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Introduction by Dónal O’Sullivan

**Sean McMeekin. *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power.*** Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010. ISBN: 9780674057395 (hardcover, \$29.95).

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Famously, German Reich Chancellor Otto von Bismarck once proclaimed that the Balkans were not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier. In his book, Sean McMeekin clarifies that Bismarck went even further and meant 'the whole Orient' as being outside the focus of German foreign policy interests. Popular sentiment in today's Germany would concur, with the 'Bagdadbahn' being as remote as Zanzibar or the other 'lost colonies' of Imperial Germany. However, as Sean McMeekin shows, Berlin's appreciation of affairs oriental changed rapidly under Kaiser Wilhelm II, who fell in love with Islam, as if to spite Bismarck. In 1898, his visit to the Middle East impressed the Emperor so much that he saw himself as *Hajji Wilhelm*, the Western protector of Islam against the infidels. No doubt this fantasy sprung from the general Orientalist fashion in Europe which induced archaeologists, linguists and adventurers to seek a counterpoint to the 'decadent' Western civilization. One of these was Max von Oppenheim, the scion of a banking family, who had made his home in Cairo, complete with a harem of concubines. Every year, Wilhelm would invite Oppenheim to Berlin to watch slideshows of life among Bedouins. Nurturing dreams of supplanting Britain, the Kaiser fed into Oppenheim's vanity and allowed him to imagine himself his personal envoy to the Middle East. Germany, Oppenheim reported in 1906, could utilize notions of Islamic *jihad* to inflame existing anti-British sentiments in case of war.

The key to the any German plans of furthering its influence would be the building of the Berlin-Baghdad railway, financed by a consortium under the leadership of Deutsche Bank. Sultan Abdul Hamid favored Germany because of its lack of a long imperial tradition and its geographic distance from the Ottoman Empire. German technological know-how and Ottoman raw commodities seemed to result in the 'perfect marriage' (37). Secret negotiations sweetened the deal: the Germans were to build the railway within eight years and raise all the capital. In return, they received exclusive excavation rights for copper and coal and archaeological artifacts in the vicinity of the line. Bypassing the Suez Canal, Berlin also hoped to add pressure on British India. However, the project 'born in sin' (43) was never finished, mostly due to the technical difficulties and the outbreak of the First World War.

Instead, German envoys plotted to instigate a holy war against Britain and France in the Middle East and conceived of 'jihad' as a secret weapon to win the war. Kaiser Wilhelm's fancy for the Orient translated in a flurry of missions to remote areas to win support for Berlin's plans. Pan-Islam, curiously led by the Jewish convert to Catholicism, Oppenheim, would be the tool to topple London's hold over the Orient. In the 1916 thriller *Greenmantle*, John Buchan had already pointed out this British vulnerability. Peter Hopkirk revisited the plot in his popular 1994 book *On Secret Service East of Constantinople: the Plot to Bring down the British Empire*.

The reviewers agree that McMeekin adds to our understanding by uncovering a wealth of documentation from German, Russian, Ottoman, and Austrian archives. Eugene Rogan calls it "a captivating new history of the Eastern front in the First World War". Eric D. Weitz

highlights that McMeekin's book "restores the importance of the Ottoman Empire to German history". Donald M. McKale calls the study "substantially superior in research and writing" than any other attempt to investigate the Middle East during the war. He adds that scholars have downplayed German oriental policy and its 'jihadist' strategy' for too long. Without a doubt, McKale contends, the idea of inciting Muslim revolts was central to German plans to win the war.

Eric Weitz underscores how McMeekin successfully demonstrates why German elites, from the military to the industrialists and bankers, envisioned an Ottoman Empire open to German economic and political interests based on Kaiser Wilhelm's formulation of *Weltpolitik* in 1898. For Berlin, the urge to contest British, French, and Russian influence and muscle into the Middle East proved too tempting. Romanticists could portray Islam as untainted by the vestiges of industrialization and project their own visions onto a perceived 'clean slate', not unlike how some Enlightenment philosophers had viewed Imperial Russia.

Taking the railway scheme as an example of power projection, McMeekin tells the convoluted story of how Imperial Germany stumbled into an unfamiliar territory, decidedly disregarding Bismarck's advice. The failed construction of the railway seriously undermined Berlin's 'holy war' strategy, the reviewers agree. In reality, the Berlin-Baghdad Express morphed into dozens of local tracks, most of which ended in buffer stops. Local leaders often played the Germans off against British agents. Oppenheim and other colorful German agents such as Oskar von Niedermayer did not achieve similar cult status as T.E. Lawrence, but they could have, McMeekin contends, if Germany had won the war. McMeekin's central thesis is that these efforts merit attention as an early example of a German *Drang nach Osten* and precursors of later anti-Semitic dalliances with Arab leaders during the Nazi era.

But there are distinct differences as to the German agents' significance. Eric Weitz goes as far as calling them "garden-variety imperialists", and Eugene Rogan considers them "eccentric". Fred Lawson would have liked to see more focus on the railway rather than on the "scholar-spies". But Donald McKale points out that Germany spent enormous amounts of money both on the railway and on supporting the Ottoman Empire, therefore justifying the attention on the secret missions. The reviewers see more difficulty in drawing any lessons from Berlin's policy during the First World War. In particular, the reviewers are divided on the alleged continuity of jihad and anti-Semitism leading up to Nazi policy in the Middle East. Whereas McKale is convinced of the coherent depiction of the "ugly circle", Lawson would have done away with references to Islamofascism, and Rogan disagrees with major points in the books' epilogue. Eric Weitz considers the treatment of the Armenian genocide in the book flawed and faults the author for being too generous in his treatment of German complicity in the tragedy. All reviewers agree that the book is an important addition to our knowledge of events in the Middle East during the First World War and consider the author's work with unpublished archival documents to be of particular significance.

Participants:

**Sean McMeekin** teaches modern history at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. He is the author of *The Red Millionaire* (Yale University Press, 2004) and *History's Greatest Heist* (Yale University Press, 2008), listed for the Ed A. Hewitt Prize in 2010. *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, his third book, won the Barbara Jelavich Prize in 2011. His fourth book, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, is forthcoming from Harvard/Belknap in November 2011. He is currently at work on a narrative history of the July crisis.

**Donal O'Sullivan** is Associate Professor of History at California State University, Northridge. His latest book is *Dealing with the Devil: Anglo-Soviet Intelligence Cooperation During the Second World War* (Peter Lang Publishers, 2010). His research interests include Soviet and Russian foreign policy, German history, and historiography.

**Fred H. Lawson** is Lynn T. White Jr. Professor of Government at Mills College. His publications include *Constructing International Relations in the Arab World* (Stanford University Press, 2006), *Why Syria Goes to War* (Cornell University Press, 1996) and *The Social Origins of Egyptian Expansionism during the Muhammad 'Ali Period* (Columbia University Press, 1992). He is editor of *Demystifying Syria* (London: Saqi Books, 2009), and currently serves as president of the Syrian Studies Association. A recent essay related to the First World War in the Middle East is his "Ottoman Legacies and Economic Sovereignty in Post-Imperial Anatolia, Syria and Iraq," in R. Hinnebusch and S. Cummings, eds. *After Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

**Donald M. McKale** received his Ph.D. from Kent State University. He is the Class of 1941 Memorial Professor and Professor Emeritus of History at Clemson University. McKale's research has ranged widely, exploring the history of subjects such as World War I, the Nazi party and German diplomacy, the Holocaust and World War II, and the postwar myth that Adolf Hitler survived the war and defeat of his Nazi regime. McKale's most recent of seven books, *Hitler's Shadow War: The Holocaust and World War II*, was a 2003 main selection of the History Book Club. His *War By Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I* (1998) received the Charles Smith Book Award from the European section of the Southern Historical Association. His forthcoming book, *Nazis after Hitler: How Perpetrators of the Holocaust Cheated Justice and Truth*, is scheduled for publication later in 2011 from Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

**Eugene Rogan** is Director of the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. He took his B.A. in economics from Columbia, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Middle Eastern history from Harvard. He taught at Boston College and Sarah Lawrence College before taking up his post in Oxford in 1991, where he teaches the modern history of the Middle East. He is author of *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, and London: Penguin Books, 2009), which is being translated in nine languages and was named one of the best books of 2009 by *The Economist*, *The Financial Times* (London), and *The Atlantic Monthly*. His earlier works include *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), for which he received the Albert Hourani Book Award of the Middle East Studies Association of North America and the Fuad Köprülü Prize of the

Turkish Studies Association; *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge University Press, 2001, second edition 2007, with Avi Shlaim), which has been published in Arabic, French, Turkish and Italian editions; and *Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 2002). He is currently working on a history of the Middle East in World War I.

**Eric D. Weitz** is Distinguished McKnight University Professor of History at the University of Minnesota, where he also holds the Arsham and Charlotte Ohanessian Chair in the College of Liberal Arts and served as chair of the Department of History. His major publications include *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (2007), *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (2003), and *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990* (1997), all with Princeton University Press. *Weimar Germany* was named an “Editor’s Choice” by *The New York Times Book Review*, and was included in the “Year in Books” of *The Financial Times* (London) and “The Best Books of 2007” of *The Independent* (London). It has been translated into Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Chinese, and Polish. He is currently writing *A World Divided: A Global History of Nations and Human Rights from the Age of Revolution to the Present*.

Review by Fred H. Lawson, Mills College

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Sean McMeekin's panoramic survey of German activities in the Middle East during the First World War is at once stimulating and frustrating. It is a delight to read, and can be recommended without apology to general and undergraduate audiences. It makes thought-provoking connections among a wide range of wartime fronts and developments, but jumps from one episode to another without offering a satisfactory analysis of each one. Although it puts the Ottoman authorities squarely at the center of the tale, it tends to reproduce the jaundiced attitudes toward the empire that were harbored by the German diplomats and commanders upon whose reports the book so heavily (and fruitfully) relies. And despite its title, the book treats the Berlin to Baghdad railway much like Shakespeare handles Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: it comes on stage at key junctures in the plot to deliver a pithy line or two and then swiftly recedes into the wings.

After introducing the *dramatis personae* in Chapter 1, McMeekin turns immediately to the railway whose photograph adorns both the front and the spine of the dust jacket. Chapter 2 melds strategic, economic, and technological aspects of this ambitious project into a coherent package. It is unfortunate that Donald Quataert's studies of the Ottoman railroad system receive no mention.<sup>1</sup> Attention to Quataert's pioneering work would have enabled the author to incorporate local political and social dynamics that affected the course and timing of railway construction across Anatolia. William Ochsenwald's history of the Hijaz railway is missing as well.<sup>2</sup> Even though the Hijaz line was no doubt tangential to the comprehensive network that was envisaged by the Germans, its role in promoting the Islamic character of the late Ottoman Empire would have fit nicely into McMeekin's overarching narrative.

After Chapter 2, the railway pretty much disappears until Chapter 14, when it becomes ensnared in the vicious fighting that flared in 1915 among the Kurds, Armenians, and Turks of eastern Anatolia. In between one finds a summary of the rise to power of the Committee of Union and Progress or CUP (Chapter 3); a brief introduction to the true theme of the book as a whole—the German government's campaign to incite Muslims to launch a religious struggle (jihad) against the British and French (Chapter 4); and a description of the diplomatic jockeying that accompanied the Ottoman government's decision to join the war (Chapter 5). These three chapters reinforce existing interpretations of their respective topics, but accord the conventional wisdom added weight thanks to new material drawn from German archives.

Chapter 6 elaborates the contradictions that were inherent in the German-sponsored call for jihad against the Entente powers. McMeekin is not quite right to claim that “according

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Quataert, “Limited Revolution: The Impact of the Anatolian Railway on Turkish Transportation and the Provisioning of Istanbul, 1890-1908,” *Business History Review* 51 (Summer 1977); Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chapter 7.

<sup>2</sup> William Ochsenwald, *The Hijaz Railroad* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980).

to strict, pre-Ottoman interpretation of Islamic law [sic], jihad was a more or less continuous condition of war between those inside the *Dar al Islam* and the *Dar al Harb* not yet converted to Islam, which is to say everyone else” (124). But his observation that “the result—a ‘proclamation of holy war against all Europeans with the exceptions of Austrians, Hungarians, and Germans’—was something of a mess, neither uncompromising enough for the Germans, nor theologically proper enough to satisfy Muslim clerics” is spot on (125). The chapter relies heavily on a “forthcoming” but otherwise unidentified paper by Mustafa Aksakal, which we should all try to find.

Chapters 7 and 8 tell the stories of two German scholar-spies who set out to instigate anti-Entente jihad in northeastern Africa and central Arabia, respectively. Chapter 9 describes the initial Ottoman defeat on the banks of the Suez Canal, while Chapter 10 recounts the tale of the victory at Gallipoli. Jihad ended up playing no part in either battle, although the railroad (or rather its shortcomings) is credited with sealing the fate of the Suez offensive (178). The simultaneous, and disastrous, Ottoman military advance into the Caucasus receives no more than a desultory paragraph (179).

With Chapter 12, the focus shifts squarely to the eastern front. Germany’s efforts to convince the Shi’i religious establishment of southern Iraq to sign on to the Ottoman sultan’s jihad deserve considerably more than the seven pages they are allotted. The discussion ignores Abdul Hamid’s long-standing crusade against Shi’i doctrine and practice,<sup>3</sup> of which the well-read German academics who set out for Karbala in the late fall of 1914 must have been aware. And the culmination of the expedition—the decision by the most prestigious scholar of Karbala to issue an edict (fatwa) that called on all Shi’is to engage in jihad against Britain and Russia—remains largely unexplained (p. 208). The text implies that Shaikh ‘Ali finally complied with Hans Luehrs’s entreaties in return for an annual subsidy of 50,000 marks. There must have been more to it than that. And even though I cannot prove this on the basis of a cursory look through the reference volumes in my study, it seems unlikely that this august personage should be called “the Grand Mufti of Karbala” (203). The position of Grand Mufti is almost always a state office, and is almost certainly a Sunni designation.

For my money, the best parts of the book cover Oskar von Niedermayer’s race to Kabul (Chapter 13), the short-lived offensive against western Egypt undertaken by the Sanusiyyah of Cyrenaica (chapter 15) and the often-overlooked Ottoman and German military campaigns in Georgia and Azerbaijan during 1917-18 (chapter 19). These three episodes are given sufficient space to be developed in detail, and the account of von Niedermayer’s mission to the court of Habibullah Khan rests firmly on previously unexamined archival sources. The somewhat shorter account of the activities of Ahmad al-Sharif, the head of the Sanusi religious order, owes much to a relatively obscure publication

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<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Eich, “Abu l-Huda, the Rifa’iya and Shiism in Hamidian Iraq,” *Der Islam* 80(January 2003); and more broadly, Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998).

by Russell McGuirk,<sup>4</sup> while the analysis of the post-1917 push toward Baku makes extensive use of Michael Reynolds's dissertation, a revised version of which has just been published by Cambridge University Press.<sup>5</sup> I intend to add both volumes to my library right away.

How the pursuit of jihad eventually backfired on the Germans is explored in Chapter 18. As the war dragged on, and setbacks started to outnumber successes on the battlefield, the Ottomans steadily turned on their German allies. At the same time, friction between the comparatively youthful commanders of the Ottoman armed forces and the older, more experienced German field officers who advised them flamed into mutual antipathy. By early 1916, German and Austrian soldiers had to worry about being physically assaulted by Ottoman troops and civilians alike. Germany's ambassador in Constantinople reported that January that "it was being shouted far and wide, that we should do with the Germans what we did to the Armenians" (311). It gradually dawned on the foreign ministry in Berlin, the Deutsche Bank, and the directors of the Baghdad Railway Company that the billions of marks they had invested in the empire had been spent in vain. Germany received most of the blame for the loss of Iraq to the British-Indian army in the spring of 1917, and on 6 September of that year the torching of the ornate Haydarpasha train station, the western terminus of the empire's Asian railway system, brought "a fittingly apocalyptic end to the Kaiser's Berlin-to-Baghdad dreams" (317).

So what is up with the closing excursus on "The Strange Death of German Zionism and the Nazi-Muslim Connection" (Epilogue)? Part of the conclusion discusses relations between the foreign ministry in Berlin and the German Zionist Federation (343-348); part deals with persistent disagreements between German diplomats and the CUP regarding Jewish immigration to Palestine (348-355). Then there is a brief rant about the "virulent strand of murderous anti-Semitism" allegedly practiced by the infamous mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad Amin al-Husaini (356-357). This leads to the observation that "the Kaiser's burgeoning anti-Semitism after the war was actually closer in spirit to Nazism" (358), followed by a rambling discussion of links between the planners of the anti-Entente jihad, the Hitler regime and al-Husaini (359-362). The book ends with remarks on Islamofascism and supposed views about Nazism in the contemporary Arab world (363-365). It would be interesting to see what comments the author got from his referees and editors about all this. The bits that concern the diplomacy of Zionism clearly belong in the main body of the text, either interspersed chronologically or as a separate chapter. But the rest could just as well have been jettisoned.

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<sup>4</sup> Russell McGuirk, *The Sanusi's Little War: The Amazing Story of a Forgotten Conflict in the Western Desert, 1915-1917* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2003; Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Specialists in Middle East history will be tempted to point out to their students several minor, and easily avoidable, mistakes. Rulers of Egypt were not granted the title of khedive until after the death of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha (64, 101). Arabic-language newspaper titles are transliterated inconsistently: *al Liwa* and *Al-Mu'ayyad* (25), *Masr el Fatat* (27). The border dispute between British Egypt and the Ottoman Empire that erupted in 1906 concerned Taba, not Kaba (26). The world Islamic community should be called "the global *umma*", not "the global *ulema*" (63, 81). (On the other hand, I suspect that McMeekin means on page 72 to say "the Islamic *ulema* [religious scholars] of Constantinople" rather than "the Islamic *umma* of Constantinople".)

More troublesome errors may well reflect political and cultural features of the twenty-first-century world. McMeekin notes that in all the uproar over the launching of the anti-Entente jihad, everyone forgot about "the Sultan's Muslim subjects, who had not been consulted as to whether they wanted to live under the strict Sharia law of a revived Caliphate" (66). Despite the fact that al-Qa'idah and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan equate "strict shari'ah law" with a restoration of the caliphate, it is highly doubtful that this linkage existed in 1914. In a similar vein, McMeekin uses the term "reactionary" to refer indiscriminately to both the "aggressive Ottoman nationalists" or "unionists" of the CUP (71) and the backers of Sultan Abdul Hamid's efforts to assert the Islamic bona fides of the empire (73). Calling these two quite divergent currents equivalent forms of "the purist strain of fundamentalist Islam" (66) is confusing and misleading.

I have a more than casual interest in Sean McMeekin's *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, inasmuch as I published a book in 1998 entitled *War By Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I*.<sup>1</sup> In that book, I examined some of the same subjects that McMeekin does. However, as much as it pains me to say so, McMeekin's work is *substantially* superior in research and writing to anything that I did and to the work of nearly every other scholar heretofore examining World War I in the Middle East. I'm very impressed with McMeekin's study, not only its organization and writing style, but especially the extensive research on which it is based. As I told the Harvard University Press when I reviewed McMeekin's work for publication by the press, it is a seminal book in that, for the first time, it shows *without doubt* that Imperial Germany's jihad strategy in World War I—organizing and exploiting a unified or pan-Islam in the Middle East to stoke the fire of native Muslim revolts against the British in Egypt and India and against Russia—was central to German plans to win the war. Students of the 'Great War' will no longer be able to dismiss—as nearly all of them have—the German 'holy war' strategy, carried out with the aid of Germany's ally, the Ottoman empire, as merely peripheral and of little significance to overall German war strategy. For far too long, this feature of German wartime policy has been downplayed or ignored by scholars.

McMeekin writes with a crisp, clear, and entertaining style that should appeal to an audience considerably broader than academics. In Chapter 1, he examines the prewar roots of the German jihadism, showing how the global ambitions and policy of the young German emperor (*Kaiser*), Wilhelm II, led him to believe that in the event of a war with Germany's European rivals—Britain, France, and Russia—the *Reich* could organize and exploit pan-Islam among the millions of Muslim subjects of these rivals in their African and Asian colonies to help produce a German victory. This view of the Kaiser existed at the root of his prewar friendship with the Ottoman empire. Pan-Islamism was a doctrine that proclaimed the sultan-caliph's religious authority over all the world's Muslims. The Kaiser, with his unbounded arrogance (and ignorance), believed that he could act as the 'protector' of the world's many Muslims because Germany, unlike its European rivals, held overseas lands that had very few Muslim subjects. In these views, Wilhelm II, as McMeekin shows, was influenced significantly by—and in turn influenced—Max von Oppenheim, the scion of a wealthy Cologne banking family and one who had renounced his Jewish background in favor of Christianity. Before World War I, Oppenheim traveled extensively in the Middle East, as both an archaeologist and political spy for his country. McMeekin is the first scholar, at least to my knowledge, to provide substantial evidence of Oppenheim's influence on the Kaiser's thinking about pan-Islamism and to show that the two men met and talked personally on a number of occasions; in this regard, McMeekin used archival materials that very few others have examined, namely the Oppenheim archive in Cologne.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald M. McKale, *War by Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998).

Between 1896 and 1909, while he served as an official at the German embassy in Cairo, Oppenheim filed no less than 497 reports with Berlin on Arab tribal and other politics, pan-Islamism, the British navy in the region, the Arab chieftain in Mecca known as the Sherif, the Ottoman Sultan who had proclaimed himself Caliph among all Muslims, the divide among Sunni and Shia Muslims, and the Baghdad Railway. Most of these reports are in the German foreign ministry archives, which McMeekin has mined thoroughly. In Chapter 2, McMeekin traces the history of the railway, the prewar negotiations between Germany and Turkey for the Germans to construct a railroad that would run from Constantinople through Anatolia, Mesopotamia to Baghdad, and end at the Persian Gulf. In this respect, too, McMeekin in path-breaking fashion links German jihadism to the building of the railroad; the latter, he emphasizes repeatedly in the manuscript, was intended to help funnel money and arms to Muslims in the Middle East, to help encourage them to revolt against or otherwise oppose the British in Egypt and India and the Russians. For numerous reasons, by the end of World War I in 1918, only about half of the rail line had been completed; as McMeekin stresses, this failed construction seriously undermined the German pan-Islamic campaign, undertaken in the war with Germany's wartime and Islamic ally, the Ottoman empire.

In subsequent chapters, McMeekin traces in a masterful, and detailed fashion, the seizure of power in Constantinople by the Young Turks, who put in a puppet as Sultan-Caliph; the Ottoman claim on the caliphate resting precariously on Ottoman military supremacy in Arabia, and over the holy shrines there in Mecca and Medina; the widespread anti-Semitism among British officials in Cairo, Constantinople, and London that proclaimed the Young Turks "tools" of a large Jewish conspiracy; the holy war fever among Germany's highest officials once war was declared in August 1914; the blueprint for jihad in the Muslim world produced by Oppenheim's headquarters in Berlin, that dispatched masses of propaganda, money, and political missions to Arabs in Syria, Palestine, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Libya, Abyssinia, Persia, and Afghanistan; the German persuasion of the Young Turk government to join the German side in the war in November 1914; the Turco-German "global jihad" that preached to Muslims death to infidels everywhere (unless they be Germans and their allies, the Austrians!), especially the British, French, and Russians; Ottoman massacres of Christian minorities in the empire, and most horribly in 1915-16 of Armenians; and the failed Turco-German assault in February 1915 on the Suez Canal. Much of McMeekin's research on such subjects rests on archival material he has gathered, some of it never before published, from German and Austrian archives.

As McMeekin shows, nearly every effort by the Germans and Turks to foment pan-Islamic activity in the Muslim world failed. Everywhere failure happened, the author carefully analyzes why; especially he notes the many—nonsensical—contradictions inherent in Germany's role in trying to foment 'holy war.' Especially worthy of mention is McMeekin's handling in Chapter 10 of the famed Gallipoli campaign, during 1915 and early 1916, when the British attempted unsuccessfully to forge the Dardanelles and capture Constantinople. Also McMeekin sorts out better than any other scholar to date the bitter divisions between the Ottoman government and the principal Arab tribal leaders in Arabia. In Chapter 11, he shows how both Oppenheim and the Ottoman rulers sought to woo to the Turco-German side the principal Arab sheikh, the Sherif of Mecca; how, for such a purpose, Oppenheim

met personally with the Sherif's son, Feisal, in April 1915; how the Germans and Turks were losing the effort to the British, who had extensive influence on the Sherif—both economically and politically—from British headquarters in Cairo; and why, in June 1916, the Sherif 'betrayed' the Ottomans by declaring war on them, with British military assistance (and promises of postwar political autonomy for Arabs).

In Chapter 14, the author demonstrates how the German missions to Shia Muslims in Mesopotamia (portions of Iraq today) and Persia and to the Muslim ruler of Afghanistan to appeal to them to join the jihad by attacking British India were undermined significantly by the serious trouble that erupted along the stretches of the Baghdad Railroad. During 1915 and early 1916, along the railway in Syria and Cilicia, massive and unprecedented Ottoman atrocities against Armenians slowed both the construction and use of the rail line for the purposes of the Ottomans and Germans transporting men, money and war materiel both east and south. McMeekin provides a superb account of the causes and course of the Armenian tragedy; his endnote 21 (394) contains an extensive bibliography of the vast and ever-growing literature on the subject. His original contribution to the horrendous story, however, is his use of Russian archival material to help disentangle the loyalties and intentions of the different ethnic players in conflict: the Armenians, Kurds, Assyrians, Nestorians, Syriac Christians, and, of course, the Russians and Ottomans. On such a controversial subject, the author provides a careful, and fully documented, analysis.

The latter chapters are devoted to describing how "Oppenheim's holy war had barely scratched the surface of possibility" (259), failing to arouse the support for the Germans and Turks of the Muslim chiefs in Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Afghanistan. Nearly everywhere, such chieftains attempted to play off the Turco-Germans against the British; the Muslim leaders held back their support for both sides while the latter paid handsome subsidies to the leaders. Chapter 17 describes the Arab revolt in mid-1916 against the Ottomans and Germans, with British assistance. Astounding is the amount of money, McMeekin shows, the Germans had spent during the war on the unfinished Baghdad Railroad (311-12) and on supporting Germany's Ottoman ally (315).

The epilogue is based almost exclusively on the key secondary literature—studies by Egmont Zechlin, Isaiah Friedman, David Fromkin, and Erich Lohr. McMeekin's views regarding anti-Semitism and anti-Zionist thought among British leaders, and the lack of British sincerity in proclaiming the Balfour Declaration in late 1917, are well founded. As Arab-Jewish tensions exploded in Palestine following World War I, the British took the Arab side. Similarly, McMeekin's treatment of Germany's wartime relations to Zionists is based on the above named sources. It is difficult to quarrel with his most damning judgment regarding the Germans: that the 'holy war' of the Kaiser, Oppenheim, and Imperial Germany, even though it failed to produce a victory for the Germans, nevertheless laid a foundation for later Muslim fanatics, like Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who incited mass murders of Jews in the 1920s and 1930s in Palestine (and, as McMeekin notes, it was the British rulers in Palestine in 1920 who appointed al-Husseini, a veteran of the Ottoman army in World War I, as mufti). The Grand Mufti played a significant role, as McMeekin observes, in World War II, allying with the Nazis and participating in the Holocaust. In 1948, al-Husseini issued a directive that declared the

murder of Israeli Jews forever was a Muslim duty. Finally, McMeekin's discussion of the attraction of Oppenheim and Curt Prüfer, the latter one of Oppenheim's chief agents in the World War I jihad campaign, to Nazism and especially anti-Semitism ("a toxic self-pitying disease," p. 366), seems to complete the ugly circle. Today, this manifests itself most glaringly in much Arab anti-Semitism, with its denial of the Holocaust and demands for the destruction of Israel. Thus, there is much to be learned about today and the recent past from McMeekin's superb study of World War I.

At the height of the First World War, John Buchan wrote a thriller based on a not-so-fictive German plot to harness Islamic extremism to overturn the British Empire. What makes *Greenmantle* such a remarkable book is that, already in 1916, Buchan got so much of the history right – the Germans really were inciting Asian Muslims to rise up against British rule. This was, as Buchan recognized, too good a story to leave to ‘poor romancers’ like himself. In the forward to *Greenmantle* he foresaw the day when “the full history” would be written – “sober history with ample documents”.<sup>1</sup>

Sean McMeekin is in fact the second historian to tell ‘the true story’ behind *Greenmantle*. In his 1994 study, *On Secret Service East of Constantinople: The Plot to Bring Down the British Empire*, Peter Hopkirk drew on British archives to recount the failed Jihad made in Germany.<sup>2</sup> McMeekin adds a wealth of documentation from Russian, Ottoman, German and Austrian archives to tell the story of German and Ottoman wartime efforts to raise a holy war against the Entente powers in the protagonists’ own words. The result is a captivating new history of the Eastern Front in the First World War.

In 1898, the German emperor Wilhelm II made a state visit to the Ottoman Empire. Carried away by his enthusiasm for the Orient, Wilhelm declared Germany’s perpetual friendship to the Ottoman Sultan “and his 300 million Muslim subjects scattered across the earth, who venerate him as their Caliph” (14). This visit marked the beginning of a German-Turkish special relationship based on a misconception of the Ottoman sultan’s authority in his titular role as Caliph, or spiritual leader of the world’s Muslims.

The prophet of German Islam policy was Baron Max von Oppenheim (1860-1946), explorer, scholar, and scion of a Jewish banking family whose conversion to Catholicism spared Max the worst effects of anti-Semitism. He made his home in Cairo, and began to file extensive reports to the German foreign office that fused hostility to the British Empire with a growing conviction in the anti-imperial power of pan-Islam.

The instrument of German influence in the Ottoman Empire was a railway project linking Berlin to the Persian Gulf. In December 1899, the Ottoman government awarded the concession to a German group headed by Deutsche Bank to build a railway from the Anatolian city of Konya to the port of Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf, via Baghdad, within eight years. For the Ottomans, the railway provided a means to consolidate their hold over their remote Arab provinces in Syria and Mesopotamia. For the Germans, the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway would create a strategic land bridge that reduced travel time from the Mediterranean to India by as much as three days over the Suez Canal route. It would be a pressure point on one of the vital arteries of the British Empire in India.

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<sup>1</sup> John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), p. v.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *On Secret Service East of Constantinople: The Plot to Bring Down the British Empire* (London: John Murray, 1994).

When Europe went to war in the summer of 1914, Germany was determined to secure Turkey's entry on their side. Oppenheim promised that a call for holy war by the Ottoman Sultan, in his role as Caliph, would turn Muslims in British and French colonies into jihadi insurgents. The Ottomans drove a hard bargain and, when they finally entered the war in November 1914, the Sultan duly proclaimed a jihad against the Entente powers. The move provoked deep concern in Britain and France but had no effect in the Muslim world.

Undeterred, the Germans unleashed missions in Afghanistan, Persia, the Hijaz, Mesopotamia, Central Arabia, Sudan, and the Libyan desert, to provoke local jihads that, collectively, might encourage a global movement. McMeekin traces these ill-fated missions, led by colourful adventurers like Oskar von Niedermayer in Afghanistan, Leo Frobenius in the Red Sea, and Wilhelm Wassmuss in Persia. Relatively unknown today, these men and their exploits would have been as famous as Lawrence of Arabia had the Germans and Ottomans won the war.

Ironically, the roots of the Turco-German defeat lay in the Berlin-Baghdad Railway. Logistical problems in the Taurus and Amanus Mountains meant that whole sections of the line had not been completed by the outbreak of war. The railway was tragically linked to the wartime Armenian genocide. Armenian communities along the length of the railway line were deemed a security risk and deported to the notorious death marches in the Syrian Desert. Aside from the human tragedy, the deportation of Armenian workers denied German railway engineers the skilled manpower they needed to complete the line in Cilicia. Without the railway, the Germans lacked the means to transport men and weapons to the remote parts of Asia where they hoped to encourage anti-British insurgencies, and the jihads never materialized.

McMeekin has written an engaging history peopled by larger than life characters in exotic settings. There is however a disconcerting tendency for the eccentric and racist views of German Orientalists to filter into his own analysis of Islam – nowhere more so than in his epilogue, where McMeekin tries to connect Oppenheim and his acolytes to the pathological anti-Semitism of the Third Reich, the Palestine-Israel conflict, and the rise of Salafi Jihadism today. “One does not have to saddle Oppenheim with personal responsibility for the actions of murderous Muftis and Mullahs,” McMeekin concludes, “to see that his idea of a worldwide holy war targeting innocent civilians set an extremely dangerous precedent” (365). Clearly the lesson from the Berlin-to-Baghdad Railway should be the opposite. Muslims are no more susceptible to single-minded fanaticism today than when they ignored the German-Ottoman appeal to jihad in 1914.

*Making a German Orient*

A boom is underway in German colonial studies. We now have a much richer picture of Germany history in a global context. But arguably, the Ottoman Empire and its vast domains were of much greater significance to German imperialists than the five formal colonies over which Germany presided from 1884 to 1919. Especially from the onset of Kaiser Wilhelm's *Weltpolitik* in 1898, the Ottoman Empire, stretching from Southeastern Europe to Anatolia to the Middle East, inspired grand visions among Germany's power elite, including Kaiser Wilhelm II, the civilian cabinet, the military cabinet, industrialists and bankers like the chiefs of the Krupp firm and Deutsche Bank, and pro-imperial and well-connected intellectuals and publicists. They all came to see the Ottoman Empire as the prime site of German imperial interests, a place where Germany could project political and economic power, earn profits, and, certainly not least, contest British, French, and Russian predominance in various parts of the region.

Samoa and East Africa had their plantations, Southwest Africa its ranches, none of which amounted to a whole lot in real-world calculations. German imperialists knew that, even if they kept trying (on the cheap) to make something significant out of the colonies. The Ottoman Empire was a different matter. It was, after all, a storied empire of six centuries' duration and a member of the Concert of Europe. Its domain included areas of critical strategic value to any European power with global pretensions. Economically, one could reasonably conjure up the promise of great markets for German goods among the Empire's millions of Muslims and countless investment opportunities for German businesses, something much harder to do for Southwest Africa with its total population of less than a couple hundred thousand (if that) around the turn into the twentieth century.

It is a notable achievement of Sean McMeekin's *The Berlin-Baghdad Express* that he restores the importance of the Ottoman Empire to German history. McMeekin sets out this general point in the first section of the book, in which he recounts the notable story of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway and introduces the characters who will star in his epic tale. They were a colorful lot—Max von Oppenheim, who ran around the Middle East as an informal foreign ministry informant, though often kept at arms-length, not least because of his partially Jewish background; the trained philologist Curt Prüfer; the interesting anthropologist Leo Frobenius, and a host of others. They were German variants of Richard Burton, T. E. Lawrence, Sven Hedin, and so many other imperial adventurers and Orientalists of various nationalities, some of them highly educated specialists conversant in many languages, others more fly-by-the-seat-of-the-pants, learn-as-you-go, garden-variety imperialists. They published anti-British screeds, and presented Germany as the defender of global Islam, echoing Kaiser Wilhelm II's famed 1898 comment from Damascus that Germany was the true friend of the world's 300,000,000 Muslims. More seriously, but no more successfully, they smuggled arms to Muslims and fomented conspiracies against the British Empire. Those excited by the possibilities of a German-dominated Orient (to use the language of the day) imagined Germany, finally a true world power, displacing the British

from Cyprus to Cairo to New Delhi. Bismarck's famed comment about the entire Balkans not being worth the bones of a single Pommeranian grenadier would be finally and totally laid to rest. Cairo and Damascus, as well as New Delhi, Hyderabad, and Bombay, would certainly be worth many bones of many Pommeranian grenadiers.

World War I is the central focus of McMeekin's book. The war was a godsend for his footloose German Orientalists. Now they had the opportunity to affect the course of events, they thought. By raising Muslim revolts against the British (and the Russians, though less so), they could achieve for Germany the global power that was its right and mission. Paraphrasing the thinking of Oppenheim and company, McMeekin writes: "Imagine what [Muslim subjects of the British Empire] could do if the power threatening the Sultan-Caliph were Great Britain itself. If Germany could conjure up such a war, the waves of Muslim rage could bring the British Empire to its knees. After long years in the wilderness, Baron Max von Oppenheim, the prophet of global jihad, would now take center-stage" (82).

McMeekin offers his readers excellent descriptions of the many sites of German involvement in the Muslim world, from the Sinai to Gallipoli, the Arabian desert to the Indian subcontinent. His accounts of events like the German-Ottoman crossing of the Sinai and attack on the Suez Canal and the more well-known Gallipoli campaign are riveting.

But what did it all amount to? This is where the reader of McMeekin's book begins to have some doubts. Analytically, two items need to be distinguished. The first, uncontested, is the importance of the Ottoman Empire in German strategic, political, and economic calculations. The second, far more questionable, is the scope and meaning of the German efforts to raise global jihad.

The various eastern fronts of the war, from Russia to Mesopotamia to the Pacific, have long been neglected in North America and Western Europe. In teaching, scholarship, and popular accounts, our attention has been fixated on the trench warfare of the western front. That is the place where, of course, so many young English, French, and German men died. The bracing war literature we know so well, from Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen to Henri Barbusse, Erich Maria Remarque, and Ernst Jünger, is centered on the western front. So are popular renditions, from James Cagney's "The Roaring Twenties" (1939) to the present-day "Boardwalk Empire." In both, GIs return from the trenches physically and psychologically wounded and turn to a life of violent crime.

For all the significance of the long-neglected warfare beyond Europe, the European fronts, west and east, were always central to every German calculation about the war. Once the German advance was stopped at the Marne in September 1914, all the planning, all the offensives, all the restrictive home front policies, were designed first and foremost to break out of the enervating (though bloody) logic of trench warfare. In Eastern Europe, despite the successes of the Central Powers and greater troop mobility, the war also turned into debilitating, slogging sets of battles that sapped both sides. To break out of the stalemates west and east, Germany's resources of every sort were stretched to unbearable limits. Only the collapse of the Russian army and the Russian Revolutions eased matters for Germany in the East.

Of all the domains of the Ottoman Empire, its core, Anatolia, not Arabia or the Suez or anyplace else, proved critical to German war strategy, and for two reasons: It was the center of the Ottoman Empire and had to be protected, just as every state sought desperately to protect its capital and the surrounding region, and it was another venue to fight the archenemy Russia. Everything beyond, all the little conspiracies and the pitched battles, the not-so-little arms smuggling and the meetings with Bedouin chiefs and Shi'ite clerics, whether in Egypt, the Syrian desert, Persia, Iraq, Afghanistan, or India—all that was a sideshow. McMeekin writes: "To dismiss the importance of pan-Islam in Germany's wartime plans . . . is to fall victim to hindsight. In 1914, if not when they were writing post-war memoirs, Germany's leaders saw in Islam the secret weapon which would decide the world war." (87). But Germany ventured lots of secret weapons in the war, each of which was supposed to turn the tide: poison gas, submarines, massive, frontal assaults like Verdun. Every one of them failed.

To be sure, some German imperialists like Oppenheim, their reputations at stake, claimed that jihad would provide the breakthrough that would save Germany-in-Europe. But none of the German General Staff, nor the Kaiser, nor the members of the civilian government, believed them. Europe was always their central concern. Like the subjects of his book, McMeekin has gone native. Although the author has a bitter-sweet relationship with his Orientalists, he has, in the end, been seduced by their claims of influence.

So when McMeekin writes, "pursued by demons only they understood, the Kaiser, the Baron [Oppenheim], the Dragoman [Prüfer], would make the world pay for its failure to recognize their greatness" (31), this reader responds with some wonderment. The point may hold for the impetuous, insecure, infantile Wilhelm II. But did the other two, typical of the western adventurous hack journalists and scholars who made careers and life stories out of the Orient, really exercise such influence on the world? Even if they did, does this kind of personalized history get us very far in understanding the course of events in the Ottoman Empire and its successor states? The Hussein-McMahon correspondence, the Sykes-Picot agreement, the Arab revolt under British sponsorship, the Balfour Declaration—that was serious business. The German efforts of Oppenheim, Prüfer, and others seem more out of something like "Abbott and Costello Go East."

But there is one very large issue of the utmost importance, and that is the Armenian Genocide. McMeekin tries to avoid it with an "even-handed" approach that presents the "Turkish position" and the "Armenian position" (394, note 21). But it is misplaced, to say the least, to presume that a scholarly interpretation matches seamlessly onto nationality. Would anyone write that there exists a "Jewish position" on the Holocaust, and presume thereby that all Jews follow the same interpretive line? The scholarship on the history of the late Ottoman Empire and the fate of the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks -- the first two the victims of genocide, the last of ethnic cleansing—has advanced enormously in the last fifteen years. The Republic of Turkey has an official position, which is denial of genocide, and it has many adherents. But that is rather different from formulations that implicate all Turks in the stance of the government.

Aside from the hired hands of the Turkish state and a few exceptions like Guenther Lewy, cited so positively by McMeekin, the scholarly consensus (not the “Armenian position”!) is quite clear—a genocide was carried out by the Young Turk government against the Armenians. The deportations and massacres were coordinated by the central government, the ministry of interior in particular, and the Young Turk party organization. A preexisting plan had not been formulated, but the Young Turks had developed, even before the outbreak of World War I, a clear orientation—the demographic restructuring of the Empire was absolutely necessary (see especially Taner Akçam’s forthcoming, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2012)). Much of their thinking was based on the difficult and tragic experience of the Balkan Wars, as well as all the other losses of territory and population that the Empire had suffered from 1910 onward (let alone the earlier losses). The Armenian reform commission, imposed upon the Ottomans by the European powers early in 1914, only aggravated their sentiments. To the Young Turks, the reform commission seemed like just another imperialist maneuver to shear off Ottoman territory, which would ultimately lead to the demise of the Empire. The Armenians in toto had come to be seen as an existential threat. War gave the Young Turks the opportunity to deal with them once and for all—as interior minister and later also grand vezir Talaat Pasha expressly said.

In McMeekin’s hands, the tragic fate of the Armenians was the result of a “classic escalatory spiral” (252) of rebellion and repression. Yet this formulation suggests that no one had responsibility, that the events just somehow happened. While there most certainly were Armenian rebellions against Ottoman rule, the vast majority of Armenians deported were civilians, and in most areas, they were predominantly women, children, and the elderly, precisely because the men were often killed outright. The notion of armed Armenians battling it out with Turkish troops and gendarmes is a worn, tired image that captures a sliver of truth in some areas, Van and Cilicia the most well known, but utterly distorts the larger reality of the Armenian Genocide.

Moreover, to pin the genocide on jihad (257-58) is unconvincing and flies in the face of recent scholarship. Young Turk policies were not based on radical Islam. They were an eminently modern form of social engineering in keeping with so many other instances of forced deportations and genocides in the twentieth century. One need not run through the ever expanding catalog of these policies around the globe. Suffice it to say that ethnic cleansing and genocide are only minimally, if at all, the result of religious fanaticism. They are, instead, the practices of state- and nation-building, particularly when the states in question and the international community believe that domestic and international security as well as the rights of the people (whoever they may be) are best assured when the population is homogeneous. If that goal cannot be reached, then plan B kicks in, namely, the primacy of one nationality in the state and the reduction of others to minority status or, in a few cases (like Burundi), to the status of a suppressed majority.

Finally, the German role was by no means as benign as McMeekin presents (254-58). The genocide was a Young Turk policy. German businessmen, officers, missionaries, diplomats, and intellectuals and publicists were all over Anatolia and the Middle East. From the very

first killings in spring 1915, they knew precisely what was going on. Some German consular officials and others responded with alarm, and pleaded with their ambassador, Baron Hans von Wangenheim, to protest the policies to the Young Turk government and to Berlin. When he finally did so, it was much too little, much too late. In any case, the civilian cabinet under Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, the general staff, and the Kaiser himself all blocked any serious protests. In so doing, they made Germany complicit in the Armenian Genocide.

*The Berlin-Baghdad Express* is an important book. It presents a side of World War I little known even to many historians, let alone the broader public. It is sprinkled with colorful characters and exceptional events. If the larger analysis is not always convincing, it does demonstrate the global character of World War I. Oppenheim and Prüfer may not have been the handmaidens, but in the year of the Arab Spring, we are still living with the war's impact on the Muslim world.

Author's Response by Sean McMeekin

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I would like to thank Professors Lawson, McKale, Rogan, and Weitz for taking the time to read my book. Their detailed comments suggest that they have read the book very closely, and responded in a constructive spirit. I will try to do the same.

I will begin with Professor McKale's report. McKale was the last western scholar to tackle German *Revolutionierungspolitik* in the Middle East in his *War by Revolution*, a work I made great use of in my own study.<sup>1</sup> McKale's earlier biography of *Curt Prüfer* is, to my knowledge, the only one of its kind, and I could not have done without it.<sup>2</sup> We historians must always rely, to some extent, on the work of those who precede us, and I am grateful to have been able to draw on McKale's pioneering research. It means a great deal to me that Professor McKale has troubled himself to review my work and to do so with such generosity of spirit.

I am also grateful to Fred Lawson for his suggestions, which I hope to be able to incorporate into a new edition of *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*. I had not seen the works of (the late) Donald Quataert or Ochsenwald on the Baghdad and Hejaz railways before writing my book, and I wish that I had. Being based in Turkey, as I am, I have at once keen scholarly advantages and disadvantages on a topic such as this over colleagues based in the U.S. or UK: closer proximity to the scene and to many relevant archives, but much more scattershot access to secondary literature. References like this are invaluable and I do hope that I can improve the second edition in light of them.

Professor Lawson also makes several intriguing comments regarding the structure of the *Berlin-Baghdad Express*. He clearly thinks I let the railway disappear for too long in the narrative in between chapters 2 and 14 – and it is true that I “check in” only occasionally with progress on the line in that section of the book. In a way, this parallels a number of critiques ordinary readers have made on Amazon (especially the UK site) – people wanted more on the railway! For this I can only apologize: I myself wanted to weave the railway in more consistently, but simply could not figure out a way to do this without disfiguring the narrative.

The disconnect here, I think, arises partly from the title, which does indeed suggest a primarily railway-oriented book, although I never meant it to be so. In this vein Professor Lawson suggests that I could have ended my story with “the torching of the ornate Haydarpasha train station” in September 1917, which brought “a fittingly apocalyptic end to the Kaiser's Berlin-to-Baghdad dreams.” I considered doing this myself. It would have made for a shorter book, a pithier one, and in the end a much easier one to finish. In the end, I decided that cutting off the narrative in 1917 would leave too many loose ends dangling, including the Germans' Russian revolutionary stratagem, Brest-Litovsk, the fall of

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<sup>1</sup> Donald M. McKale, *War by Revolution. Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> McKale, *Curt Prüfer. German Diplomat from the Kaiser to Hitler* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Press, 1987).

the Young Turks, and of course Zionism. Lawson also suggests that I could have woven the Zionism story into the main narrative, rather than leaving it for an epilogue. Easier said than done! If I had figured out how to do this, I would have done it.

Lawson also supplied several corrections, for which I am grateful. I do wish to dispute, however, his contention that “it is highly doubtful that a linkage” between “strict shari’ah law [and] a restoration of the caliphate...existed in 1914,” with the idea being that this linkage would occur only later, to al-Qaeda and their ilk. This seems a sloppy formulation to me, as, first of all, the sentence in my book about the “the strict Sharia law of a revived Caliphate” referred not to 1914, but to the shadow-boxing between Britain and Germany over the Caliphate in 1906, the idea being that this is how British and German thinkers envisioned “reviving” (not restoring) the Caliphate. Second, strict compliance with Sharia law – or its eclipse – was a, if not the, major issue in the power struggle between Abdul Hamid II and the Young Turks which erupted in 1908-9.

Eugene Rogan’s critique is somewhat different in nature. His criticism seems to be the mirror image of his praise. Although I have produced an “engaging history peopled by larger than life characters in exotic settings,” he writes, at times I allow “the eccentric and racist views of German Orientalists” to filter into my prose. While I do try to be careful to distinguish between my views and those of my characters, and I simply reject the idea that I wrote in such a manner, I think I see what he is getting at. I do sometimes use words like “the east” and “the Orient,” and sometimes make qualified generalizations about Islam, Turks, and Arabs, much as German Orientalists did. So did John Buchan, whose novel *Greenmantle* serves as my principal narrative inspiration. Rogan evidently approves of it as well, since he begins his own comment with a gloss on *Greenmantle*. So far as I follow Rogan’s reasoning, since he chides me for what he sees as my objectionable language but also admits his admiration of *Greenmantle*, it is acceptable for John Buchan, to do this sort of thing, but not so for authors today, in our more culturally sensitive era.

Of course, I understand all this. Still, I wonder how far it must go. Are we so squeamish now that we cannot say *anything* about ethnic, national, or religious groups, nor use colorful labels, lest someone somewhere possibly take offense? On this question, I stand with Elie Kedourie, who once lamented – in the *New York Review of Books*, of all august scholarly venues! – that “fifty or a hundred years ago an author who felt drawn to Middle Eastern subjects had a tremendous variety from which to choose: Barbary corsairs, belly dancers, fanatical Mussulmans, sultans, pashas, moors, muezzins, harems.” Ah, the rich language of Orientalism! Alas, in the era of high Arab nationalism when Kedourie was writing, everyone in the greater Middle East outside of Turkey and Iran became simply “Arabs,” about which nothing colorful or interesting, much less keenly critical, could be said.<sup>3</sup> In any event, Rogan concludes his critique with his own anodyne and debatable generalization about “Muslims,” thereby violating his own rule.

Eric Weitz seems to have enjoyed my book, which gladdens me. He does dispute two issues, which I will take up in turn. First, there is the importance of Germany’s Middle

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<sup>3</sup> Elie Kedourie, “Not So Grand Illusions,” *New York Review of Books* 9 (9): 23 November 1967.

Eastern strategy in the First World War. As Weitz writes, “The Hussein-McMahon correspondence, the Sykes-Picot agreement, the Arab revolt under British sponsorship, the Balfour Declaration—that was serious business. The German efforts of Oppenheim, Prüfer, and others seem more out of something like ‘Abbott and Costello Go East.’” I take this as a compliment to my writing –the German-sponsored jihad produced, at times, great entertainment, which is part of what attracted me to the subject.

I strenuously object, however to the notion that the “business” conducted by the British during the war was serious, whereas that conducted by the Germans was not. This is the worst sort of hindsight. The British won the war: therefore their agreements, for the most part, took effect. The Germans, in the end, lost the war, and so their own agreements, over matters such as the Baghdad railway, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Afghanistan, and with figures such as the Egyptian Khedive Abbas Hilmi II, Feisal, Sherif Hussein, Sheikh Ali el Irakein of Karbala, Emir Habibullah, Hindu prince-pretenders, and so on, were rendered moot. This does not make the Germans’ Middle Eastern “business” less serious than that of the British. Was the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918, which remade the East from the Baltic to the Caspian, not “serious,” because it was later overturned after the German collapse on the western front?

In similar vein, Weitz asserts that “all the little conspiracies and pitched battles” discussed in my book were ultimately a “sideshow” to the more important arenas of the war. Since Weitz does not name here any actual conspiracies or battles, I am not sure if he means to dismiss the importance of the two battles for the Suez Canal; the Ottoman disaster at Sarikamış; the Dardanelles campaign; Gallipoli; the Russian conquest of northern Persia; the fall of Erzurum and the Russian advance deep into Anatolia in 1916; or the struggle for Baku and the Transcaucasus in 1918, all of which are given extensive coverage in *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*. These were by no means sideshows.

In terms of expenditure, firepower, scale of battles and so on, of course it is true that no front compared to the western, and that the Ottoman and Persian theaters were secondary. In terms of the final outcome, the western front was certainly the decisive one, although this was arguably accidental, owing to the stalemate-breaking American intervention (itself the lowest-comedy sort of accident, made possible by the Zimmermann telegram).

The First World War, I would argue, was not fought over Flanders in any more than the most literal sense. *Where* a war is fought is a different matter than *why* and for *what aims* it was fought. Aside from the Longwy-Briey iron field and its surrounding industrial basin, the Germans had little interest in the territories over which their armies marched on the western front. They did, however, have great ambitions in the Middle East (the famous *Drang nach Osten*) which was rather the point of my book. This was even more true of the Russians, for whom, as I argue in a forthcoming book, World War I was essentially a “War of the Ottoman Succession.”<sup>4</sup> For Britain and France, the war did not start out as a struggle to master the Middle East, but this is largely how it ended for them, after both were drawn

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<sup>4</sup> Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/Belknap, November 2011).

into the Ottoman theater by Germany and Russia.

The second area of Professor Weitz's critique is more serious. It is also more perplexing. A single endnote on p. 394 of my book seems to have set him off in such a way that he devotes 912 words, or about 40% of his entire comment, to criticizing it. The endnote itself is fairly innocuous, one of those "some scholars say this, other scholars say this" references designed more to dot one's i's and cross one's t's than to advance an argument of any kind. I would urge interested readers to read it and judge for themselves.

The subject is the Armenian deportations and massacres (or genocide) of 1915. From Weitz's lengthy excursus on a single footnote, one might surmise that this subject was the primary subject of my book, rather than a side gloss in chapter 14, the subject of which was the Baghdad railway. Since Weitz cites only three words of text from my book ("classic escalatory spiral"), and these without explanation or context, it is hard to know what, exactly, has upset him (other than the footnote). I am bewildered by his odd response, which ignores my description of the harrowing plight of Armenian refugees forced to march on foot over the Taurus and Amanus mountains (253), my citation of a horrifying witness report of "1,000 dead Armenians during the daylight hours of his journey, lying by the railway" (253), my discussion of the "cruel manhandling" of Armenian railway employees, most of whom were "trembling for their lives" (254), my original contribution to the story of the expulsion of the entire Armenian population of Adana, which left the city so barren that even its Ottoman Governor (who had given the deportation orders) joined them on the refugee trail (255) and my overall judgment that the brutal deportation campaign, marked by the "slaughtering en masse" of civilians, many at the hands of formal execution squads, led to the "extirpation of the Armenian people in much of Anatolia." (253).

Surely it must have been something. It is hard to say what, however, as Weitz's critique, at least in this area, is based not on what I say at all. He writes, for example, that "the German role was by no means as benign as McMeekin presents (254-58)" (no text is cited). This is strange. What I actually write, on p. 256, is that the first rebuke from the German high command to the Ottomans' Armenian expulsion policy was not delivered until November 1915, "by which time...hundreds of thousands of Armenians had already lost their homes and lives." Weitz then complains, in a seeming contradiction, that I "pin the genocide on jihad (257-58)" (again, no text is cited). And yet this is not what I do. What I write here is that Austria's Ambassador to the Porte, Johann Markgraf von Pallavicini, "connect[ed] the Armenian tragedy...to the unleashing of holy war in Turkey," when he was trying to account for the emotional breakdown of his German counterpart, Hans von Wangenheim. Pallavicini's idea was that Wangenheim felt guilty about his role in helping facilitate, or at least not doing anything to stop, Ottoman atrocities against Armenians. So, if I have this right, I have wrongfully exonerated the Germans; but I have also exaggerated their guilt for having promoted jihad. Which is it?

To the extent I follow Weitz's critique at all, he seems to think that, by daring to discuss the wartime context of the deportation campaign – as Weitz puts it, the "notion of armed Armenians battling it out with Turkish troops and gendarmes is a worn, tired image" – I

have violated some all-powerful “scholarly consensus” on the subject. Such a consensus does not exist.

I will happily read Taner Akçam’s next book, as I read his last one,<sup>5</sup> and I expect to learn new things from both books, as Akçam (unlike most scholars of the subject) has done substantial work in the Ottoman archives. The same is true of Fuat Dündar, whose recent study, *Crime of Numbers* (which came out the same year as mine) is the best demographic work I have seen on the Armenian population of Turkey before and after the wartime deportations and massacres.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, Dündar’s estimate of the number of Armenians who died during the wartime deportation campaign, 664,000, is only 22,000 higher than that of Guenter Lewy, cited in my own *Berlin-Baghdad Express*. Weitz says that the only people (aside from Lewy) who disagree with his “scholarly consensus” are “hired hands of the Turkish state.” If so, I find it interesting that the new consensus figure on the death toll of 1915 – taking even Dündar’s higher estimate of 664,000 – is closer, by an order of magnitude, to the “Turkish position” (about 500,000) than the “Armenian one” (the 1.5 million figure cited in hundreds of books; other scholars on the “Armenian” side go as high as 2 million). The “consensus” seems to have moved, but this is nowhere reflected in Professor Weitz’s review.

I also hope that Taner Akçam and Fuat Dündar, and other scholars, can learn something from my own *Berlin-Baghdad Express*. Something that is underplayed in the reviews is my original and revelatory use of Russian sources. In addition to having read many of the same German, Austrian, and American consular reports western historians have worked with for decades, I have also done original work on the subject in both the Ottoman and the Russian military archives, something very few scholars can claim. I trust in my ability to interpret documents, just as I trust my readers to be able to make up their own minds on controversial matters. This is why I try to let the primary sources speak for themselves, rather than appealing to higher scholarly authority to tell everyone what they are supposed to think. Is this not the very purpose of historical scholarship, of the academic enterprise itself?

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<sup>5</sup> Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: the Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010).