

Introduction

The Historic Near East Peace of Lausanne

The Middle East is a global hotspot. Peace in the Middle East is among the most significant challenges of the twenty-first century and the topic of this book. Of particular concern is the former Ottoman imperial core region that had remained part of the sultanate-caliphate until the 1910s: Anatolia (today's Turkey), Iraq, and "Greater Syria," including Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. The negotiators at the Near East Peace Conference in Lausanne in Switzerland, 1922–3, rightly insisted that they faced the challenge of "world peace," that is, of working for the world's most precious common good. This Conference and its outcome, the Treaty of Lausanne, mark the end of a world war that proved particularly long and devastating in the Middle East.

Recent wars have made us aware that neighboring regions in the North, from the South Caucasus to Crimea and the Ukraine, belong to a connected historical geography where the First World War "failed to end" in 1918, especially for those vanquished.¹ There, including countries like Turkey and Hungary, the "Great War," the end of empires, and related revolutions, agreements, and imperial legacies and losses still heavily impact politics. On 24 July 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne liquidated the Ottoman Empire. It concluded peace between the victors of the First World War and Turkey, a loser of this war, but winner of the subsequent wars in Anatolia under a Bolshevik-supported counter-government in Ankara. The Lausanne Treaty recognized the Ankara government that henceforth officially replaced and succeeded the Istanbul-based Ottoman sultanate-caliphate, an empire allied to Germany and Austria-Hungary during the Great War. It thus reintegrated Turkey into Western diplomacy after a decade of ruptures and wars. These constitute the real, decade-long "Ottoman Great War" that Lausanne ended.

¹ Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

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“Unjust Peace Is Better than the Justest War”

Lausanne opened up a new era of post-Ottoman international relations, and it laid new legal and political foundations for Turkey and her Middle Eastern and Southeastern European neighborhood. It was widely considered the solution of modern Europe’s notorious “Eastern Question”: the future of the Ottoman realm and the sultanate-caliphate. The Eastern Question was the longest lasting and most intractable issue of modern European diplomacy. The Lausanne Treaty was the last of a series of post-Great War treaties of which all others were concluded in or around Paris.

In *When Democracy Died*, the Lausanne Conference and Treaty emerges as the pivotal endpoint of the Paris peace system – and as a basis and focus for dictatorial party-states afterward. The punitive Treaties of Paris–Versailles and Paris–Trianon, as well as related settlements that frustrated World War victors like Italy and Japan, undeniably contributed to the rise of resentful fascisms in Europe and Asia, as has been argued in many places. Also, it is well known that what the Chinese felt to be the betrayal of a deprived ally by the Paris Peace Conference radicalized Chinese nationalism and boosted the rise of communism.²

A Treaty like Lausanne, which rewarded revisionist violence, thus cancelling the Paris–Sèvres Treaty for the Ottoman Empire, had however a much more direct and assertive impact. It endorsed and certified an emerging radically nationalist and authoritarian republic, thus setting a shining example that fascinated “revolutionists” from the right. From early 1924, Gazi Kemal (Atatürk) spread his image on stamps: the very first ones of this sort commemorated the Lausanne Treaty while highlighting the great leader Gazi Kemal. Subsequently, the supreme leader pushed the cult of his personality by erecting heroic statues throughout the country.³ Other upcoming actors of antidemocracy and coercive social transformation believed that they were entitled to emulate this model, after high diplomacy in Lausanne offered legitimacy to Ankara, fascist Rome, and Bolshevik Moscow.⁴

Europe’s “era of tyranny” had begun with the imperial dictatorship of the warring Young Turks in 1913. From August 1914, state-centered

² Rogers R. Anthony and Nur R. Daut, “China in the First World War: A Forgotten Army in Search of International Recognition,” *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations* 3.3 (2017), 1237–1269.

³ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 185–187. See also “Philately in Turkey,” <https://travelatelier.com/blog/philately-turkey>.

⁴ The term “antidemocracy” is broadly used in recent political studies. Although related to them, it transcends traditional studies of fascism, ultranationalism, and totalitarianism. See notably Hamit Bozarslan, *L’anti-démocratie au XXI^e siècle: Iran, Russie, Turquie* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2021).

authoritarianism started spreading to other countries affected by the First World War. In Paris of the Belle Époque, democratic-minded intellectuals, first among them the philosopher and historian Elie Halévy, had “wondered whether the world would see a kind of federal democracy, Swiss-style, or a universalized Caesarism. The war chose: the Caesars won.”⁵ After Europe’s seminal catastrophe, the political philosophy of the League of Nations briefly gave hope for a revision of this choice induced by total war. The Lausanne Conference, however, as *When Democracy Died* will argue, hammered the last nail in the coffin of the League’s project of global peace through law and democratic self-determination. Real peace was lost from sight (Figure 1).

Nevertheless, this book also appreciates the complexity of the Lausanne Conference and gives room to positive diplomatic achievements. The Conference gathered Turkish, European, US-American, and Japanese representatives as – more or less – equal partners after a decade of protracted wars, united in the will to make peace in the particularly challenging Near East (as it then was called, looking from Europe). This book appreciates this fundamentally positive fact. It appreciates the mutual readiness to integrate the successor state of the Ottoman Empire into an intended global peace architecture, based on what it calls the Paris–Geneva (i.e. Western) post–Great War peace project. It also appreciates the desire, promise, and at least partial readiness on the Turkish side to depart to new social, cultural, and political horizons based on universal references. It has pondered the words of Erasmus on peace: “Even if the arbitrators [of a peace] are unjust . . . the disagreeing parties come off with less injury than if they seek the outcome by war. Even a very unjust peace is generally better and preferable to the justest war.”⁶

However, the truth of Erasmus’ words does not preclude questioning settlements that, in the long term, enabled further violence, persecution, and grave injustice. *When Democracy Died*, therefore, looks carefully at the way the Near East Peace of Lausanne was made. It considers the dark sides and unfulfilled or deliberately broken promises of this settlement. Its critique has nothing to do with any nationalism and irredenta or any nostalgia of empire and caliphate. It is about democracy, human rights, and historical truths, versus amnesia, euphemism, and a pact of interests on the back of others. The Lausanne Treaty normalized mass violence

⁵ C. Bouglé, “Préface,” in Elie Halévy, *L’ère des tyrannies: Etudes sur le socialisme et la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), 12. Halévy suggested we understand the beginning of the Great War in 1914 as the opening of Europe’s “era of tyrannies” (ibid., 214). One must consider that Turkey had remained outside Halévy’s historical horizon.

⁶ Desiderius Erasmus (of Rotterdam), *Querela pacis* (Basel: Frobenius, 1518), 31–32; and *Ein Klag des Frydens* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1521), xix. Both versions www.e-rara.ch.

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Figure 1 “Second [half of the] Lausanne Conference. [Madame] Peace: ‘Who will look after me when there are so many beautiful women?’” The unattractiveness of real peace as long as the party goes on. (*Akbaba*, no. 38, 16 April 1923, 1. Drawn by Ramiz)⁷

and dispossession of civilians in a dimension far beyond anything experienced in Europe in 1914–18. It endorsed both politics of Western interests in the post-Ottoman Middle East and what genocidal violence had achieved during the last Ottoman decade in Asia Minor (Anatolia). Thanks to Lausanne, a unitary, modernist, and dictatorial polity could be built up there upon these “achievements.”

⁷ I thank Ilkim B. Okyar, Istanbul, who has drawn my attention to the subtle *Akbaba* caricatures.

The Lausanne Treaty is the international founding deed of the Republic of Turkey, declared three months after it was signed; it is rightly considered the new state's "birth certificate."⁸ However, as this study will detail, Turkey's rebirth as a republic is a Lausanne-based fiction insofar as, in reality, imperial cadres of late-Ottoman Turkey got their way. The reorganization of Muslim power in Anatolia under the former Young Turk general Gazi Kemal Pasha – the later Atatürk – in Ankara after 1918 would have remained little more than a pathetic attempt to restore the sultanate-caliphate, had military victory not opened the road to the high-profile Lausanne Conference.

Leaving its marks on all parties concerned, the mega-event at Lausanne plunged a willing delegation from Ankara into the universe of Western references and exigencies. It gave a new nationalist actor the opportunity to compromise with the Great War victors and to inscribe itself at least partly in the self-declared "civilized world" of nominally liberal Western powers. These powers, however, themselves national empires of questionable democratic quality, discredited their liberal credo by abandoning elementary requirements of the Paris–Geneva peace project. They opened the door for ascending antidemocracy.

Might Made Right

All delegations in Lausanne emphasized the sublime task of achieving world peace by turning the page of the late-Ottoman past. Relations with Ankara's "new Turkey" (as was emphasized not only by the Kemalists, but also abroad) had to be normalized after continuous war since 1914 and troubled diplomacy since 1911, when Italy invaded Ottoman Libya. After a decade of wars, including the Great War and the demise of the defeated Ottoman Empire, the Lausanne Treaty shaped new post-Ottoman states with regard to boundaries, political systems, notions of citizenship, family law, minority concepts, and visions of history. These, together with Ankara's integration into Western diplomacy, are the achievements, "the bright side," of the Lausanne Treaty – as stated in numerous works by diplomats and academics during the twentieth century.

The Lausanne settlement, however, carried an ultimate, unmistakable, and deeply ambivalent message to the world: might made

⁸ René Albrecht-Carrié, *France, Europe and the Two World Wars* (Geneva: Droz, 1969; first ed., 1960), 135.

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right – not the peaceable principles of a fresh League of Nations in Geneva on which many had set great hope.⁹ The Covenant of the League of Nations was a first serious, if failed or only “experimental,” attempt to promote democratic, human-rights-based national constitutions and to domesticate them within one binding global supra-covenant.¹⁰ However, the insertion of the League’s new internationalism into treaties concluded in traditional logics of victorious powers, as in Paris, was unfortunate.¹¹ Antidemocratic detractors took this as carte blanche for revolutionary violence against the Paris–Geneva peace. However, this circumstance does by no means derogate from the powerful and elaborate democratic thought that underpinned the League’s genesis and intellectual history, and the pro-League movements in general.¹² The democratic argument of those engaged for the League was popular, and both idealistic and realistic. But it could not, and did not want to, arouse the same (short-sighted) emotions, ideological fervor, and violence-prone militancy as did contemporary Turkism, Fascism, and Nazism on the one hand, and Bolshevism on the other. Sure enough, it depended too much on Western Europe’s national empires.

The League experiment coincides with the end of premodern empires in wider Europe, and the emerging global competition between a liberal US-American, a Russian-led communist and a fascist projection of the future. People from various strands of society, from Eastern Europe and “Yiddishland” to Armenia and Kurdistan, had set great hopes on the burgeoning League that was rivalled in its universal claim by Moscow’s contemporary Comintern

⁹ A number of fresh and appreciative in-depth studies of the League of Nations have been published in the early twenty-first century, notably Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Much of this new literature approaches the League “from a perspective of networks and ideas,” and “interprets the League from being ‘a failure’ to being a ‘father’ or ‘teacher’ to many of today’s international organizations, norms and practices” (Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikononou, “Making Sense of the League of Nations Secretariat: Historiographical and Conceptual Reflections on Early International Public Administration,” *European History Quarterly*, 49 (2019), 426. Most of the League’s rich archives are now accessible online; see <https://archives.ungeneva.org/lontad>.

¹⁰ For an insider’s view of the League, see William E. Rappard, *The Geneva Experiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931). For a recent reflection on the search for a social contract-based world peace, see Philippe M. Defarges, *Une histoire mondiale de la paix* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2020), 99–132.

¹¹ The League Covenant figures at the beginning of all Paris treaties. See also Jean-Michel Guieu and Stanislas Jeannesson “L’expérience de Genève (1920–1946),” *Monde(s)* 19 (2021), special issue *La Société des nations. Une expérience de l’internationalisme*, 18.

¹² See notably John A. Hobson, *Democracy after the War* (London: Allen and Unwin, 2017). See also Sakiko Kaiga, *Britain and the Intellectual Origins of the League of Nations, 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

(Communist International, or Third International).¹³ Among the League's strongest proponents were the internationalist sons and daughters – teachers, doctors, professors – of American missionaries whose parents had set foot in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century where they founded modern educational and medical institutions. In line with constitutional currents in various Ottoman circles, they had hoped to contribute to democratizing modern “Bible lands” where peoples would be empowered to coexist in peace. Levant-centered late-Ottoman American millenarism had aimed for a modern and global “republic of Jesus” to emerge from a Near East that would democratize at last.¹⁴

The ultimate failure of covenant-based peace coincides with the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire at the Conference of Lausanne. The failed “great peace” after the Great War is an essential antecedent of the Shoah, the Jewish catastrophe in Europe culminating in the Holocaust. Put pointedly, Lausanne made Europe and international diplomacy safe for fascist party-states, minority repression, and future genocides – Ankara serving in this process as *the* model dictatorship. After Lausanne, the League's political project of a law-based, democratizing global order was dead – killed by compromises of a new realpolitik established during months of negotiations from November 1922 to July 1923. Though still using “League speech,” the new realpolitik did without justice and repair for genocide, and made millions of persons objects of imposed population transfer. A comprehensive and serene historical perspective cannot positively assess Lausanne's official “population exchange,” because it joins the dots with previous genocidal policies implemented by the Young Turk party state, the real predecessor of the Ankara government.

The Lausanne settlement led its Western signatories to use the euphemism of “model dictatorship,” “developmental dictatorship,” or “educational dictatorship” for Ankara's regime for decades. It silenced the experience of victims – in particular Armenian genocide victims – and established disregard, condescendence, and even contempt for the weak. It was, on the one hand, the discrete triumph of an ageing British Empire that had however to give up former imperial ethics as these had definitively come to its limits. On the other hand, it represented the triumph of a new state born in mass violence and driven by common interests of Anatolia's Sunni-Muslim majority population. This was the core group

¹³ Alain Brossat and Sylvie Klingberg : *Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism* (New York: Verso, Paperback, 2017; first French ed. 1983).

¹⁴ See H. L. Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010), 15–97.

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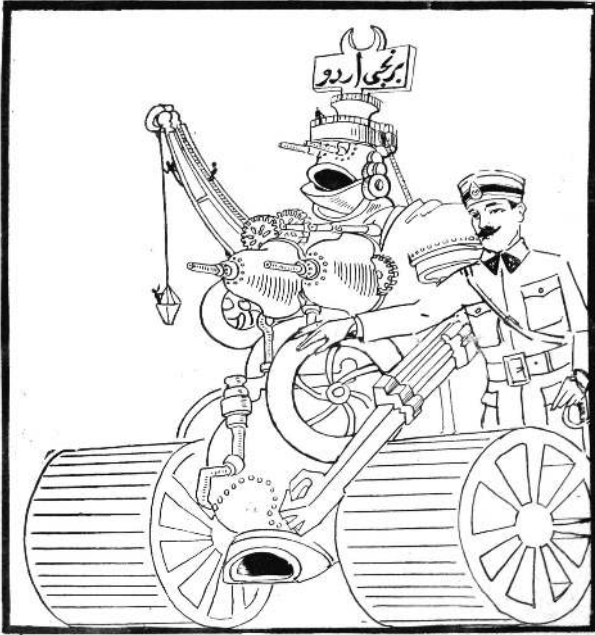
and *ümmet* (Islamic community) of the defeated Ottoman Empire in whose name the Young Turks had fought until 1918 and continued their armed fight from Ankara until 1922. Most cadres of the war regime in the Ottoman capital Istanbul took positions in the new power center in Ankara.

Not democratic negotiation and consent, but war against the Great War victors and Anatolia's Christians was the common denominator of Ankara's new National Assembly from 1920 (see Figure 2). "Ankara believes that all things can be solved by arms. . . . They have not made proof of any other skill than soldiering," noted Mehmed Cavid in his diary in 1921.¹⁵ An Ottoman minister of finance multiple times, Cavid was a seasoned Turkish nationalist, but became a secluded dissenter during the Lausanne Conference where he served as a counselor. The Conference and its Treaty empowered Ankara's leadership under Kemal Atatürk, which built up a dictatorial party-state in its immediate aftermath. Hailed by most Westerners, the coercive experiment of Kemalist modernization and ultranationalist indoctrination lost its breath with Atatürk's death in 1938. New economic and military life came from the American Marshal Plan and a new NATO partnership after the Second World War.

The immediate lesson to draw from Lausanne was that one must do it like Ankara. Only victors could sit and have a say at the same table with those who claimed to represent Western civilization. Woe to those who could not timely produce military victories and (forcible) domestic transformations. Woe to victims and those who had believed in the self-determination of constitutional and liberal nation-states under the League's roof, and not in vigorous, but illiberal authoritarianism (see Figure 3). The upcoming German National Socialists were among Ankara's greatest admirers. Solidly in power by 1937, they sent poison gas to Ankara that served to kill Alevi Kurds during the Dersim genocide, while Turkish Nazi sympathizers proudly reported how Hitler honored Atatürk as his role-model (see Part IV).

Belatedly concluding post-Great War peace-making in the Middle East, the Conference of Lausanne defined a new era of *realpolitik* that left Western diplomacy open to fascism. Only two triumphal, self-serving, and self-centric narratives of the Lausanne Conference could be produced: one, the predominant one, by Kemalists; the other – more discreet, because no one could deny the inherent moral defeat compared to the earlier ambitions – on the British side. These are narratives by the main opposite

¹⁵ Cavid Bey, *Meşrutiyet Ruznâmesi* (Ankara: TTK, 2015), vol. 4, 326, diary entry of 28 September 1921, and 373, entry of 29 June 1922.



ازمیر یولنده تجریم ابدلش ماکینه بودنده حرکت ابدوسه حرمانده تکمیل روزری پامیاس لیبیقارتیر.

Figure 2 “If the [war] machine, which made its way to Izmir, moves this time again, it will probably make all the bumps [problems] flat.” Referring to the devastating defeat inflicted on the Greek army in summer 1922, this caricature gives a martial answer to heated discussions in Lausanne about Ankara’s demand for Greek reparation payments (*Journal Zümürdüanka*, no. 40, 28 May 1923). Trust in military might emerges in many other contemporary publications, notably after the Conference break in early January 1923 that induced renewed calls for war. One example from the wide-spread satirical journal *Karagöz*: “Commanders: ‘We will not give a hair of our independence.’ ‘At your command, our excellence general. Let’s feel our strength to those who do not acknowledge our rights! . . . our enemies will recognize our right even before they taste our bayonets.’” (*Karagöz*, no. 1560, 28 February 1923)

powers sitting at the negotiation table, the latter representing the then-foremost Western power.¹⁶ In its core, the Lausanne Treaty is therefore a deal and compromise between a regional and a global power holder – not

¹⁶ For a triumphalist British version of the Lausanne Conference, see, for example, chapter XI, “Lausanne: The Final Triumph,” in Harold G. Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase, 1919–1925: A Study in Post-War Diplomacy* (London: Constable, 1934), 314–350. Kemalist triumphalism will be dealt with in detail in Chapters 26–32.



Figure 3 “Monument of Victory” (Zafer âbidesi). (*Akbaba*, no. 13, 18 January 1923, 1. Artist: Ramiz)

a peace of peoples and democratizing polities. Since its inception in 1920, Ankara was in need, and knew time and again to play different sides of geostrategic crises: during the Russian Civil War, the “Interwar period” (as experienced from Western Europe), the Second World War, the Cold War (though to a lesser extent), and again during the recent wars in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Ukraine.

The mutually satisfying outcome for the main signatories explains the longevity of the Lausanne Treaty and the protracted silence on the Treaty’s