

Friedman, Isaiah: *British Miscalculations. The Rise of Muslim Nationalism, 1918–1925*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 2012. ISBN: 978-1-4128-4749-0; XVI, 378 S.

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Isaiah Friedman (1920–2012) was professor emeritus of history at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Known for his first-rate texts on the Great powers, the Palestinian question and the rise of Zionism and Israel, his volume on Germany, Turkey and Zionism, 1897–1918 (Oxford University Press 1977), is seen as a classic, with an edition at Transaction Publishers a decade later as well. Now, in his final book, Friedman tackles the British miscalculations and the rise of Muslim nationalism in the seven years after World War One. He shows the spread of Islamism as an ideology of jihad in the post-war era too.

Fourteen chapters focus on why and how the Ottomans allied themselves with Islamism and the Germans, their post-war expectations for a Global Muslim League – Berlin called this old idea „Der Islambund“ – and Egypt’s 1919 struggle for independence. Friedman illuminates that leaders of the British Empire became not only the target of an Islamist, Turkish and Bolshevik assault, but soon rivals in an Anglo-Soviet-Nazi fight for sway in the region. Moreover, kinds of nationalism grew too on the edges in Afghanistan and Iran as well, while nationalists and Islamists kept ties to a defeated but still attractive Berlin.

The author stressed the main British miscalculation remained a hope of an end to all the hostilities after World War One. This was not meant to be. On the one hand, Switzerland became a focal point for Islamists like the Arslan brothers, Shakib and Adil (with close ties to Moscow as the Nazis later alleged). This happened not by chance. Berlin planned already before World War One to use neutrals such as America or towns as Geneva, Bern and Lausanne for safe havens of Islamists riding them of strict control in the homelands.

But not all plots came to fruition. At the end of 1915 the key instigator and fund raiser for Indian Islamists at the U.S. German Em-

bassy in Washington D.C., Franz von Papen, was declared persona non grata and had to leave his post as a military attaché in the US and Mexico after his exposure as a central figure in what was then called the „Hindu-German Conspiracy.“ He limited this disaster by serving since 1917 as an officer on the General Staff in Istanbul, where he prevented a young officer of a court martial, and as an officer attached to the Ottoman army in Palestine. Joachim von Ribbentrop returned this favor by making von Papen ambassador in Vienna, during the era of the „Anschluss,“ and then in Ankara until the war’s end. However, to settle Islamists in democracies proved effective.

New players, on the other hand, rose by the leftist movements, which were either infected by Lenin’s theory of imperialism or by the 1919 founding wave of Communist/Socialist parties in the British Empire. Originally, planners of the Kaiser’s foreign policy wanted to incite Islamist revolts in the colonial hinterland to weaken rivals. But the shadowy „furor islamiticus“ occurred only after the war’s end, and just country-by-country. Mideasterners started to reject British overlords by revolts as the one in Mesopotamia in 1920. It was, the reader might conclude, as if most German-Ottoman ploys materialized only after the Great War.

As evidence Friedman cites texts by Richard Meinertzhagen of London’s delegates to the 1919 peace meeting (p. 30–31). On May 17, this officer criticized the „immoral principle“ of giving to foreigners what was Turkish before. The partitioning of Asia Minor, he opined, „will sound the death knell of the British Islamic Empire.“ With Egypt in revolt, he explained, Afghanistan proclaiming jihad and trouble in Mesopotamia, the not at all unlikely vision of an Indian mutiny and a general upheaval will eclipse previous efforts to throw off the British yoke in India, and „an almost certain prospect of an Arab-Jew clash in Palestine.“

„We,“ the British visionary Meinertzhagen stressed, „are deliberately inciting Muslims all over the world to unite against the Christian, which is the British Empire, and do not let us deceive ourselves we are unable to meet it [...] if a Pan-Islamic rebellion

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broke out it would engulf also the Arab East, Egypt, Persia and the Indian continent and, when combined with recrudescence of Turkish military operations, the British position would become precarious." Friedman illustrates that the specter of „Islamist revolts" haunted British actions, which turned into miscalculations, leading finally to the downfall of the Empire. The Islamist plot became a steady blackmailing which led to missteps in London, especially in the 1920s, after Arabs in Berlin tied their fate with ex-comrades-in-arms on the German right wing like Franz von Papen and Erich Ludendorff. Whereas the former Ottoman officer supported the founding of the 1927 Islam Institute in Berlin by the Euro Islamist Abd an-Nafi' Shalabi, the former general promoted Shalabi's 1931 call to parallel boycott the Jews in Jerusalem and Berlin, the „whole Islam against the Jewry."

Aptly, Friedman describes how in the early 1920s Great Britain had to face not only a determined Turkish nationalism (when Mustafa Kemal still toyed with Islamism until he abolished the caliphate in 1924), but also the „menacing Islamist rebellions" of Arab and other Islamic people. In that time the Allied coalition was falling apart; the cabinet was often split down right in the middle, and the country was hit by multiple crises: revolts or threats thereof in the Middle East; the budget, unemployment, and on top, Ireland.

Here one cannot but wonder about two points. Firstly, whether or not there was a sharp distinction between nationalists and Islamists. And secondly, on examples that the Irish case set for the Mideasterners. If we accept the notion of multiple identities in a person, it appears that being a Muslim was the overriding one, even if at times people said they are nationalists. As waves of becoming nation states ended in two decades after World War Two, the faith grew again more prominent in the given set of identities. Incidentally, the 1970s became a decade in which Islamists again stepped to the fore: activist ideologues as in the 1920s. Identity moved flexibly as a multi-layered form. Clear cut Western views of it were questionable as in Islamic regions was a stable unity of state and mosque. Thus, where authors often explained nationalism, Islamism worked already in the

background.

Friedman's also solidly researched the revolt in Mesopotamia, the Greco-Turkish War, the clash in Smyrna, and Arabs and Jews in Palestine. Obviously, dissolving an Empire was a losing proposition. In hindsight, much went wrong except the Indian democracy. All the more important is Friedman's view on alternatives. A compelling book by thoroughness in exploring many aspects from conflicting sides; and a must read for those who research the German-Ottoman jihadization of Islam and its truly enduring Great War after-shocks.

HistLit 2015-2-117 / Wolfgang G. Schwannitz über Friedman, Isaiah: *British Miscalculations. The Rise of Muslim Nationalism, 1918–1925*. New Brunswick 2012, in: H-Soz-Kult 21.05.2015.