ARAB RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN THE COLONIAL ERA:
REREADING RASHİD RİDÂ’S IDEAS ON THE CALIPHATE

MAHMOUD HADDAD
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Muhammad Rashid Ridâ has long been represented as a reformist figure dedicated to constructing a consistent Islamic theory of the caliphate, in order to pave the way for an Arab caliphate that would replace the ailing Ottoman one. The evidence presented here strongly suggests that Ridâ was more pragmatic than was thought until now, and that his ideas on the issue were far from consistent. However, there is a common thread that brings his ideas together, namely, the necessity of the political independence of Muslim lands, and especially those Arab areas, with their holy places, that are considered the cradle of Islam.

MUHAMMAD RASHİD RİDÂ (1865–1935) is a well-known figure of the modernist intellectual salafiyya movement that gained some currency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.1 Ridâ, like Jamâl al-Din al-Afghâni (d. 1897) before him, was concerned with both Islamic religious reform and strengthening the Muslim world in order to ward off Western imperialist designs on Muslim lands.2 Ridâ is also considered an Arab nationalist who engaged intellectually the Ottoman Turks during the last phases of the Ottoman empire.3 This study will try to show that Ridâ’s thinking on the issue of the caliphate, although steeped in Islamic literature on the subject, was eclectic, yet concentrated above all else on the necessity of the political independence of Muslim lands, especially those Arab areas, with their holy places, that are considered the cradle of Islam.

Most scholars who wrote about Rida’s thought in regard to the caliphate concentrated on his 1922 treatise, al-Khilâfa aw al-imâma al-‘uzmâ (The Caliphate or the Supreme Imamate), considered to be his most important work. Henri Laoust and Malcolm Kerr confined their study to Ridâ’s attempt to construct a legal and political system that reconciled medieval Islamic political thought with the requirements of modernity.4 Hamid Enayat believed that Rida’s treatise should be looked at in the context of the crisis over the caliphate which emerged when Turkey abolished the temporal powers of the caliph in 1922, and then abolished the caliphate altogether in 1924. For Enayat, Ridâ’s treatise is an expression of “the tension between the demands of Arab nationalism and religious loyalty to the caliphate” in the early 1920s.5

Although all three scholars were correct in pointing to one aspect or another of Ridâ’s doctrine, they either did not connect his thought with historical events or did not trace the development of his thought and activities over the whole span of his life. In relying almost exclusively on a textual analysis of his 1922 work, they neglected the contextual. The text is by no means irrelevant, but the historical situation proves as revealing—or even more so. The dynamic interplay between text and

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5 Hamid Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1982), 70.
context, moreover, shows that Rida's attempt to reconcile medieval doctrines and the requirements of modern Islam, as he perceived them, was built on the three semi-Islamic and semi-secular themes which he generally adhered to but failed to treat in a systematic manner. It is only when we recognize these distinct yet related spheres that we understand both Rida's comprehensive ideological views regarding the caliphate, and his seemingly "incoherent" thinking and political behavior over a period of three decades.

Rida's thought on the subject of the caliphate is based on a separation among the three institutions of religion, state, and civil society under a modernized sharī'a. Rida's confusion in this regard lay in the gap between this fundamentally practical division and his ideal that considered Islam a divine system allowing no separation between temporal and religious realms. At the same time, while his ideal exposition stressed that Islam had no religious hierarchy comparable to Christianity, he was, in fact, calling for a similar Muslim religious institution that would reinterpret the sharī'a and commit all Muslims to one modern unified interpretation of its edicts. Another source of confusion is the way Rida treated the caliph. In accordance with his distinction among the institutions of civil society, state, and religion, he at different times projected the caliph as the chief of a constitutionally limited government, to stress the theme of consultative democratic rule; or as the symbol of an independent Muslim power to stress the theme of necessity of preserving such power at a second point; or as the spiritual leader of the salafiyya's cherished separate religious institution, whose main task was to modernize the sharī'a.

Rida's ideological development can best be understood in the context of four major phases of his life. The first centered around the period of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II's rule; the second around the period of the Committee of Union and Progress' effective rule; the third around the period of World War I; and the fourth around the year 1922, after Turkey abolished the position of sultan, retaining only that of caliph. Circumstances were to lead

Rida to defend the Ottoman caliphate in the first phase, to become engaged in Arab nationalist endeavors in the second phase, to work for the establishment of an Arab caliphate in the third phase (as secret British archival material now reveals), and to concentrate on calling for a spiritual Arab-Turkish caliphate in the last phase.

I. UNDER HAMIDIAN RULE

The theme of religious reform and revival of Islam had been evident in Rida's writings since 1898, the first year he began publishing al-Manār. Beginning at that early point, he held that Islam, the religion, was not responsible for the Muslims' sorry state of affairs. He blamed, instead, the temporal and religious leaders of the Muslims—the umarā' and the 'ulama'. In a series of articles entitled Rabbānā inna atā'na sādatanā wa kūbarā'ānā fa'adallūnā al-sabīlā (Oh Our Lord, Our Own Masters and Leaders Have Led Us Astray) Rida held that the umarā' had permitted freedom in unbelief and substituted secular laws for the sharī'a. The corruption of the umarā', he charged, was exceeded by the corruption of the 'ulama' who busied themselves with seeking the favors of the rulers. In fact, Rida saved the brunt of his attacks for the 'ulama', because they magnified the differences between different Muslim sects and schools of law; they neglected modern sciences and failed to modernize the sharī'a to the point where the rulers had to adopt secular laws; and they—and especially the Sufis—confused religion with mawālid (objectionable popular festivals) and ḥida' (harmful innovations), while some, he said, went to the other extreme and acted in an excessively ascetic manner.

As a remedy for this situation, Rida did not call immediately for the establishment of a spiritual caliphate, but for a religious society. Although Rida proposed that such a society should be under the auspices of the Sultan-Caliph Abdul-Hamid II, Mecca, not Istanbul, was to be its center:

This reform is consistent with the creation of an Islamic society, under the auspices of the caliph, which will have a branch in every Islamic land. Its greatest branch

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6 In this respect, the attitude of Rida was very similar to that of the "Young Ottomans." See Carter Findley, "The Advent of Ideology in the Islamic Middle East (Part I)," Studia Islamica 55 (1982): 143–70, and idem, "The Advent of Ideology in the Islamic Middle East (Part II)," Studia Islamica 56 (1982): 147–80.

7 Kerr, Islamic Reform, 176.

8 On the methodological point of differentiating between the ideal and the practical, see Felix Gilbert, "Intellectual History: Its Aims and Methods," Daedalus (Winter 1971): 88.

9 "Rabbānā inna atā'na sādatanā wa kūbarā'ānā fa'adallūnā al-sabīlā," pt. 1, al-Manār 1 (1898): 606–10. In vol. 1 of al-Manār, there are no specific dates for the month and day of publication. See also Charles Adams, Islam and Modernism in Egypt (New York: Russell & Russell, 1939), 188–89.

should be in Mecca, a city to which Muslims come from all over the world and where they fraternize at its holy sites. The most important meeting of this branch should be held during the pilgrimage season, when members (әәдәр) from the rest of the branches in the rest of the world come on pilgrimage. Thus they can bring back to their own branches whatever is decided, secretly and openly, in the general assembly (әәдәр-әәма). This is one of the advantages of establishing the great society in Mecca rather than in the дәәр аль-кхиләфә [Истанбул].11

Riďdä's religious society had the same general function as had the well-known Arab Qurayshite caliphate of another Salafi thinker, әabd al-Рaмәn al-Kaвәкibi (d. 1902). This was "a sort of spiritual directory which would be recognized by all Muslims as the authoritative exponent of the Faith."12 Riďdä explained that Muslim religious unity meant the abolition of sectarian differences and reviving a doctrine that concentrated on the teachings of the salaf who pre-dated the founders of the different Islamic sects and schools of law. By this, Riďdä was restricting his definition of the salaf to the companions of the Prophet. Although he maintained that the founders or eponyms of the schools of law contributed much to the development of religion, he envisioned a reunion of the Muslim sects and schools of law through a return to the usul (bases) of the faith.13 Riďdä also rather ambiguously made the point that the modernized shar'i'a would give equality of rights to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.14 The centralizing tendency in Riďdä's proposal might be detected in his statement that "the caliph would announce that this is Islam and all who believe in it are brethren in faith...although they may differ in secondary religious matters."15 The society should, furthermore, strive to unify the language of religion and of the state by making Arabic the official language of the Ottoman state.16 Riďdä held that such unification would result in both secular and religious benefits. It would spread the language of religion and abolish the racial differences between the Arabs and the Turks. For Riďdä, at that point, language was the criterion of race, and competing languages would breed conflicts between the races of the Ottoman empire in the same way they bred conflicts in the Austro-Hungarian empire.17

Riďdä's proposal had a political dimension as well. It emphasized the unity of Muslims against European encroachments on their lands. This might have been one reason he stated that if the unity of Sunnis and Shi'i was contingent on permitting a Shi'i Imam to reside in Mecca then such a request should be granted. He even called on the two great Muslim states, the Ottoman and the Iranian, to realize the common European danger they faced. The two should present a united front in foreign affairs, and cooperate in internal affairs, such as education, legislation and language, in a confederate manner similar to that of the United States of America. Each ruler would govern independently of the other in the internal administration of his country with the assistance of a separate, elected shuраr, or council.18

But toward the British, Riďdä had an accommodating stance. For him, if a Muslim country had to be ruled by a European power, it was preferable that it be British. This was so because Muslims under British rule—as in India and in Egypt—were free in their religious affairs. Thus, the Muslims would prefer British rule as long as their religion and its holy shrines were secured from foreign aggression or from non-Muslim interference.19

This last provision might explain other facets of Riďdä's choice of Mecca as the center of his religious society. He wrote that such a center had other advantages, "the most important among them being the distance [of Mecca] from the intrigues and suspicions of foreigners and security from their knowing what there is no need for them to know either in part or in whole."20

But Riďdä did not wish even the British to have any political or economic leverage in the Hijaz because "the security of the Muslims' greater bond is dependent on the security of the Hijaz."21 Since the British controlled the Red Sea and could blockade the Hijazi ports, thus denying the holy places their necessary imports, Riďdä supported building a railway between Damascus and

16 Ibid., 769–71.
17 Ibid.
Mecca, a project which the Ottoman government was seriously considering at the time.22

As to the theme of the caliphate as a necessary temporal power, Riḍā seems always to have been conscious of the need for at least one independent Muslim power which could defend religion and enforce its edicts. As early as 1899 he maintained that one of the bases of Islam was the pursuit of authority and power, not in the sense of imposing its will on non-Muslims, but in the sense of making its shari‘a the supreme principle of rule.23 As he put it at one point,

The Muslim does not consider his religion in full being unless there exists a strong independent Islamic state capable of enforcing the shari‘a without opposition or foreign control.24

During the Hamidian period Riḍā considered the Ottomans the representatives of that Islamic temporal independent power. Writing in 1898 and emphasizing terms used earlier by another medieval jurist and historian, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 809/1406), Riḍā did not regard the Ottomans as ideal caliphs, since their authority was for him “based on the ‘asabiyya (social cohesion) of malk (temporal power) not religion,” and they even disregarded the title of caliph “until Sultan Abdul-Hamid II revived its use.”25 However, he was also careful to stress that he was not working against the Ottoman caliphate, at that point at least, because that would have meant destroying the only available temporal Islamic power. This logic was reminiscent of yet another medieval jurist, Ibn Ja‘mā‘a (639–733/1241–1333) who legitimized what he termed “the caliphate of conquest.”26 Moreover, for Riḍā, those Arabs of Qurayshite descent who opted for an alternative Arab caliphate to replace the Ottoman lacked other important requirements. Scholars have failed to note that at this time he even explicitly expressed agreement with Ibn Khaldūn when he explained that the hadith which says “the Imamate belongs to Quraysh” has its rationale in the Quraysh’s influence and authority during the early Islamic era. Since the Ottomans have a comparable influence in the modern era, “the condition is to be consid-

ered legally fulfilled.”27 In so arguing, Riḍā was not—as E. I. J. Rosenthal described him at one point—“a rigid adherent to the classical theory of the Khilâfa”28 which emphasized the condition that the caliph must be of the Prophet’s tribe. Riḍā, rather, accepted Ibn Khaldūn’s thesis which explained the condition of Qurayshite descent in secular or semi-secular terms. But this was the only time he would voice this opinion and, in fact, he would reverse himself on this point in 1922. Riḍā also defended Sultan Abdul-Hamid II’s title as caliph when an Egyptian ʿalīm questioned it in 1906.29

The theme of consultative/constitutional rule was also present in Riḍā’s ideological formulations during Hamidian rule. Like other aspects of his thought, Riḍā’s ideas on this subject were a blend of Islamic and Western notions of representative government. For example, after Iran’s constitutional revolution in 1905–630 Riḍā expressed the opinion that shūrā (consultation) is the basic feature for any Islamic government, and despotic rule may not be called Islamic. He voiced dismay that Sultan Abdul-Hamid II was the only ruler who did not congratulate Muzaffar al-Din Shah of Iran on sanctioning the popular demands for a constitution in his country. He went on to say: “If consultative rule is established in Iran while other Muslim governments remain despotic, then we have to admit that the Iranian government is the only true Islamic government on earth. We should support it lest the rule of the Qurān be effaced from the world.”31 As for the notion that constitutionalism is a Western concept, he wrote an article a year later in which he said that one of the positive effects of the European presence in the Orient is the acquired awareness of the Orientals of the benefits of constitutional rule in comparison with Ottoman absolutism.32 For him, at that point, although shūrā had always been one of the tenets


Ibid.
24 Muhammad Rashid Riḍā, al-Khilāfa ʿaw al-imāma al-ʿuzma (Cairo: Matba‘at al-manār, [1923]), 114.
of true Islam, it was the interaction with Europeans which reawakened the sense of opposition to absolutism in Muslims.  

Here it is essential to consider the Arab nationalist aspect of Rida’s political thought. While he backed the Young Turk movement in its demand for a democratic type of rule, he was concerned by the movement’s adoption of Western national themes which emphasized the primacy of the Turkish race in the Ottoman domains. He thus sided with the Young Turks’ movement on the issue of democracy, but with Sultan Abdul-Hamid II on the necessity of resisting the Turkish nationalism advocated by the Young Turks. Since the latter were expressing unfavorable opinions about the Arabs and Arab civilization and culture, Rida addressed the subject of the relationship between Arabs and Turks. As early as 1900 he was engaged in writing articles in al-Manâr where, in the words of Sylvia Haim, he “takes up the cause of the Arabs against the Turks, in evaluating the contribution of both to Islam.” He is correctly quoted as saying in 1900:

The Turks are a warlike nation but they are not of greater moment than the Arabs; how can their conquests be compared to those of the Arabs, although their state lasted longer than all the states of the Arabs together? It is in the countries which were conquered by the Turks that Islam spread, became firmly established and prospered. Most of the lands which the Turks conquered were a burden on Islam and the Muslims, and are still a warning of clear catastrophe. I am not saying that those conquests are things for which the Turks must be blamed or criticized, but I want to say that the greatest glory in the Muslim conquests goes to the Arabs, and that religion grew, and became great through them; their foundation is the strongest, their light is the brightest, and they are indeed the best umma brought forth to the world.

In fact, Rida was—as were other members of the salafiyya—generally consistent in presenting the Arabs as the one Muslim element which had supremacy in the religious sphere. Indeed,

To care for the history of the Arabs and to strive to revive their glory is the same as to work for the Muslim union which was only obtained in past centuries thanks to the Arabs, and will not return in this century except through them, united and in agreement with all other races. The basis of the union is Islam itself, and Islam is none other than the book of God Almighty, and the sunna of his prophet, prayer and peace be on Him. Both are in Arabic. No one can understand them properly unless he understands their noble language . . .

Hence, Rida perceived a de facto division of labor between the Arabs and the Turks within the general framework of the caliphate. For him, the Arabs have supremacy in the religious sphere while the Turks have supremacy in the attributes of political and military power, at least since the emergence of the Ottoman Empire. As he elegantly put it at a later point, “The Arab is the germ (jurthuma) of Islam while the Turk is its piercing sword.”

Rida was implying not a racial but a religious hierarchy between Arabs and Turks. The importance of Arabic in his discourse clearly stems from the fact that it is the language of Islam and not of the Arabs per se. Rida’s “Arab nationalism” may be better described as “Arab religious nationalism.” This is evident when he elaborated on the importance of Arabic, showing clearly the influence of Ibn Khaldun on him.

Whoever understands them [the Qur’an and the sunna] in this sense is, according to our usage, an Arab. For we do not mean by the Arabs only those who have kinship with an Arab tribe, because we do not desire to be fanatics for race; on the contrary, we deplore such an attitude and shun all its exponents. Not all who contributed to Arab civilization in which we take pride were pure Arabs with a clear lineage; but the foreigner among them did not have his knowledge in his foreign language, for the impetus to acquire this knowledge came to him from the Arab lands and the religion which he learnt in the Arabic language. Ibn Khaldun was right

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33 Ibid.
36 For an example of the Young Turks’ calls to adopt Western culture at the expense of Arab culture, see Niyazi Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey (Montreal: McGill Univ. Press, 1964), 298–99.
40 Rida, al-Khilafa, 61.
when he said that people such as al-Zamakhshari and ‘Abd al-Qahir [al-Jurjani], the knights of the language and the keepers of the treasury of Arabic were foreigners only in their ancestry.41

Likewise, Riḍā’s preference for the conquests of the Arabs to those of the Turks was based on a comparison between conquests which led to the conversion of the inhabitants of the conquered lands, and those which fell short of that ideal. For him, the conquests of the Turks in Europe were a burden on their power and served as a distraction from annexing other Muslim lands.42 His lamenting the fact that the Turks did not adopt Arabic as the official language seems to have stemmed from temporal as well as religious considerations.43 Had they done so, then the languages of religion and state would have been unified, a matter which explains, for him, the Arabs’ success and the Turks’ failure in converting the conquered peoples to Islam.

But here, as well, Riḍā employed secular logic to explain other aspects of his argument. For him, Islam and Arabic do not have an exclusively religious utility, but a national one as well. A common religion and a common language are two bonds that knit a nation together in a cohesive manner. Riḍā held that the Arabs were able to convert the peoples they conquered to their language and religion through their moral authority. The European nations achieved the same goal through brute force, imposing conversion on Arabs, Jews, and native European pagans. Yet the Ottoman state did not follow either course; thus it failed to establish any firm bond between the state and the conquered people, who await any opportunity to break away from the empire.44

On the historical level, Riḍā echoed other members of the salaḥiyya inperiodizing Islamic history in a way that gave preference to Arab Islam and associated the demise of the caliphate with the despotism of the Turkish military, who began to dominate it under the Abbasid caliph, al-Mu’tasim (r. 218–27/833–42). He emphasized, as he would again at a later point, that while the Arabs lost their racial ʾasabiyya within the wider religious identity of Islam, the Turks and the Iranians retained their pre-Islamic racial ʾasabiyya.45 Here it is important to correct an erroneous statement of Sylvia Haim’s:

[T]his partiality to Arab Islam, in the case of al-Afghani and of Muhammad Abduh, did not betoken an interest in or an encouragement of Arab nationalism. It was otherwise with Rashid Rida. A good example of the divergence between his views and those of Muhammad Abduh occurs in a footnote he added to the passage in al-Islām waʾl-naṣrāniyya mentioned above, in which Muhammad Abduh discusses the causes for the stagnation of Islam. The caliph who was responsible for introducing the Turks as mercenaries, says the footnote, was al-Muʾtasim, and, it adds, “how miserable was his helping (blameworthy) innovation to triumph over the sunna, and how miserable was his action in enabling the Turks to spoil the umma.” The footnote is noteworthy not only because it makes explicit and exaggerates a possible tendency of Muhammad Abduh’s argument, but also for the implicit change it introduces into the concept of umma. Traditionally, the word meant the body of all the Muslims, and made no distinction based on race, language, or habitation. But Rashid Rida seems here to be saying that the Turks, Muslims as they were, were not really part of the umma, that the umma consisted only of Arab Muslims. This remains an ambiguous hint, however, and is not made explicit.46

A careful examination of al-Islām waʾl-naṣrāniyya, the source on which Haim based her argument, reveals that Riḍā did not accuse the Turks of spoiling the umma, but rather of spoiling the mulk (temporal power) of the umma. His statement should thus be translated as follows: “How miserable was his [al-Muʾtasim’s] helping (blameworthy) innovation to triumph over the sunna, and how miserable was his action in enabling the Turks to spoil the mulk of the umma.”47 Riḍā, then, did not hint at excluding the Turks from the umma. Haim was more precise elsewhere when she stated that Riḍā’s partiality to the Arabs “was based on a regard for Islam and on a zeal in its defense which, so Rashid Riḍā thought, had been best insured by the Arabs.”48

Riḍā’s “Arab cultural nationalism” was evident when he defended the Arabs’ contribution to civilization when they were at the zenith of their power. He thought they created a new civilization and revived dead sciences. At that time, “there was no science except their science, no industry was better than their industry, and no agricul-

41 Madaniyyat al-ʿarab,” ibid., 289–93.
43 Ibid.
44 Jamʿiyyat al-shūra al-ʿuthmāniyya,” 950.
45 Riḍā, al-Khilāfā, 123.
ture and trade equalled their agriculture and trade.” But it should be stressed that when Riḍā talked about Arab civilization, he meant by it civilization under the ʿUmayyads and the Abbasids, he certainly did not believe that the Arabian Peninsula was rich in sciences or crafts or civilization in general even under the Rāshidūn caliphs. When a Turkish newspaper, for example, criticized those who called for an Arab caliphate to replace the Ottoman and argued that the caliphate is the responsibility of the most civilized Muslim nation and that most capable of defending the domain of the caliphate, Riḍā agreed only in part: “Yes, temporal power is the basic mainstay [of the caliphate] . . . but this power should be compatible with the justice of the shariʿa.” On the other hand, Riḍā had strong reservations about linking the caliphate with the requirements of advanced civilization: “If civilization were a necessary condition, then the caliphate of the Rāshidūn would be illegal.”

In fact, Riḍā stressed that God had chosen the Arab nation (in the Arabian Peninsula) for the Islamic mission precisely because it had no pre-Islamic civilization, although it was surrounded by areas which hosted great civilizations. Having been isolated, the Arabs of the Peninsula had greater free will and more independent thought. They had no spiritual or temporal leaders ruling over them despotically, and no religious customs to rival Islam when it emerged.

At any rate, Riḍā believed that the Arabs, during the heyday of their empire, produced a higher civilization than the Turks at the zenith of their power. He held that the Arabs had better mental faculties and possessed superior scientific minds than the Turks. Yet he conceded that in modern times the Turks were more educated and thus more civilized than the Arabs, but only because the Ottoman state allocated more funds for education to the Turkish provinces than to the Arab provinces of the empire.

At the same time Riḍā was developing his ideas on Arab “religious nationalism” he called for Arab-Turkish cooperation. For him, “Islam both gave people equal rights and transformed them into brethren. The achievements of each should be perceived as complementary. Otherwise, racial conflict which was the cause of Muslim weakness in the past might become the cause of their total destruction in the future.”

Riḍā agreed with the Turkish historian Jawdat Pasha’s description of the Ottoman state at its inception as “a combination of Arab religion and courage blended with steadiness which is characteristic of the Turks.” For Riḍā, natural obedience to their rulers was the Turks’ superior quality; it enabled the Ottoman state to survive for longer than any Arab state had ever done. But Arabs were more courageous, and more steadfast in adherence to Islam, Riḍā wrote. Unlike the Turks, who usually followed their leaders unquestioningly, Arabs were prone to political power struggles. But in Riḍā’s view, this fractiousness, while not promoting unity, reflected the Arabs’ closer adherence to the Islamic “democratic principle” and an independence of mind and will.

Riḍā’s concern for the unity of Islam did not mean that he neglected his concern for Arab unity. The main reason for his calls for such unity was that he perceived it as one component of a larger Islamic and Ottoman unity. For him, Arab unity did not mean the separation of the Arabs from other Muslims or from the Turks, in particular, but underlined the necessity of each Islamic component to strive to improve its conditions and elevate its status, a matter which contributes to the progress of the whole Islamic umma. However, the underlying cause for Riḍā’s urgency in arguing for Arab unity lay elsewhere. Riḍā feared most of all that Arab lands would come under foreign occupation, and he believed that the Arabs were more vulnerable to such danger than the Turks. Writing at a time when further European encroachments seemed imminent, he compared the prospects of the collapse of Ottoman power for both the Turks and the Arabs. In such a case he saw the Turks being able to preserve their

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50 See his series of articles on the civilization of the Arabs, the first of which appeared under the title “Madaniyyat al-ʿarab,” ibid.
52 It is interesting to note the similarity between Riḍā’s views on the Arabian Peninsula and those of the Iranian intellectual, ʿAlī Shariʿatī. The latter wrote six decades later and in 1968, for example: “At the time of the appearance of the Prophet of Islam, all the civilizations in existence were gathered around the Arabian peninsula. But the peculiar geographical location of the peninsula decreed that just as none of the vapors that arose over the oceans ever reached the peninsula so too not a trace of the surrounding civilizations ever penetrated the peninsula.” In Ali Shariʿatī, On the Sociology of Islam, tr. from the Persian by Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizz Press, 1979), 54.
53 “Fādat majd al-islām, al-Manār 3 (1 April 1900): 74–75.
55 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 170–71.
59 Ibid.
independence in Anatolia because “they represent an independent element capable of ruling itself and attaining a status par with Europe’s.” The Arabs, on the other hand, dependent on the Turks as they were, would become victims of European ambitions. The Arabs lagged behind in what Rida considered the three elements of power: [modern] knowledge, wealth, and military preparedness. Since the Ottoman authorities allocated most funds for education to the Turkish provinces, and since wealth is a derivative of education, and since it was only the Turks who were educated in military sciences, and there were few Arab military commanders, it was logical to conclude that the Turks were in a much better position than the Arabs to defend themselves in case of foreign aggression.

The irony of the situation is reflected in Rida’s perception that while the Arabs were, so to speak, “spiritually superior” by virtue of the linkage between their destiny and the destiny of Islam, they were “materially inferior” and were the weakest of Muslim peoples in terms of the ability to defend themselves. In this respect they not only lagged behind the Turks, but behind the Afghans and the Iranians as well.

Thus, since for Rida danger loomed largest for the weakest of the Muslim peoples, and since he believed that the Ottoman central government was unable to spread education in all its provinces, he called on the Arabs to rely on themselves and asked the sultan to implement compulsory military training in all provinces to enable each to devise measures of self-defense in case of European attack. For Rida, “this kind of preparedness to preserve the Arab nation and its unity is not incompatible with Ottoman sovereignty.”

Rida’s principle of independence vis-à-vis the European powers was not exclusively religious and political, but it also had a geographical dimension. The cherished independent Islamic power was not just any power, but one that would be capable of defending Arab lands, the lands of Islam par excellence. In this respect Rida constructed a two-tier religio-territorial hierarchy: The top tier referred to the Arabian Peninsula, as the early homeland of Islam. Of particular importance was its western province, the Hijaz, where the two holiest shrines of Islam are located, in Mecca and Medina. He once described this province as a sanctuary of last resort for Muslims; thus to Rida, its status was “similar to that of a mosque where non-Muslims are not allowed to enter.” The lower tier of the religious territory hierarchy encompassed the Arab Asiatic lands adjacent to the peninsula, namely, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq.

Rida’s failure to insist on the freedom of Egypt and other Muslim lands in Africa and Asia is revealing. It demonstrated Rida’s pragmatism, in that he chose not to challenge the European powers where they had already seized control. Apparently, he acquiesced in the Muslim loss of political control over those regions that were already under European occupation before World War I, but considered the Arab Ottoman Asiatic provinces, which were until then free of such control, as the bare territorial minimum necessary for preserving Islam as a temporal and religious force.

As early as 1900, Rida was sensitive to the prospects of non-Muslim control of the holy places in the Hijaz. He became extremely concerned about this issue after reading a series of translated articles, written originally in French, by Gabriel Hanotaux (1853–1944), a statesman and historian, in which he said that “the Semites in general and the Muslims in particular cannot be equal to the Christians or Aryans because of the fatalistic nature of the formers’ beliefs.” What alarmed Rida most were not Hanotaux’s remarks, but his description of the ideas of an obscure Greek writer, a certain D. Kimon. Kimon was correctly quoted as calling for a joint European military expedition to eradicate Islam by destroying its two holy cities and the tomb of its prophet. For Kimon, to destroy Islam we have only to suppress the action center of Islam; that is, Mecca, and to seize, in Medina, the remains of the prophet Muhammad, transport them to the Louvre Museum and this epigraph could be written on the remains: R.I.P. Islam. Born in Mecca in 612 and eliminated in 1897.

Although Hanotaux was, in fact, criticizing Kimon’s bizarre scheme, Rida felt that the direction of Hanotaux’s logic was not opposed to Kimon’s. In addition,
Riḍā held that the latter's hostile attitude toward Islam was representative of the opinion of many influential European writers and politicians.70

II. UNDER C.U.P. RULE: THE PRE-WAR YEARS

Riḍā's political thought and behavior entered a new phase when the Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P.), an offshoot of the Young Turk movement, assumed power in Istanbul in 1908 and reinstated the Ottoman constitution of 1876. At first he set aside his misgivings about the Turkish nationalist tendency of the Young Turks, and the C.U.P. in particular, and praised the C.U.P. and its anti-corruption program, emphasizing that the return to the constitutionalism was in line with the consultative and democratic principles of Islamic rule.71 However, Riḍā was careful to argue at that point that Sultan ʿAbdul-Hamid II was still the head of the umma and the implemen ter of its laws and shariʿa, and thus should be treated with due respect.72 Yet, when the C.U.P. deposed ʿAbdul-Hamid II in April, 1909, after a counter-revolution to restore his absolute powers failed, Riḍā sided with the C.U.P. For him, ʿAbdul-Hamid II's conspiracy proved his unwillingness to abide by the constitution, and thus his deposition was lawful.73

The theme of a spiritual caliphate or religious revival was somewhat muted in Riḍā's writings during this phase. Riḍā was concerned, instead, with trying to counteract the activities of Christian missionaries by founding a society and a school to prepare Muslim missionaries for proselytizing activities outside Ottoman domains.74

During his stay in Istanbul, Riḍā tried to reconcile the differences between Arabs and Turks. He wrote many articles in the Turkish press which were republished later in al-Manār. His central point was the need to shun the ideas and policies of nationalism based on race. He argued that racial nationalism was a European concept which was incompatible with the interests of the Ottoman empire because it was composed of numerous racial elements.75 To Riḍā, "if the Turks pursue a policy based on racial nationalism they stand to lose most, because they would end up restricting themselves to Anatolia."76

Again, Riḍā's Arab nationalism was not intended to displace the Ottoman Empire politically, but to live within it. Riḍā's Arab nationalism was restricted to the religious and cultural spheres; politically he thought that Arab nationalism, though useful as a unifying principle for Arabs, should give way to the wider concept of Ottomanism.77 On the eve of World War I, Riḍā accused the C.U.P. of having, in effect, abandoned Islamism and Ottomanism in order to embrace Turkish nationalism.78

But the dominant themes in Riḍā's writings during this period were the need for the political independence of Islam from foreign powers and the preservation of an Islamic temporal power. It was out of this concern that Riḍā differentiated between his opposition to Ottoman policies—first, to the unconstitutional rule of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II before 1908 and then to the Turkish nationalist policies of the C.U.P.—and his loyalty to the Ottoman state. In fact, he never advocated the formation of an Arab caliphate to rival the Ottoman one before World War I. At the beginning of the Ottoman-Italian war over Tripolitania in 1911, Riḍā wrote:

Islam is a religion of authority and sovereignty. These attributes may be more firmly rooted in the hearts of its adherents than the belief in the unity of God. Muslims all over the world believe that the Ottoman state is fulfilling the role of defender of the Muslim faith. It may fall short in serving Islam because of the despotism of some of its sultans, or the irreligion of some of its pashas, or the threats from Europe. But these are symptoms that will disappear when their causes cease, as long as the [Ottoman] state remains independent and responsible for the office of the caliphate.79

What made Riḍā, however, restive and politically very active on the eve of the war was the fact that military and political developments were pointing clearly in the very direction he feared most, namely, the collapse of the last temporal power capable of protecting Islam. Indeed, he was to reflect later that the only factors that deterred Arabs from trying to form an independent Arab

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70 “Hānātū waʾl iṣlāḥ,” 338.
71 “al-Umma al-ʿuthmānīyya waʾl dustūr” al-Manār (29 August 1908): 539–44.
76 Ibid., 823.
77 Ibid., 929.
state before World War I were respect for the non-racial principles of Islam and fear of European occupation.80

After the loss of Tripolitania, Rīdā voiced concern about the future of both the Arabian Peninsula and Syria. He wrote an article about the former at the end of 1912, underlining its character as the homeland of Islam:

Every Muslim should know that what is left in the hands of this [Ottoman] state is neither the inheritance of the Turks nor of the Ottomans. It is the inheritance of Islam itself. The soul of all these lands is the Arabian peninsula. The first bud of Islam and its holy shrine. It is where the Qurʾān was received and where the seat of the Kaʿba and the tomb of the seal of the prophets is. Muslims were content with making this [Ottoman] state the defender of the Peninsula from the enemies of Islam only because they thought that it was capable of such a task and not because it possessed any colonial rights or transmitted any scientific or civilizational influences. . . . Now . . . it is imperative that they [the Muslims] should, wherever they are, think about a way to protect the Arabian Peninsula from foreign occupation or influence. . . .81

As he was extremely critical of the Ottoman administration, Rīdā’s proposed solution was to ask the central government in Istanbul for reform and autonomy, not just for the Arabian peninsula, but for all the surviving Arab Ottoman Asiatic provinces. This, he thought, would make possible the reconstruction of Arab lands and the progress of the Arabs “so that they won’t collapse if the [Ottoman] state collapses and they would contribute, through their progress, to the progress and esteem of the [Ottoman] state if it survives.”82

At the same time, Rīdā was trying to help create a federation among the amirs of the Arabian Peninsula to secure a common defense for the region since, as he put it, “the power of the Arabs is in their peninsula.”83

As for Syria, Rīdā was alarmed at the beginning of the war by French news reports that London and Paris had reached an agreement which would put southern Syria under the control of the British, and northern Syria, including Mount Lebanon, under the control of the French. He was particularly disturbed by the fact that the Syrian Christians, especially the Maronites of Mount Lebanon, were alloying themselves with France while the Muslims, conscious of the traditional Anglo-French rivalry, were expressing pro-British sentiments.84 In a strongly worded article, Rīdā addressed his fellow Syrians, rejecting the control of either power. For him, it was humiliating to be ruled by the French, but it was even more humiliating to ask to be ruled by the British. Rīdā told the Syrians that both powers harbored vicious intentions toward their homeland. He pointed out that, although Britain was usually more tolerant toward the inhabitants of its colonies, in this case it was intent on forcibly controlling all Arab lands, while France might be content with Syria alone. He warned them that British control over Syria would be tantamount to the downfall of the Ottoman state and the dismemberment of its remaining provinces. As for those who were hopeful of building an independent Arab state, either under British or under Anglo-Egyptian auspices,85 Rīdā perceptively remarked:

Our Syrian brethren should know that Britain does not permit the establishment of an esteemed and independent Arab state even if it were to come under British protection. Neither does Britain look favorably on Syria becoming a dependency of Egypt even if the latter maintains its present status (i.e., being under British occupation, which permits the creation of an Egyptian military power for the needs of internal security only, and for securing what is within its zone of influence in the Sudan). Therefore, nobody should be deceived by these fictions or false political promises. They are nothing but daydreams.86

Rīdā then appealed to his fellow Syrians to concentrate on reforming their homeland and their Ottoman state, to which they should remain loyal.87

At this time, Rīdā repeated his old theme that it was impossible to reform the Ottoman Empire from the center in Istanbul, which had become too Europeanized and too dependent on Europe to pursue its own independent course.88 He wrote that the Balkan War might prove to be a blessing in disguise if Ottoman statesmen could get

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82 “al-Masʿala al-ʿarabiyya,” 40.
83 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
rid of their “European complex,” an idea he had expressed earlier. For Rida those Ottoman statesmen were so concerned with keeping the empire a “European power” that they neglected the opportunities of both the Turks and the Arabs in Asia. Ottoman Europe was draining Ottoman resources to such an extent that the state was able to defend neither its European nor its Asiatic possessions.\(^89\) Rida’s proposed remedy was very similar to his remedy of a decade earlier: he wished to change Istanbul into a purely military outpost and move the capital either to the Arab city of Damascus or to the Anatolian city of Konya.\(^90\) Arabs and Turks should join together then in creating “local Asiatic military formations” capable of defending themselves in case of foreign danger. Priority would be given to defending the Hijaz and the two holy sanctuaries in Mecca and Medina and the lands adjacent to them.\(^91\)

III. DURING WORLD WAR I

1. 1914–1915: An Arab Caliphate in Case of Ottoman Collapse

By far the most dominant theme in Rida’s thought during World I was the need to preserve an Islamic temporal power should the Ottoman Empire collapse. But while this concern made him stress his Ottoman loyalty before the war, it pushed him in the direction of trying to construct an Arab caliphate during the war.

At the start of the war, Rida was careful to demonstrate his Ottoman loyalty, confining his criticism to the C.U.P. He wrote an open letter to the Muslims of Syria urging them not to turn against their non-Muslim compatriots but to cooperate with them as the shari‘a dictates and assist their Ottoman state in its hour of trial. He told them that the “Arab renaissance” was not directed against the Turks, and even asked them to drop their earlier demands for reform because all internal conflicts should cease at the moment of external danger. He reminded them, however, that such loyalty is confined to carrying out orders that are in conformity with the shari‘a. Without mentioning the C.U.P. by name, he went on to say that orders from such bodies are not to be respected if they were contrary to the shari‘a or the intents of the nation and the fatherland.\(^92\)

These were fine sentiments but they show nothing more than political wavering. Rida was unable to maintain these views when war raged across the empire. Rida also seems to have himself confronted the fact that Ottoman collapse was now inevitable\(^93\) and would lead to European control of Arab lands. Rida reacted similarly to the way he had acted at the end of 1912 when Istanbul seemed about to fall to the Bulgarians. Apparently, he felt that an Anglo-Arab alliance that would guarantee Arab independence after the war was the only way to save both the temporal and spiritual authority of Islam. However, with the war under way Rida was prepared to go a step further and work for the re-establishment of an Arab caliphate to substitute for the Ottoman one. He was unequivocal about his intentions when, in July 1915, he told Sir Mark Sykes, Assistant Secretary to the British War Cabinet, that

> the fall of Constantinople would mean the end of Turkish military power, and therefore it was necessary to set up another Mohammedan state to maintain Mohammedan prestige.\(^94\)

Later in the same interview, he was more specific, remarking that

> when Turkey fell Islam would require the setting up of an absolutely independent Arabia, including Syria and Mesopotamia, under the sherif [of Mecca].\(^95\)

At the beginning of the war, Rida believed that “the help of Great Britain to the Arabs and Mohammedans to maintain their independence in their own country was quite consistent with her own political and economic interests.”\(^96\) He was encouraged in this belief by British officials in Cairo and Khartoum who were initially in favor of an Arab caliphate, in spite of the objections of other British officials, especially in the India Office.\(^97\)

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., 110.
95 Ibid.
96 “Supplementary Note to the Memorandum...” Wingate Papers 135/790.
According to Riḍā himself, Ronald Storrs, the Oriental Secretary at the British residency in Cairo, and Gilbert Clayton, Sudan Agent and Director of Intelligence for the Egyptian Army, gave him all the assurances he needed. Ronald Storrs, wrote Riḍā,

explained to me that in the event of Turkey joining the enemies of England in this war, England would not associate the Arabs with the Turks and would consider them as friends and not as enemies. . . . If the Arabs seize then the chance to proclaim their independence, I was assured that Great Britain would help them in every possible way and would defend them from any aggression. . . . We were also promised in case it was necessary for military reasons to occupy with military forces certain parts of their country, Great Britain would give them back to the Arabs.98

According to Riḍā, Clayton also

repeated to me the same pleasant assurances, which it is needless for me to say, have given to me and to all our brethren the Ottoman Arabs, real pleasure and much satisfaction.99

Having received these promises orally, Riḍā suggested that Britain issue a comprehensive proclamation formalizing them. An English language translation of such a proclamation exists in the archives of the British Embassy in Cairo. An analysis of the text and statements by Riḍā about the proclamation led me to believe that this document is the English translation of the suggested draft proclamation as written by Riḍā himself and presented to the British authorities on 4 December 1914, after Istanbul had joined the war the previous month. It is not, as Abdul-Latif Tibawi says, an official British document recording a promise to the Arabs, nor was it even composed by junior British officials, as Elie Kedourie suggested.100

The proclamation thus should be read merely as a record of oral promises made by Storrs and Clayton to Riḍā in Cairo in 1914. Riḍā wanted these promises formalized by London, but London would refuse to do so. The proclamation specifies the areas of Arab independence as “Arabia, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia—the countries lying between the Red Sea, Bahr El-Arab, Persian Gulf, frontiers of Persia and Anatolia and the Mediterranean Sea.”101 It clearly assures the Arab residents of these regions that “the Government of Great Britain . . . has decided not to attack you nor initiate war against any of you—nor does it intend to possess any part of your countries neither in form of conquest and possession nor in the form of protection or occupation. She also guarantees to you that her allies in the present war will follow the same policy.” If the Arabs would unite their forces, declare independence and drive out the Turks and the Germans, “then Great Britain and her allies will recognise your perfect independence . . . without any interference in your internal affairs.” The proposed proclamation promises British help “if you help yourselves and take steps to establish an Empire for the Khalifate to administer your vast countries.” It explains, in the language
of an ʿālim and employing terms used earlier by Ibn Jamāʿa, that one of Britain’s “fundamental traditions is to be the friend of Islam and Muslums [sic] and to defend the Islamic Khalifate even if it was a Khalifate of conquest and necessity as the Turkish Khalifate.”

Although it knew that the caliphate is the right of Qurayshite Arabs, Britain

has helped the Turks and defended them as the Indian and Arab Muslims were willing to keep the Islamic Khalifate with them. She did not wish to create dissen-
sion amongst them. For this reason England has not shown sympathy before towards the Arabs nor did she help the Arab wishers of reform either by word or action.

The reasons for Britain’s change of heart were expressed in the following way:

Now that the Germans had pushed the Turks to expose themselves and their Empire to final destruction by fighting us and our allies, the cause which had prevented us from giving assistance to the Arabs has now disappeared and another cause has taken its place calling us to their assistance because the fall of the Turkish Khalifate is impending following the fall of their great Empire, and there is no nation amongst Muslims who [sic] is now capable of upholding the Islamic Khalifate except the Arab nation and no country is more fitted for its seat than the Arab countries.

The proclamation was never published. Instead it was returned to Riḍā, most probably after being sent to London, “with,” in his words, “the most important phrases . . . crossed out, thus leaving it devoid of the spirit which would tend to gain the hearts and confidence of the Arabs.”

The edited version left out British denial of any ambitions in Arab lands and replaced it with “a promise of free trade to the Arabs in the Arab country which will become possessed by the English Government. A phrase relative to the Hedjaz [sic] Railway was also cancelled.” Riḍā protested against those changes which did “not agree with the official assurances hitherto made to us.”

He also criticized the British occupation of Faw and Basra in Iraq in the beginning of the war, which he said amounted to “complete annexation.” Yet Riḍā in his long memorandum was most concerned with the need to preserve the temporal independence of Islam, which he saw as essential for maintaining Islam. As he put it:

What I seek from Great Britain represents the feelings of Mohammedans in general and Arabs in particular. They all wish Great Britain to use her influence to retain the complete independence of Islam in its cradle in the Arabian Peninsula and the bordering Arabian countries, bound by Persia and the Persian Gulf in the east, the Red Sea, Egypt and Mediterranean in the west, Asia Minor in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south. They ask her not to consent that any part of this country should be the slave of any power or in the zone of influence or under the protection of such a power. This in case the powers think of taking possession of a portion of the dominions of Turkey when peace is concluded, also if the allies be determined on her dismemberment if the final victory be their [sic]—as it is desired to be.

In doing this Great Britain will gain the friendship and loyalty of more than one hundred million of her Moham-
medan subjects, because they would then be confident that the precepts of the Koran and the sanctity of the holy places will not be interfered with.

There can be little doubt that Riḍā’s central concern was preserving the temporal power of Islam, rather than merely “the sanctity of the holy places,” because he mentioned that the strongest point in the argument of anti-British Arabs and Muslims was that “England was trying to efface the Mohammedan authority and rule from the world.”

[This argument] is even stronger than their saying that England wishes to take the “Haramein” or destroy them. Mohammedans consider that the destruction of the “Haramein” could be repaired, but the destruction of the Mohammedan prestige and authority is irreparable.
For Riḍā, the callers to jihād in support of Istanbul
have been given a strong point of argument in their
favour by the capture of El-Basra. They can make use
of this to prove to the Mohammedans that their indepen-
dence, both materially and religiously, is threatened, and
thus gain them to their side. They have thus been given
a chance to represent to the public that England intends
to take possession of their country in the same manner
as Russia with regard to the country of Turkey.112

In another memorandum, which addressed the subject
of Turkish sovereignty in the Arabian Peninsula, Riḍā
made the point that the Turks had only nominal and
ineffective temporal authority there, since Arab principal-
ities retained autonomy in their internal affairs. At the
same time, the Arabs thought they had superiority in the
religious sphere, and many of them felt that “they are
more eligible [than the Turks] for the Caliphate which
is the highest Islamic post.”113 Nevertheless, the Turks
“influence the Arabs by acting as defenders of the Holy
Places and all the Arab countries from foreign aggres-
sion . . . [in the case of which] the Arabs would lose
their invaluable independence.”114

Riḍā furthermore explained that pre-1914 Arab calls
for reform were not directed against the Ottoman caliph-
ate. This very fact underlines that the Arabs “did not
look on the Turks as if they were their enemies and try
to cause the downfall of the Government.”115 Aware
that the war might end in Russia taking possession of Istan-
bul,116 Riḍā pointed out that

most of the Mohammedans fear now that the destruc-
tion of the Turkish Government will involve also the
destruction of the Mohammedan independence. This is
one of the principal reasons which make them so much
attached to Turkey.117

Yet, it was this very fear which drove him to work
for an Arab substitute caliphate. In accordance with his
religio-geographic hierarchy, Riḍā maintained that the
Arab Peninsula, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq
should not be placed on the same level with Egypt and
other places in Africa or with Tunisia. These countries,
from strategical, geographical and religious points of
view, stand on a wholly different basis.118

The religious significance of the Arab Peninsula was
clear, but Riḍā also wished to include the remaining
Arab Asiatic provinces in his caliphate scheme for the
following reasons:

The capture of El Irak would also involve the Nagaf,
Kerbela, Samirra and El Kazimia. These are considered
holy places by the “Shia” Mohammedans who are nu-
merous in those districts and the neighbouring countries,
such as Persia, Baluchistan and India; other sects of
Mohammedans equally respect these holy places. Be-
sides it involves the capture of one of the roads to Mecca
and the holy “Haramein” [Mecca and Medina].

The capture of Syria and Palestine would mean the cap-
ture of Jerusalem, which is much respected by all the
Mohammedans. It is styled in the “Hadith el Sherif” as
the third holy place to the Mohammedans: to get pos-
session of it would mean taking command of the railway
line to the Hedjas [sic] . . .

The capture of El Irak and Syria, which means complete
control of “El Haramein,” would have a more serious
effect on the hearts of the Mohammedans. It would mean
doing away with the independence of Islam without
which the Mohammedan Faith cannot exist. The Moh-
hommedans rank this matter on the same level with the
Mohammedan two creeds (i.e., That there is no other
God but God and that Mohammed is His Prophet). This
is the only reason which makes the Mohammedans so
concerned about and attached to the Ottoman Govern-
ment, in spite of the fact that they have reaped no good
from her whatever, neither materially nor religiously.
This is the reason which induces the Mohammedan sub-
jects of non-Mohammedan Powers to be so much at-
tached to the Government of the Khalifate.119

Jiddah and the shī’a shrines in Iraq were immune from attack
or molestation by British naval and military forces, and that,
at the suggestion of the British government, France and Russia
gave similar assurances.” In Tibawi, Anglo-Arab Relations, 38.
113 Undated and unsigned memorandum written in Arabic and
found with the other two English translations of Riḍā’s memo-
randa in Wingate Papers. Handwriting and content of this origi-
nal Arabic document indicate it most probably is Riḍā’s. It seems
to me that it was written at about the same time as the other
two, i.e., early 1915. “al-Siyāda wa’il nufūdh al-turkī fi bilād
114 Ibid., 101/17/3.
115 “Translation of a Memorandum by Rashid Rida,” Wingate Papers 135/7/95.
116 Ibid., 135/7/83.
117 Ibid., 135/7/79.
118 Ibid., 135/7/77.
119 Ibid., 135/7/66–67.
Ridā repeated his well-known position that “England is preferable in the eyes of the Mohammedans to Russia, Germany and France, on account of its justice and the religious freedom she gives to her subjects.” However, he very clearly cautioned the British not to misinterpret this preference for England as Arab and Muslim approval of putting the Muslim holy places under British protection, however indirect this may be. For him, such an idea “is absolutely wrong and I can swear upon my word of honour that there is not a single Mohammedan who would agree or accept anything of this description.” But Ridā did believe Arab-British cooperation would be beneficial to both parties especially in the economic sphere. In summary, “the Arabs wish to be the best friends of England, but they do not want to be under her authority or protection.”

For this reason, Ridā adamantly refused the idea of an Arab caliphate dependent on British power, whether it had its center in Egypt or in the Hijāz. Events in Egypt only strengthened Ridā’s conviction. In December 1914, Britain made Egypt a protectorate, deposed the khedive ʿAbdās Hilmi II, and selected Husayn Kāmil as sultan of Egypt, thus severing the last political link between Cairo and Istanbul. After these events Ridā wrote:

Some Englishman may be inclined to believe that the appointment of a Sultan to Egypt and the proclamation of a Khalifate in it or in the Hijāz, who would be nominally and actually under them, or actually and not nominally, would satisfy the majority of the Mohammedans. They are wrong if they think so and they would be depending on mere appearances and theory.

He was even more specific when he addressed the widespread expectation that Britain would establish an Arab puppet caliphate in the Arab Peninsula:

We have persistently heard rumours in Egypt that England wishes to establish an Arabian Khalifate whom she could use as a tool of her hand. I have no doubt that these are nothing but idle imaginations. I know that the Arabs in their “Gezira” and their Irak consider England as their most fearful enemy and they only fear for the safety of their country. In like manner the Mohammedans in Syria fear only France and consider her a dangerous enemy who has ambitions in their country. I say this although I am well aware of the friendship which exists between certain British officials and some Arab chiefs, which is generally based on deceit or fear.

As the war went on, the future political independence of Islam increasingly became the fundamental issue. In the spring of 1915, Ridā complained to Ibrahim Dimitri, Wingate’s Arabic secretary, that the chief censor in Cairo did not permit him to publish in al-Manṣūr a translation of a letter on the caliphate written by Lord Cromer which appeared in The Times of London, “although I concurred in every word stated by Lord Cromer and said that he had hit a vital chord.” The censor’s behavior was to be expected since Lord Cromer, who was then a member of the British House of Lords, underscored in his letter the very same aspect of the caliphate which Ridā was usually propounding:

If I understand it rightly, Moslem opinion generally as regards the position of the Khalif bears some analogy to that entertained at one time by strong Catholics—and perhaps to some extent still fostered—as regards the temporal power of the Pope. In other words, it is held that the due exercise of the spiritual power cannot be ensured unless the Khalif is placed in a position of assured political independence. Hence, although possibly the substitution of some Khalif other than the Sultan of Turkey might be effected without any very great shock to Moslem opinion and sentiment, the recognition of a Khalif who could directly or indirectly be brought under non-Moslem influences would be strongly resented.

Lord Cromer seems to have been outside the mainstream of official British policy toward the caliphate, just being formulated at that time. For this reason the censor blocked, in Egypt, Ridā’s publication of Cromer’s views. Ridā encountered further opposition from Sir

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120 Ibid., 135/7/72.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 135/7/76–77.
124 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 135/7/73–74.
128 Undated translated letter from Rashid Ridā to Ibrahim Dimitri, Wingate Papers, 135/9/27. Since Lord Cromer's article appeared in The Times on 24 April 1915, Ridā’s letter should have been written shortly after that date.
Mark Sykes, who wrote the following about Riḍā after meeting him a few months later:

[He] is a leader of Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic thought. In conversation he talks much as he writes. He is a hard uncompromising fanatical Moslem, the mainspring of whose ideas is the desire to eliminate Christian influence and to make Islam a political power in as wide a field as possible.

He said that the fall of Constantinople would mean the end of Turkish military power, and therefore it was necessary to set up another Mohammedan state to maintain Mohammedan prestige.

I asked him if the action of the Sultan in accepting the dictation of the German Emperor was in consonance with the independence of the Caliph, whether such people as Enver, Talat, Javid, and Carasso could be considered as Moslems, whether the Committee of Union and Progress had not slaughtered Khojas and Ulema without mercy, whether the whole policy of the young Turks had not been originally anti-religious in the widest sense. To this he replied that in the eyes of Islam, Turkey represented Mohammedan independence, and that the actions of individuals had no influence on this view, and that when he had criticized the actions of the Committee, he had been subject to attack and loss of prestige.

His ideal was that the Sherif should rule over Arabia and all the country south of the line Ma’arash, Diarbekir, Zakhu, Rowanduz, that the Arabian chiefs should each rule in his own district, and that Syria and Iraq should be under constitutional governments. He resolutely refused to entertain any idea of control or advisers with executive authority of any kind. He held that the Arabs were more intelligent than Turks and that they could easily manage their own affairs; no argument would move him on this point; the suggestion of partition or annexation he countered by the statement that there were already German officers who had become Moslems, that more would do so, and that England would hardly dare annoy her numerous Moslem subjects in India and elsewhere.

I understand that Shaykh Reshid Riḍā has no great personal following but that his ideas coincide with those of a considerable number of the Arab Ulema. It will be seen that it is quite impossible to come to any understanding with people who hold such views, and it may be suggested that against such a party force is the only argument that they can understand [emphasis added].

Riḍā may have made exaggerations in his meeting with Sykes, especially when he hinted at the help the Arabs would get from “German officers who had become Moslems.” But Sykes’s depictions of Riḍā’s views lacked insight into the latter’s ideological premises and frame of mind. On the other hand, Sykes’s strong language against Riḍā indicated that British policymakers were increasingly opposed to the establishment of an Arab caliphate to replace the collapsing Ottoman caliphate. It is relevant to quote here A. H. Grant, Secretary to the (Indian) Foreign Department, who expressed the view as early as November 1914 that

the creation of a powerful Caliphate was definitely not in Britain’s interest. What we want is not a united Arabia: but a weak and disunited Arabia, split up into little principalities so far as possible under our suzerainty—but incapable of co-ordinated action against us, forming a buffer against the Powers in the West.

If this was the generally emerging British policy toward an independent caliphate, then the story that the British authorities in Egypt entertained the idea of sending Riḍā to exile in Malta during the war cannot be easily dismissed.

In late 1915, Riḍā began developing a comprehensive scheme for a Qurayshite caliphate, called “The General Organic Law of the Arab Empire.” It posited a division of labor between the religious and temporal spheres even to the point of designating two separate capitals: Mecca as the seat of the caliphate and religious center, and Damascus as the seat of a president and a secular government. Riḍā here followed his earlier territorial definition of the caliphate. Without explicitly saying so, he envisioned the “second tier” provinces of Syria and Iraq, with their large non-Muslim minorities, as run by a constitutional and thus partly secular form of government. The Arabian Peninsula, which was overwhelmingly Muslim, would govern itself religiously, i.e., in full accordance with a modernized shari‘a.

According to Riḍā, his plan met with approval from both Muslims and non-Muslims, for it “combined the precepts of modern civil government with the precepts of the shari‘a.”


133 Memorandum dated 25 June 1919, written in Arabic and signed by Rashid Riḍā, addressed to Prime Minister Lloyd
recognized both Christianity and Judaism and would have given non-Muslims the right to serve in the administration of the government and in the judicial system (except the exclusively Muslim shari'ī courts). He detailed his program in “The General Organic Law of the Arab Empire,” which he submitted to the British authorities in December, 1915:

[1] The Arab Empire is composed of the Principalities and Provinces of Jezirat-el-Arab and the Provinces of Syria and Iraq and the parts between these last.

[2] The Arabian Empire to be constitutional and decentralised: its official language to be Arabic and its official religion, Islam. It is the Government of the Islamic Khalifate and should recognise officially both Christianity and Judaism and the freedom of their peoples as that of Muslims.

[8] The Khalif should be the house of the Sherifs of Mecca. He should recognise the organic law of the Empire and guarantee to preserve it.

[9] The Khalif should manage in detail all religious affairs both in theoretical and in practical [sic]. He should have a special legislative Council to help him in managing the Khalifate and the empire and he should appoint a Vicar General for the Council of Ministers called Sheikh el-Islam, Vicar General or Adviser. He it is who will inform the Khalif of all matters pertaining to religion in the Empire, according to the Law.

[10] Besides the above, the Khalif has also the right of having his name mentioned in religious sermons, and stamped on coins. Treatises or decisions of the Council of Deputies are to be ratified and judgments executed only after his permission. He can commute sentences or reprieve. He can settle any dispute, litigation or disagreement brought before him by any of the authorities of the Empire.

[11] The seat of the Khalifate is Mecca and the seat of the Presidency of the Government and its Council of Deputies is Damascus. All the peoples of the Arabian Empire are free in their religious beliefs, personal rights and financial operations, unless they go beyond the limits of religion, law and general morality. The non-Muslims have the same rights as the Muslims in the privileges and official posts of the Kingdom with the corresponding duties save in affairs of religion.

[12] A non-Muslim can be Minister but he cannot be a judge in Muslim Courts. Non-Muslim questions of personal status among non-Muslims to be decided before their religious authorities.

Article 9 of Rida’s program is especially notable in that it does not clearly define who has full spiritual authority—the caliph or the shaykh al-Islam, his advisor on religious affairs. This deliberate ambiguity may have reflected Rida’s lack of confidence in the religious judgment of Sharif Husayn, the Qurayshite figure Rida would have liked to be caliph. Rida apparently wished to use the shaykh al-Islam as a check on the spiritual power of Sharif Husayn who already had temporal power in the Hijaz. In 1922, Rida would no longer see any purpose for a shaykh al-Islam under a completely spiritual caliph, as we shall see later.

2. 1916–1918: Backing Both the Arab Revolt and the Ottoman Caliphate

Rida’s thinking and behavior seem to have shifted not after the war but during it. Although backing an Arab caliphate during the first two years of the war, he apparently realized by the beginning of 1916 that the British were not going to support seriously its establishment to replace the Ottoman one. Fearing that the collapse of the Ottomans in the war might mean the end of the caliphate altogether and the European occupation of both Turkish and Arab lands, Rida trod a delicate course. He backed the Arab revolt led by Sharif Husayn of Mecca in June 1916, but also emphasized his allegiance to the Ottoman caliphate, differentiating it from the C.U.P. government, which effectively held power in Istanbul. Equally important, Rida argued that the Arab revolt was not a political and military effort to emancipate the Arabs from Turkish domination, but instead a preemptive move to protect the Arab Peninsula, and particularly the Hijaz, from falling under European rule in the likely event of Ottoman defeat. This could be inferred from Rida’s statement in support of Sharif Husayn in 1916:

Sharif Husayn has rendered the greatest service to Islam. Foreseeing the possible destruction of the [Ottoman] state, he became afraid that the sanctuary (Haram) of God and his prophet and their outer regions of the Arabian Peninsula might be among the areas that would fall

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George, entitled “Mudhakkira fi raghā’ īb al-muslimin wa l’arab al-siyāsiyya marfu’a īlā maqām wazir al-dawla al-barātāniyya al-akbar al-mistir lloyd george” (Hereafter “Ridā’s Memorandum to Lloyd George”) F.O. 371/4232.

outside Islamic sovereignty. . . In declaring independence he put the Hijāz under a purely Islamic authority which could lead to a large Arab Islamic state.\textsuperscript{135}

Ridā explicitly expressed his view that the independence of the Hijāz was a “precautionary” measure meant to save this holy territory from the control of the Allied powers, who, he believed, would win the war.

If [the Ottoman state] and its allies come out of this war victorious, then it would be easy for it to do as it wishes in the Hijāz. If, on the other hand, its enemies come out victorious then Ottoman concern with the situation in the Hijāz becomes irrelevant, since [Ottoman] unity would naturally be shattered to pieces and, it is feared, its enemies will end its independence. In that case every Muslim, whether he is an Arab or a Turk, would heartily wish that the Hijāz and other Arab lands should escape falling under the tutelage of the victorious Allies.\textsuperscript{136}

Ridā’s view was an unusual one at the time. Sharif Husayn, for example, was completely absorbed in the struggle for independence from Istanbul and did not foresee the long term threat to independence posed by the Allies. Ridā’s opinions would earn him the suspicion of elements in the British and French intelligence services.\textsuperscript{137}

Shortly after the proclamation of the Arab revolt in June 1916, Ridā travelled to the Hijāz on a pilgrimage and there contacted Sharif Husayn. In an article published in 1921, after the lifting of British censorship on Arabic publications in Cairo, Ridā divulged that during his visit he had cautioned the sharif about the dangers of proclaiming himself a caliph, especially since the sharif had given his bay’ā (oath of allegiance) earlier to the Ottoman sultan-caliph Muhammad Rashād. Ridā here followed the theory of another medieval jurist, al-Māwardi (d. 1058), which allowed for only one legitimate caliph at any one time.\textsuperscript{138} Ridā said that he boldly reminded Sharif Husayn of a hadith which does not permit the appointment of two men to the position of caliph: “If the bay’ā has been rendered to two caliphs, kill one of them.”\textsuperscript{139}

In 1916, Ridā was pleased with the way Sharif Husayn handled the issue of Hijāz independence. He confined his criticisms to the policies of the C.U.P., did not refer to the Ottoman state except in a positive manner, and mentioned the name of the Ottoman sultan-caliph Muhammad Rashād in the khutba (sermon).\textsuperscript{140} In December 1916, Ridā even congratulated the sharif on his recognition by the Allied powers as “the King of the Hijāz,” but also carefully expressed the wish that Husayn may become “the King of the Arabs,” reflecting his desire for the creation of a large Arab state.\textsuperscript{141}

He turned against Sharif Husayn when he realized that the latter’s secret agreements with the British compromised the independence of Syria and Iraq after the war.\textsuperscript{142} Ridā also turned against the British and the French when their 1916 secret Sykes-Picot agreement for dividing the Arab countries between the Allied powers was published by the new Bolshevik regime in Russia.\textsuperscript{143}

\textbf{IV. AFTER WORLD WAR I}

1. \textit{Ridā and the Turkish Caliphate}

As World War I came to an end, Ridā became active in agitating for Arab independence, opposing any form of European control over Syria and Iraq. He went to Syria in 1919 and became a member of the Syrian National Congress, serving as its chairman for a brief period in 1920, before French troops entered the country to put an end to the short-lived independent Arab government there. In June 1919, after the British prime minister, Lloyd

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{136} “Ibid., 148.
\bibitem{141} Letter dated 18 November, 1916, from Shaykh Rashid Ridā to King Husayn. Cited in ibid., 96–97.
\end{thebibliography}
George, had declared that Great Britain would respect the sanctity of the Muslim holy places, Riḍā sent him a memorandum, in which he stated again his well-known conviction that preserving an Islamic sovereign temporal power was more important than preserving the sanctity of the Muslim holy places. Interestingly enough, after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, Riḍā also expressed the opinion that Muslims considered the Turkish state as representative of the caliphate:

The great minister should know that his government's declaration which expresses respect for the Islamic holy places in the Hijaz, Jerusalem, and Iraq and continued Muslim control of them has no positive effect on the Muslims whatsoever. Such a declaration is even painful to them since it implies that the holy places are under foreign sovereignty and consequently worship there depends upon the will of the foreigner. He [the prime minister] no doubt knows that contrary to British expectations, recognizing the independence of the Hijaz and proclaiming the amir of Mecca a king did not have a positive effect on the Muslims. That was the case because the Hijaz is one of the poorest and weakest Muslim countries. It is not a land of sovereignty and temporal authority, but of worship. Muslims were not concerned that their holy places would be demolished or access to them denied; their real concern was for Islamic [political] sovereignty without which Islam itself and its mosques could not be safe. The preservation of this sovereignty is a desire mixed in the blood of every Muslim who regards the survival of his religion as dependent upon the existence of an independent strong [Islamic] state subject to no foreign influence. This is why most Muslims in the world passionately cling to the Turkish state and consider it as representative of the Caliphate although it lacks all the Caliphate conditions except power and independence. Otherwise, they would have recognized the Caliphate of the Yemenite Imam for his noble [Qurayshite] lineage, knowledge of the shari'a, justice, and other caliphal conditions. These last conditions are regarded as secondary relative to the basic condition [i.e., sovereignty and independence] [emphasis added].

After the end of the war, Riḍā began to work to reconcile the Arabs and the Turks. In October 1919 he met Georges Picot, a French diplomat in Beirut. He told Picot that, while they had celebrated their liberation from the Turks a year earlier, many Syrians were now asking for the return of the Turks because they were afraid of French rule. More significant still is Riḍā's revelation, in a letter he wrote to his friend Shakib Arslān in 1926, that he had attempted an Arab-Turkish reconciliation when he was in Syria in 1919–1920. He had then sent a long letter to Mustafa Kemal, the leader of the Turkish nationalist movement, urging him to strengthen the Turkish national bond among the Turks but at the same time to maintain the Muslim bond between Arabs and Turks. Although Riḍā mentioned nothing about the caliphate at this point, his memorandum to Lloyd George in 1919 showed that he clearly considered the Turkish caliphate as the only legitimate one. Here it is important to highlight a neglected aspect of the Kemalist Turkish national movement during its earlier phase. The composition of the movement then was not free of an Islamic "religious tinge." The Turkish nationalist leaders who were struggling against European occupation of their lands at the time stressed the religious aspect of their movement "to gain moral support from Muslims throughout the world."148

Another forgotten chapter in the history of the modern Middle East is the cooperation between the Arab nationalist movement in Syria and the Turkish nationalist movement, in 1919–1920.149 Becoming alert to the imminent French occupation of their country, a Syrian Arab nationalist trend emerged with the view that an Arab-Turkish alliance was preferable to coming under French control.150 On his part, Mustafa Kemal was "ready to accept the suggestion put forward by the national organization of Syria and Palestine that a confederation should

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144 "Riḍā's Memorandum to Lloyd George." This memorandum was also discussed in A. L. Tibawi, "From Rashid Riḍā to Lloyd George," Islamic Quarterly 20–22 (January–June 1978): 24–29.
be set up between Syria, Irak and Turkey, after their emancipation.”

2. Turkey’s Abolition of the Sultanate

In 1922, the Turkish national movement, with considerable Soviet aid, scored major military victories against an invading Greek army and consolidated its international position, in spite of Great Britain’s alliance with Greece. The Turks’ success in liberating themselves from European control was greeted with enthusiasm in the Arab countries. Many Arabs looked at Turkish independence as the first step toward their own, and supported closer ties to the Turks. The Turks were also open to continued cooperation. In late 1922, it was reported in the Arab press, for example, that “[Mustafa] Kemal Pasha favored the creation of an Arab Government to include all the Arab countries which were formerly part of the Turkish Empire, to work with the Turkish Government in regard to questions of military, financial, and foreign policy in a manner similar to that which obtained in Austro-Hungary before the war.”

When the Turkish Nationalists finally triumphed in 1922 they stripped the sultan-caliph, Wahid al-Din, of his position and abolished the sultanate. They retained the caliphate as an exclusively spiritual office and appointed another member of the Ottoman dynasty, Abdul Mejid, as caliph in Istanbul. The Turks moved the center of state, however, from Istanbul to Ankara. This decision entailed also an endorsement of the view that sovereignty did not reside in the shari’a, but in the will of the Grand Turkish National Assembly.

Ridâ’s reaction to these events was complex. During the course of the Turkish war of independence, a reader of al-Manâr sent him a letter asking if non-Arabs, and especially Turks, were true Muslims. The reader complained about certain pre-1914 C.U.P. policies, which he perceived as having been detrimental to Muslim beliefs, and cited other objectionable practices by earlier Ottoman sultans. Ridâ replied that the Islam of non-Arabs was as good as that of Arabs. The only difference conceded by non-Arab Muslims was one of historical seniority, i.e., that the Prophet Muhammad and his close associates were Arabs and were the first to uphold the cause of Islam. In the present era, however, Ridâ wrote his correspondent, the Arabs had no superiority whatsoever over non-Arabs. In fact, the Turks were better than the Arabs in maintaining national power and independence. He even repeated a statement which he said was made by an Iranian amir: “Had it not been for Mustafa Kemal Pasha every Muslim would now feel humiliated.”

Addressing the conflict between the true caliphate and malk in Islamic history, Ridâ pointed out that the Arab Umayyads were the first to base their rule solely on their own lesser ‘asabiyya and to neglect the shûrû by the ahl al-hall wa’l ʿaqd (governing by consultation of decision makers in Muslim society). Later the Abbasids took up this practice; they relied first on the ‘asabiyya of the Iranians and then on the ‘asabiyya of the Turks. Thus, Ridâ said, errors by the Turkish sultans had very likely been committed earlier by Arab rulers. At the end of his reply Ridâ emphasized that any discussion leading to enmity between the two largest Muslim peoples—the Arabs and the Turks—was the shortest avenue to humiliation of both peoples by foreigners.

Ridâ hailed the triumph of the Turkish nationalist movement a few months later. He considered it proof of the failure of “the British Crusader policy of eradicating all independent Muslim power in the world.” He described the Turkish achievements in the most glowing terms, for example, using the phrase “the Turkish Kemalist tigers” to describe the victorious Turkish army. Ridâ also argued that deposing the sultan-caliph, Wahid al-Din, was legitimate on the grounds that he collaborated with a foreign intruder. Moreover, he considered the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara representative of the ahl al-hall wa’l ʿaqd who had the authority to depose Wahid al-Din. On the other hand, Ridâ pointed out the emptiness of the spiritual caliphate newly created by Ankara. It was ceremonial only and effectively had neither temporal nor spiritual power nor

151 Ibid., 23.
152 Alarmed by the possibility of Western political and military presence at its southern borders, Soviet Russia found common cause with the Turkish nationalists. The Soviets supplied the Turks with money, weapons and ammunitions, and a Turkish-Soviet treaty of friendship was concluded in March, 1920. See Hurewitz, 2: 250–53.
155 Ibid., 434.
156 Ibid., 432.
157 Ibid., 432–33.
158 Ibid., 435.
160 Ibid., 714–17.
161 Ibid., 718–19.
162 Ibid., 718.
the right of *ijihād*.163 Although Riḍā referred to this new caliphate of the Kemalist Turks as a “mistake,” he urged all Muslims to continue their support for the Turkish nationalists since it was “they who were fighting Europe’s designs for ending all Muslim *mulk* in the world.”164 He wrote that Muslims should wait until the Turks achieved full independence and then try to explain to them that the power of a true caliph was restricted by *shūrā* and *shari‘a*, and that the caliph was the symbol of the power and unity of the *umma*, not an individualistic despotic ruler.165 Riḍā also wrote that abolishing the sultanate and constructing a new Turkish spiritual caliphate was a political move by the Turkish nationalists to reduce the British enmity toward them and also an effort to encourage the Russians to increase their support for the Kemalists’ struggle for Turkey’s independence.166 He explained that the British were averse to an Islamic caliphate because they feared its impact on their Muslim colonies, while the Russians feared it because it was anathema to their Bolshevik ideology. Riḍā even pointed out that since the old Ottoman caliphate was, for all practical purposes, a nominal caliphate whose political influence benefited the Ottoman state, the new Turkish state did no harm to Islam by abandoning that political influence. It would, nevertheless, benefit again from such influence when it would construct a true caliphate anew.

V. RIḌĀ’S TREATISE ON THE CALIPHATE

It was during the winter of 1922–23, just after Turkey had abolished the sultanate, that Riḍā wrote his well-known treatise, *al-Khilāfa aw al-imāma al-‘umrān* (The Caliphate or the Grand Imamate). For Riḍā this treatise was an opportunity to bring together in one work the three themes regarding the caliphate that had absorbed him throughout his life. *Al-Khilāfa aw al-imamā al-‘umrān* was the culmination of Riḍā’s political and religious thought.

Riḍā’s treatise was divided into two parts. The first was a presentation of the theoretical foundations of the caliphate, while the second part concentrated on Riḍā’s suggestion for creating a new caliphate. In the first part, Riḍā quoted al-Māwardi and other medieval jurists who wrote of the necessity of the caliphate.167 He repeated the hadith which says: “Whoever dies without having given a *bay‘a* [to the imam of his time] dies the death of the days of *jāhilyya*.”168 In accordance with the theories of most other medieval jurists, especially al-Māwardi’s, Riḍā repeated the same general requirements that a caliph must be installed in office. He emphasized, however, that the caliph should be a *mujtahid* and a Qurayshite, and elaborated most extensively on the latter requirement. He quoted two hadiths which say: “Give primacy to Quraysh,” and “The imāms are of Quraysh.”169 Riḍā also paid tribute to “the Arabs who spread the message of the “Arabic Qur’ān” and defended Islam with their swords.”170 Following the main outline of Ibn Khaldūn’s theory, Riḍā stressed that it was Islam that unified the Arabs. He also mentioned that non-Arab Muslims were followers of the Arabs, although the *shari‘a* treated both Arab and non-Arab Muslims with equality.171 Riḍā’s treatise emphasized the primacy of the Arabs in the religious sphere. He based this primacy on a periodization of Islamic history which gave preference to Arab Islam, and on a classification of Muslim territories which gave preference to the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, and Iraq. For Riḍā, the Rāshidūn caliphs were the ideal caliphs who combined religious and secular functions. As to the association between Islam and its birthplace in the Hijāz, Riḍā said that it was second only to the association between Islam and the Qur’ān and the *sunna*. He pointed out that the prophet had specified the Hijāz and the entire Arabian Peninsula as the territory where no other religion should be allowed save Islam.172 For Riḍā, “even the new Turkish caliph adopted the title *khādīm al-ḥaramayn*, which had been used earlier by the Ottoman sultans.”173

Riḍā blamed Muʿawiyah, the first Umayyad caliph, for transforming the caliphate into *mulk* through two innovations: first, supplanting the method of selecting a caliph by *shūrā* with a method based on hereditary kingship; and second, supplanting the larger *asabiyya* of the Arabs with the lesser *asabiyya* of the Umayyads.174 Furthermore, and contrary to the manner in which he argued in 1898, Riḍā refused to accept Ibn Khaldūn’s notion of the linkage between *asabiyya* and competence on the grounds that it was based on race, a notion which for Riḍā was in contradiction to Islam and its tenets.175 Riḍā’s objective in this instance was to insist that the caliph should be of Qurayshite lineage.

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163 Ibid., 717–18.
164 Ibid., 718.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid., 270.
168 Ibid., 11.
170 Ibid., 21.
171 Ibid., 21–22.
172 Ibid., 22.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid., 134.
175 Ibid., 135.
Riḍā differentiated between three types of caliphate. First, there was the ideal caliphate, which existed under the Rāshīdūn and the pious Umayyad Caliph ʿUmar Ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, “the fifth of the Rāshīdūn.”\(^{176}\) The caliph had in this case all the šarīʿi requirements. The second type of caliphate was “the caliphate or imamate of necessity.” This type would be allowed when the *ahl al-hall waʿl ʿaqd* decided to install a caliph who had most but not all the legal requirements. To this type of caliphate belonged some of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs who lacked *ʿilm* (knowledge), imperative in exercising *ʾiṭḥād*.\(^{166}\) The third type of caliphate was the caliphate of tyranny or conquest (al-*taγhallaḥ biʿl quwwa*), which was contracted by force without the *ahl al-hall waʿl ʿaqd*.\(^{178}\) This last type of caliphate appears very similar to Ibn Jamāʿa’s “caliphate of conquest.”\(^{179}\) For Riḍā, it denoted that worldly leadership had become wholly dependent on *shawka*, or force. To this last type belonged the Ottoman caliphate, according to Riḍā at this point. Although he said that such a caliphate should be obeyed because “necessity makes lawful what is otherwise forbidden,” Riḍā also mentioned that it should be overturned whenever it became possible to do so.\(^{181}\) For him this was the case when the Turkish nationalists overthrew the Ottoman caliphate; but he was quick to add that they, in fact, replaced one caliphate of conquest with another.\(^{182}\) Moreover, Riḍā voiced concern that the new Turkish caliphate might not be in accordance with the šarīʿa, not because it separated the sultanate and the caliphate and abolished the former, but because the šarīʿa was not made the ultimate source of law.\(^{183}\)

The second part of Riḍā’s treatise outlined his vision of a renewed viable caliphate and the steps he thought necessary to make it successful. In this section, Riḍā addressed all three semi-religious and semi-secular themes which he and the *salafiyya* had emphasized earlier: the desirability of civil government and consultative and democratic rule, the need for an Arab spiritual caliphate, and the preservation of a Muslim temporal power.

The theme of civil government and consultative and democratic rule was evident in the way Riḍā identified the *ahl al-hall waʿl ʿaqd*, who would apply the principle of consultation (ṣūrā) to choose the caliph and lead the umma. For him this group were the leaders of the umma in both religious and secular affairs.\(^{184}\)

Riḍā said that the *ahl al-hall waʿl ʿaqd* in modern times should include not only *ʿulāmāʾ* and jurists but, in order to represent all sectors of modern Islamic society, also prominent merchants and agriculturalists, managers of companies and public works, leaders of political parties, distinguished writers, physicians, and lawyers.\(^{185}\) They were to be elected by the people along democratic lines and their decisions would represent the *ijmāʿ* (consensus) of the umma. Riḍā’s position thus directly contradicts Hamid Enayat’s statement that “one guarantee of democracy for Riḍā is the predominance of the *ʿulāmāʾ* who, in his view, are ideally placed to act as the natural and genuine representatives of Muslims.”\(^{186}\)

To support his point, Enayat cites Riḍā’s praise for the Shiʿite *ʿulāmāʾ* of Iran for their leadership of the Tobacco Rebellion of 1892 and the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. But judging from the composition of his *ahl al-hall waʿl ʿaqd*, Riḍā sought for the modern caliphate the participation of both secular and religious social elements.

Actually, Riḍā thought that the umma should be the source of all legislation except in those cases when direct guidance would be available as an explicit text (*nass*) in the Qurʾān or in the authentic *sunna*. But Riḍā was careful to say that “*nass* is very limited.”\(^{187}\) Thus he granted the *ahl al-hall waʿl ʿaqd* broad powers to exercise their legislative authority as a “sort of parliamentary body.”\(^{188}\) But he maintained that sovereignty should be exercised within the confines of the šarīʿa, not outside it.

In Riḍā’s proposal the caliph’s powers were carefully circumscribed. “He is limited by the prescriptions of the Qurʾān and the *sunna*, by the general example of the Rāshīdūn caliphs, and by consultation.”\(^{189}\)

As to the two themes of the need for a spiritual caliphate and the preservation of a Muslim temporal power,

\(^{176}\) Ibid., 35.

\(^{177}\) Ibid., 36.

\(^{178}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{179}\) See above, p. 256.

\(^{180}\) Riḍā, *al-Khilāfa*, 37.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{182}\) Ibid.

\(^{183}\) Ibid., 55.

\(^{184}\) Ibid., 58.


\(^{186}\) Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 77.


\(^{189}\) Ibid., p. 15; Riḍā, *al-Khilāfa*, 30.
Riḍā faced a dilemma. He had to choose between giving priority to an Arab spiritual caliphate or to the emerging Turkish temporal power, especially since he adhered to the basic framework of the salafīyya which gave the Arabs supremacy in the religious sphere and the Turks supremacy in the political and military sphere. Riḍā’s solution to this dilemma was to call for the establishment of a new “caliphate of necessity.” This caliphate, for Riḍā, would attempt to reconcile the “spiritual superiority” of the Arabs and the “temporal ascendance” of the Turks. To do so, Riḍā had to show that the salafī notion of installing a new spiritual caliph in the Hijāz was impractical at that time. Riḍā thus discredited Sharīf Husayn, the ruler of the Hijāz, writing that he had become too dependent on a non-Muslim colonial power (Great Britain), that he was not a mujtahid, that his rule was despotic and personal, and that his government opposed religious and temporal reform. More important, Riḍā made the point that the Hijāz lacked shawka and wealth, which were imperative for the caliphate.

On the other hand, Riḍā thought that installing the caliph in Turkey would be difficult because Arabic was not spoken in Anatolia and because Arabs, especially those of the Peninsula, would oppose the move. Riḍā was critical of the Turkish nationalist decision to keep the caliph in Istanbul, “the city of empty luxury and passing grandeur which had become peripheral to Islamic lands and vulnerable to attack from foreign powers.” For Riḍā, if Istanbul was unsuitable to be the capital of the new Turkish nation, then it was more unsuitable still to be the capital of the Islamic caliphate.

When it came to his preference for a capital for the new caliphate Riḍā was astonishingly flexible. His first choice was to convince the Turks that the capital of their state, Ankara, should also be the capital of the caliphate. Scholars have overlooked this preference of Riḍā’s, which is revealing because it shows that he was willing, if necessary, to sacrifice spiritual considerations for temporal advantages. Riḍā here was willing to compromise on the salafīyya’s idea that the center of the caliphate should be in the Hijāz; but he still insisted that the caliph be a Qurayshite one. This showed that Riḍā was primarily concerned at this time with maintaining some Islamic power independent of the Europeans, who were by now dominant in the Arab world, even if this meant forfeiting the salafīyya’s original claim for the religious primacy of the Hijāz.

In case Ankara were to prove impractical as a capital, Riḍā suggested the city of Mosul in northern Iraq, a territorial compromise between Arabs and Turks. Iraq and Turkey were at the time contesting the sovereignty of Mosul. Riḍā saw in the uncertain status of this area and its location between the Arab world and Turkey an opportunity to create a neutral zone (shiqat hiyād) which could serve as a “spiritual link” (rābiṭat waṣl ma’nawī) for the three Muslim peoples of the region—Arabs, Turks, and Kurds. But if this second choice could not be agreed upon, then Riḍā believed that the only other alternative was establishing the caliphate in the Hijāz.

Whatever the location, Riḍā’s idea of a spiritual caliphate was a natural extension of his work for “Islamic reform,” already evident in his scheme for a religious society in 1898 and his seminary project in 1912. In all his proposals Riḍā was striving to create some sort of centralized religious authority not unlike the Catholic papacy. This was evident in the outline he developed for the organization of his caliphate: “Program of the higher educational college where the caliphs and mujtahids graduate; Program of electing the caliph; Program of the administrative and financial council of the caliphate; Council of general consultation (shūrā); Council of fatwas, sharʿi opinions and evaluation of publications; Council of investiture of heads of government, qādis and muftis; Council of general surveillance of the government; Council of propaganda and missionary work; Council of sermons, preaching, guidance, and hisba; Council of zakāt and its distribution; Council of pilgrimage and service of the ḥaramayn; Council of correspondence.”

Riḍā’s spiritual caliphate was to adhere to the general social and legal program of the salafīyya. More precisely, it would envision that the “renaissance of Muslims is dependent on ijtiḥād.” Riḍā believed this “renaissance” should neither be led by the hizb al-mutafarnijīn (“the Europeanized party”), which believed that religion was incompatible with modern civilization, nor by hizb ḥashawiyyat al-fugahā’ al-jāmīdīn (the party of the “reactionary jurists”), who refused to employ ijtiḥād in all aspects of mu‘āmalat (daily transactions). Instead he called for leadership by hizb al-īslāḥ al-islāmī al-muʿāṭadil (a “moderate party of Islamic reform”), which would follow the teaching of one of his earlier salafī mentors, Muḥammad ʿAbdūh (d. 1905), and “combine the necessary

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190 Riḍā, al-Khilāfa, 75–76.
191 Ibid., 76.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid., 78.
194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid., 80. Cited also in Ker, Islamic Reform, 183.
197 Riḍā, al-Khilāfa, ibid.
198 Ibid., 61–64.
understanding of the essence of the shari’ah and the essence of the European civilization.”

In addition to these broader concerns with Islamic doctrine, Riḍā in his treatise also had very specific political motives. The introduction of his treatise was, in part, his political prescription for re-establishing an Islamic framework for an enduring Arab-Turkish cooperation. This is evident in a letter from Riḍā to his friend Arslān written early in 1923, when Riḍā was in the midst of publishing his book in serial form in al-Manār. Riḍā wrote to Arslān,

I should confess to you that I still prefer the rule of the Turks to that of all the Europeans despite the fact that the Turks have humiliated us and treated us with contempt. . . . I even prefer [the rule of] their atheists who oppose our language and religion and express contempt toward our salaf (forefathers) . . . to . . . the rule of Europeans in whatever form. . . . Because of this I hope we can find some common bases for a firm agreement with the men of wisdom among the Turks.

Riḍā told Arslān that he hoped his treatise would convince “our Turkish brethren . . . that they cannot retain their position of primacy in the Islamic world through the office of the caliphate unless they come to a cordial agreement with the Arabs.”

Riḍā explicitly stated his motives and his intended audience in the introduction to his treatise—which was not translated into French by Laoust. For him, the “renaissance of the Turkish people” and their independence from all foreign control was an opportunity for Arab-Turkish cooperation and the revival of Islamic civilization through renewing the caliphate. He dedicated his treatise to the “courageous Turkish people,” who would, through the Islamic caliphate, “combine religion and civilization to serve mankind.” In fact, Riḍā’s lofty hopes were to be disappointed. He based his treatise on the premise that the Turkish nationalists still had an abiding interest in the Arab and Muslim worlds; but the latter, as they demonstrated in 1924 when they abolished the caliphate altogether, were concerned more about their own national destiny than about cooperating with the Arabs to revive the caliphate, or with any notion of primacy in the Islamic world.

CONCLUSION

Riḍā, as we have seen, was not consistent in his line of thought about the caliphate. He, at times, advocated a purely spiritual role for the caliph similar to the role of the catholic pope. But there was no precedent in Islamic history for a similar role, as Sir Thomas Arnold has demonstrated. Riḍā was aware of this fact. This may explain his apt description of the function of the caliph at one point,

The authority of the caliph is Islam is purely governmental. He is responsible for his work like any other [state] functionary although he is both a temporal and religious leader. The meaning of his religious leadership is that he has priority and primacy in al-‘ibādāt al-ijtihādiyya (obligatory social religious matters) such as the leadership in prayers and khutba. But a Muslim does not have to follow him in his ijtihād in al-‘ibādāt al-shakhsiyya (matters of belief and personal religious obligations). He [the caliph] should be obeyed in what he orders as a ruler if he is not ordering a sinful act. Some Abbāsid caliphs required the upholding of the view of the createdness of Qurān but were challenged by the greatest Sunnī imāms like al-Shāfi‘i and Aḥmad [Ibn Ḥanbal] although those two imāms never challenged the caliphs in what they ordered or ruled in political and civil matters which were in conformity with the shari‘ah.

Yet, Riḍā vacillated between the two views—the caliph as spiritual leader, versus the caliph as temporal ruler. This led Malcolm Kerr to criticize Riḍā’s thought as incoherent:

On the question of spiritual and temporal authority, he [Riḍā] is again often incoherent. This is partly because of the ambiguity of meanings in the theory he inherited and partly, perhaps, because of the pressure of apologetics under which he wrote, which led him, in his zeal to prove the soundness of his own doctrines and errors of others (Turks, Westernizing Arabs, and Europeans), to a tendency to dash off in several directions at once. In principle he recognizes that in traditional theory the caliphal power is temporal while its ultimate signifi-

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199 Ibid., 61–62.
200 Letter dated 30 January 1923 from Riḍā (Cairo) to Arslān (Geneva), in Arslān, al-Sayyid, 315.
201 Ibid., 317.
202 See, Laoust, Le Califat.
203 Riḍā, al-Khilāfa, 6.
204 Ibid.
cance is spiritual—that God possesses sovereignty but man exercises it—and seeks at times to stress the temporal aspects and to demolish the notion that there can be such a thing as a "spiritual" Caliphate. His own proposals for a restored Caliphate, however, do in fact suggest a spiritual institution. This is partially explained by his belief that a more temporal office could not at the time be realized; yet in some of his theoretical passages he implies that the nature of the authority of even the true Caliphate is spiritual rather than temporal.207

What Malcolm Kerr did not recognize was that the vicissitudes of Riḍā's political thought masked the fact that Riḍā, throughout his career, usually placed the political independence of Islam above all other concerns, including theoretical consistency. For example, during the Hamidian rule Riḍā supported Abdul-Hamid II as caliph because, as temporal leader of the Ottoman Empire, he was most capable of defending Muslim lands. But when it seemed that the Turks would lose in World War I, Riḍā sought to establish an Arab caliphate to take over the defense of Arab Muslim lands. He certainly was not among those Arab nationalists whom Hamid Enayat described as having welcomed the weakening of the Ottoman caliphate in order to restore it to the Arabs.208 Riḍā changed his view, yet again, after the war when European powers won control over Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, and when Turkey became independent. After these developments Riḍā needed another way to link Arabs and Turks to form the strongest possible Islamic coalition. With the temporal avenue closed he proposed a purely spiritual caliphate, a variant of Ibn Khaldūn's idea. Though the city had no spiritual significance, he initially chose Ankara as capital because he thought it would, practically speaking, best ensure the caliphate's independence. Clearly a pragmatic, Riḍā was willing to sacrifice theoretical considerations about the caliphate for the arrangement most likely to guarantee Islam's political independence. Riḍā was not alone in viewing the continued political independence of Islam as the main bone of contention in Islam's confrontation with the West. Sir Thomas Arnold made the same argument, albeit from the British colonial perspective, at the end of World War I. He did so most explicitly not in his well-known book The Caliphate, first published in 1924, but in a secret note which he wrote in 1918. Arnold, then educational adviser for Indian students to the British Secretary of State for India, wrote:

[I]t is necessary that the Muhammadans should recognize that the days of the political independence of Islam are at an end. Such self-governing Muhammadan states as survive will owe their continuance in existence to the goodwill of European powers; of course, such a condition of affairs runs counter to the fundamental principles of Muslim polity (which moreover is clearly bound up with their religion), and the Muhammadans will bitterly resent the hard logic of facts, and will continue to do so, as long as they read their own literature. It will therefore be an advantage to us, that we should not have to stand alone as objects of odium, and the more numerous the powers associated with us are, the more likelihood there is of the Muhammadans coming to realise that any attempt to gain for themselves political independence is doomed to failure.209

207 Kerr, Islamic Reform, 176.
208 Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought, 70.
209 "A Note by Dr. T. W. Arnold" dated 4 November 1918, India Office Records, L/P&S/11/141/5072.