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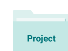

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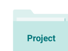

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Decolonization through Secularization: A Geopolitical Reframing of Turkey's 1924 Abolition of the Caliphate

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Following World War I, answers to the Eastern Question emerged amid the Great Powers' occupation of former Ottoman territories. In this context of "decolonization," there were numerous contending perspectives on matters relating to both religious and politcal institutions. Breaking from traditional and contemporary scholarly works that narrowly depict the abolition of the caliphate in terms of secularization, this article situates the experience in terms of contemporary geopolitical realities (i.e., the recent conclusion of an almost five-year European occupation of Istanbul and the emergent nation-state based in Ankara since 1920). Employing unique primary sources in Ottoman Turkish, the authors thus critically assess the abolition not as a matter of callous and universal secularization but, rather, as an experience of decolonization. In doing so, they contend that the elimination of the caliphate resulted from an emerging nation-state's attempts both to assert sovereignty and to decolonize from within amid Western powers' endeavours to institute neo-colonial hegemonies over former Ottoman territories while simultaneously extolling the virtues of decolonization and seeking to co-opt the caliphate as an indigenous instrument for the subjugation of Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia.

Key words: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, caliphate, decolonization, Ottoman Empire, secularism, sovereignty, Turkey

À la suite de la Première Guerre mondiale, des solutions à la Question d'Orient ont été proposées par les grandes puissances lors de l'occupation des territoires de l'Empire ottoman moribond. Dans ce contexte de « décolonisation », de nombreux points de vue s'opposaient autour des questions concernant les institutions religieuses et politiques. En se démarquant des travaux académiques habituels ou contemporains décrivant l'abolition du califat en termes étroits de sécularisation, cet article positionne l'événement dans le cadre des réalités géopolitiques du moment : la fin récente de près de cinq ans d'occupation européenne d'Istanbul et de l'émergence depuis 1920 de l'État-Nation turc basé à Ankara. En consultant des sources primaires uniques en turc ottoman, les auteurs examinent de façon critique l'abolition du califat qui ne serait pas une simple question de sécularisation insensible et universelle, mais plutôt une expérience de décolonisation. Ce faisant, ils affirment que l'élimination du califat fut le résultat des efforts d'un État-Nation naissant d'affirmer sa souveraineté et de se décoloniser de l'intérieur, pendant que des puissances occidentales œuvraient pour consolider leurs hégémonies néocoloniales sur les territoires autrefois ottomans. Simultanément, ce nouvel État exaltait les vertus de la décolonisation en tentant de coopter le califat comme un outil local pour la asservir les musulmans du Moyen-Orient et de l'Asie du Sud.

Mots-clés: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, califat, décolonisation, Empire ottoman, sécularisme, souveraineté, Turquie

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Introduction

Dealing squarely with the highly contested geopolitics of decolonization in the context of the emerging Turkish Republic, this article focuses on the religious and political (and highly politicized) institution of the Ottoman Caliphate. While a great deal of attention in contemporary scholarship is devoted to the Turkish Republic and the question of secularization, this overwhelming focus (partly attributable both to current political dynamics and to the deliberate reshaping of historical narratives by Islamist politicians and academics in Turkey) on the topic of a separation of politics and religion obfuscates the issues and dynamics of Turkey's past. Indeed, it is essential to remove oneself from "abstractions" of this history that might reduce it to simply a question of secularization in order to look critically both at the colonizing/decolonizing contexts and at the "bundles of relationships" (Wolf 1982, 1) operating during the period in question. In doing so, we can readily discern that the abolition of the caliphate took immediately following Istanbul's almost five-year occupation (November 1918–September 1923) by European powers, ostensibly decolonizing the territories of the Ottoman Empire, and that the European-controlled caliphate (and sultanate) engaged in the issuance of *fatwās* (religious decrees based on Islamic legal opinion) that denounced Mustafa Kemal (hereafter Atatürk) and other nationalist leaders who sought to establish an independent Turkish nation-state. The caliphate, and its abolition, was thus central to a clash of competing visions for decolonizing the Ottoman Empire at its remaining core; one view was defined from Istanbul by occupying Europeans and a remaining Ottoman hierarchy, the other articulated from Ankara by Turkey's nationalists in the evolving republican capital. Thus, this historical geography concerning the geopolitics of the caliphate and its abolition is the first work to engage with this event as a (post)colonial struggle of decolonization between Istanbul and Ankara, between Europeans and nationalists, and between supporters of the caliphate (most of them either in Europe or in South Asia) and those who sought to eliminate that institution. Both in re-evaluating this history with respect to its geopolitical circumstances and in considering its outcomes, we argue that the abolition of the caliphate reflected not simply an uncompromising imposition of secularism (as commonly depicted by Turkish Islamists today) but, rather, a nationalistic drive both (1) to assert sovereignty *and* (2) to effect decolonization from within.

The ongoing relevance of the caliphate question is difficult to overstate today, not only with respect to our historical understanding of the past but also as it pertains to the present politics of Ottoman/Turkish historiography and to the ongoing development of contemporary world events. Today, Turkey's steps toward an Islamist elected government are discussed a great deal (often in glowing terms by Western media—many of whom also appreciate the free-market neo-liberalism of Turkey's Islamist politicians). Amid this supposed euphoria for Turkish political Islam, there are many ongoing efforts within Turkey (and in the West) to rewrite the histories of the empire and the early republic—often with the enthusiastic (and monetary) support of the present government and its supporters. This research, though not intended as a retort to such ongoing political projects, offers a perspective on a key matter that is a critical alternative *both* to the narratives of the present pro-Islamist literature *and* to the nationalistic historiographic traditions of the republic (on just a few of the broad contours and dynamics of these debates, see Fisher 2009).

Moreover, and beyond Turkey and Ottoman/Turkish studies alone, there have been numerous efforts over the past years to revive or reinvent the office of the caliphate, as seen in the 100 000-strong meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, in August 2007; in the comments of some followers of the Turkish

Gülen movement; in the list of aspirations of members of Hizb ut-Tahrir; and in manifesto-like statements from al-Qaeda and a number of its representatives, and from other parties as well. A common theme for *some* Islamic revivalists/fundamentalists, the caliphate appears to its modern-day proponents as an opportune vehicle for reasserting Islam as a civilizing (and political) force in the world. Advocates of such aspirations are sometimes noted for their absolute detachment from histories of the political significance (and manipulations) of the institution in the late Ottoman era, but many are keenly aware of these and insist that enough time has elapsed since the institution's corruption by the West and that it should be revived to mobilize and empower Muslims on a global scale. It is also cause for concern, however, that many voices in the West have incorporated the terms "caliph," "caliphate," and "caliphal" into the motivated vernaculars employed both in post-9/11 xenophobic tirades and in attempts to legitimate American foreign and military policies in the Muslim world (for a survey of such examples—and something of a reflection of the latter, in terms of its conclusion—see Liebl 2009). Amid such debates, a more careful historical analysis of the institution itself and of the colonial (and decolonizing) geopolitics surrounding its demise is much needed.

In presenting this historical geography of the closure of Islam's highest religious and political office (at least for most Sunni Muslims of the day), this study relies upon primary (both official and unofficial) and secondary source materials available in Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish, and English. The most significant primary sources employed in this project were Ottoman-language documents derived from archival materials held and catalogued by the Turkish Republic's Presidential Archive (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Arşivi, or TCCA, hereafter cited in text with corresponding classification numbers of documents referenced) in Ankara, Turkey. These records are of particular significance because they have been used in only one prior study on the abolition of the caliphate (Akbulut 2006). Additional primary sources consulted include minutes from parliamentary debates and associated documents (*TBMM Zabit Ceridesi,* cited thus hereafter); Atatürk's *Nutuk*, the written record of his October 1927 six-day speech covering the history of the republic's rise (Atatürk 1929); pamphlets produced prior to and following the abolition of the caliphate (e.g., Hoca Şükrü Efendi 1339/1923; Seyyid Bey ca. 1340/1924), memoirs (e.g., Yalman 1956); and contemporary newspapers. Apart from two historical studies (Akgün 1985; Akbulut 2006), most secondary sources consulted and cited were of peripheral importance to this project and only aided either in theoretical or broader contextualization of the article, on the one hand, or in providing specific facts or references for further reading, on the other.

This article is divided into six sections. The first provides a brief introduction to the caliphate in terms of its origins and religious significance; it also examines the institution as it acquired geopolitical significance both for Muslims and for those who sought to colonize territories of the Muslim world. The second section deals with the tensions that arose following World War I and during the War of Independence between the sultanate–caliphate of Istanbul and the emerging nationalist state of Ankara. The third section addresses the relationship between the creation of a nationalist government in Ankara and the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate; it continues by engaging with perceptions of the caliphate in a post-sultanate context. The fourth section examines the politics of the press in the debates that ensued over the caliphate and the abolition itself. In the fifth section, we examine the reactions that were recorded (and monitored and sometimes even policed by the new republic) as manifest in Turkey and abroad; the six section is concludes the article with observations on the institution of the

caliphate and colonialism/decolonization.

The Caliphate as Islamic Institution, Geopolitical Prize, and Geopolitical Target

As a universalizing religion, Islam is commonly depicted as an all-encompassing faith for the *ummah* (i.e., the wider community of Muslims) that incorporates social, legal, and political spheres. Established by the Prophet Muhammad (AD 570/71–632), the *ummah* is guided religiously and politically by *Shari'a* (Islamic law), which is based upon the Qur'an, *sunnah* (prophetic tradition), and—to varying degrees—*fiqh* (decisions of religious authorities) and *hadith* (presumed statements of the Prophet). On this basis, later Muslim rulers acquired legitimacy through *Shari'a* and by fulfilling responsibilities to the *ummah*. Accordingly, a ruler's primary duties were to safeguard the *ummah* and to enforce *Shari'a*. Integral to this conceptualization of legitimate authority, the institution of the caliphate and the *ummah* were inseparable.

The term "caliph" (from the Arabic *khalīfa*) can be understood as "successor, viceregent, title [for] supreme head of the Muslim community, [an] imam, [or the] successor or vicegerent of the Prophet" (Arnold 1927, 881). This plurality of meanings conveys how the caliphate historically symbolized one of the most important Islamic institutions and constituted a foundation for the unity of the *ummah*. Indeed, the caliphate emerged after the Prophet Muhammad's death as a means both to seal the spiritual and political vacuum and to preserve the *ummah*'s cohesion. With no directives on qualifications or selection, the first Muslim jurists themselves established a process of appointment by election and the provision that candidates must belong to the Quraysh tribe (i.e., the tribe of the Prophet). The eminent 14th-century North African historian Ibn Khaldūn later summarized the duties of the caliph as follows:

> [To exercise] the caliphate means to cause the masses to act as required by religious insight into their interests in the other world as well as in this world … Thus, [the caliphate] in reality is a substitute for Muhammad in as much as it serves, like him, to protect religion and to exercise leadership of the world (1981, 155).

Described as a "deputy or successor to the Prophet" and as "the custodian of the moral and material heritage of the Prophet" (Lewis 1988, 46), the caliph initially held a position of ultimate sovereignty. Indeed, the only preliminary limitations on the caliphate distinguished it as an office subordinate to that of the deceased Prophet and therefore *not* imbued with prophetic or otherwise divine authority (authority in matters of interpretation is something still debated by scholars). Given the significance of the office, varying forms of strife understandably ensued over contested claims to it thereafter. In the years immediately following the death of Muhammad, the Sunni–Shi'ite split arose over the question of succession during the brief era of the Rashidun (the "rightly guided caliphs" who were elected, AD 632–61). Discord associated with the caliphate thereafter came with its transformation into a geopolitical prize when it re-emerged as an unelected, dynastic institution under the Umayyads (AD 661–750) and the Abbasids (AD 750–1258)—with some challenges to legitimacy (as with the Shi'ite Muslim Fatimid Caliphate, AD 909–1171).

In the years following the Mongol siege and sacking of the Abbasid capital of Baghdad and their execution of Abbasid Caliph al-Musta'sim (AD 1258), various leaders throughout the Muslim world began to use the title to enhance their legitimacy as rulers. Additionally, Abbasid descendants sought refuge under the Mamluk rulers of Egypt and continued to employ the title—though without political authority. Scholars often characterize this period, which spanned the 13th through 16th centuries AD, as that of

a "shadow caliphate." After the Ottoman Empire's defeat of the Mamluk Sultanate in AD 1517, the Ottomans delivered al-Mutawakkil III (r. AD 1508–17), the last surviving Abbasid claimant, to their capital. With the professed transfer of the caliphate from al-Mutawakkil III to Sultan Selim I in Istanbul in that year, Ottoman sultans acquired not only a title but also religious authority and legitimacy over their lands and (especially) their Muslim citizens. Although these sultans lacked the ancestral pedigree that authorized their claims to the caliphate, they presented an alternative type of legitimacy. Indeed, though their authority was not recognized by all Muslims, Ottoman territorial control over the cities of Mecca and Medina and their subsequent pledges and actions to safeguard the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to these holy sites for all Muslims—not to mention their military force and the wider extent of their geopolitical possessions—presented a compelling rationale.

Though the Ottomans maintained the title (among other honorifics and appellations) in concert with that of the sultanate, most historians of the empire concede that the caliphate was not of particular religious or political significance until the 18th century. In the later periods of the empire, as they faced external and internal geopolitical challenges, Ottoman leaders began to invoke the title and institution of the caliphate as a means of asserting legitimate sovereignty over Muslims and associated territories. This practice was first noted most prominently in the context of the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca between the empire and Tsarist Russia, which normalized relations with respect to numerous territories (largely to the exclusive benefit of Russia) and conferred rights of protection over Christians in Ottoman territories on Russia and, nominally, comparable rights over Muslims in Russian territories on the Ottoman sultan-caliph (on the history of this treaty see Davison 1976).

By the 19th century, the caliphate again attracted international attention as Sultan Abdülhamid II (1842–1918; r. 1876–1909) began to employ the title as part of Hamidian-era Islamist policies geared toward enhancing the loyalties of the empire's Muslim citizens (as promoted more broadly among all citizens under sometimes conflicting policies of Ottomanism). Such policies were particularly evident in some contexts following the empire's losses in the Balkans, North Africa, and elsewhere. Since many Christians departed Ottoman lands amid this ongoing territorial and institutional fragmentation, unifying the remaining citizens by emphasizing their Islamic identity seemed a viable strategy for the empire's leaders. In general, however, this approach came to be regarded as divisive, inadequate, or both. Moreover, for European empires that challenged Ottoman sovereignty on many fronts, and had their own Muslim subjects, this emphasis on Islamism was not infrequently perceived as antagonistic. Summarizing this situation, one Turkish historian writes that

> Ottoman sultans tried to make the caliphate into a religious and political office. This was like a double-edged sword, however, as any wrong move could harm it [i.e., the caliphate]. Ottoman muscle was not strong enough to swing the sword. In the hands of Europeans, the caliphate would be a toy until it was time to discard it (Akbulut 2006, 108).

Given Britain's long-standing presence in South Asia and its concerns about its own Muslim colonial subjects and their obedience, debate among British politicians, and in the European press, more generally, emerged by 1877 and steadily intensified thereafter (see Karpat 2001, 241–57; Buzpınar 1996)—especially in the wake of Ottoman internal rebellions and defeats to Russia. Likewise, various Arab nationalist and other dissident groups began to question the legitimacy of an Ottoman caliph by the 1870s, sometimes suggesting Arab alternatives (see Karpat 2001, 258–75; Buzpınar 1996). For their part, various British statesmen and writers actively promoted this idea of a return to an Arab

caliphate. Many champions of this idea were unabashed supporters of Britain's imperial ambitions, but others were opponents of imperialism. Noted poet and traveller Wilfrid Blunt (1840–1922), for example, endorsed the idea of an Arab caliphate with powers strictly limited to religion. Of the sultan, he wrote that "his political power is the only thing that reconciles Islam with an Ottoman caliph, and without sovereignty he would be discarded" (1882, 189).

This international struggle over the caliphate grew more urgent during and after World War I. Entering the war on the side of Germany, the Ottoman sultan—as caliph—proclaimed in 1915 that the conflict constituted a *jihad*. For its part, Britain supported Arab groups as part of its effort both to achieve territorial control of particular regions that it deemed vital and to undermine Ottoman claims to socio-religious leadership among Muslims. For example, the British supported the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali (1854–1931), and pledged Britain's assistance and the caliphate itself as reward for his resistance to the Ottomans. Viewing the Sharif's position as a result of British intrigues, however, many Arabs were reluctant to support Hussein bin Ali—or other opportunistic regional leaders (e.g., the Khedive of Egypt and Sudan, Abbas Hilmi Paşa, 1874–1944) who eyed the caliphate for themselves. Rebelling not on religious grounds, however, but simply out of a dislike of Ottoman rule, many Arabs did find it expedient to collaborate with Britain and/or France. Often this collaboration was based on an emergent (and sometimes externally promoted) Arab nationalism.

The consequences of the war—and the politicization of the caliphate—were disastrous for the Ottomans, for most Arabs, and for the institution itself. With the Ottoman signing of the Mudros Armistice in October 1918, the empire was subjected to onerous terms. Moreover, this agreement made many Arabs, Turks, and others wards of Britain and/or France when territories were divided and Mandate regimes established; as a result of these developments, Arab–Turkish relations became strained. Istanbul was occupied on 13 November 1918. In negotiating the provisions of the armistice, Sultan Mehmed VI (hereafter Vahideddin, 1861–1926; r. 1918–22) stipulated only one condition: the preservation and maintenance of the caliphate, the sultanate, and the rights of the Ottoman dynasty. By insisting upon the caliphate, the sultan still hoped to unify all Muslims who remained within the empire's tremendously diminished territories (Akgün 1985, 32). Less concerned with (or, perhaps more aptly, less capable of) preserving the territorial integrity of a Turkish nation than with the perpetuation of the Ottoman dynasty, the sultan was ineffectual in resisting ongoing schemes to apportion the lands of Anatolia among the Great Powers and regional claimants, including Greece (on this history of imperial competition and partition see Gökay 1997). In this context of occupation, the Ottoman sultanate–cali-phate ceased to appear as a guarantor of geopolitical or spiritual sovereignty. This growing perception created a divide with—and an opportunity for—Turkish nationalists.

Istanbul versus Ankara, or, the Clash of Competing Fatwās

Following the 1918 armistice, new associations emerged in Turkey. Some sought to preserve what remained of the Ottoman Empire, while others made claims for local/regional independence. Arriving in Anatolia in May 1919, Atatürk worked to unify many such groups under a single authority, with the declared goal of restoring the sultanate–caliphate from the dishonour of European (especially British) captivity. Despite this declaration, authorities in Istanbul were guarded and suspicious of this development. Indeed, there was profound concern that the nationalist movement would defy the sultan's authority. This apprehension—and strong British encouragement—

induced Vahideddin, as sultan and caliph, to condemn the nationalists publicly on 11 April 1920 as a manifestation contrary to Islam. In so doing, he obtained on the same date a *fatwā* from Şeyhülislam Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi (1860s–1923)[1] denouncing the nationalists for manoeuvring without the sultan's (i.e., the caliph's) authorization. In addition, the nationalist movement was defined as a revolt, and the Army of the Caliphate was established to fight them.

In order to diminish the consequences of the *fatwā*, nationalists issued something of a counter-*fatwā* declaring that, like Istanbul, the sultanate–caliphate was essentially subordinate to Britain under occupation. The *müftü* of Ankara, who prepared this counter-*fatwā,* declared that according to *Shari'a*, a caliph must be free from any undue pressures in order to decree a religiously valid *fatwā*. Since the sultan–caliph and Şeyhülislam Dürrizade were essentially captives of the British, their *fatwā*, he declared, could be neither valid nor legitimate.

With large Muslim populations living in their colonies, both the British and the French empires were increasingly intent on preserving the caliphate as a mechanism of geopolitical control. In particular, British efforts to cultivate an image of amicable relations with the caliph were geared toward placating their Muslim subjects in India. For those Indian Muslims aware of the geopolitical situation, any attempt to diminish the power of the sultan would likewise lessen the dignity of the caliph. The British were therefore not only displeased with the national movement in Anatolia but compelled also to prompt the sultan–caliph to confront the nationalists directly—and in an independent manner. Indeed, it is argued that the British even spent significant sums on subsidizing the raising of the Army of Caliphate (Akyüz 1975, 76), an ineffectual force that eventually "fell to pieces" when challenged (Jaschke 1981, 31).

During the ensuing struggle with Greece, nationalist forces not only fought the Greeks but also were in conflict with the Army of the Caliphate. The nationalist discourse of that time and thereafter heavily emphasized "the Padishah–Caliph's treachery." As described by Atatürk, a sort of conceptual inertia among the populace enabled this betrayal of the nation:

> That the country could possibly be saved without a Caliph and without a Padishah was an idea too impossible for them to comprehend. And woe to those who ventured to think otherwise! They would immediately have been looked down upon as men without faith and without patriotism and such would have been scorned (Atatürk 1929, 16).

Though he initiated the popular struggle for national independence and sovereignty, Atatürk did not, in the early years, explicitly convey any opposition to the institution of the caliphate. On the contrary, despite tensions between Istanbul and the nationalists in Ankara, he declared that this struggle was launched to save the sultanate–caliphate. Amid later discussions about abolishing these institutions, some assembly delegates questioned his prior declarations of apparent support. Explaining how a prioritization of nation over religion emerged, he thereafter spoke to his earliest affirmations of the institution in terms of his *overriding* commitment to defending the nation and its sovereignty against threats both foreign and domestic:

> We were compelled to rebel against the Ottoman government, against the Padishah, against the Caliph of all Mohamedans, and we had to bring the whole nation and the army into a state of rebellion.… It would undoubtedly have been of little advantage if we would have put forward our demands at the very beginning in a resolution of such far-reaching importance. On the contrary, it was necessary to proceed by stages, to prepare the feeling and the spirit of the nation and to try to reach our aim by degrees, profiting meanwhile by our experience (Atatürk 1929, 18–19).

Nationalist Reforms, the Elimination of the Sultanate in 1922, and a Post-sultanate Caliphate

Viewed in terms of the reforms that characterized the coming of the Kemalist republic, the first phase of institutional divergence from the sultan–caliph's authority took place with the establishment of a parliamentary body—a "People's Government"—on 23 April 1920. It opened with a "vital" declaration that "there is no power standing above the Grand National Assembly of Turkey [the Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, hereafter TBMM]"; the declaration also noted that "as soon as the Sultan–Caliph is delivered from all pressure and coercion he will take his place within the frame of the legislative principles which will be determined by the Assembly" (Atatürk 1929, 380). A second step toward the new republic came with the TBMM's 20 January 1921 declaration of a constitutional act (the Teşkilât-ı Esasiye Kanunu) that declared that "sovereignty belongs to the nation, without restriction and without conditions. The system of administration is founded on the principle that people are actually and individually guiding their own destiny" (Atatürk 1929, 477).

After proclaiming the radical idea of extending sovereignty to the people, Atatürk turned to the matter of a constitution. In the associated debate, however, some deputies expressed trepidation about yielding too much power to the TBMM and insisted that its authority should not extend beyond the liberation of the sultan–caliph. At most, many deputies sought to replace Vahideddin with another heir to the royal house of Osman. Atatürk postponed deliberations until a later time, but he also warned that Vahideddin—and the British—would contest any alternative sultan–caliph (Atatürk 1929, 480–81).

As a matter of emerging ideology and associated political change, however, the materializing nationalist state emphasized the pursuit of modernization. According to many sources, as this priority crystallized, Atatürk viewed the evolution of a new socio-political order as attainable only by diminishing the dominant power of religious tradition (e.g., Mardin 1971). As an institution of power, therefore, the sultanate became the main target of his opposition to established institutions. In line with this ongoing hybridization of Turkish nationalism and modernism, Atatürk's views on Ottoman institutions increasingly reflected the idea that they were both corrupted and debilitating to national sovereignty and progress (Atatürk 1929, 18).

The abolition of the sultanate became a wider priority following the nationalists' victories over the Greek army and the sultan's insistence on determining Turkey's conduct *vis-à-vis* the Allied powers in signing a formal treaty. The Istanbul government's telegram to Ankara claiming this authority provoked a volatile situation. On 1 November 1922, several deputies of the TBMM proposed (1) a formal separation of the sultanate from the caliphate and (2) the abolition of the former. During the TBMM's deliberations on the abolition of the sultanate, some deputies argued that their objections were against Vahideddin only, not against the institution of the sultanate. Many, however, considered the entire regime profoundly corrupted and were highly suspicious of its potential for revitalization (Feroze 1976, 278–80). The main discussion that subsequently arose was whether the caliphate could exist without political authority. Atatürk clarified that the Turkish nation had taken its destiny into its own hands and that from that point onward, sovereignty belonged unconditionally to the nation. As for the future of the caliphate, he noted that history presented examples of the caliphate's continuing side-by-side with the sultanate. Though the sultanate was gone, the caliphate could endure as the spiritual and religious centre of the whole Muslim world with the honour of the TBMM's support (Gologlu 1973, 32). After listening to the exchange of views, however, Atatürk presented a final statement that underscored how this issue also was

implicated in the wider question of Turkish sovereignty and how best to safeguard that sovereignty for the nation (Atatürk 1929, 578).

The sultanate was quickly abolished via a resolution of 1 November 1922 that actually back-dated its eradication, declaring that

> the sovereignty of the Sultan had ceased to exist on March 16, 1920, the date on which the Ottoman Parliament had met for the last time and prorogued itself indefinitely, and that the Caliphate belonged to the Turkish State. The Grand National Assembly would choose the most learned and worthy member of the Ottoman dynasty as Caliph (Feroze 1976, 83).

Following this declaration, Vahideddin fled abroad. Dethroned, he still bore the title of caliph. To prevent his (or others') use of this title and any future exercise of power or intrigues in the name of the caliphate, the TBMM elected Abdülmecid II (1868–1944; a.k.a. Abdülmecit Efendi) from the Ottoman dynasty to serve as the new caliph.

After Abdülmecid II's election, various *hocas*[2] sought clarification concerning the caliphate. They queried whether the caliph would exist and function as a simple dignitary within Islamic society and whether the acts of the TBMM could be valid without ratification by the caliph. In essence, they wanted to know whether the caliph would be a head of state or wield actual political power within the TBMM. These inquiries gave way to lengthy debates in sessions of the TBMM—and also opened doors for the opportunistic.

Ostensibly seeking to merely clarify the TBMM's decision, Hoca Şükrü Efendi, a deputy from Karahisar, addressed these matters specifically in a January 1923 pamphlet. In brief, he proposed that he could represent the caliph at the head of the TBMM. He further asserted that according to Islam, the caliph led the TBMM, and that his ratification was necessary to validate all TBMM activities and resolutions. Arguing that the abolition of the sultanate, the uncertain fate of the caliphate, and the geographic separation of the caliphate and the TBMM contributed collectively to anxiety among all Muslims, he stated that without the sultanate or some comparable political power (e.g., at the head of the TBMM), the caliphate devolved into something like a mere papacy. He also asserted that a caliph should possess both temporal *and* spiritual authority; lacking either power, the caliphate would diminish considerably. According to him, the caliphate should have powers comparable to those wielded during the reigns of the Rashidun (Hoca Şükrü Efendi 1339/1923, 1–4, 6, 11, 26). Further emphasizing these views, he wrote that "the Caliph belongs to the Assembly and the Assembly belongs to the Caliph" (4). Strongly opposing Hoca Şükrü Efendi, three members of parliament who were also *hocas* issued their own pamphlet to refute his assertions about the powers of the caliph, his ideas of governance under Islam, and his treasonous use of the press to misinform the public (Hoca Halil Hulki, Hoca Elhac İlyas Sami, and Hoca Rasih 1341/1923).

For many observers, the nationalists seemed to have two options: eliminating the caliphate or preserving it in a form that its advocates sought. According to Arnold Toynbee (1927, 1), Ankara settled upon the first of these options at approximately this time. Whether or not we accept this view of a deliberate choice at this moment, we can discern that a new discourse and debate emerged in Turkey with respect to the caliphate. In line with this somewhat open (and sometimes penalized) dialogue, additional sets of pamphlets were published to inform (and to sway) the public (e.g., *Hilafet ve Milli Hakimiyet* 1339/1923).

In marked contrast with Hoca Şükrü Efendi's support of the caliphate—and himself—other deputies wrote pieces that supported nationalist reforms. Most of them expressed opinions in favour of a separation between the sultanate and the caliphate, and only a few tried to reconcile modern national identity with religious tradition. A collection

of such essays was compiled in the 1339/1923 book *Hilafet ve Milli Hakimiyet* ("The Caliphate and National Sover-eignty"). Ziya Gökalp, a philosophical father of Turkish nationalism, was among the contributors to this publication; his essay focuses on the two competing identities of religion and nationalism. Gökalp asserted that the basic social duty of a person is to know which nationality and religious group he belongs. To do this, however, one should first know the distinction between these identities. While a European could easily make this distinction, Gökalp argued, most Eastern Muslims could not answer such a question. For Gökalp, the *ummah* embraced many nations and could provide all with religious unity. The term "nation" was more complex, however, because it identified linguistic, political, and social identities as well as religion (Gökalp 1339/1923, 5). Clarifying these as separate identities, Gökalp asserted that the caliphate was an office of religious authority and spiritual guidance and that, therefore, giving the institution political authority would be divisive, as it would both impose a contradiction and compromise loyalties to the multinational Muslim community (10).

The Turkish Press and the Abolition of the Caliphate: Conservative Voices, Foreign Intrigues, and National(ist) Sovereignty

Amid uncertainties regarding the status of the caliphate, some hoped that the TBMM would extend authority to the newly chosen caliph, Abdülmecid II. For them, the October 1923 proclamation of the Turkish Republic was a profound disappointment. Although nationalist victories over the Greeks provided Atatürk with enormous prestige within the TBMM and around the country, there were voices of opposition within the assembly that strongly opposed reforms and sought to advocate for the primacy of Islam. This opposition was known as İkinci Grup ("the Second Group"), and their distinct positions became apparent during prior debates over the sultanate (on their opposition, see Demirel 1994). To prevent them from obstructing other major political reforms, most were variously disqualified from participation in subsequent elections. Within several months of the 24 July 1923 Treaty of Lausanne recognizing Turkish independence, the TBMM declared Turkey a republic and Atatürk the state's first president. The new government further distanced itself from the Ottoman past when it designated Ankara as the new capital of Turkey (see Evered 2008). In the eyes of some, this relocation not only distanced the republic from the empire but also further weakened the caliphate (Miller 1966, 556).

By this time, rumors were circulating widely that the caliphate would be abolished or that Abdülmecid II would be forced to resign, and the Istanbul press became the main source of (and outlet for) continuing speculation. When Lütfi Fikri Bey published an open letter to the caliph in an Istanbul newspaper, he stressed if the caliph resigned, the Turks would have neglected their Islamic obligations and would betray both the Ottoman dynasty and the Turkish fatherland. An eager proponent of the caliphate, he further asserted that the loss of the caliph would constitute socio-political suicide for the state and for Turkism (Bozarslan 1969, 120). In the 11 November 1923 edition of the daily paper *Tanin*, there was an expression of deep concern over a possible abolition of the caliphate. Citing this voice of opposition, Atatürk later quoted from it:

> Is this a national way of thinking? Every Turk who really possesses national feeling must support the Caliphate with all his strength.
> To endanger the Caliphate, the heirdom of the Ottoman dynasty acquired for ever by Turkey, would apparently be an action which could by no means be in accord with reason, patriotism or national sentiment (1929, 669).

In response to such discourse, Caliph Abdülmecid II issued press statements emphasizing the national need for the caliphate. He stressed the anxiety of millions

of Muslims throughout the world who sent him letters and telegrams. He resolved that, in view of the great importance of his office to Turkey and to all Muslims, he would not resign as caliph.

It was not only the Istanbul press, however, that exerted pressure upon the TBMM; Muslims throughout the world expressed dissent. One important event related to the abolition of the caliphate was the open letter of Emir Ali and Agha Khan, which appeared in print even before it reached the addressee, İsmet Paşa (İnönü), in Ankara. Published in influential Istanbul newspapers on 24 November 1923, it requested that the Turkish government place the caliphate "on a basis which could command the confidence and esteem of the Muslim nations, and thus impart to the Turkish state unique strength and dignity" (Ahmad 1993, 54). This letter significantly raised the levels of political tension already evident within Turkey. In particular, it made critical reference to the caliph's diminished position after the abolition of the sultanate and the proclamation of the republic. Its authors argued that "any diminution in the prestige of the Caliph or the elimination of the Caliphate as a religious factor from the Turkish body politic would mean the disintegration of Islam and its practical disappearance as a moral force in the world" (Lyber 1924, 877).

In Ankara, the letter's emphasis on the importance of the caliphate abroad was considered a manipulative (and profoundly suspect) attempt to offer foreign support to religiously conservative adversaries (Ahmad 1993, 54). After its publication, the TBMM held a closed session, and a "Tribunal of Independence" was created and endowed with full authority. The tribunal was authorized to investigate suspect events in Istanbul and to arrest the editors of *Tanin*, *Tevhid*, and *İkdam*—papers in which the letter appeared; all were ultimately aquitted.

Although Agha Khan and Emir Ali claimed both to represent the Indian people and to speak on their behalf, alternative voices from South Asia arose as well. The Indian Organization of the Caliphate sent a telegram to Atatürk that read in part, "the committee considers the proclamation of a Turkish Republic to be a great step forward for the development of Islam, and that any communication appearing to express disapproval of this step must not be considered as reflecting the opinion of Indian Moslems" (Lyber 1924, 877–78). Indeed, Turkish nationalist leaders and exchanges within the TBMM conveyed collectively that many Turks were suspicious of Agha Khan and Emir Ali—and of their close ties to the British government (for further detail see Öke 1991, 97–105). Furthermore, the Turkish nationalist press declared Agha Khan and Emir Ali to be pawns implicated in a broader British policy and asserted that their supporters in Turkey were conspiring to achieve the downfall of the republic's Ankara-based government. Responding to these accusations in the *London Times*, Agha Khan denied any undue British influence and asserted that he sought to see the "development of the sovereignty and independence of Moslem nations, including not only Turkey, but Persia and Afghanistan" (Lyber 1924, 877). For their part, nationalists in Ankara had good cause to be suspicious of Britain's confirmed use of South Asian spies in fomenting discord around the issue of the caliphate (as in the 1921 case of Mustafa Saghir: see Gökay 1997, 127–28).

Although the caliph was a symbol of Muslim unity, the Kemalists claimed that it was imperative to make nationalism and not religion the ideology of the state, and Atatürk tried to accustom the Turkish people to this idea by means of the press. In January 1924, he invited leading newspaper editors to a meeting and discussed with them the issue of the caliphate. The editors suggested that maintaining the caliphate would be very helpful for the future of the Turkish state, and that the only necessary consideration was how to make this institution more efficient

(Uluğ 1973, 40). The Turkish leader's response was forthright: "There is just one possible solution. The khalifate has to be abolished altogether" (Yalman 1956, 137). Ahmet Emin (Yalman) was among the journalists at this meeting, and he later described in his memoirs the feeling of the journalists in the room:

> We felt as though we had been struck by lightning. Our brains stopped functioning. Somebody dared to think and speak of the abolition of the khalifate! It was like telling the Irish that the Vatican was to be outlawed. What about sacred traditions, centuries old? What about the resentment of the whole of Islam, and of the people of Turkey? (Yalman 1956, 137).

The journalists' main concern was the reaction of the Muslim world. They argued that if the caliphate were abolished, Turkey would lose the sympathy and loyalty of Muslims. "'What is there to prove the actual value of this sympathy?' Kemal asked, and replied: 'We proclaimed a holy war, and hundreds of thousands of Muslims fought against us in the ranks of a Christian enemy'" (Yalman 1956, 138). Questioned about an anticipated loss of prestige in Turkey's international standing, Atatürk reportedly responded,

> Prestige? We have been in lost in a fool's dream. All the imperialistic powers would rejoice to have us retain the khalifate; they would pretend to be hearty friends. We would remain slaves of theocracy and deprive ourselves of all serious opportunity for modernization; and that would suit them well (Yalman 1956, 138).

Yalman reminds his readers that Atatürk's predictions were accurate and that after the abolition of the caliphate, friendly foreign nations applauded Turkey, while only hostile ones criticized Turkey's loss of "influence and power" (Yalman 1956, 138). By the meeting's end, Yalman notes, the journalists were convinced of the necessity of abolishing the caliphate. Thus, they agreed both "to attack the government for not realizing the danger to the unity and stability of the country which the continuation of the khalifate constituted" and to expose that the presumed prestige ascribed to the caliphate was merely "a myth" (Yalman 1956, 141).

Amid the controversial discussions of the position of the caliphate that ensued, an Izmir deputy, Seyyid Bey, published the pamphlet *Hilâfet ve Hâkimiyet-i Millîye* ("The Caliphate and National Sovereignty") before the abolition of the caliphate (1340/1924; though the pamphlet did not carry his name on the cover, he later referred to it in TBMM sessions). In his text, he presented a new interpretation of the caliphate, arguing that it was primarily a governmental—*not* necessarily a religious—institution. He claimed that neither the Qur'an nor the *hadiths* render instructive information, citing only one Qur'anic verse that mentions the caliphate and indicating that it deals with the Prophet David and not with the period after the Prophet Muhammad. He emphasized that the *hadiths* contain information on every aspect of life—are even so meticulous as to dictate the grooming of one's beard and nails—but make no mention of the caliphate. It was to be assumed, therefore, that the caliphate was not designed to be a religious institution but arose as a "lawgiver" and that it could be modified to accommodate changing conditions (Seyyid Bey 1340/1924, 3–4). After a lengthy description of early Islamic centuries to convey that the caliphate evolved into the sultanate, Seyyid Bey highlighted the idea that it was a trusteeship not unlike the offices of elected world leaders; in other words, if people did not endow them with the right to lead, the caliphs could not rule (57). With these ideas as a basis for his position, he tried to validate the establishment of the republic as a legitimate regime that represented the people's will. Later, during debates over the abolition of the caliphate, Seyyid Bey repeated the same argument to his fellow deputies.

Another deputy also sought to reconcile the concept of the republic with Islamic

notions and became enmeshed in this controversy. Employing the arguments of early Muslim jurists, Agaoğlu Ahmed justified the proclamation of the republic by declaring that

> the prophet himself made a clear distinction between worldly affairs and religion, and that, in early Islam, under the first four rightly guided Caliphs, … the Caliphate was elective and the affairs of the Islamic community were taken care of by consultative bodies as in a republican government and that a republican government conforms best to the spirit of Islam (Inalcik 1987, 27).

He supplemented his position by equating the modern concept of national sovereignty with the Islamic notion of *icma-yı ümmet* (a consensus of the *ummah*).

In a similar manner, but with a greater degree of spiritual *gravitas*, religious leader Şeyh Saffet Efendi also spoke to the superfluous nature of the caliphate alongside the new republic. Furthermore, he viewed the institution as yielding a dual-headed leadership that impinged upon—and could potentially damage—national sovereignty. Arguing that the caliphate of the early Islamic period existed to lend meaning to the government, he observed that it ceased to serve this function in the modern era (*TBMM Zabit Ceridesi* 27). During TBMM debates, it was argued strongly that so long as the caliphate remained, it encouraged a reversion to the sultanate (74). Deputy Tunalı Hilmi Bey asserted that they were not abolishing the caliphate but, rather, abolishing Turkey's claim to that institution, and that it could thus continue to exist within any number of other Muslim countries (76).

Perhaps the final push toward the actual abolition of the caliphate came when Abdülmecid II appealed to the nationalist government in Ankara for an increase in the funding provided to the caliph's treasury. Following this appeal, and after much discussion, the TBMM decided that rather than declaring that "the Caliphate was abolished," they would simply declare that "since the Caliphate existed in the meaning of the government and the republic, it was abolished in that context" (*TBMM Zabit Ceridesi* 162). On 3 March 1924, the TBMM passed three laws that (1) deposed the caliph, abolished the caliphate, and exiled Abdülmecid II and his family abroad; (2) abolished state institutions of *Shari'a* and *evkaf* (Islamic charitable foundations); and (3) consolidated all schooling under the Ministry of Education. Interestingly, it was through the latter two laws, far more than the first, that the republic achieved secularization by claiming exclusively for itself the three main spheres of religious authority as exercised in traditional Ottoman society (the judicial, the charitable, and the educational).

Monitoring—and Policing—Responses to the Abolition of the Caliphate

Given the significance of the caliphate on a global scale, there was significant reaction to its abolition. Responses varied from outright shock, to disbelief, to anger and protest, to praise. In Turkey, there was some surprise, but there was relief as well. Turkish acquiescence derived from the nationalists' preparations over the preceding months but also from the belief of some that the caliphate was embodied "in the spirit" of the TBMM. Commenting on favourable reactions, one observer wrote,

> The reactions of ordinary Turkish citizens were far from the expected. This might be a result of the Nationalists wide campaign against this centuries old institution: The Turks themselves remained indifferent, and there has been far less excitement than might have been expected in Muhammedan countries outside Turkey (Chirol 1924, 236).

Journalist Ahmet Emin (Yalman) also later recalled that "through well-planned and well-executed publicity, basically persuasive, one of the more radical and rapid reforms in social history found general acceptance as a matter of course, and public life continued without real shock" (Yalman 1956, 143).

Mindful of the issue's political volatility, however, the nationalists retained all records related to the abolition—local and international telegrams, translations from foreign newspapers, and all associated publications. The first noted reaction came from Abdülmecid II. In a statement from his new residence in Sweden on 12 March 1924, he argued that the TBMM abolition violated prevailing national will and that the decision should never be accepted (TCCA, A:IV-17a, D:68, F:47, 12 March 1924).

Mayors, ordinary citizens, and various *müftüs* sent telegrams to Ankara in support of the abolition. Even Abdülhalim b. Hazret-i Mevlana (i.e., the leader of the Konya-based Mevlevi Sufi order and a member of parliament) sent a telegram applauding the action. His enthusiasm resulted from his strong conviction that the Ottoman family had become nothing but a source of trouble for the nation (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:20-65, 10 March 1924). A telegram from Kengri (today's Çankırı) also congratulated the TBMM and emphasized the national atmosphere of optimism and merriment that resulted from their decision (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:19-101, 6 March 1924). Many dispatches to Ankara reflected the negative image of the royal Ottomans that prevailed among the public, including accusations of collaboration, greed, and self-interest. Some praised the new perspective on the caliphate as now embodied by the TBMM. Other telegrams reported widespread joy and assured the TBMM that citizens would now pray for the new government at Friday prayers, as had been the tradition for the sultan–caliph (see, e.g., telegrams at TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:19-43; TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:19-45; TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:19-47; TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:19-107; and, TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:19-63). This question of who people would pray for actually emerged as a concern in TBMM debates over the sultanate and caliphate.

There were also negative reactions to the abolition—and associated state responses. Resentment was especially apparent among the nationalist elite. Although key figures in the War of Independence, including Kâzım Karabekir, Refet Bele, and Rauf Orbay, worked with Atatürk, their post-war relationships grew strained. Rauf Orbay opposed the abolition and believed that replacing the caliphate with a different order would create "disappointment and disaster." After the abolition, their resentment became more explicit and, to some extent, evolved beyond the question of the caliphate into power politics among former compatriots (Inalcik 1987, 29). To combat opposition, a tribunal was established to suppress any attempts to revive older, abolished institutions. Following the February–March 1925 Shaikh Said rebellion in Eastern Anatolia, which had its roots not only in Kurdish nationalism but also in emerging religious divides, the TBMM passed the March 1925 Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu (Law on the Maintenance of Order). This law granted enormous powers to the Tribunal of Independence and, in the view of many historians (e.g., Zürcher 2005, 171–72, 176), transformed Turkey into a dictatorship. It targeted not only rebels but Marxists, journalists, and others. In addition, the law criminalized attempts to demonstrate support for the caliphate (Akgün 1985, 225).

Abroad, reactions from South Asia's Muslims were stronger than any witnessed elsewhere in the Muslim world. Learning of the decision to abolish the caliphate, many initially distrusted the news and thought it must only be the topic of a radical debate in the TBMM (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:22-5). Though most condemnation was directed toward the TBMM, some criticized Atatürk directly. For example, Mohammad Barakatullah (1924, 12) stated that although Atatürk abolished the caliphate, history might forgive him because of his other services to Islam. Some especially vocal Indian Muslims, however, including Agha Khan and Emir Ali, were viewed with great suspicion (i.e., as British agents) in Ankara. Emir Ali, for example, told one newspaper that

Ankara's decision was a "disaster for the Islamic civilization" (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:23-2, citing the *Times*, 5 March 1924). According to a letter to the *Times of India*, the abolition of the caliphate would have a ponderous impact on Muslim unity:

> The arrogation by a Muslim State to "abolish" any of the fundamental institutions of Islam is a grave tragedy—the gravest within the last seven centuries …
> The Caliphate is not a national institution, the property of any single state, to be "abolished" at its free will. It is an integral part of the Sunni system. Any nation is free to abandon Islam but no nation or State can arrogate to itself the power to alter or abolish its institutions so as to affect other Muslim communities (qtd. in "Current Topics" 1924, 408–9).

In contrast, other Indian Muslims repeatedly petitioned Atatürk to assume the caliphate himself, some stressing that this would promote Islamic unity. Some prominent intellectuals, such as Maulana Muhammad Ali, asked Indian Muslims to accept Turkey's decision:

> The only reasonable course for the Muslim world at present is to recognise the decision of the Angora Assembly and accept the Khilafat as vesting in the Turkish National Assembly.… If an autocratic ruler for the last thirteen hundred years has been accepted as rightly representing the Khilafat of a nation against the example set by the first four, the rightly-directed Khalifas, there is not the least reason in objecting to a representative Assembly being made the emblem of that Khilafat. Neither of these two forms accords exactly with the example set by the immediate successors of the Holy Prophet but the form adopted by Angora is not as great a departure from that model as the autocratic rule which has remained in force for thirteen hundred years without a demur from the Muslims (1924, 2).

Within the Arab world, Egypt was the site of most reaction. After the abolition, some Arabs criticized this action heavily, but others supported it. The Syrian Shakib Arslan was not so forgiving, condemning the Kemalists for the "revolt of Ankara against the Caliphate, against Islamic principles, against Eastern traditions, against even Allah himself" (Cleveland 1981–1982, 18). While some considered the Turkish decision an affront to the honour of Islam and related traditions (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:20-3), others reserved their true ire for the exile of Abdülmecid II and his heirs. A few even equated this action with the expulsion of Arabs from Andalusia (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:15, *Fettu'l Arab,* 5 March 1924). In other cases, some expressed hopes that Atatürk would become the new caliph. On 25 March 1924, the leading *ulama* in Egypt declared in a lengthy statement that "Muslims were no longer bound to obey the deposed Ottoman caliph and that the office was vacant" (Kedourie 1970, 183). Indeed, supporters of the abolition had their own plans for selecting a new caliph at the congress to be held in Cairo in the following year. In the coming years, however, more Arabs sent telegrams to Atatürk and again asked him to be caliph, agreeing to recognize him as the legitimate successor (see, e.g., TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:20-6; TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:20-37). For many, although no member of the Quraysh tribe, Atatürk was a strong leader from the wider region who stood up to Britain rather than functioning as a collaborator (as many considered Sharif Hussein to have done).

Among Western countries, there was no universal reaction, though many feared that any re-establishment of the caliphate by a Muslim ruler could threaten their own colonies. While some blamed Turkish nationalists for the abolition of the caliphate, Europeans themselves were among the first both to produce and disseminate anti-caliphate propaganda among Muslims (until just after World War I) and to emphasize the illegitimacy of the Ottoman caliphate (see, e.g., Şeyh Abdülaziz Çavış 1334/1917–1918, 3).

Reactions among the British were mixed. While some criticized the decision

vehemently, others expressed relief:

> For ourselves, in fact for all nations that have large Muhammadan communities in their overseas possessions, but especially for ourselves, there is no reason to regret the disappearance of the Turkish Khilafat, which, two or three years ago, threatened to be really the spearhead of the great Muhammadan, and even of a great Asian, revolt against the West (Chirol 1924, 237).

In the eyes of others, the absence of an Indian nationalism precluded any challenge to Britain in South Asia, but they nevertheless longed for an instrument of control over their Muslim subjects—such as a subservient caliphate (Akbulut 1988, 80). At the same time, however, the British also feared what the French would do after the abolition. For example, a piece in the *Daily Telegram* on 4 March 1924 speculated that in the absence of the caliph, the French would be free to institutionalize a new one in North Africa—perhaps even undermining British authority in Egypt and/or Afghanistan (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:18-20; TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:18-21). On 3 and 5 March 1924, items in the *Daily Telegram* stated that the abolition of the caliphate was the result of Atatürk's superior ego, describing him as a "Dictator of Ankara" who could tolerate no higher authority than himself (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:22-3) and who would reduce Turkey to a "third-class Tatar state" (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:18-17, citing *Daily Telegram*, 3 March 1924).

According to the French press, the abolition of the caliphate had been anticipated, and inevitable, ever since the Second Constitution of 1908. Many in France considered this move a success but speculated as to how the Kemalists succeeded in achieving this change in a society still dominated by religious traditions (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:18-6). To them, the abolition of the caliphate was the last stage in a long political struggle between Istanbul and Ankara. The only context in which the French considered the abolition a "historical mistake" was in terms of its possible negative impact on Muslims (especially in India and Afghanistan) and their relations with Turkey (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:20-8).

Soviet Russia was the only country that formally congratulated the Turkish government on the abolition of the caliphate. A telegram to Atatürk sent by the commissar of foreign affairs, Georgy Chicherin, on behalf of the Russian people applauded the action (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:22-1). Indeed, the Soviets feared that the caliphate might otherwise pass to a ruler who would be easily corrupted by the British (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:37-30). Like Italy, however, they were also concerned that the British might recruit the exiled Abdülmecid II as an imperial asset of spiritual and geopolitical consequence in Egypt and beyond. The TBMM's decision to exile the ex-caliph, therefore, was a "bad mistake that could result in giving the Caliph to Britain as a gift" (TCCA A:IV-17a, D:68, F:18-8).

Conclusions

In 1924, supporters of the caliphate argued that its elimination by Turkish nationalists would precipitate a revolutionary reaction within Turkey and upheaval among Muslims on a global scale. Actual responses from Muslims in Turkey and beyond, however, proved contrary to such dire predictions. While anti-secular explanations from Turkey and elsewhere traditionally attribute the lack of disturbance in the republic to Atatürk's wielding a presumably heavy hand, this article documents that the abolition was not simply an act of secularization; indeed, we further contend that, rather than resorting to presumed acts of brutality, the Turkish leadership relied far more on a discourse of both national sovereignty *and* decolonization (anti-colonialism)—and on its recruitment of the press.

While Britain and France commonly portrayed themselves as "decolonizing" the territories of the Ottoman state, their attempts to exert a not-so-indirect control

over the Muslim world in the context of "decolonization" by manipulating institutions such as the caliphate constituted very real steps toward the relationships of neocolonialism that defined later twentieth-century relations between Western and non-Western peoples and regions. Functioning as conjoined institutions since the early 16th century, the Ottoman sultanate and caliphate were institutions clearly antithetical to the establishment of a secular Turkey. However, it was the last Ottoman sultan–caliph's collaboration with the forces occupying the empire's capital in his own political struggles against the nationalists that advanced claims of his being a "collaborator" and "traitor" of no further relevance to the peoples of Anatolia. For the Kemalists, decolonization of Turkey came not only with the War of Independence against foreign powers but also with a rejection of institutions and legacies of the Ottoman Empire that might jeopardize their future sovereignty.

While much literature on histories of colonialism (e.g., in Latin America, the Caribbean, and elsewhere) has focused on straightforward attacks on and the demise of Indigenous cultures and institutions, it is also fruitful to examine colonial subjugation through the appropriation and manipulation of such cultures and institutions. An ideal example of such manoeuvres with indigenous political–religious institutions is Tsarist Russia's appropriation of Islam and its manipulation first through Orenburg and then from Ufa (see, e.g., Crews 2006), and the indigenous anti-colonial responses of Jadidism and Pan-Turkism that resulted. Turkey had a similar (though shorter) experience with Western occupation and religious (i.e., caliphate-related) intrigues, and this experience produced a different response: the abolition of the institution itself. Reframing this historic event—often interpreted narrowly in terms of secularism alone—in its geopolitical contexts reveals the profound emphasis on both national sovereignty and anti-colonialism. Indeed, such reframings of terms, ideas, and events are increasingly essential amid ongoing efforts to represent secularism, the caliphate, and Islam in limited ways for the sake of particular historiographic and political agendas.

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Note

1 A would-be guarantor of orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire, the *şeyhülislam* was the leading religious authority serving under the sultan–caliph.

2 In the Turkish context, the term *hoca* refers to a devout Muslim man, often regarded as having religious training and the authority to function as a community leader and/or teacher of religious matters.

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