



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of the Ottoman Empire in World War I (1914-1918)

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Sep 20, 2024 Accepted: Oct 27, 2024	The Ottoman Empire is considered one of the greatest empires that was able to expand in many lands of the world, and in different continents in Asia, Europe and Africa. It carried the banner of the Islamic caliphate that it inherited from the Abbasid state, and was able to impose its influence, power and expansions for centuries, which made it the focus of attention of European countries that tried to eliminate this increasingly expanding and influential empire, so they involved it in a global war in order to divide its possessions and territories, and for this reason, this study came to highlight the role played by the Ottoman Empire in World War I 1914-1918, and try to know the nature of the relationship between the Ottoman state and European countries, and clarify the most important implications that resulted from participation in the war.
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INTRODUCTION

The Ottoman Empire is one of the greatest empires that ruled on the face of the earth and was able to impose its control over all the regions around it, as it was able to cross into Eastern Europe, as it was the first Islamic state to reach the Balkan region, reaching the peak of glory and greatness in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and reached its maximum breadth to include vast lands of the three continents, controlling Asia Minor and vast areas of southeastern Europe and North Africa.

But since 1740 AD, the Ottoman Empire began to decline and weaken significantly and lag behind civilization, this made it the object of ambitions by European countries about areas of influence, so competition was born between them about dividing the properties of the Ottoman Empire, and expanding their geographical field at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, which sparked many international crises that ended with the outbreak of World War I, after which the world was divided into two conflicting camps, and the Ottoman Empire was a party to this conflict in alliance with the Central Powers.

Because the history of great countries is full of important events, this study came to highlight the situation of the Ottoman state in the First World War, and to delve into the nature of the conflict between the warring countries, while shedding light on the causes of this war and what resulted from it. The following questions were raised: What are the most important events that the Ottoman Empire

witnessed in the First World War, and what were the motives that pushed the Ottoman state to fight the war?.

1. The reasons why the Ottoman Empire entered World War I:

There are many reasons that prompted the Ottoman Empire to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers against the Entente Powers, this war has been raging for some time, after which the Ottoman Empire was subjected to many shocks by the Entente Powers, so that the Ottoman Empire was the only Islamic state that decided to participate in the First World War, and there were several factors that made it prefer to fight the war on neutrality between the warring powers (Lichichowski, W.d, p. 65).

As a result of the ambitions of Russia, Britain, and France in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, which became evident at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Ottoman authorities tended to cooperate with the Germans, believing that German ambitions were the least dangerous colonial ambitions to the security and integrity of the empire, especially since Germany did not acquire any part of the Ottoman Empire's possessions as the other countries did. The first results of this cooperation were reflected in the Ottoman army, which was reorganized and retrained by a group of German experts consisting of 42 officers headed by General Lehmann Von (Lichichowski, W.d, p. 65).

- The Turkish leaders' confidence in the strength of the German army and its ability to achieve victory was great, so the German leadership found little difficulty in dragging the Ottoman Empire to sign an alliance on April 2, 1914, and Germany aimed to achieve the following goals behind its alliance with the Ottoman Empire:
- Closing the Turkish straits and preventing communication between Russia and its ally France and Britain, i.e. closing the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles to all shipping bound for Russia, and hindering Britain and France in their supply of war materiel to Russia (Al-Samad, 1985, p. 33).
- Closing the Suez Canal, cutting off the route between Britain and its colonies in Asia, and thus forcing Britain to abandon a large number of soldiers in the East and in Egypt.
- Declaring holy jihad and dragging Muslims in Asia to declare revolution against Britain and France and exhausting their power, as the Ottoman Empire is the guardian of Muslims.
- The occupation of the Caucasus region belonging to Tsarist Russia, which pushes the latter to distribute its forces on several fronts, which eases the pressure on Germany and its allies, and allows it to occupy France and then return to crush the Russian forces, in addition to the aforementioned items, the German government hoped to strengthen its control over the Middle East, including the Arab countries, by transforming the Ottoman Empire into a semi-colony (Al-Samad, 1985, p. 34).

If these were Germany's goals in dragging the Ottoman Empire into the war, what were the Ottoman Empire's goals in going to war on the side of the Center Bloc countries?.

The Ottoman Empire was suffering from many restrictions imposed on it as a result of the system of foreign privileges and special rights granted to foreign countries, and its sovereignty over the straits was diminished due to the agreements imposed on it in the days of its weakness, especially during its war with Muhammad Ali and Russia's exploitation of that war, so what the Ottoman Empire aimed to achieve by entering the war on the side of Germany is the following goals:

- Germany's rapid emergence as a leading power on the continent, the Germans played a leading role in international trade and colonial matters (Hayman, 2011, p. 17).
- French and British interests were clearly a colonial policy aimed at delegitimizing the Ottoman Empire as well as striking the Muslim peoples ideologically and economically. In addition to enslaving Muslim peoples in Asia (especially India and the Persian Gulf) and in

Africa (the Nile Valley and North Africa beyond the Sahara), France and Britain had their sights set on Iraq, the Levant, and the Straits themselves (Nawar, 2014, p.p. 441-445).

- Austro-Russian pressure on the Ottoman Empire.
- Russia posed the greatest danger to the future of the Ottoman state in the Tripolitanian War and the Balkan War, and Russia was clearly seeking to undermine it, and the Astana government failed in the hot summer of 1914 to reach a real understanding with the Entente countries that would preserve its entity and restore some of what it lost in the Balkans in Egypt, so the Astana government's turn towards Germany was natural (Ozutana, 1999, p. 228).
- As the federalists began accounting for the Russian presence in the Turkish territories, the truth is that they set the Turkish people on their feet in a frenzy.
- Freeing the Ottoman Empire from foreign tutelage.
- Reclaiming Ottoman provinces that have fallen under foreign control, such as Egypt, Cyprus, and possibly Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria.
- Liberation of Turkish-populated territories occupied by Russia (Caucasus, Turkestan).
- The Turkification of the Ottoman Empire after some nationalist voices demanded autonomy or full independence (Khalil, 2015, p. 70).

In addition to re-establishing the authority of the Ottoman Caliphate over all parts of the Islamic world, there were indeed voices that called for not getting involved in the war, but Enver Pasha was convinced that victory would inevitably be on the side of the Germans and that the opportunity had come for Turkey to take revenge on its great enemies, and Enver Pasha's personality was so strong that he concluded a defense treaty with Germany against Russia on April 2, 1914, the day after Germany declared war on Russia (Khalil, 2015, p. 71).

The only obstacle to Astana declaring war on the Entente countries was the right opportunity, especially after Britain detained two warships that the Ottoman authorities had purchased from Britain and were still in British ports after the outbreak of the war. When, on April 11, 1914, the German warships *Jubben* and *Breslau* arrived in the Ottoman straits to escape the pursuit of the British fleet, they were given the right to enter the straits and dock in Ottoman ports, while these straits were closed to the British fleet in the Mediterranean Sea and the Russian fleet in the Black Sea (Nawar, 2014, p. 442).

This was in response to the detention of the two ships in British waters, but no sooner had the pieces of the Ottoman fleet, including *Jubben* and *Breslau*, suddenly hit the ports of Odessa and Sebastopol, which was the beginning of Turkey's actual participation in its war alongside the Central Powers against the Entente countries. The Ottoman Sultan, the Caliph of Islam Mehmet V, declared a call to jihad in the hope that Muslims in every country controlled by the English, French and Russians would revolt, and the Ottoman armies prepared to fight the Entente on several fronts:

- 1- The Anatolian Caucasian Front.
- 2- The Balkan front.
- 3- The Arabian Gulf front, Iraq and Persia.
- 4- The Suez Canal front and the Levant.
- 5- Yemen Front (Nawar, 2014, p. 443).

Through the above, we can conclude that the First World War was driven by a set of indirect and hidden causes in the nineteenth century, then came the direct cause that blew up the war and was the beginning of what is known as the Great War, and we also conclude that the weakness of the Ottoman Empire and its desire to regain its status is what pushed it to enter the First World War (Nawar, 1999, p. 336), (Abu Alia, 1993, p. 373).

2. The Ottoman Empire's military confrontations in the war:

A member of a Serbian secret organization killed the Crown Prince of Austria in the town of Sarajevo. Austria gave an ultimatum to the Serbs, who accepted most of it, but Austria wanted to eliminate the Serbs, so it declared war on them, hoping to wipe them out. Russia and France supported the Serbs, while Germany supported its ally Austria, and Britain soon entered the war on the side of Russia and France.

The Ottoman state, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria declared their neutrality in the war, and the Entente countries emphasized to the Sultan that the Ottoman state's continued violation of the neutrality plan and its dismissal of all German officers from service would ensure respect for the independence of the Ottoman lands. However, the alliance of France and Britain with Russia, the traditional enemy of the Ottoman Empire, during the days of the Turanian movement, provoked the Turks against Russia and provided an opportunity for the Ottoman Empire to join the Central Powers and Austria (Mustafa, 1986, p. 283).

The unionist leaders Anwar, Talat and Cemal had tightened their grip to face the difficult circumstances facing the state after the Balkan War. Moreover, Anwar Pasha, who enjoyed a strong personality, admired the German military, especially after the German victories of the war, which helped German naval officers to occupy important positions in the Ottoman fleet, and German officers were appointed to supervise the Dardanelles fortresses. Moreover, a secret pact was signed between Enver Pasha and Germany without the knowledge of the Sultan and the Grand Sadr (Yaghi, 1996, p. 220).

On September 7, 1914, Anwar Pasha announced the abolition of foreign privileges in order to induce the Entente countries to declare war on the Ottoman Empire, and the state also decided to increase the customs duties it determines according to foreign privileges, and foreign post offices were seized, and it was decided that foreigners in the empire would be subject to Ottoman laws, and it was decided to try them before the Ottoman courts, and Anwar issued an order to close the two ports to foreign ships in order to prevent the Entente countries from interfering, and the Ottoman state provided material and military aid to Iraq, so Anwar Pasha ordered the Ottoman fleet to start military actions against Russia, bombing the Ottoman fleet (Mustafa, 1986, p. 288).

While we find that the German policy succeeded in including the Ottoman state on the side of Germany and its allies, as Germany wanted to exploit Iraq, penetrate Persia commercially and politically, deal a fatal blow to the British presence in Egypt, and threaten British control over India (Mustafa, 1986, p. 288).

As soon as the Ottoman Empire entered the war, Britain sent its troops to occupy Iraq, while the Turks thought of invading Egypt, and the Sultan used the title of the Caliphate to declare jihad against the Entente countries, and called on Muslims in the world, especially the Muslims of Russia and Britain, to participate in the war against the infidels, and stopped the payment of profits due on Ottoman public debt bonds owned by nationals of the enemy countries. The war forced the Turks to fight on six fronts, while most of the Ottoman military operations were aimed at defending Ottoman lands, especially in the Dardanelles, the Caucasus, the Aden front and the Suez Canal, and the Ottoman armies achieved many victories due to the modernization system implemented by the rulers of the state (Yaghi, 1996, p. 222).

During the war, Anwar pursued a strategy based on the appeals of the Islamic League, which succeeded to some extent in upsetting the English, French, and Italians about their security in Muslim countries and in encouraging guerrilla warfare against the Italians in Libya (Al-Shenawi, 1980, p. 235).

2.1. Russian front:

The Ottoman Empire opened its hostilities against Russia before formally declaring war, when the German cruisers Guben and Breslau, flying the Ottoman flag under the command of the Admiral Zushun, raided some Russian ports in the Black Sea.

The Ottoman forces consisted of the Ottoman Third Army (commanded by Field Marshal Hasan Izzet Pasha), which included the 9th Corps (17th and 29th Infantry Divisions), 10th Corps (3rd Infantry Division) and 11th Corps (5th, 8th and 33rd Infantry Divisions). In addition to the cavalry division, the 37th Infantry Division, army support, and 271 artillery pieces. Field Marshal Hassan Ezzat Pasha established his headquarters in Erzurum and began to mobilize his forces in the area between Wan and Erzurum, but he was unaware of his opponent's strength - which was in fact weak - and therefore did not attempt to gain the initiative before the Russian forces were fully mobilized. The mobilization of the Third Army's formations was delayed due to poor transportation, and the Ottoman formations lacked many of the necessary tasks such as weapons, equipment, and equipment for the very cold winter in those regions, and the phenomenon of desertion was widespread to a remarkable degree, making the formations a skeleton that did not reach half of its staff (Al-Bitar, 2013, p. 1309).

As for the Russian forces, they were commanded by General Voronov and consisted of the 39th Infantry Division, the Barato Cavalry Division and an independent infantry brigade, and the Russians were aware of the German danger threatening their country and therefore they made their main military effort to confront Germany and the secondary effort to confront Austria-Hungary and did not pay attention to the front of the Ottoman Empire, so they confronted it with symbolic forces that did not exceed one corps, but their military instructions were to follow the opponent and obtain the most accurate details about everything related to it (Al-Bitar, 2013, p. 1310).

The commander of the Russian forces dared to surprise the Ottomans by attacking them with his small force in order to disrupt their mobilization measures, and began operations on November 3, 1914, by advancing into Ottoman territory with three columns. Barato's cavalry division advanced along the right bank of the Aras River and reached the outskirts of Ognut.

The Ottoman commander Izzet Pasha decided that the Russians aimed to occupy the city of Erzurum, so he mobilized formations to defend this city, but when he noticed that the momentum of the Russian attack had faded and that there were no opposing forces, he changed his plan and resorted to positional defense to stabilize the Russian columns rushing into Ottoman territory, and formulated a plan to confront them on November 25, 1914. The Russian commander of the Third Army decided to renew the attack on November 26. The Russian commander discovered his opponent's intentions early on and issued orders to withdraw to the international border line for fear of being involved in an unequal battle (Al-Bitar, 2013, p. 1310).

When the Ottoman Third Army was fully mobilized, it advanced and occupied Sari Qamish and from there rushed to Fars and occupied it, but the Russians made several counterattacks in late December 1914 that stopped the Ottoman army from penetrating further into their country.

Exaggerated reports of Ottoman victories in frontier battles reached Istanbul, and Defense Minister Enver Pasha believed them. He appointed himself commander-in-chief of the Caucasus front, and formed a high-level staff consisting of Turkish and German officers of proven competence for this purpose (Al-Bitar, 2013, p. 1310).

Anwar Pasha traveled to Trabzon in order to distract the front with a diversionary movement from the direction of Sari Qamish in order to encircle the Russian forces. Anwar Pasha resorted to issuing an order for compulsory marches for his troops, but the Russians took advantage of this situation and annihilated the two legions and captured large numbers of them, and only a few escaped, and the number of the Third Army dropped from 9,000 fighters to only 1,200 fighters (Al-Bitar, 2013, p. 1311).

In July 1916, the Russians launched a general attack in successive waves amounting to 10 waves, but the Ottoman army formations withstood these attacks and thwarted them all in succession without the Russians making any progress. On August 17, 1916, the Russians launched a strong attack and forced the Ottoman army formations to withdraw from Tbilis and Mosh, and the situation stabilized in favor of the Russians.

The situation between the warring armies remained almost constant when it was characterized as a war of positions, until the Great Russian Revolution of November 1917 and the peace treaty between the Russians and the Ottomans at Brest-Litovsk (Al-Bitar, 2013, p. 1314).

2.2. Iraq front:

On November 25, 1915, Townsend, commander of the Anglo-Indian campaign in Iraq, was forced to retreat toward Kut al-Amara as a result of increasing Turkish pressure. By December 7, the Turks had encircled the English forces in Kut. Since Kut was an imperfectly fortified position, and not a treasure to withstand Turkish artillery led by German officers, and since General Inkson, the commander-in-chief of the campaign, had allowed six men to retreat to Kut al-Amara. the commander-in-chief of the campaign had allowed 6,000 Arab soldiers who had enlisted in his army for pay to stay with the besieged in Kut, the people of the city were overwhelmed, supplies ran out, and hunger riots spread (Al-Dirawi, 1999, p. 376).

Townsend remained steadfast in the hope that fresh supplies would come up the river and save his deteriorating position, but the Turks, meanwhile, were not oblivious to strengthening their positions. They were fortifying important bridges on the Tigris, or coordinating some of them just in case. They also concentrated their artillery and wooed the Iraqis to their side, securing an uprising against them.

Seizing the opportunity, Nurettin Bey, the Turkish commander, attacked Townsend's forces on December 9, 12, and 24, 1915, with the intention of destroying their morale. Townsend begged his command, stating that the supplies he had in his possession would not last long, so he asked for a naval and land attack, thanks to which he would be able to retreat or escape.

The English army began to advance on January 4, 1911, but a single clash with the Turks at Sheikh Saad convinced the English that they could not save those trapped, and when the attempt failed - the Turks had destroyed the wall of Kut from the northwest, making it impossible to repair or defend - Townsend wrote to his command stating: "We have only 50 days of supplies." (Al-Dirawi, 1999, p. 377).

Throughout this period, the English continued to attempt small offensives, but each time they failed. The boldest of these attempts was the surprise attack, which Goring launched on February 22, in which he captured Saniya, but on March 7 he was unable to take the fortified position of Seine, although his forces rose to 30,000 from the army of the Government of India.

On April 9, the English made their last attempt to break through the Turkish lines, but the Turks had poured their heavy fire in tightly, and the flooding of the river at that time of the year flooded the ground, creating a great obstacle for the English during the march. For these two reasons, the attacking English force retreated after leaving 4,000 dead in the field, and in a period of time not exceeding five hours.

The English realized that any new attempt to save Kut or start a new march on Baghdad would be futile. Meanwhile, the Turks were closing in on Townstead. When Nureddin Bey saw that victory had been secured, he sent a letter to Townstead offering to surrender (Al-Dirawi, 1999, p. 377).

2.3. Battle of Gaza:

After withdrawing from the port, the Turks made their line of battle stretch between Gaza and Beersheba, but great gaps weakened this line. In Gaza, for example, there were no more than 4,000

soldiers under von Gurs, and this force was encamped in the Muntar and Teh positions overlooking Gaza. Along the line to Beersheba, the English forces advancing from Mina were able to cross the Negev and take Beersheba, if their left flank could occupy Gaza (Al-Dirawi, 1999, p. 382).

On the basis of this situation, Dobell, the commander of the British forces operating east of the canal, drew up his war plan, which was approved by Murray, his superior officer, on March 20, 1917. The attack was scheduled for March 25, to be carried out in two phases: The first would succeed in occupying the Gaza Valley, and the second would encircle the city and isolate its garrison from the possibility of receiving supplies from the east.

Only luck favored the Turks this time. It was a mistake by Doble that forced his soldiers to retreat from the areas of the Gaza Valley they had already occupied. The Desert Battalion, one of his attacking battalions, was delayed a few hours before its mission, and Doble thought it had been destroyed by Turkish supplies.

As his soldiers were exhausted by heat and thirst, and the German artillerymen and Turkish archers were valiantly holding their positions in the valley, Doppel decided to withdraw his troops and retreat. The Turks seized this opportunity and reinforced their forces in that position. This ended the initial phase of the attack and the English retreated to the positions from which they had started. The casualties of the battle were 4000 English and 2500 Turks (Al-Dirawi, 1999, p. 383).

A New Zealand battalion was able to break through the Turkish natural fortifications there, but the news of the fall of Rabia al-Muntar reached Doble only through the command in Cairo, so it came late and after he had ordered his troops to retreat.

2.4. The Arab Revolt of 1916:

The Arab Revolt is the armed movement called for by Arab secret societies in the Arab Levant against Ottoman rule, and it was launched from Hejaz in 1916 under the leadership of Sharif Hussein bin Ali, and the Great Arab Revolt represented a decisive stage in the stages of Arab nationalism, which is the stage of the clash between the Turks and the Arabs (Al-Kayyali, W.d, p. 909).

The Arab revolt in the Hijaz had two important goals: The first was to rid the Levant of Turkish rule, and the second was to form an independent Arab state with Hussein ibn Ali as king. Ali Hussein was the first to obtain the explicit approval of the British for the independence of the Arab countries, through his correspondence with McMahon, but the British aimed for a revolution announced by Sharif Hussein that would not change their colonial plans in the region, nor their secret agreements with their allies, especially France (Nawar, 1973, p. 59).

CONCLUSION:

After this simple presentation, which we do not claim to have done justice to the subject, we have reached the following conclusions:

- The Balkan Wars are one of the causes of the outbreak of World War I, which resulted in a shift in the balance of power in the world.
- The competition between the world's great powers as a result of the political and military events in the world as a whole is considered a reason for the emergence of alliances between European countries such as the Austrian-German alliance, the French-Russian alliance, and thus the outbreak of World War I. The Balkan Wars were one of the reasons for the outbreak of World War I.
- The men of the Union and Progressive Society had a hand in the participation of the Ottoman state in the First World War despite the Sultan and some of the state's men.
- The Ottoman Empire achieved several victories during World War I, especially on the Dardanelles front at the expense of its allies.

- The Great Arab Revolt had the greatest impact on the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, after the Arab countries supported the Allies in the war against it, due to the Ottoman Empire's refusal to fulfill their demands.
- World War I resulted in the dismemberment of parts of the Ottoman Empire, and its Arab states were placed under British and French mandates.

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