

The Great War as a Global War: Imperial Conflict and the Reconfiguration of World Order, 1911–1923*

TOWARD A GLOBAL HISTORY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

When the First World War formally ended in late 1918 with an Allied victory, three vast and centuries-old land empires—the Ottoman, Habsburg, and Romanov empires—vanished from the map. A fourth—the Hohenzollern empire, which had become a major land empire in the last year of the war when it occupied enormous territories in East-Central Europe—was significantly reduced in size, stripped of its overseas colonies, and transformed into a parliamentary democracy with what Germans across the political spectrum referred to as a “bleeding frontier” toward the East. The victorious Western European empires were not unaffected by the cataclysm of war either: Ireland gained independence after a bloody guerilla war against regular and irregular British forces. Further afield, in Egypt, India, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Burma, Britain responded to unrest with considerable force. France fought back resistance to its imperial ambitions in Algeria, Syria, Indo-China, and Morocco and, even further from the main theaters of the Great War, Japan did the same in Korea. The United States, having been catapulted into a position of unprecedented prominence and influence in world affairs, was struggling to define its role in the world and reconcile its republican traditions with its growing power and expanding imperial domain.

Benito Mussolini famously commented on the disintegration of the great European land empires and the new challenges confronting the blue-water empires with a surprisingly nervous reference: neither the fall of ancient Rome nor the defeat of Napoleon, he insisted in an article for *Il Popolo d'Italia*, could compare in its impact on history to the current reshuffling of Europe’s political map. “The whole earth trembles. All continents are riven by the same crisis. There is not a single part of the planet . . . which is not shaken by the cyclone. In old Europe, men disappear, systems break, institutions collapse.”¹ What would come

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1. Mussolini as quoted in: R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London, 2002), 121.

to replace the fallen old order, he did not say. But he had a point. For centuries, the history of the world had been a history of empires, both within the European continent and beyond it, marked by maritime exploration, expansion, and conquest of overseas territories. Indeed, the decades that preceded the war arguably saw an unprecedented expansion of the imperial world order, as new entrants such as the United States, Japan, and Germany sought to carve out their own spheres of colonial domination. On the eve of the Great War much of the landmass of the inhabited world was divided into formal empires or economically dependent territories. That world unraveled dramatically in the twentieth century, beginning with the cataclysm of the First World War.

The First World War is hardly a neglected subject of historical research. Yet—understandably perhaps, given the impact of the fighting on Western Europe—a great deal of the literature produced over the past ninety years has focused on the events on the Western Front and their impact on metropolitan Britain, France, and Germany. Most of these histories are framed within two “classic” assumptions: first, that the war began with the sounding of the “guns of August” in 1914 and ended with the Armistice of November 11, 1918 and second, that the war was primarily one fought in Europe between European nation-states. Meanwhile, ethnic minorities, imperial troops, and Eastern European or non-European theaters of fighting, conscription, and upheaval have remained at best sideshows in general history accounts of war and peace on the Western front.²

These assumptions have dominated and defined the Western historiography of the Great War for decades. And while the literature based on them has produced many valuable insights into the causes and consequences of that conflict, this essay argues that the history of the Great War must be drawn on a wider canvas, one perched on two premises that diverge from the usual assumptions. The first premise is that we must examine the war within a frame that is both longer (temporally) and wider (spatially) than the usual one. This move will allow us to see more clearly that the paroxysm of 1914–1918 was the epicenter of a cycle of armed imperial conflict that began in 1911 with the Italian invasion of Libya and intensified the following year with the Balkan wars that reduced Ottoman power to a toe-hold in Europe.³ Moreover, the massive violence triggered by the conflict continued unabated until 1923, when the Treaty of Lausanne defined the territory of the new Turkish Republic and ended Greek territorial ambitions in Asia Minor with the largest forced population exchange in history until the Second

2. Despite recent attempts to write transnational histories of the Great War, the global history of its immediate aftermath is yet to be tackled. The most recent attempts at transnational histories of the Great War include Alan Kramer, *Dynamics of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford, 2008). On the global ramifications of the Paris Peace Treaties, see: Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007).

3. Richard Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London, 2000). Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2011), 1–10.

World War.⁴ The end of the Irish Civil War in the same year, the restoration of a measure of equilibrium in Germany after the end of the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr, the decisive victory of the Bolshevik regime in Russia in a bloody civil war, and the reconfiguration of power relations in East Asia at the Washington Conference, were all further signs that the cycle of violence, for the time being, had run its course.

The second contention of this essay is that we should see the First World War not simply as a war between European nation-states but also, and perhaps primarily, as a war among global empires. If we take the conflict seriously as a *world* war, we must, a century after the fact, do justice more fully to the millions of imperial subjects called upon to defend their imperial governments' interest, to theaters of war that lay far beyond Europe including in Asia and Africa and, more generally, to the wartime roles and experiences of innumerable peoples from outside the European continent. In so doing, this essay builds on a growing literature on the experiences of the Indian *sepoys*, Chinese laborers, African *askaris*, the French Armée d'Afrique, and African American soldiers to offer both a synthetic analysis of empires during the First World War and an agenda for future research.⁵ We can now also draw on scholarship that has explored the effects of the war on regions outside of Western Europe, including Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and also Eastern Europe, a region which has long and quite rightly been called "the forgotten front" and which recent scholarship is now bringing back into focus as the region in which the Great War originated and played out in a most violent way.⁶

The mobilization of millions of imperial subjects proved essential for nearly all of the combatant states, from Germany to the Ottoman, Habsburg, and Romanov empires and, of course, the Entente powers. Indian, African, Canadian, and Australian soldiers among others all served on the Western Front, as well as in a range of ancillary theaters and hundreds of thousands of them died. Noncombatant laborers—notably from China—also proved vital to the conduct of the war, as did the involvement of the Japanese Empire, which used the war as an opportunity not only to try to penetrate further into China but also to stage an extensive occupation of Siberia that lasted until 1922. Fighting also took place in

4. Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923* (Oxford, 2009).

5. Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (London, 1991); David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London, 1994); Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity, and the Development of National Consciousness* (Manchester, 2004); Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, NH, 1999); Christian Koller, 'Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt'. Die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik (1914-1930) (Stuttgart, 2001); Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and Empire in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore, 2008). Heike Liebau et al., eds., *The World in World Wars: Experiences and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Leiden, 2010). For the African American contribution, see, e.g., Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I* (New York, 1996).

6. Gerhard P. Gross, *Die vergessene Front – der Osten 1914/15: Ereignis, Wirkung Nachwirkung*, 2nd ed. (Paderborn, 2009).

many locations outside the European theater of war—from Siberia and East Asia to the Middle East, from the South Pacific to the protracted campaigns in East Africa. The impact of the war was profoundly felt by hundreds of millions living across the imperial world, as the war brought conscription, occupation, inflation, and economic dislocation, while also in many instances kindling new opportunities, ideas, plans, and hopes.

Mobilization in a colonial context was a delicate and difficult task. After all, a war fought on both sides with native auxiliaries was likely to undermine the very principle on which colonialism rested: the notion of white racial superiority. As early as 1902, influential commentators such as J. A. Hobson cautioned that the use of nonwhite troops in a European War would lead to the “degradation of Western States and a possible debacle of Western civilization.”⁷ If a “colored” man was trained to kill white men, what guarantee was there that he would not one day attack his own colonial masters?

In many of the colonies, there was a political calculation on the part of those who chose to enlist or those who encouraged others to do so. Leaders of the Indian National Congress or many “Home Rulers” in Ireland supported the war in the hope of greater political autonomy, perhaps even national independence. Mahatma Gandhi, who returned to India from his long sojourn in South Africa in 1915, famously campaigned to recruit his fellow Indians to fight for the empire. This puzzled observers at the time and since who have wondered how this campaign squared with his already long-professed principles of nonviolence. But Gandhi, like many other Indian nationalists, hoped that Indian participation in the imperial war effort would place India within the imperial structure on par with the white Dominions and qualify them for home rule. London encouraged this line of thinking, making wartime promises for the greater participation of Indians in their own government.⁸ This imperial strategy was applied elsewhere as well, most famously perhaps in the incompatible wartime promises made to Arabs and Jews over the disposition of Ottoman Palestine.⁹ In this respect, the war proved a great disappointment for a great many who had hoped to parlay support for the Allied war effort into advances in claims for self-government, setting the tone for decades of conflict to come.

One of the supreme ironies of the war, of course, was that a war fought for the protection and expansion of empire in fact led to the dissolution of empires. Its most immediate victims were the vast, multiethnic empires of Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottomans and also the newer, aspiring German empire. But the war also delivered a severe body blow to the empires on the winning side, generating new forms of upheaval, disorder, and resistance which presented

7. John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London, 1902).

8. See Shane Ryland, “Edwin Montagu in India, 1917–1918: Politics of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report,” *South Asia* 3 (1973), 79–92.

9. See e.g., David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914–1922* (New York, 1989).

unprecedented challenges, both practical and ideological, to imperial managers. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the victorious empires, the British and French in particular, saw significant territorial expansion in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. But this expansion came at a heavy price, overextending the resources of imperial control even as they faced new and more intense forms of resistance as well as the novel duties and constraints imposed by the League of Nations mandate system.¹⁰ The war thus hastened a process of imperial decline that would eventually lead to the collapse of a global order based on territorial empires and replace it by one predicated on the nation-state as the only internationally legitimate form of political organization.

Viewing the war as a war of empires also helps us to see how the violence that came before August 1914 and after November 1918 was in fact part of the same process of the realignment of global patterns of power and legitimacy. Large-scale violent conflict continued for years after 1918 as the Great War destroyed the dynastic empires of Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Ottoman Turkey and created a heavily contested border in Germany's East, thereby leaving what some have called "shatter zones," or large tracts of territory where the disappearance of frontiers created spaces without order or clear state authority.¹¹ Revolutionary regimes came to power and then fell in quick succession as massive waves of violence engulfed the East and Central European shatter zones of the defunct dynastic land empires. The massive carnage of the Russian civil war only intensified after the armistice, as did a number of major but hitherto little-studied relief projects, not least the American Relief Administration led by Herbert Hoover, which delivered more than 4 million tons of relief supplies between 1919 and 1923.¹² And of course, civil war accompanied by large-scale massacres and population transfer of unprecedented scope raged in Anatolia. The massive violence did not come to an end until the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which stabilized, at least temporarily, the postimperial conflict in South-Eastern Europe and Asia Minor.

It was not only the losers who suffered; the conflict dealt a substantial blow even to those empires that emerged victorious. The period that followed the armistice, after all, saw a series of major upheavals across the colonial world and there is much

10. Susan Pedersen, "The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 32, no. 4 (2006): 560–82.

11. The term "shatterzone" was first used in the interwar years, but it was in the 1960s that the term became an analytical tool. In its modern sense, it was first used by Gordon East, "The Concept and Political Status of the Shatter Zone," in *Geographical Essays on Eastern Europe*, ed. N. J. G. Pounds, (Bloomington, 1961), before being further developed by Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford and New York, 2009), 81. For an overview of the ethnic violence attendant on the collapse of the multiethnic empires, see: Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (London, 2001); Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empire: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington, 2013).

12. Harold H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia, 1919–1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York, 1927).

truth in John Gallagher's argument that the British Empire faced its most severe crisis to date during the period 1919–1922. As early as the spring of 1919, Britain was facing major civil unrest in Egypt and the Punjab. By May, British forces were engaged in the opening stages of the Third Afghan War, and Ireland was beginning its descent into an extended period of insurgency. From January 1919 onward, British regular and irregular troops were engaged in a prolonged and ultimately unsuccessful guerrilla war with the Irish Republican Army that would lead to the establishment of the Irish Free State. The British Empire deployed extreme and widespread violence, including civilian massacres and aerial bombardment to quell revolts in Ireland, India, Iraq, and elsewhere, and they were not alone in doing so. The French fought viciously to beat back fierce resistance to their expanding rule in the Levant and Indochina; the Japanese struggled to contain challenges to their empire on the Korean Peninsula even as they sought to expand their influence deep into Siberia, a move that in turn helped prompt the Western allies, including the United States, to send forces to intervene there. Indeed, the entire edifice of the imperial world order was convulsing violently in the aftermath of the Armistice even as it reached its greatest territorial extent. The organized mass violence of the war had not ended; it had only shifted its modes and focal points.

In short, thinking about the Great War as a conflict of nation-states is a case of reading history backward. The world before 1914 was at least as much a world of empires as it was a world of nations even within Europe, not to mention in vast expanses of Asia and Africa. Clearly, nationalist myths, propaganda, and popular sentiments were vigorously mobilized to recruit manpower and build support for the war effort. But the war itself was fought as much—indeed, arguably more—for the defense and expansion of empire as for the nation. In almost all cases it was, in fact, empires rather than nations that were mobilized for the war. This essay therefore sets out to lay out the different trajectories of the major world empires in the era of the First World War, exploring how different imperial societies mobilized for total war and how the conflict changed the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

DISMANTLING EMPIRES, EXPANDING EMPIRES

The announcement of the Armistice on the November 11, 1918 augured a new world of sharp contradictions. Empires both disintegrated and expanded, and while violence ended on the Western front and in some other theaters, it continued unabated and sometimes even intensified elsewhere. In much of the former territories of the Habsburgs, the Romanovs, and the Ottomans, the blood continued to flow freely for years after. For many others, too, the war did not end with the Armistice. For two weeks after the guns fell silent on the Western front, German commander Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck carried on his campaign in East Africa, and large-scale violence persisted in places, such as Egypt, India, Korea, and Indochina. In Europe, Chinese laborers started clearing up the battlefields and

French African troops were stationed in the Ruhr region. For those black soldiers who returned home during 1918–1919, demobilization proved to be a slow and difficult process full of disappointments.

In Europe itself, the Armistice of November 11, 1918 brought anything but peace. In fact, the cessation of hostilities on the Western front was atypical for interwar Europe as violent upheavals, pogroms, and civil wars remained a characteristic feature of life in postwar Europe. Violence was particularly intense in the vast territories of the defeated dynastic land empires—the Habsburg, Romanov, and Ottoman empires—whose disappearance from the map provided the space for the emergence of new and often nervously aggressive nation-states.¹³ Those who fought in the name of these new nation-states sought to determine or defend their real or imagined borders through force and strove to create ethnically or religiously homogenous communities. The birth of these new nation-states in East-Central Europe and the Baltic region was generally most violent in those regions where national and social revolutions overlapped. For herein lay one of the peculiarities of the “wars after the war”: in the collision in Eastern and Central Europe of two currents of global revolution, the revolutions of national self-determination and the social revolutions for the redistribution of power, land, and wealth along class lines.¹⁴

Despite regional variations in the intensity of violence and its causes, hardly any territories east of the river Elbe remained unaffected. An extensive arc of postwar violence stretched from Finland and the Baltic States through Russia and Ukraine, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Germany, all the way through the Balkans into Anatolia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East, with newly founded Czechoslovakia under President Tomas Masaryk remaining an exceptional island of peace.¹⁵ In the absence of functioning states, militias of various political persuasions assumed the role of the national army for themselves (often against armed opposition from other groups that harbored similar ambitions) while the lines between friends and foes, combatants and civilians, were far less clearly demarked than they had

13. Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires* (Cambridge, 2011); Alexander V. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992* (Oxford, 2010), 72–97; Piotr Wróbel, “The Seeds of Violence: The Brutalization of an East European Region, 1917–1921,” *Journal of Modern European History* 1 (2003): 125–49.

14. Peter Gatrell, “Wars after the War: Conflicts, 1919–1923,” in *Blackwell Companion to the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Oxford, 2010), 558–75.

15. Recent literature on some of these conflicts discussed include: Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford, 2007); Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*; Michael A. Reynolds, “Native Sons: Post-Imperial Politics, Islam, and Identity in the North Caucasus, 1917–1918,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56 (2008): 221–47; John Paul Newman, “Post-imperial and Post-war Violence in the South Slav Lands, 1917–1923,” *Contemporary European History* 19 (2010): 249–65; Julia Eichenberg, “The Dark Side of Independence: Paramilitary Violence in Ireland and Poland after the First World War,” *Contemporary European History* 19 (2010): 231–48; Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923* (Oxford, 2009); Tim Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1918–1922* (Oxford, 2010).

been during the Great War. Not since the Thirty Years' War had a series of interconnected civil wars been as messy and deadly as now, as civil wars overlapped with revolutions, counterrevolutions and border conflicts between states without clearly defined frontiers or internationally recognized governments. German freebooters fought with (and against) Latvian and Estonian nationalists, Russian whites and reds clashed throughout the region while Polish, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian armed bands fought over ill-defined borders. The death toll of the short period between the Great War's official end in 1918 and the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923—was extraordinary: including those killed in the Russian Civil War, well over 4 million people lost their lives as a result of civil wars or interethnic struggles, not counting the millions of expellees and refugees.¹⁶

The abrupt break-up of Europe's land empires and the inability of the successor states to agree on borders with their neighbors certainly played a prominent role in triggering postwar violence. All national movements in the former land empires took inspiration from U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's promise, manifested most famously in the "Fourteen Points" of January 1918, that the nations of East-Central Europe should have an opportunity for "autonomous development" as well as from the Bolsheviks' insistent advocacy of the principle of "national self-determination."¹⁷ But while the slogan of "self-determination" provided a powerful rallying cry for the mobilization of anti-imperial emotions and personnel both within and outside Europe, the nascent national movements of Eastern Europe quickly encountered opposition from various camps. In Estonia and Latvia, where national movements seized the opportunity of the Bolshevik coup to declare their independence, the legitimacy of the new national assemblies was swiftly called into question.¹⁸ The situation became more confusing in the spring when a German offensive led to the occupation of all of Latvia, Estonia, Belorussia, and Ukraine, only to be reversed when the German war effort collapsed in November that year and was followed by a Red Army advance toward Minsk and Vilnius.¹⁹ In Poland, too, the attempt to restore a powerful nation-state in the heart of Europe encountered severe problems: by the spring of 1919, Josef Pilsudki's reorganized Polish armed forces were engaged on four fronts: in Upper Silesia against strong German

16. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence after the Great War* (Oxford and New York, 2012).

17. To what extent the late European empires were indeed "people's prisons" remains a controversial question to this day—recent scholarship has emphasized the Habsburg empire in particular as an evolving civil society rather than as a decrepit polity doomed to dissolution by the forces of centrifugal nationalism. See: Jonathan Kwan, "Nationalism and All That: Reassessing the Habsburg Monarchy and Its Legacies," *European History Quarterly* 41 (2011): 88–108.

18. Alexander V. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992* (Oxford, 2010), 74f; Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-1923* (London, 2001).

19. On the German occupation of "Ober-Ost," see: Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge, 2000).

volunteer forces, in Teschen/Teshyn against the Czechs, in Galicia against Ukrainian forces, and against the Soviets threatening to invade from the West.²⁰

The fate of territorial dismemberment also affected another defeated state: the Ottoman Empire, which lost all of its Arab possessions and was threatened in Western Anatolia by an initially successful Greek advance into Asia Minor shortly after the Ottoman defeat in October 1918 as well as an Armenian insurgency and a Kurdish independence movement in the East.²¹ What the Young Turks and nationalist historians in Turkey to this day refer to as the “War of Liberation” (*İstiklâl Harbi*, 1919–1923) was in essence a form of violent nation-state formation that combined mass killing, expulsion, and suppression and represented a continuation of wartime ethnic un-mixing and exclusion of Ottoman Greeks and Armenians from Anatolia—a process that began long before the proclamation of a Turkish nation-state on October 29, 1923.²² Here, as elsewhere, the nation-building process came at a high price, paid in particular by the minorities of the country. When Smyrna was re-conquered by Turkish troops in 1922, some 30,000 Greek residents were massacred and many more expelled in what became the largest population transfer in European history before the Second World War. All in all, some 70,000 people died violent deaths in Turkey during the decade after the war’s end, while approximately 900,000 Ottoman Christians and 400,000 Greek Muslims were forcibly resettled in a “homeland” most of them had never visited before.²³

In imperial domains beyond Europe, postwar violence, while not nearly as massive as it was on the continent, was nevertheless widespread; even where there was little violence, the imperial edifice was often knocked off balance. Indeed, by the time of the Paris Peace Conference, the relationship between the white dominions and the British Empire had fundamentally changed. The dominions claimed a place at the conference in their own right and fought for their own interests. Australian Prime Minister “Billy” Hughes was a particularly disruptive

20. Julia Eichenberg, “Soldiers to Civilians, Civilians to Soldiers: Poland and Ireland after the First World War,” in Gerwarth and Horne, *War in Peace*; Wróbel, “Seeds of Violence”; Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence*.

21. John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York, 1998), 415; Erik-Jan Zürcher, “The Ottoman Empire and the Armistice of Moudros,” in *At the Eleventh Hour: Reflections, Hopes, and Anxieties at the Closing of the Great War, 1918*, ed. Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle (London, 1998), 266–75.

22. Erik-Jan Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Rôle of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement 1905–1926* (Leiden, 1984); Paul Dumont, “The Origins of Kemalist Ideology,” in *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey*, ed. Jacob M. Landau (Boulder, CO, 1984), 25–44; Sabri M. Akural, “Ziya Gökalp: The Influence of his Thought on Kemalist Reforms” (PhD thesis, Indiana University, 1979); M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Garbçılar: Their Attitudes Toward Religion and Their Impact on the Official Ideology of the Turkish Republic,” *Studia Islamica* 86 (1997): 133–58.

23. There are no reliable statistics on the postwar Kurdish massacres, but the approximate numbers are: 5,000 deaths in 1921; 15,000 deaths in 1925; 10,000 deaths in 1930; and 40,000 deaths in 1938. See: Robert Gerwarth and Ugur Umit Ungor, “Imperial Apocalypse: The Collapse of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires and the Brutalization of the Successor States,” *Journal of Modern European History* (forthcoming).

force, driving U.S. President Woodrow Wilson (who referred to Hughes as a “pestiferous varmint”) to exasperation, antagonizing the Japanese delegation with his fierce opposition to the inclusion of a “racial equality clause” in the League of Nations covenant, and irritating everyone with his incessant demands that Australia be granted mandated territorial control over the former German New Guinea.²⁴ Nonetheless, the form of postwar nationalism in the settler dominions varied. For Canada and South Africa the pressing problem of appeasing large, disgruntled non-British ethnic communities, further embittered by the war, drove the mobilization of nationalist sentiment as the ideological glue to keep these fragile polities together in the immediate postwar years. In both these dominions, nationalism was articulated around moving away from the Empire—more republican, self-sufficient, and grounded in a sense of cultural difference from the British.²⁵ In Australia and New Zealand, however, postwar nationalism was equally strong but in contrast oriented around the twin themes of national maturity and Empire loyalty. Far from nationalism being the antithesis of Empire, as in other settler dominions, in Australia and New Zealand, nation and Empire, were inextricably linked.²⁶ The bloodshed of Anzac troops at Gallipoli, in particular, maintains its central position in Australian and New Zealand collective memory as the violent passage to nationhood, but also as proof of the bond between “Anglo-Saxon” settlers and the imperial motherland.²⁷

If the crisis of empire had a rather mixed impact in the white dominions, its effects across nonwhite territories was far more consistent in its destabilizing effect on imperial legitimacy and authority. Indeed, the years immediately after the war saw widespread upheaval across much of the Middle East and Asia. In Egypt, the “1919 Revolution” that erupted in the spring following the armistice included mass street protests in the cities and widespread acts of sabotage in rural areas, targeting telegraph lines and other symbols of imperial authority. Egyptian nationalists, who saw the peace conference as an opportunity to be rid of British meddling and established a political party—the Wafd, or “delegation,” whose express purpose was to present the case for Egyptian independence in Paris—grew increasingly frustrated as their hopes for a hearing evaporated and mobilized forcefully against the British presence. Though London managed to stave off the internationalization of the Egyptian question, the continuing instability eventually led it to give Egypt its independence unilaterally in 1922 while keeping for itself the “core interests” of defence and the Suez Canal. But Egyptian nationalists, who

24. See L. F. Fitzhardinge, “William Morris Hughes,” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography Vol. 9, 1891-1939*, ed. Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle (Melbourne, 1983), 393-400.

25. M. S. Careless, *Canada: A Story of Challenge* (London, 1953), 339-46.

26. See e.g., Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return* (Melbourne, 1996); Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Melbourne, 1999); and Marina Larrson, *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War* (Kensington, 2009).

27. Stephen Garton, “The Dominions, Ireland, and India,” in Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, eds., *Empires at War, 1911-23* (Oxford, 2014), 152-78.

grew increasingly assertive in the postwar years, remained recalcitrant. The tense relationship persisted for decades until 1956 despite London's efforts to retain a decisive influence over Egyptian politics with the time-tested method of divide and rule, pitting the royal court against the elected, Wafd-controlled government.²⁸

In India, too, the spring of 1919 saw widespread disturbances, as Gandhi and others mobilized Indians against Westminster's so-called "Black Acts," the Rowlatt Acts that extended wartime emergency measures into peacetime; an imperial effort to stem resistance that begat greater resistance still. The killing of hundreds of unarmed protesters who broke curfew in the Punjabi city of Amritsar became a rallying cry and a focal point of nationalist resistance. As in Egypt but more successfully, the British authorities continued to play on the divisions among Indians to retain their influence for a while longer, but they struggled in vain to restore the atmosphere of imperial harmony and legitimacy that had surrounded the Delhi Durbar of 1911, held to mark the coronation of George V as the sovereign of India. When the mainstream Indian National Congress adopted "complete independence" (*purna swaraj*), the complete severance of the imperial connection, as its goal in 1930, it brought into the heart of the independence movement a position that, until 1914, had been articulated only on the far margins of Indian political discourse.²⁹

As Britain's imperial managers strained to restore order and contain cascading crises across their old domains, they also struggled to shape and control the new territories they acquired as a result of the war, especially those detached from the defunct Ottoman Empire and awarded to the British Empire under the novel arrangement of the League of Nations mandate. The question of Palestine seemed—at least for the time being—relatively manageable. But efforts to reconcile the wartime commitments made to London's French and Arab allies and the concurrent need to find an instrument of control for the newly acquired, oil-rich mandate territory of Iraq, led to the idea of installing an allied Hijazi prince Faisal bin Hussein as monarch over Mesopotamia. That move, along with the brutal application of newly developed British airpower to suppress restive tribal revolts, managed to stabilize the situation in the mandate by the early 1920s, at least for a time.³⁰

The French mandates proved even more troublesome in the interwar period, as did other parts of the French empire: serious uprisings against French colonial rule in the interwar period included the Rif War (1925–1926), the Syrian revolt (1925–1930), the Kongo-Wara in French Equatorial Africa (1928–1931), and the Yen Bay

28. Selma Botman, "The Liberal Age, 1923–1952," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Vol. II: Modern Egypt*, ed. M. W. Daly (Cambridge, 1998).

29. D. A. Low, ed., *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917–1947* (London, 1977).

30. Priya Satia, "The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia," *American Historical Review* 111 (2006): 16–51.

mutiny in Indochina (1930–1931).³¹ It is clear that the encounter of colonial workers and *troupes* with Europe's competing political, social, and economic ideologies (socialism, syndicalism, and communism among them), began to have an effect in many French colonies. Wilson's call for self-determination famously inspired Ho Chi Minh to inquire about the concept's applicability to colonial possessions outside Europe. In Africa, meanwhile, prominent political figures like Blaise Diagne exploited the rhetoric and ideals of French universalism and egalitarianism to carve out an enhanced role for nonwhite people within the French empire while in restive North Africa, Messali Hadj's nationalist North African Star organization in the later 1920s challenged the legitimacy of the colonial state and cultivated links with international anticolonialism through the *Ligue contre l'impérialisme et l'oppression coloniale*, formed in 1927.

To be sure, the vast majority of African veterans did not rise against their colonial masters. As Gregory Mann has shown in the case of *ex-tirailleurs* in Mali after both world wars, veterans often suffered frustration when the full promise of their service was not realized (in the form of preferential treatment, employment, pensions, and even citizenship). Yet they often framed their demands to colonial authorities in a language of reciprocity that did not necessarily call into question the colonial order. In fact, even if sometimes "unruly clients" of the French state, veterans could be rather conservative, since they themselves had invested so much in that order, and thereby hoped to gain from it.³² If *troupes indigènes* did not provide a constituency for the organization of anticolonial violence, as some contemporary observers might have expected and feared, it was not because these men were satisfied in the happy enjoyment of increasing rights and acceptance under a progressive and humanitarian French republican colonialism. First of all, there were practical obstacles to paramilitary mobilization. Once demobilized and thrust back into colonial societies, these men resumed their places in a social and political hierarchy that was profoundly more racist and rigid than that of the metropole or the army, and where the mechanisms of social and political control were more or less well developed and deployed by vigilant and suspicious colonial governments assiduous in the use of racial and legal controls to uphold white "prestige."³³

Where rebellions did occur, they invariably met a ruthless response. The French army and colonial authorities deployed overwhelming force against the four major rebellions of the interwar period, making use, like the British, of the latest military technology, such as air power, gas, and tanks, as well as superior numbers, firepower, communications, and logistics. Even a thoroughly humiliated

31. See Martin Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester, 2005), 211–44.

32. Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, 2006).

33. Emmanuelle Saada, "The Empire of Law: Dignity, Prestige, and Domination in the 'Colonial Situation,'" *French Politics, Culture and Society* 20 (2002): 98–120. See also her *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago, 2012).

and much weaker France made clear at least its short-term advantages in these areas right after the Second World War, killing tens of thousands putting down uprisings in eastern Algeria (Sétif and Guelma, 1945) and Madagascar (the MDRM uprising, 1947). In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that veterans of the Great War in the colonies failed to translate their war experience into anticolonial unrest.

It is often forgotten that the British and French were not the only ones struggling to consolidate territorial gains and revive the legitimacy of imperial rule in the immediate postwar years. Japan's leaders fought mightily and successfully in Paris to retain their wartime gains of territory and other concessions in China, obtaining the recognition of the other Allied powers of their takeover of former German territories in Shandong Province. At the same time they brutally suppressed the widespread resistance associated with the March First Movement in their colony of Korea, a movement that erupted in the spring of 1919 inspired in part by Wilsonian rhetoric of self-determination. Despite the hopes that such rhetoric raised among Koreans, Washington adopted a studied posture of neutrality on the question of Korea, whose status as a colony it considered a settled matter.³⁴

Indeed, though the United States possessed several colonies in this period, territorial legacies of its victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898, these colonies played a relatively minor role in the structure of U.S. power in the postwar period and an ever smaller one in the order that U.S. leaders sought to construct in the immediate postwar period. Having already moved much further in allowing native self-government than other colonial powers, Washington experienced little resistance in its formal colonial possessions, including the Philippines and Puerto Rico, though U.S. Marines occupied Haiti in 1915 and the Dominican Republic the following year and carried on sporadic but brutal campaigns to suppress resistance there over the next five years even as Washington consolidated quasi-protectorates in Cuba, Nicaragua, and elsewhere in the circum-Caribbean region.

Still, U.S. leaders, Wilson most conspicuously, but also his Republican successors led by Charles Evans Hughes and Herbert Hoover, were already imagining and beginning to work toward an imperium of a kind very different from the vast, multiethnic, hierarchical territorial empires, whether land- or sea-based, that undergirded and defined global power in the prewar era. Instead, Wilson and his successor imagined a global imperium of nation-states, interlocked within a system of international organization and governed by the principles of free trade, an imperium in which U.S. economic (and later, military) preponderance would sustain Washington's hegemony globally, patterned to no small degree on the hegemony it had already achieved, or imagined itself to have achieved, in the Western hemisphere under the Monroe Doctrine. The pursuit of this vision in the interwar years was, of course, haphazard, held hostage to domestic resistance of

34. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 197–214.

various stripes made at least temporarily ascendant by the ravages of the Great Depression. But it is within this framework that we must view the U.S. pursuit of a stable and congenial order in East Asia, a goal at least temporarily achieved with the Washington Conference of 1922 which sought to stabilize the postwar order in the “Far East” in much the same way that Lausanne would do in the “Near East” the following year.

CONCLUSION

One of the great historical ironies of the Great War is that a war of empires, fought primarily by empires and for the survival or expansion of empire, delivered a debilitating blow to dynastic empires, which were for centuries the preeminent type of state organization and to imperial expansion and acquisition as the main logic of relations between states in world affairs. None of the four dynastic empires on the side of the Central Powers survived the war in their prewar form, and all of them (and their constituent parts, at least within Europe) were reorganized after the war into one republican form or another even while (sometimes) preserving the territorial forms and (usually) some form of the oppressive practices of their imperial predecessors in new guises. The empires on the Allied side—with the notable and significant exception of Russia—managed to survive and even expanded their imperial territories, but a war fought for the “rights of small nations” could not but undermine severely the legitimacy of imperial formations and strained the relations of imperial centers with even the most enthusiastic of imperial peripheries, namely the British crown’s “white dominions.”

It was not simply that equality in sacrifice implied equality in status and rights—after all, “peripheral” populations had been fighting for empires for millennia without expecting, or receiving, such a reward. It was that the logic of popular rule, which argued that political legitimacy derived not from divine sanction but from the people, had finally, after a long and arduous process, achieved near-universal recognition. The argument from civilization—the imperial scoundrel’s last redoubt—largely drowned in the ocean of blood that flowed in the battlefields even—especially—in the empires’ most “civilized” European provinces.

The postwar violence that wracked the territories of most of the participants, both winners and losers, was in part a struggle over the remnants of fallen empires. But it also reflected, at least in part, the crisis of imperial legitimacy ignited by the war and its aftermath. The spectacular appearance of President Wilson on the international stage, with his talk of self-determination and the rights of small nations, and the yet uncertain but growing specter of revolution in Russia and elsewhere in east and central Europe made together for a volatile mix of ideas, examples, and potential sources of support for the enemies of empire everywhere. The global movement of information and ideas, its pace quickened by the war and recent technological and institutional development, meant that the anti-imperial contagion spread quickly.

By 1923, even as the United States retreated off the global stage for the moment, networks of communist organizers, emboldened by the support of the now consolidated regime in Moscow, set about establishing the organizational structure for revolution against empire across the colonial world. Meanwhile, the former European territories of the Habsburgs, in an often bloody and generally chaotic process whose general direction was nevertheless quite clear, were established as nation-states. Across the world, the imperial state as a form of territorial governance was under attack and in retreat, while the nation-state was on the rise. And while it took another several decades and an even more murderous war between 1939 and 1945 to usher the process of imperial dissolution toward completion, the Greater War of 1911–1923 remains a global watershed in that process.