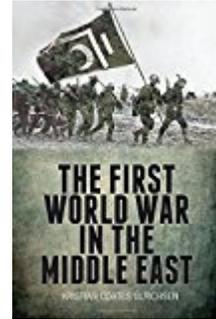


Kristian Coates Ulrichsen. *The First World War in the Middle East*. London: Hurst & Co., 2014. xiii + 263 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84904-274-1.



Reviewed by Hakan Gungor (Florida State University)

Published on H-War (January, 2016)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen presents a multidimensional perspective of the First World War in the Middle East. *The First World War in the Middle East* endeavors to demonstrate how the roots of ongoing issues such as Arab nationalism, political Islam, Arab-Israeli conflict, and even terrorism lay in the legacies and decisions of the Great War. His work, thus, examines the military campaigns, political decisions, and diplomatic engagements from the end of Tanzimat in 1876 to the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Although the author covers a large period, the core of the book spans from 1914 to 1918. Ulrichsen effectively shows how the war shaped people's identities and everlasting problems through examinations of the major campaigns in the region: Dardanelles, Mesopotamia, and Caucasus.

The author divides the work in three parts. In the first part, which includes two chapters, Ulrichsen examines the overlapping interests of the British, French, Ottomans, Germans, and Russians in the Middle East before 1914. The author argues that colonial penetration in the region and competing interests ignited "pan-Arab[ism]" and the sense "of belonging" (p. 12). Direct Western intervention in the politics and economics of the region, as seen in the Urabi Revolution in Egypt, brought about a forceful response to colonialism. Fur-

thermore, the author, setting the scene for the war, explores the logistical, administrative, and environmental challenges of military operations in the region. He successfully shows the importance of the local people during the campaigns; even the great powers were dependent upon the indigenous peoples. The long distance of the theater from home made the belligerents often reliant on local producers and animals for military mobilization. Part 2 of the book, which has four chapters, examines the military operations themselves. This part respectively examines the Ottoman and Russian campaign in eastern Anatolia, the British-led campaign at the Dardanelles, and the British-French campaigns in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Although all these campaigns contributed to fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Caucasus campaign greatly shaped Armenian identity and resulted in mass deportations of the Armenians. While the British were humiliated by the defeat at Dardanelles in 1915 and at Kut in 1916, the operations lasted until the last day of the war in the region. Part 3 includes two chapters that examine the negotiations, agreements, and conferences during and after the war. The author explores the secret agreements and the pledges of the British support to multiple parties in the region. While the British promised the Arabian Peninsula to the Hashemite dynasty and Ibn

Saud family, they also planned to share the same region with the French by signing the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Furthermore, the British, with the Balfour Declaration, pledged to support the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine. The author successfully presents the scale of national backlash against British-French endeavors to remap the region in their interests. The British mismanagement and pledges turned the region into an everlasting war zone.

Although Ulrichsen endeavors to give a balanced account of the war, he largely presents the British perspective of the war in the region. This is due to his heavy reliance on primary sources from London, such as the Imperial War Museum, the British Library, and the National Archives. In fact, the author failed to make use of any Middle Eastern archival sources. Despite inclusion of two chapters on the Caucasus Campaign and Gallipoli Campaign, he did not cite materials from the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi or Genel Kurmay Arşivi (the Ottoman State Archive and Military Archive), which hold volumes of documents on these campaigns. Furthermore, although the author mentioned the Armenian incidents and deportation between 1914 and 1918 (pp. 59-64), he did not use the nine volumes of primary documents published by Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı titled *Armenian Activities in the Archive Documents 1914-1918* (2006), which are available

in the original language, modern Turkish, and English. Making use of Middle Eastern archives would have made the author's work stronger. In addition, the use of maps would also have greatly contributed to the book, particularly in following the military campaigns. The use of maps could further attract readers who do not have background in the regions covered in the book, spanning from the Caucasus to India.

Despite the lack of Middle Eastern primary sources, *The First World War in the Middle East* still makes a solid contribution to the existing literature. In this comprehensive work, the author presents a broad view by effectively integrating causes and consequences of the war in the region by combining military, political, and social history in one volume. Parts 2 and 3 of the book are a good synthesis of the existing literature on the military, politics, and diplomacy of the region during the Great War. He adds nuance to our understanding by including the role of military campaigns in the region and how diplomacy and politics intermingled with military operations. When read with *The Near East since the First World War* (1996) by Malcolm Yapp and *A Peace to End All Peace* (1989) by David Fromkin, Ulrichsen's work can be more helpful in understanding the political, economic, and social consequences of the Great War in the Middle East.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Hakan Gungor. Review of Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates, *The First World War in the Middle East*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. January, 2016.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=43638>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.