

## THE PATH LEADING TO THE ARAB REVOLT OF 1916 AND ITS AFTERMATH

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We will examine in this paper the Arab revolt of 1916, the conditions, persons and groups of various interests that led to its eventual break out, its immediate effects, the reasons and the conflicting positions of the groups that led to its limited reach in the Arab world. In our examination, we will formulate our discussion around Hussein and his sons, the British officers in Cairo, the secret Arab societies al-Fatat and al-Ahd and their most influential members in the revolt, al-Faruqi and al-Misri playing their respective role in the prospect of the revolt.

We excluded the Sykes-Picot agreement from our consideration since it was important for the negotiations between Hussein and the Allies only after the initial period of the revolt, where by then the turmoil of the immediate aftermath had passed and the British turned out to seize the control of the situation in the Arab world. The French are also excluded, since they would be important only during the eventual negotiations after the war. The French were mostly distant to Arab revolt contrary to the British, since the critical commanders and the imperial institutions of the latter were situated in Cairo, negotiating with the Arabs themselves without the agency of the former, even though they were calculating their promises to the French.

### **Hussein and Cairo contacts, The Great War breaks out, Hussein leans over to one side**

The first attempts of Hussein for his imperial dreams date back to February 1914, when he sent his son Abdullah to Egypt to consult the British for whether they would help against the Ottoman authorities and Wahib Bey, the governor of Egypt by the time, and what position that they would take if a revolt took place; Hussein's attempt of contact was following him

being informed over the scheme of Young Turks to depose him; Lord Kitchener of the Secretary of the State for War, the other party in the communication, was startled to see that Arabs, the subjects of the empire that were deemed to be the most passive now were scheming against the Sultan; for that Kitchener found it wise to keep in contact with Abdullah to check for Arab sentiment, to have a leverage for utilizing a potential ally<sup>1</sup>.

In another instance, Abdullah again visited Cairo, two months after his first visit, consulted Kitchener, asked him to support the Sharifate to prevent the Hijaz railway's extension to Mecca, since that would disturb the camel-oriented transportation jobs there, that which the Sharifate had a financial profit in; the answer of the British turned to be negative, claiming that scheming against their ally, the Ottomans, and especially on the governance of the holy cities would not be suitable for them, perhaps fearing that it would grieve the Sultan for the symbolic significance of the control over the holy lands; however, the outbreak of war in August 1914, some three months later, changed the outlook completely. Kitchener then offered Hussein a defensive alliance<sup>2</sup>.

The outbreak of the Great War put the sharif of Mecca in an awkward position, while he was sure the empire would be drawn into it, he prepared for the independence of Hijaz from Istanbul, meanwhile being divided in motivation to side with Turks, whom his younger son Faisal supported, or seek help from the Allies, which his eldest son Abdullah was inclined towards<sup>3</sup>. Beside these, Turks had a direct access to Hijaz that they lacked in other regions of the empire and therefore, Hussein had to be careful to take a measure<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 119; E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 203.

<sup>2</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 204.

<sup>3</sup> P. Mansfield, *The ottoman empire and its successors* (1973), 36.

<sup>4</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 124.

Young Turks, when the war broke out, had asked Hussein to issue a *fatwa* due to his important position in the Islamic world, and when he remained reluctant, they threatened him with deposition. In the meanwhile, Kitchener was offering help if Hussein started a revolt; henceforth, not through Arab unity and claim of independence but these two factors played a role in determining Hussein's course of actions, and in fact, if a national sentiment was present in Arab world ever, it would be such marginal to the political trends of the region, remaining an unimportant factor for influencing the agenda of Hussein<sup>5</sup>. In addition to these two factors, the course of war Hussein was observing played a role in his actions; Enver's unsuccessful Transcaucasian campaign, Jamal Pasha's attack on the Suez Canal and the bloody setback of the offensive which costed a handful of military personnel to the Ottomans, and the growing tension of the Gallipoli campaign made the Allies appear more appealing to him<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Faisal's journey, the secret Arab societies, the Damascus Protocol***

During Ali's journey, Hussein's eldest son, with Wahib Pasha to Medina; he discovered a scheme when the documents in a briefcase fell into the hands of one of Ali's men, in which it was revealed that Wahib Pasha wished to remove Hussein from the Sharifate and end the relative autonomy that Hijaz was enjoying. Ali notified his father about the situation and Hussein sent Faisal to Istanbul to discuss the removal of Wahib Pasha from his office; meanwhile a member of the secret societies arrived at Hijaz to inform them that a revolt was

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<sup>5</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 124; H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 125-126.

<sup>6</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 205.

planned in Syria. Faisal was given an additional mission to check how serious the planned revolt was<sup>7</sup>.

"Ottoman ineptitude and Turanian arrogance" were the seeds of the anti-Turkish sentiments that appeared in a small group of Arab writers, students, and businessmen, who were already prominent people of significance of the empire<sup>8</sup>. It was estimated that there were around 350 activists in the secret societies among whom were al-Fatat and al-Ahd that emerged after the Young Turk Revolution with the abovementioned sentiments, and their effect did not reach the Arab subjects of the empire that numbered around ten million<sup>9</sup>.

Al-Fatat hoped that the empire remains out of the war, and their administrative committee stated in their resolution that the main goal of Arabs was independence, and they would cooperate with Turks against the European imperialists<sup>10</sup>. However, their position changed along the way; but it was not Jamal Pasha's policies of cruel and unsound methods to suppress an uprising among Arabs in Syria, but mostly the course of the war that led the secret societies to seek independence with a revolt, assuming that the Ottomans were on the side that was deemed to lose.

In early 1915, after combining their operations with al-Ahd, al-Fatat began planning a revolt that could be directed by Ibn Saud, but he refused kindly; following his rejection the plan was offered to Hussein, considering his position in Islamic and Arabic world; with this invitation Hussein became an important figure in the course of developing events, and at the

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<sup>7</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 62.

<sup>8</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 120.

<sup>9</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 172.

<sup>10</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 57.

same time the geographical expression of the dreams of the societies were adopted by him in his claim to an Arab empire<sup>11</sup>.

Faisal, having been commissioned to seek out the situation in Syria after Hussein was notified about the activities of the secret societies, went on his way to Damascus. Once he arrived, Faisal was introduced into al-Fatat and declared a member; in his conversations with the society members, he was convinced of the strength of al-Fatat within the Ottoman army by the enticements of the members. The leaders of the two societies negotiated for conditions with British cooperation after Faisal continued to Istanbul; the demands were collected into the "Damascus Protocol" that was deemed to be presented to British<sup>12</sup>. In Istanbul Faisal realised that the empire was on the verge of collapse<sup>13</sup>. On his way back, Faisal arrived at Damascus on 23 May, where he had a meeting with Yasin al-Hashimi and he was told that there was no need for external sources and the reach of the societies within the Ottoman army was enough with respective divisions consisting of Arab units and the military officers who were secret members of the societies<sup>14</sup>. Faisal arrived in Mecca on June 20; handing his father the "Damascus Protocol" he notified his father the aptitude of the societies in Syria for the revolt. In family gathering Hussein and his sons arrived at two decisions to follow: Faisal would return to Syria to communicate with and organise the societies to prepare for the revolt, and Hussein would initiate negotiations with Britain since without their help the revolt would not succeed<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 60-61.

<sup>12</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 63.

<sup>13</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 64.

<sup>14</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 64.

<sup>15</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 65.

### ***Hussein's first letter to McMahon***

Britain would be quite content with the passive benevolence of Sharif Hussein since Red Sea coast where Hijaz extends to its northeastern would be a likely position for German submarines<sup>16</sup>. However, with Hussein's pursuit of an Arab caliphate and an Arab empire the British started considering an alternative scenario for Hussein to play an active role in. Having a connection with the two secret societies, Hussein represented his intentions to the British on behalf of the "Arab nation", even though having little reach to and communication with the Arab subjects of the empire and having a limited military strength even in Hijaz<sup>17</sup>.

Considering his proposal, if the British needed to separate the Arab subject from the Ottoman Sultan, Hussein appeared as a strong candidate to cause a stir among Arabs, and potentially turn them against their suzerain<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, Henry McMahon, the new British high commissioner, was awed by the ambitious claims of Hussein considering his minor position<sup>19</sup>. Prior to him, British were planning to maintain a smaller Ottoman Empire, but their support to keep the Ottomans alive did not last long and the catalyser for the turn of their position was Sharif Hussein of Mecca<sup>20</sup>.

### ***Al-Faruqi appearing on the scene, however, with fake accounts***

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<sup>16</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 123.

<sup>17</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 181.

<sup>18</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 215.

<sup>19</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 126.

<sup>20</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 203.

On 20 August 1915, during the battles in the Gallipoli front between the Ottomans and the British forces, young Iraqi officer Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi deserted for the British side; he disclosed to the British that he was a member of a secret society headed by Aziz Ali al-Misri, whose purpose was to start a revolt in Syria against the Ottomans, due to the cruel policies of Jamal Pasha over the Arab population there; he wanted to meet with Sharif Hussein to correspond and he provided the British with a list of officers of the Ottoman army that were members of al-Ahd<sup>21</sup>. Given that Hussein was a prominent candidate to run the revolt, the Cairo office did their best to persuade their counterparts in London and India, supporting their motive with the accounts of al-Faruqi of al-Ahd, with potency and capacity of the society<sup>22</sup>. Faruqi's defection helped Cairo convince London and India to install Hussein as the leader for the revolt and the secret societies as their partner.

Gilbert Clayton, the director of military and political intelligence in Cairo, realised with surprise that the accounts of al-Faruqi was quite similar to that exchanged with Hussein in the letter of 14 July; for that the British was convinced that the claims of Hussein were also that of all Arabs; furthermore, Clayton was forced to take actions immediately or otherwise the Turkish and German forces would gain the upperhand for the loyalty of the Arabs<sup>23</sup>. The similarity of the two accounts was influential in the change of attitude between the two letters of McMahon to Hussein, first in 30 August and the second in 24 October, and it was deemed by the British that Hussein was indeed the true representative of all Arab nation<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 70.

<sup>22</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 216.

<sup>23</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 73.

<sup>24</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 76.



Al-Faruqi claimed to the British that 90 per cent of the Arab officers operating in the Ottoman army were members of the societies, and the activities of which reached civil coordination in Syria<sup>25</sup>. However, it turned out the accounts given by al-Faruqi about the size and the extent of operations belonging to the secret societies were exaggerated; and hence al-Faruqi was manipulating the British; but considering from another perspective, maybe the British side was also ready to be manipulated, and they were indeed had been convinced for their preconceptions for the Arab revolt<sup>26</sup>.

### ***McMahon's second letter to Hussein***

The British, for their promises to and cooperation with al-Faruqi, were considering that if they evaded the proposals or otherwise ignored them, the societies would soon fall to the control of the Ottomans and all Arabs would thereafter unite for the cause of "jihad" for where it would be a definite defeat for the British<sup>27</sup>. With that the British were considering their options for providing the demands of Sharif Hussein, considering he might had been the only effective person against the call to jihad; meanwhile Britain had no knowledge of the public opinion in Syria and Iraq and only were familiar with Cairo which left them unconfident to manoeuvre without accounts either of Hussein or of the secret societies<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 71-72.

<sup>26</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 76-77; E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 216-217.

<sup>27</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 218.

<sup>28</sup> P. Mansfield, *The ottoman empire and its successors* (1973), 38.

The attitude of the British side with the intervention of Mark Sykes, who would be later the representative in the famous secret agreement Sykes-Picot between the Entente powers, had shifted gears considering the betrayal of Istanbul together with Hussein's pro-Allied sentiments and dynastic dreams changing his mind regarding the "Levantine melange" as now he was perceiving that the situation was serious and open to exploitation<sup>29</sup>.

### ***Changing situation in Syria***

To settle the final arrangements regarding the revolt, Faisal arrived at Damascus in January 1916; the situation he encountered was completely different than what he left seven months ago; the Arab divisions were moved to other fronts along with their officers which were the members of al-Ahd, and in their stead Turkish divisions from Anatolia were positioned; Faisal concluded that the revolt was no longer applicable considering the conditions, and for a success, he presumed, an Allied landing at Alexandretta was necessary<sup>30</sup>. When Faisal was doing his visit to and back from Istanbul and meanwhile visiting Damascus to meet the Syrian secret society members, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, the surveillance and intelligence agency of the Ottomans, through suspecting an Arab revolt, decided to take precautions in Syria; with Enver's request in June 1915, Jamal Pasha moved the respective divisions of the Ottoman army to fronts, away from Arab lands. Especially the mobilisation of the 25th Division following the 35th Division was a repellent update for the revolt. Those divisions were supposed to be the backbone of the branch of the revolt in Syria<sup>31</sup>. Considering the scale of the revolt which was being conspired, the lack of control over the crucial martial and

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<sup>29</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 127.

<sup>30</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 78.

<sup>31</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 66.

executive personnel that was necessary for the revolt was a precursor to potential demise of which.

Not wanting to remain long in Damascus, Faisal offered Jamal Pasha for him to recruit Hijazi volunteers for the second offensive to the Suez Canal; Jamal Pasha accepted and let Faisal go to Hijaz in February 1916<sup>32</sup>.

### *Hussein flirting with Enver, and the final straw to the revolt*

Hussein was being precautionous and was considering his options carefully, flirting also with the Ottomans; he declared to Enver Pasha in a telegram in March 1916 his demands if they wanted Sharif's support in the war. The demands were a general amnesty for the political prisoners in Syria, autonomy to Syria, and finally, the succession of the Sharifate of Mecca becoming hereditary in his family; Enver replied sharply, denouncing Hussein not to meddle with matters beyond his scope. Hussein just before writing to Enver his demands, requested from McMahon again in March 1916 that the British to cause stir in Syria to pave way for the revolt; however, if the British could have done this, they would not need Hussein in the first place; they needed him for his potential to set the Levant ablaze with his declaration of a revolt<sup>33</sup>.

It was in June that the revolt had begun; a Turco-German force was on its way to Yemen, and was about to arrive in Hijaz; after recalling Faisal from Damascus where he was

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<sup>32</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 79.

<sup>33</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 192-193; E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 80.

with Jamal Pasha, Hussein started the revolt; he was hoping that an Allied force would arrive and land in Alexandretta, extending the revolt to Syria. However, the request was rejected by the British war cabinet considering their ally France for the British presence in Syria could have irritated French, deteriorating the mutual cooperative imperial effort in the Arabic peninsula; and since Turks had already been prepared in Syria for a potential revolt, the action remained confined to Hijaz<sup>34</sup>.

### ***Revolt takes place***

While the revolt was taking place, the public opinion in the empire was shifting between being hostile or otherwise disinterested; and *ulama*, the educated class and the officers of the Ottoman Empire, refused Hussein's title as long as the empire remained intact<sup>35</sup>. Indian Muslims did not receive the news of Hussein seizing the title of caliphate positively, where they considered the revolt as "detestable conduct of the Arab rebels"<sup>36</sup>. There had been hostile reception among the Arabs: Syrian-Lebanese emigre community was especially hostile considering the rich territories being ruled by an "undisciplined riffraff" situated in Hijaz, even though the revolt was pro-British; Persian Gulf principalities received the news of revolt with indifference, finding no profit in supporting or otherwise publicly denouncing it; sheiks of Kuwait and Muhammarah sent congratulations but kept their pro-Turkish attitude and their support remained only in formalities, but otherwise there was no material support for the revolt from these regions; especially Ibn Saud, having no sympathy towards Hussein, was

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<sup>34</sup> P. Mansfield, *The ottoman empire and its successors* (1973), 42-43.

<sup>35</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 188.

<sup>36</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 187.

irritated by his claim to an Arab empire; Mesopotamian, mostly Shi'ite population remained disinterested to the revolt and rejected participating; there were no expectation for national liberation anyway, even in the areas of British control; meanwhile British tried to persuade, without success, the prisoners of war in Mesopotamia to participate in the revolt<sup>37</sup>. Contrary to Balkan provinces of the Empire where the national sentiments led to large scale liberations from the Ottomans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Arab lands remained suspicious to the call of the Sharif of Mecca.

The effect of the revolt was as following in the general perspective: Ibn Rashid and Imam of Yemen remained loyal to Turks; in a meeting in November 1916 Ibn Saud declared his support for the British and the Arab cause; in Iraq, just like Syria, there had not been a response, due to both Turk presence there and the Arab forces of the Ottoman army being in mission elsewhere, and the attitude of the government of India whose concern was Iraq that from the start was irritated by the Sharifian revolt denounced Hussein<sup>38</sup>. It is interesting that not even the measures of Jamal Pasha in Levant in late 1915 onward changed the public opinion regarding the Sultan, on the contrary, the Arab subjects remained mostly loyal to their Sultan<sup>39</sup>. It appears that the cohesive figure of the Sultan was still stronger than any national sentiment that Arabs might had been carrying, and even if such sentiments were mobilising individuals or groups of activists, these movements failed to drag along them the Arab population in large bodies and remained quite limited in their reach.

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<sup>37</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 188; E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 188; E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 189.

<sup>38</sup> P. Mansfield, *The ottoman empire and its successors* (1973), 43.

<sup>39</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 189.

### ***Temporality of the revolt and Al-Misri***

There was already a weak Turkish presence along the Hijaz coast of the Red Sea, where only in one summer it was captured and cleaned of Turkish and German soldiers; the success of the mission for the British was the elimination of potential refuel bases for German submarines<sup>40</sup>. However, after the initial victories the momentum of the revolt was lost; 15,000 Ottoman troops hold Medina against the irregular Arab forces; and they even cleaned the twenty-mile radius of the town from the Arab tribal forces and threatened to proceed further<sup>41</sup>.

Al-Misri played a key role in, as the first commander of, the revolt, considering his unsuccessful offensive of Medina, which had been obscured by himself due to his personal animosity with Sharif Hussein<sup>42</sup>. In early July 1916 al-Faruqi was appointed as the Cairo representative of Hussein. In his office his initial move was to offer to British Aziz Ali al-Misri as the commander of the revolt army; the British, following this, offered al-Misri to Hussein for his profession in matters of arms; al-Misri, meanwhile, revealed to Hussein his concerns to either Ottoman or Allies ruling the Hijaz, and instead offered that keeping the empire intact meanwhile having autonomy in the Arab provinces as the best solution; this made Hussein suspicious of him; for that without much enthusiasm he recruited him into the revolt with the British pressure.

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<sup>40</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 131.

<sup>41</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 133.

<sup>42</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 181.

In his office, al-Misri made attempts to form, beside the large regular army, light-camelry forces that would strike the enemy in key locations and communication channels; Hussein and his sons remained uninterested and rejected the plan; in another instance al-Misri wanted to move the forces from Rabigh to Yanbu, away from Mecca, for he would be more autonomous from the Sharifate, but his demands were rejected by the British since this would leave the army in a weak position and vulnerable against the attacks from Medina; al-Misri had been rejected constantly for his demands to form units that would enlarge the offensive capabilities of the revolt army; Hussein was concerned that gaining too much control over the military al-Misri could become stronger in the lead of the revolt, and could declare himself independent from the authority of the Sharifate<sup>43</sup>. This concern of the Sharifate had been influenced by the case of Enver Pasha; and Hussein was fearing that al-Misri could have become a second Enver<sup>44</sup>.

It was in the Medina offensive, that the revolt army was preparing for, al-Misri started planning to communicate with the Turks in Medina; his ultimate goal was to join the forces of Medina, and later negotiate with Istanbul for an autonomous Turco-Arab empire in the Arab regions; however, the plan had been revealed and the offensive failed, the British and Hussein lost trust in al-Misri<sup>45</sup>.

It was not only al-Misri that Hussein was afraid of. He also opposed the Arab Bureau's attempts to mobilise the rest of the Arab world, where he insisted that the revolt should be commanded and controlled by Hijazi confederation<sup>46</sup>. This was indeed

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<sup>43</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 93-94.

<sup>44</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 95.

<sup>45</sup> E. Tauber, *The arab movements in world war I* (1993), 96-97.

<sup>46</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 135.

contradictory for his ultimate plan to build an Arab empire where he feared that the revolt could go in a direction he was not foreseeing and there could appear stronger figures usurping his position as the leader of the revolt.

### ***General remarks regarding the revolt***

Weakness of the empire was attributed to the animosity between the Turks and its subjects, and in our case, Arabs; and the Allies were ready to exploit this weakness<sup>47</sup>. However, the British plans were not in the beginning to disturb the cohesion of the empire but its central governance, but Hussein and the secret societies had a catalysing effect in that regard. But even if the Arabs played an important role in the defeat of the Turks, they could have achieved little if it was not the British cooperation that they utilised<sup>48</sup>. However much it has been argued that it was the alien element, that of France and later Britain that kindled Arab nationalism that had long been present in Christian Balkans<sup>49</sup>, this remained confined to particular groups and there was observed too little of a reception from other parts of the Arab world; and after six months from the start of the revolt the Turks regained their composure, even threatening to take what they have lost<sup>50</sup>. Further, interestingly, neither the empire's entry into the war did trigger an Arab national revival, nor did the Arab subjects of the empire betrayed to the Sultan but instead fought until the end for their suzerain<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> P. Mansfield, *The ottoman empire and its successors* (1973), 35.

<sup>48</sup> P. Mansfield, *The ottoman empire and its successors* (1973), 44.

<sup>49</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 120.

<sup>50</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 133-134.

<sup>51</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 171.



We need to understand how the Arab population was structured in social and political life. The societies that offered local solutions to local problems would have any appeal, but even before then, a strongman, chieftain or family that occupied the use of material resources would overthrow a de jure ruler, having the loyalty of populace; and for such actors, it was their own kingdom rather than national ideas that they would have pursued<sup>52</sup> as we have observed in al-Faruqi, al-Misri and Hussein where each one of these actors were seeking their own political feat meanwhile either cooperating or confronting each other. Considering these, the discourse of the nationalistic historiography of the Arab revolt is misleading, ignoring the historical connotations of the revolt, where it remained confined mostly to Hijaz, hence was not widespread, and it was mostly driven by the imperial bid of Sharif Hussein and the actors surrounding him in his actions<sup>53</sup>.

It is important at this point to mention some characteristics of the societies. First, there was no unity in cause and in action in the Arab societies, hence they can be described as proto-nationalism as best<sup>54</sup>. Considering their position, the revolt was an ambitious plan for the two societies; both having a total of eighty odd members they remained as comically small fraction of all the Arab officers in the Ottoman army; and most of the Arab units along with their Arab officers were moved to other fronts, away from Levant<sup>55</sup>. Hence, neither the conditions were proper, nor their position was strong enough to handle a large scale revolt.

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<sup>52</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 173-174.

<sup>53</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 185.

<sup>54</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 172.

<sup>55</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 183.

We also need to mention another dimension of the revolt, that is the subsidies provided by the British. Hussein's irregular forces would not continue their cooperation with the Sharif if they did not find it profitable; generous British subsidies were handed by the mediatorship of Hussein to the tribes of Hijaz<sup>56</sup>. For the Hijazi bedouins it was the British gold that mobilised them, not the ideals of freedom or otherwise national sentiments<sup>57</sup>. Lawrence described Sharif Hussein in his report of November 1916 the following way: the Sharif is feeding not only his family and fighters but also the tribes; and in fact, it was the time when the tribes had been the fattest; and Lawrence himself was known at that time among the tribes as "the man with the gold"<sup>58</sup>. The subsidies were in incredible amounts, and it can be claimed that it was the fuel of the revolt. For the subsidies Hussein continued his claims and cooperation with the British, keeping them in the game, and indeed, the sum of gold provided to Hussein and his sons was forty times that of Ibn Saud's subsidy<sup>59</sup>.

## ***Conclusion***

In this paper we have examined the timeline of the revolt, its preparation, and the respective partners that played a vital role in the development and execution of the plan. We claim that Hussein's imperial dream was the factor that pushed him to take action and to collaborate with the British for the revolt, that there had been constant manipulation by each individual and group seeking out their goals, and that there had been constant manipulation by the secret

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<sup>56</sup> H. M. Sachar, *The emergence of the middle east: 1914-1924* (1969), 136.

<sup>57</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 191.

<sup>58</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 191.

<sup>59</sup> E. Karsh & I. Karsh, *Empires of the sand: The struggle for mastery in the middle east, 1789-1923* (1999), 191-192.

societies, al-Faruqi, al-Misri and Hussein in their accounts to the British and to each other. The revolt was confined to a limited region for quite a long time, before the initiative was taken control by the British until its end together with that of the Great War. The reasons for this confinement were twofold. First, there was already a weak cohesion under the Arab nationalist sentiments and each region of the Arab world was considering their own problems, approaching the revolt suspiciously, remaining loyal to the Sultan until it was clear that the Ottomans would lose. Second, Hussein protested for al-Misri's attempts to separate himself from the Sharifate and for attempts of the British to spark the uprisings in other regions of the Arab world, since this would lead to the movement to grow larger than he could control only by himself. Eventually, we recognize with our examination that the historiographic storytelling surrounding the Arab revolt was misleading that seldom recognizes the true intentions of the respective agents in the action.

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