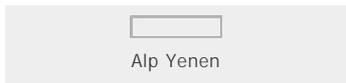




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Legacies of Jihad 100 Years after World War I – by Alp Yenen

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On November 11, 1914, the Ottoman government issued a series of fatwas signed by 29 Islamic scholars and sanctified by the

Ottoman Sultan-Caliph calling for a global jihad against the Ottoman Empire’s enemies in the First World War. The proclamation of jihad was made public with a grand ceremony on November 14, 1914. 100 years later, [Alp Yenen](#) writes about this call for jihad and how it remains a disputed event with complex legacies, which still echo in the recent developments in Iraq and Syria.

The idea of jihad certainly went through several discourse formations through the years, from being mocked by contemporary critics in 1915 as *The Holy War ‘Made in Germany’*, to post-9/11 thoughts of *Holy War and Unholy Terror*—to use Bernard Lewis’ bestselling book title. Nevertheless, certain aspects that characterized the jihad of 1914 continue to play a role in our understanding of jihad today.

The jihad of 1914 had an ambiguous and uneven impact for several reasons.

Firstly, it was proclaimed in a time when the Western mind was preoccupied with Pan-Islam and holy war—similar to the post-9/11 hysteria surrounding Islamism and jihadism in the present age. John Buchan’s bestselling classic *Greenmantle* from 1916 illustrates the peak of the cultural obsession in the West with ideas of the ‘Islamic menace’ in the World War I era. European Orientalists, novelists, and colonial adventurers prepared the holy war discourse collectively. Thus, it was already on the horizon of expectancies when it was proclaimed in November 1914.

Secondly, the 1914 jihad has obscured and alienated observers since its proclamation due to the overtly vocal role the Germans played in it. The deep involvement German imperialists and Orientalists played in the jihad propaganda machine lent relevance to the allegations that it was, to quote C. Snouck Hurgronje, “The Holy War ‘Made in Germany’”. Hurgronje criticized his German Orientalist colleagues for hijacking the Islamic jihad to promote wartime interests; according to the Dutch scholar of Oriental and Islamic studies, it was a dangerous and unethical move. In the end, both the Germans and their European critics and adversaries shared an Orientalist view on Islam and Muslims. The “Orient” had its ferocious powers, but it lacked its own agency; like in *Greenmantle*, it needed sinister machinations to find its lost powers.

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Proclamations of Jihad were, however, nothing new to the Ottomans. There has certainly been several Ottoman calls for jihad in its modern sense dating from the late 18th century until the Ottoman-Italian War in 1911-1912. Even before the “sinister machinations” of the Germans, jihad was already an integral part of the Ottoman framing strategy of armed struggle against European adversaries.

Furthermore, commonplace depictions of the Young Turks as secularists or Westernizers are another factor that has blurred perceptions of the jihad of 1914. The Young Turks’ intentions are explained as a mere tactical move by a secular elite to mobilize the “uneducated” Muslim masses for the war effort. It is a gross simplification to imply that Islam as a collective identity did not play a role in Young Turks’ ambiguous love-hate relationship with the West. One needs only to take into consideration that the jihad of 1914 was proclaimed at a time when the Ottoman Empire was itself a semi-colony due to its public debts and economic and judicial capitulations, when racist and Orientalist hegemonic discourses were inescapable, and when nominal Ottoman realms in Algeria, Tunis, Egypt and Libya had been colonized. On the eve of World War I, jihad had already established itself in Muslim nationalist discourses as a “people’s war” against European/Christian colonial adversaries; for example, on August 7, three months before the Ottoman declaration of jihad, Enver Pasha believed that “such a war would be a holy war” and “Muslims will rise up” in order to “end Christian rule over Muslim peoples”.[\[1\]](#)

Lastly, contemporaries and scholars were led to believe that the jihad of 1914 was nothing but hot air as a general revolution did not take place in the Muslim lands ruled by Britain and France. However, the real picture differs severely when one looks past 1918. There were Muslim uprisings from North Africa and the Middle East to Central Asia in the aftermath of World War I. One could argue that the jihad of 1914 only catalyzed in 1919. These anti-colonialist and Muslim-nationalist struggles continued to reappear in different sites and episodes during the interwar years. The closure of World War I, the defeat and partition of the Ottoman Empire, the colonial occupation of the Arab Middle East (and Soviet advance on Caucasus and Central Asia) caused a global moment of anti-colonialist Muslim uprisings. In these struggles, jihad was not only in the eye of the colonialist beholder, but also on the lips—and probably on the hearts and minds—of those who rallied against colonial rule. The Italian Orientalist Leone Caetani came to the following conclusion in an interview to *The New York Times*, on June 1, 1919:

The convulsion [about the partition of the Ottoman Empire] has shaken the Islamic and Oriental civilization to its foundations. The entire Oriental world, from China to the Mediterranean, is in ferment. Everywhere the hidden fire of anti-European hatred is burning. Riots in Morocco, risings in Algiers, discontent in Tripoli, so-called Nationalist attempts in Egypt, Arabia, and Libya are all different manifestations of the same deep sentiment and have as their object the rebellion of the Oriental world against European civilization.

Behind the uprisings in the aftermath of World War I, there was a vaguely defined culture of anti-colonialist (and anti-Christian/European) Muslim-nationalist militancy. But this Muslim-nationalist militancy was a far cry from the ideological jihadist militancy, we read about in the media today. The jihadism of today, as it is embodied in the self-proclaimed Islamic State, does share some of the colonial legacies of the aftermath of World War I, but has also been significantly transformed into an Islamist-fundamentalist ideology of collective violence; quite distinct from the Muslim-nationalist struggles in the aftermath of the World War I.

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To understand this transformation of jihad, one needs to connect the Orientalist

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legacies of the jihad of 1914 to its more contemporary Islamist reinventions. Since the call for jihad in November 1914, jihad became something like necromancy in the Orientalist mindset. In this act of necromancy, the necromancer needs to reach into this world of old forces, summon the old spirits, and reveal their ancient secrets to unleash its wrath against unbelievers. This necromantic perception of jihad is essential in understanding Orientalist dynamics of the jihad of 1914, and the fears and hopes which arose with it in Western and Westernized minds.

Peculiarly, as an “Orientalism in Reverse”—to refer to Sadiq al-‘Azm—Islamists adopted this Orientalist processing of jihad as necromancy later in the second half of the 20th century, coming to its climax in the terrible acts of 9/11.^[ii] Since then the modern-day jihadists and neo-Orientalists created a new understanding of jihad as an esoteric communicative campaign of resource mobilization. In this new Orientalist/Islamist mental processing, the static energy of Islam could only be turned into dynamic energy if Muslim leaders effectively mobilized their respective communities to engage in a violent transgressive performance against their enemies.

As the jihad of 1914 slowly blurs into a distant history after 100 years, intended and unintended legacies of World War I and Orientalist/Islamist reinventions of jihad appear to withstand the test of time.

^[i] Quoted in Mustafa Aksakal, “‘Holy War Made in Germany’? Ottoman Origins of the 1914 Jihad.” *War in History* 18, no. 2 (2011): 184–199, 196.

^[ii] For a similar allegory between necromancy and jihad see: Farida Majid, “The Necromancy behind Suicide Bombings,” *Daily Times* (Pakistan), July 18, 2005. URL: <http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/editorial/18-Jul-2005/view-the-necromancy-behind-suicide-bombings-farida-majid>

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