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Eugene Rogan. *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. Basic Books: New York, 2015.

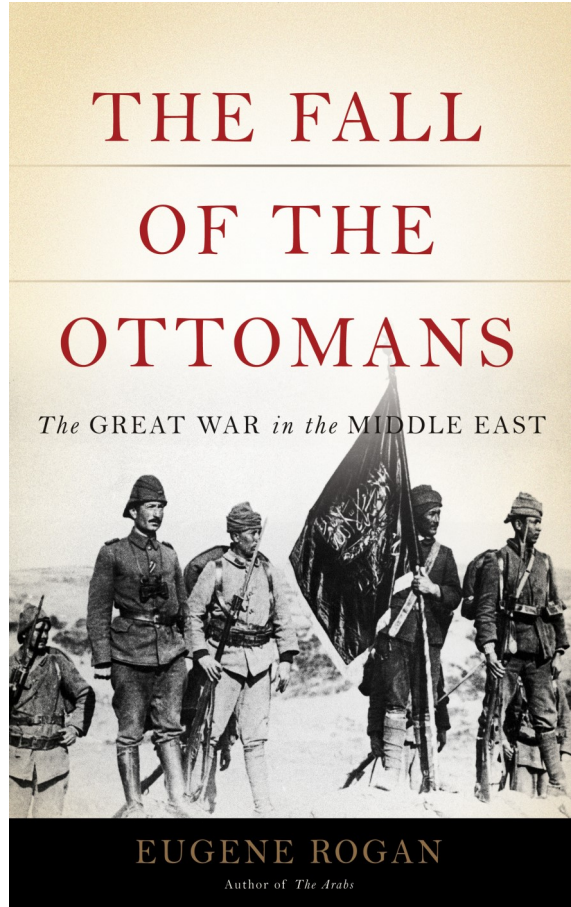
Book Review

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Robert Smith, PhD.

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Ironically, this review of Eugene Rogan's *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* began on the same day that Omar Sharif—the actor most noted for his role in *Lawrence of Arabia*—died. That movie, along with T. E. Lawrence's *Pillars of Wisdom*, is often the sum of knowledge for many in the military, the government, and in academia about the fall of the Ottoman Empire. It is an unexplored dimension for many. Rogan's deft, insightful, and judicious handling of the political aspects of the empire's fall, coupled with a good overview of the related military campaigns, makes this a critical book to read and understand.



History—and Lawrence of Arabia—portray the Ottomans as bumbler. Granted, the previous several hundred years prior to World War One proved to be a series of reversals to the Ottoman Empire, following the defeat of their fleet

to the Holy League of Europe at Lepanto in October 1571. Even more ruinous to the empire was the loss of its financial independence. When Ottomans became unable to meet their obligations to foreign creditors in the late nineteenth century, they were forced to make economic concessions to the Great Powers of Europe—Russia, Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany. In essence, the Ottomans abdicated control of the empire's finances to the Great Powers prior to World War One. In their quest for colonies and new markets known as the “Great Game,” the European powers carved up slices of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans to Libya. The Balkan Wars of Liberation were of even greater consequence to the empire’s fall. These conflicts, fought on the eve of World War One, expelled the Ottomans from their centuries-old domains. In a sense, it is hard not to feel some empathy for an empire that did not know how to face the challenges that modernity and nationalism thrust upon it.

What really rivets the reader’s attention is the Young Turk Movement’s adoption of *Jihad* as both a wartime and social movement. In the past, most World War One historians paid this important and crucial aspect of Ottoman war-making scant attention. Several generations of historians have ignored this aspect of Ottoman strategy. It greatly concerned the British, however, as they struggled to hold onto India in wartime and to keep passions cooled between Moslems and Hindus. Germany was an enthusiastic advocate of the Ottomans’ use of this card. Germany had no real Muslim population, so *jihad* was of no strategic internal consequence. For Austro-Hungary, however, it was another matter. Eventually, the British waged their own *jihad* against the subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire, leading—for example—to the birth of Saudi Arabia.

There will be many readers unhappy with how carefully Rogan seems to tread on the Armenian genocide controversy. In particular, Rogan does not reach any high and far-reaching moral condemnations. However, he does not shy away from the fact that the Ottomans massacred and destroyed the Armenians. Nor is he averse to using the G word—genocide. However, Rogan balances this with a storyline many may not know, and that is how the Armenian internal rebellions and aid given to Czarist Russia helped free themselves from the Ottomans. The evil is not lessened by that factor, but the explanation of why and how it happened becomes clearer.

The *Fall of the Ottomans* meets all this reviewer’s tests of significance and enjoyment and his copy is VERY marked up with pencil for areas to use in university teaching, of interest, and for further research. It is difficult to keep from dashing through the book. It is excellent, and it requires the reader to force a leisurely pace to absorb all the new material. Rogan sets the A standard for those

wanting to understand the Great War in the Middle East and its subsequent second, third, and fourth order effects today. The effects of the fall of the Ottoman Empire include the attacks of 9-11 and the rise of ISIS. Truly, this book calls out to all those interested in current world affairs.