that a British defeat might provoke an uprising among Muslims in India and Egypt, Kitchener tried to pull the navy's chestnuts out of

3. Viz., the Sykes-Picot Agreement and Balfour Declaration.

4. For which he offers no explanation. It may be that he could not gain access to the relevant records because of the Turks' habit of imposing tough restrictions on western researchers.

the fire with far few troops and after the Turks had already been alerted. Predictably, the campaign resulted in heavy loss of life and lengthened the war, possibly by as much as a year. All because of Churchill's obsessive desire for personal glory. He deserves virtually all the blame for the disaster in the Dardanelles. One has to wonder why Rogan did not consult recent work on Kitchener,⁵ who was, after all, one of the two leading characters in the story.

At more than four hundred pages in length, *The Fall of the Ottomans* is a comprehensive treatment of its subject and Rogan may be forgiven for his few sins of omission and commission. His book is the best single-volume account of the most tumultuous and least understood fronts of the Great War. Rather than the weakest link among Germany's allies, the Turks proved to be tougher and more determined than many had imagined and held out until the bitter end.

5. E.g., my *Kitchener's War: British Strategy from 1914-1916* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2005) 119-45.