

**THE KURDISH REBELLIONS OF SHEIKH SAID (1925),
MT. ARARAT (1930), AND DERSIM (1937-8): THEIR IMPACT
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TURKISH AIR FORCE
AND ON KURDISH AND TURKISH NATIONALISM**

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The Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925, the Mt. Ararat revolt of 1930 and the Dersim rebellion of 1937-38 were significant developments in the history of modern Turkish and Kurdish nationalism.¹ In this article I argue that the rebellions also contributed to the development of Turkey's air force (TAF) which was to be used as an instrument to control, suppress and eradicate Kurdish nationalism. The suppression of Sheikh Said's rebellion dealt a severe blow to Kurdish nationalism in Turkey and its potential growth in Iraq and Iran. It contributed to squashing Kurdish nationalism in northwestern Iran by Reza Khan and to British restraining of Kurdish nationalism in northern Iraq. It should be noted that the suppression of the Kurds in Iran after 1925 by Reza Khan was accomplished in part by the use of the nascent Iranian Air Force. In Iraq the British Royal Force (RAF) was instrumental in Great Britain's conquest of Iraq during WW I and its occupation of that country until 1958.

I argue in this article that the development of the TAF from 1925 onward played an important role in the ability of the Turkish state to further consolidate its ideology of Turkish nationalism vis

¹ For details of the Sheikh Said rebellion see my, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion: 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), especially pp. 91-163. For a history of Kurdish nationalism see Chris Kutschera, *Le Mouvement national Kurde* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995). I have used modern Turkish spelling throughout the text with the exception of the spelling of *Sheikh*. I prefer this spelling rather than the Turkish *Şeyh*.

à vis that of Kurdish nationalism during the inter-war period. I submit that this ability continued up to the 1990s. I do not argue that the TAF was developed solely with the objective of using it to crush Kurdish nationalism after the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925, although after this date and up to 1938 it was employed only for this purpose. Air forces were being developed by both industrialized and unindustrialized newly independent countries during the inter-war period. Air forces were major instruments by which means the imperial powers also controlled their colonies. The efficacy of air power had been amply demonstrated in WW I and every country that had the necessary means, and many that did not, wanted to develop an air force in the post-WWI era to defend perceived national security interests, to control their own populations, and to attack foes. The interest of Turkey in developing an air force had antecedents in the Ottoman Empire.

Turkish nationalism was well developed by 1925. Unlike arguments regarding the periodization of Arab nationalism, i. e., whether it was primarily a pre or post-WWI development,² there is a consensus among historians that Turkish nationalism emerged as an ideological force during the early years of the Young Turk movement.³ There is little difference among scholars of Turkish nationalism that it emerged as a political force during the years

² For an overview of these arguments in which Ernest Dawn and Rashid Khalidi have been the most active participants see Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih and Reeva S. Simon, eds., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

³ Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 34 places the date of the emergence of distinct Turkish nationalism as opposed to the ideology of Ottomanism as 1908, the year in which the Unionists, members of the secret Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) split with the Liberals; Fikret Adıvar, "The National Question and the Genesis and Development of Socialism in the Ottoman Empire: The Case of Macedonia," in *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1923*, eds., Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), p. 46 also states, "The Young Turks had already made clear their stand on the national question in August 1908,"; Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993) also thinks 1905-6 were the crucial years for the development of Turkish nationalism. In the most definitive work on the Young Turks, M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 212 states, "The CUP's shift to nationalism and secretment of the military's endorsement was realized in 1906."

1905-8. What I have argued elsewhere is that the suppression of the Kurdish nationalist rebellions of 1925, 1930, and 1937-8 enabled the Turkish government to articulate a much more strident nationalist discourse within a one-party autocracy.⁴ What I wish to add here to my thesis is that the development of the TAF in the post-1925 period and its success in containing armed Kurdish resistance enabled the government of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to raise considerably the decibels of its already strident nationalist discourse.

The periodization of Kurdish nationalism is more problematic than that of Turkish nationalism. The argument regarding the emergence of Kurdish nationalism pivots on whether the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925 was more of a nationalist than a religious movement. Obviously, both elements were involved. The attempts to periodize the development of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is important as it contributes to the greater understanding of not only Kurdish history, but to the history of Turkey in the inter-war period and the contours of post-WWI Middle Eastern historiography.

There have been a number of studies on the rebellions of 1925, 1930 and 1937-8 during the last decade. Many are polemical as the issue of the development of and periodization of the Kurdish nationalism movement in Turkey plays a significant role in the current competition between those two nationalisms in Turkey and a potential resolution between that country's two largest disputing ethnic groups.

Martin van Bruinessen was the first scholar to address the nationalist components of the Sheikh Said rebellion and he characterized it "neither a purely religious nor a purely nationalist one... The primary aim of both Shaikh Said and the Azadi [nationalist] leaders was the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. The motivation of the rank and file was equally mixed, but for them the religious factor may have predominated."⁵ In my study of the

⁴ Olson, *The Emergence*, pp. 153-63.

⁵ Maarten van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan*. Published Ph. D. Dissertation (Utrecht: Ryksuniversiteit, 1978), pp. 404-5; also see a revised addition of the above, *Agha, Shaikh and State*.

emergence of Kurdish nationalism and the Sheikh Said rebellion, written after van Bruinessen's study, I emphasized, as opposed to van Bruinessen, the nationalist motivations were more important than the religious factors.⁶ The third major study of the Sheikh Said rebellion is that of Hamit Bozarslan who thinks that the nationalist factors probably outnumbered those of religion in the rebellion.⁷

Two full length books on Sheikh Said's rebellion written by Turks have also appeared since 1991. One was written by Uğur Mumcu and the other by Yaşar Kalafat.⁸ Both of these books stress that the Sheikh Said rebellion was an Islamist reactionary movement. Kalafat characterizes the rebellion as a "backward looking, anti-democratic, anti-Republican, theocratic, anti-Atatürk, anti-revolutionary movement," that wanted to reestablish the Sultanate and the Caliphate.⁹ Mumcu also characterizes the rebellion as an Islamist rebellion.¹⁰ Two other scholars, Ergun Aybars and Mete

The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan (London: Zed Books, 1992), pp. 208-9. The revised edition has also been published in German and Turkish. In the revised additions, van Bruinessen has made no changes in his views regarding the religious versus the nationalist character of the revolt. Also in 1978 William F. Tucker and I published, "The Sheikh Said Rebellion in Turkey (1925): A Study in the Consolidation of a Developed Uninstitutionalized Nationalism and the Rise of Incipient (Kurdish) Nationalism," *Die Welt des Islams*, N.S. XVIII, 3-4 (1978), pp. 195-211. Tucker's and my account was, however, based solely on newspaper and secondary accounts while van Bruinessen's study was based on field work, interviews with people who had participated in the 1925 rebellion and, on archival sources.

⁶ Olson, *The Emergence*, pp. 152-63.

⁷ Hamit Bozarslan, *Le Problème National Kurde en Turquie Kemaliste*. Unpublished Mémoire de Diplôme De L.F.H.E.S.S. (Paris, 1986), who states, "évidemment nous aurions tout du lui [Sheikh Said] tenier des caractères nationalistes," (p. 212). But he adds the comment, "Mais les aspects nationalistes dans la personne même de Cheikh Said ne diminuent ou ne cachent nullement les traits religieux de la révolte," (p. 214).

⁸ Uğur Mumcu, *Kürt-İslam Ayaklanması, 1919-1925* (Ankara: Tekin Yayınevi, 1992). This book first appeared in a newspaper series in *Cumhuriyet* from 2 to 22 June, 1991. Yaşar Kalafat, *Şark Mesalesi Bağında Şeyh Said Olayı, Karakteri, Dönemin İdeâ İç ve Dış Olayları* (Ankara: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1992).

⁹ Kalafat, *Şark Mesalesi*, p. 321.

¹⁰ The views of Mumcu and Kalafat are similar to those of earlier Turkish works on the rebellion such as Metin Toket, *Şeyh Said ve İsyanı* (Ankara: Rüzgârî Matbaası, 1968) and Behçet Cemal, *Şeyh Said İsyanı* (İstanbul: Sel Yayınları, 1955). These two authors also stress that Sheikh Said was aided by Great Britain; a view which I have rebutted. Both books, in part, seem to be rebuttals of my own work

Tunçay, both of whom are Turkish, argue that the rebellion was primarily nationalist. Aybars states that it was only after Sheikh Said's capture that he characterized the motivations for the rebellion as being religious in order to deceive his captors.¹¹

The only full length study published in Turkey in recent years stating categorically that Sheikh Said's rebellion was nationalist in character is that of the Turkish Kurdish scholar Mehmet Bayrak.¹² Bayrak gives several reasons to support his argument that the Sheikh Said rebellion was a nationalist and not a religious revolution: 1) there is as much evidence to support the thesis that the rebellion was influenced as much by Kurdish nationalism as by religious factors; 2) evidence suggests there was strong agreement between Sheikh Abdulkadir, one of the main Kurdish nationalist leaders, and Sheikh Said. Further, Sheikh Abdulkadir was little influenced by religious factors in his decision-making; 3) religion was simply the cover (perde) to reach the goal (amaç) of independence (istiklâl); 4) one of Sheikh Said's closest acquaintances, Fakih Hasan Fehme, stated before the Independence Tribunal that Sheikh Said had written him a letter saying, "I am fighting for the Kurds"; and 6) Sheikh Said wanted to provide jobs for the lower level bureaucrats in an independent Kurdistan; jobs that were and would be denied to Kurds in a Turkish dominated country. In Bayrak's view the nationalist and political factors causing the rebellion greatly outweighed religious concerns.¹³

that emphasized the nationalist factors in the rebellion. For further analyses of these books plus others written by Turkish and Kurdish authors concerning the rebellion see my, *The Emergence*, 198-201.

¹¹ Ergun Aybars, *İstiklâl Mahkemeleri* (İzmir: İleri Press, 1994), pp. 310-27; Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek Parti Yönetimi'nin Kurulması* (Ankara: Yurt Publications, 1981), p. 129.

¹² Mehmet Bayrak, *Kürtler ve Ulusal Demokratik Mücadeleleri* (Ankara: ABC Press, 1993). Bayrak rebuts many of the arguments of Mumcu who argues that the rebellion was an Islamist movement supported by foreigners. He also accuses Mumcu of purposely not utilizing the memoirs of the leaders of the rebellion and of using only selected sources that fit his purposes. He charges that Mumcu was unfamiliar with many of the Kurdish nationalist organizations and the leaders of them. Bayrak also criticizes Mumcu for using the private papers of Arni Doğan whose papers are not available for other scholars' scrutiny. Doğan was one of the presiding judges of the Independence Tribunal Court that tried and sentenced Sheikh Said and many of his followers to death.

¹³ Bayrak, *Kürtler*, pp. 404-7.

In an interesting development over the past few years, some younger Turkish scholars, especially those trained in Europe and the United States, accept the view that the Sheikh Said rebellion, "was basically an ethnic Kurdish rebellion with religious overtones."¹⁴ Another interesting development regarding the historiography of the Sheikh Said rebellion is that even circles close to the ruling elites of the Turkish government have begun to accept that the rebellion was nationalist in character.¹⁵

What I argue here is that the development and deployment of the TAF after 1925 had as one of its major objectives to crush the armed resistance of the Kurdish nationalist movement and that the TAF was one of the major instruments used to squash and to intimidate Kurdish nationalist leaders in the inter-war period. The quelling of the Kurdish nationalists and their nationalist discourse contributed, in turn, to a more strident Turkish nationalism.

Iraq under the British, after August 1922, was the first country in the world to have a central airforce command in charge of military and intelligence operations. The "Air Scheme" utilized by the British in Iraq was highly successful in achieving the objectives for which it was created. The RAF was one of the most important

¹⁴ Ümit Güre Sakallıoğlu, "Parameters and strategies of Islam-State Interactions in Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28 (1996), p. 285. Unfortunately Sakallıoğlu provides no sources; Halil İnönü, a scholar teaching at Boğaziçi University, characterizes the Sheikh Said rebellion as "...although the objective of the leadership was to create an independent Kurdistan, or at least win autonomy, it used a religious language to motivate the followers into rebellion." See his "Islamism and Kurdish Nationalism," (forthcoming). But İnönü quotes my work, van Bruinessen's and Mete Tunçay's, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek Parti Yönetimi'nin Kurulması (1923-1937)* as his sources.

¹⁵ The study entitled *The Southeast Report* (Güneydoğu Raporu) first appeared in a series published in *Hürriyet* newspaper from 14 to 26 August 1995. The report was prepared by a research team under the direction of Doğan Ergil, a professor of political science at Ankara University. The report was submitted to the public under the auspices of the Turkish Chambers of Commerce and Stock Exchanges (TOBB) by Yahya Erez, the then president of TOBB and a close adviser to Prime Minister Tansu Çiller. The focus of the report analyzes the current discontent among the Kurds in the Southeastern region and proffers solutions to the Kurdish question in Turkey. But the report is also very interesting in that it emphasizes the significance of the Sheikh Said rebellion in "developing the fear of Kurdish nationalism among the nationalists [Turkish]." *Hürriyet*, 20 August 1995 which is number 7 of the series.

coercive instruments of British colonial control throughout the Middle East and elsewhere during the inter-war period.¹⁶ The RAF contributed to Turkey's signing of the Lausanne Treaty (24 July 1923) and more fundamentally to the 5 June 1926 Treaty between the United Kingdom/Iraq and Turkey. It is the 5 June 1926 border demarcation that still obtains between Turkey and Iraq.¹⁷

Turks witnessed the efficacy of and had first hand experiences, as targets and victims, along with Kurds and Arabs, of British air power in eastern Turkey and northern Iraq. The Turkish military commanders and political authorities saw its effectiveness and its

¹⁶ For a good overview of British air power and bombing policy during the inter-war period see David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). Omissi disagrees with those scholars who think that air power "prolonged the life of British imperialism by perhaps ten years." He argues, "Had the doctrine of 'control without occupation' not been successfully developed and applied in Iraq, it is also certain that the Royal Air Force would not have survived long into the 1920s." (p. 21). The ferocity of some of the RAF attacks on Arabs, Turks, and Kurds was undoubtedly due, to some extent, to the desire of the commanders of the RAF to demonstrate to the British imperial and colonial decision makers the efficacy of air power vis-à-vis the army and navy in achieving imperial and domestic objectives. In this regard see chapter two which deals with Iraq as well as pages 210-14 of the conclusion.

Parts of Omissi's thesis regarding air power and colonial control can be contested. This is especially true of his statement, "Had the air control scheme not offered a cheap but effective alternative to military occupation, it is likely that the British presence would have been curtailed or ended, the Arab Kingdom would have been still born and the reviving power of Turkey would have engulfed the Mosul and possibly the Baghdad and Basra vilayets." (p. 37). To suggest that, without the RAF, Turkey in the 1920s would have been able to "engulf" the Mosul and possibly the Baghdad and Basra vilayets greatly exaggerates Turkey's power and stability during this period. This view is farfetched in my opinion. Indeed, if Turkey had engulfed the Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra vilayets, it would have been confronted with an even stronger Kurdish nationalist resistance that would have even more greatly influenced the subsequent development of the emergent Turkish republic than the Kurdish rebellions of 1925, 1930, and 1937-8. In this regard see my, *The Emergence*, pp. 150-63. It was, after all, Sheikh Said's rebellion that made Turkey more eager to sign the 5 June 1926 Treaty between the United Kingdom and Iraq and Turkey. Chapter two of Omissi's book is misleading in that it overestimates Turkish power and underestimates the strength of Kurdish nationalism.

¹⁷ Although President Süleyman Demirel and Bülent Ecevit, the leader of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), suggested several times during 1995 and 1996 that the border should be moved "10 to 15 kilometers southward." See *Hürriyet*, 2 March 1996.

potential as an instrument to control rebellious peoples and tribes, as well as sedentary groups. Since the Kurds were the largest, most nationalist, and most rebellious minority population in the new Turkish republic, air power was to be used most frequently and effectively against them. However, effective use of Turkish air power was largely a development of the post-Sheikh Said period. The Sheikh Said rebellion was a large military operation. It did not, of course, compare with the movement of troops, equipment, and war matériel that Turkey mobilized during its war of independence against the European powers and Greece. But forces over 50,000 were mobilized by the Turks and some 15,000 by the Kurds.¹⁸

Turks first became interested in aviation in the early 1900s about the same time that flying became so popular in Europe and the United States. The development of aviation and of the aircraft industry was much slower in Turkey than in Europe or the United States because of technological disparities.¹⁹ It was Mahmud Şevket Paşa, the commander of the Action Army that crushed the counter-revolutionary forces opposing the Young Turks in April, 1909 while serving as War Minister (1909-12) who first encouraged the Ottoman government's interest in the possibilities of air power.²⁰ He had become interested in aviation while he was in Germany prior to the 1908 revolution. By March 1911, Mahmud Şevket Paşa managed to send two Turkish officers to the Blériot Aviation School near Paris to be trained as pilots. According to Pierre Oberling, Şevket Paşa assigned Lieutenant-Colonel Süreyya Bey the task of undertaking studies regarding the possibility of establishing an aircraft station near Istanbul.

As in the case of the Sheikh Said rebellion, it was war that facilitated the next stage of Turkish air force development. The open terrain of Libya and the Ottoman military's awareness of the devel-

¹⁸ Olson, *The Emergence*, pp. 102-6.

¹⁹ For a brief account in English of Turkish Aviation see Pierre Oberling, "The State as Promoter of Technology Transfer: The Early Years of Ottoman Aviation," in *Turks, Hungarians and Kipchaks: A Festschrift in Honor of Tibor Halasi-Kun* in a special issue of *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 8 (1984), pp. 209-14; Y. Kansu, S. Şenöz and Y. Öztuna, *Havacılık Tarihinde Türkler*, vol. 1 (Ankara: 1971).

²⁰ Oberling, "The State," p. 211.

opment of air power in Europe, increased Turkish military commanders' awareness of the potential usefulness of airplanes against the Italians in the Italo-Turkish war that began in 1911. Several Ottoman officers were dispatched to France to learn how to fly and several airplanes were purchased. In 1911, again with Mahmud Şevket's advice and aid, a 700 by 1,500 square meter hangar was built at Yeşilköy (San Stefano). During the course of the Italian-Ottoman war, Ottoman commanders realized their disadvantage in not being able to drop propaganda leaflets from airplanes as the Italians did. In many instances airplanes were perceived as being as important for propaganda purposes as for instruments of combat. By 1912 two training planes were bought through public subscription. A squadron consisting of four planes was established in the army; technicians and mechanics were brought from France and Germany. By the end of 1912, the Ottoman Empire possessed four training, and ten reconnaissance and bombing aircraft.²¹

At the commencement of the Balkan wars, the Ottoman army had 12 airplanes for reconnaissance and training of different origins and seven more were obtained in the course of the war. Eight more Turkish pilots and pilot candidates (*adays*) finished their training during the first stage of the war as well. In addition, three French and four German pilots arrived later.²² However, during the course of the Balkan wars, four planes were destroyed as the Ottoman army retreated and several were destroyed or wrecked. As the last stage of the Balkan wars neared its end, the Ottoman army was left with only three operable planes.

Enver Paşa, the Young Turk general who became Minister of War in January 1914, had an interest in aviation, but it seems to have been more of a personal and political interest rather than one realizing the potential of air power for purposes of war.²³ At any rate, the fledgling Ottoman air nucleus came under the domination of Germany soon after the Ottoman alliance with the Central Powers on 2 August 1914.

²¹ Kansu, Şenöz, and Öztuna, *Havacılık*, p. 129.

²² See C. Arslanoğlu, *Türk Hava Kuvvetleri in Türk Kültürü*, no. 116 (June 1972), pp. 491-2.

²³ Oberling, "The State," p. 213.

The Turks used air power only experimentally during their War of Independence. By the middle of August 1922, ten days before the offensive against the Greeks, the Turks possessed some 37 aircraft, largely of Italian, French and German vintage, of which 21 were fighter aircraft (*av uçak*).²⁴ During the course of the War of Independence, the Turkish government possessed around 20 fighter planes. It is difficult to determine how effective the fledgling air force was. It seems reasonable to conclude that during the War of Independence the Turkish Air Force had little role in the outcome of major or lesser battles.

1. The Sheikh Said Rebellion

During Sheikh Said's rebellion, the Turks did not fully employ the air power that they possessed. This was perhaps due to the terrain and to the threat and the actual occurrence of sabotage, especially if the aircraft were based in Diyarbakır. The first report in the British Public Record Office (PRO) concerning Turkish air operations is dated 27 April 1925 and was written by Special Service Officer (SSO) H. V. Johns, a flight lieutenant, at Mosul.²⁵ According to this officer, there was one squadron (*filo*) of six or seven airplanes at Mardin, but only two were serviceable. There was a second squadron of four airplanes, apparently received from the French, that arrived after the outbreak of hostilities. This brought the total of serviceable aircraft at the Mardin airfield to six. These six aircraft carried out two bombing raids per day from the airfield at Diyarbakır. They returned to Mardin at night to avoid sabotage by Kurdish rebels. The fuel and bombs for the airplanes arrived at Mardin by rail from Istanbul. The Special Service Officer (SSO) at Mosul conjectured that two or three of the pilots of the six airplanes were regular Turkish officers and each squadron was com-

²⁴ Arslanoğlu, *Türk Havaçılık*, p. 503; Arslanoğlu, p. 39 gives the following figures: 21 fighter planes; 12 reconnaissance planes; one training plane and one sea plane.

²⁵ Air Ministry (henceforward referred to as Air) files 23/236 in the Public Record Office (PRO) located in Kew Gardens, Great Britain. The report was written by H. V. Johns, an identical report can be found in Air 23/279.

manded by a captain (*yüzbaşı*), trained by the Germans, the other three or four being ununiformed civilians who wore badges of rank according to the rate of pay received. In a rather long report dated 16 June 1925, H.V. Johns, again assessing the situation on the ground as well as in the air, reported that two airplanes had left Mardin on 14 April for Diyarbakır.²⁶ Johns reported that at the commencement of the rebellion, the Turks had three airplanes based at Mardin that were used for bombing raids in the Diyarbakır area. The three aircraft had been transferred to Diyarbakır two days (28 February) before the Kurdish attack on that city, but were destroyed by the Kurds during the night. By the beginning of May the Turks were able to transfer six more aircraft to Diyarbakır; two of which were two-seaters mounted with machine guns. All of the pilots of these planes were Turks. The airfield was located in front of the military camp on the Harput road.

There are few reports on the use of Turkish air power in suppressing the Sheikh Said rebellion. There is, however, good reason to believe that the Air Ministry reports are accurate as the Air Command at Mosul was in charge of intelligence for all of Iraq. Since nearly all of the British SSOs were RAF personnel, they were capable of judging Turkish air capabilities and they took a keen interest in the development of Turkish air power capabilities. But the unavailability and the ineffectiveness of Turkish air power during the course of the Sheikh Said rebellion was something that the Turkish government sought to correct immediately after the squashing of the rebellion in the summer of 1925. The Turks had plans to build up the air component of the Turkish armed forces command before the signing of the 5 June treaty between the United Kingdom/Iraq and Turkey. As early as 25 May, ten days before the signing of the treaty, Major R.E. Harenc, the British military attaché in Istanbul, with information contributed by Commander Neyroni, the Italian naval attaché, who was closely scrutinizing the development of the Turkish Air Force, began a series of reports on the build-up of Turkish air capabilities.²⁷

²⁶ Air 23/280.

²⁷ Air 23/424 dated 25 May 1926.

In his reports dated 25 May, 8 July 1926 and January 1927, Harenc summarizes the purchase of aircraft bought by Turkey as follows:

ESTIMATE OF NUMBER OF TURKISH AIRPLANES: 1915-6

<i>End of 1925</i>	<i>Purchased in 1926</i>	<i>Rendered useless</i>	<i>Balance</i>	
war stock	10	-	10	-
Breguet	20	10	14	16
Junkers	10	30	10	30
Caudron	30	-	18	12
Moraine-Saulnier	-	12	-	12
Newport	-	6	-	6
Blériot-Spad	-	8	-	8
Hydroplanes-Savoias	-	-	-	-
	17	-	5	12
Rohrbach III	-	2	-	2
Evoiture	-	2	-	2
Junkers	-	6	-	6
			<i>total 106</i>	

Harenc concluded that at the end of 1926 Turkey had 153 aircraft of which 47 had been "rendered useless," leaving a total of 106 serviceable machines. Most of the airplanes rendered useless had been so rendered in eastern Turkey as a result of attempts to crush Kurdish insurrections and to control the Kurdish population. Since he did not possess the figures as to how many airplanes had been rendered useless in eastern Turkey and "it is understood

that the wastage there was considerable," Harenc thought it unlikely that there were more than 80 airplanes fit for service at the end of 1926.

The build-up of the TAF in general, and in eastern Turkey in particular, continued throughout 1927. In the fall of 1927 Sheikh Abdurrahim, the brother of Sheikh Said, attacked weak Turkish garrisons in Palu and Malatya. It was reported that Abdurrahim had captured Lice during the first part of October. Çapakçur (Bingöl) was overrun by Sheikhs Fozzi (Fevzi) and Fahri, both nephews of Sheikh Said, who had returned to Turkey after fleeing to Syria after the crushing of their uncle's rebellion. Sheikhs Fozzi and Fahri with the help of the Sheikh of the Zaza tribes in the area had occupied the heights between Palu and Kian which constituted the principle line of defense from Erzurum south. Six thousand Turkish troops were concentrated at Harput in an attempt to dislodge the Kurdish rebels before winter. The TAF was used in this operation. Kurdish revolts continued throughout the fall and winter of 1927. In the Mus district the Khaili (Hayli) tribe revolted and formed a band of 400 under the leadership of Nuh Muhammad el-Yunis. In Bidlis the Rokutan and Kharbut tribes attacked the town and occupied part of it.²⁸ There were more insurrections in Van, Bayazid, and along the entire Turkish-Iranian border. In late October 1927, 4,000 Kurdish rebels attacked and occupied Bayazid before being driven out. But the Kurds were not driven out until Turkish reinforcements from the 12th Division arrived to support the 9th Division stationed in the area. In the fall of 1927 in addition to the continuing and frequent Kurdish insurrections, the Turks also were confronted with insurrection among the Laz.

The Turks employed airplanes as one of the means to crush the multifarious rebels. On 25 October 1927 two troop trains arrived in Mardin carrying five airplanes destined for Diyarbakir. The planes arrived crated and were assembled near the Mardin railway station. Four of the planes were flown away, presumably to Diyarbakir, on 27 October, but one crashed immediately after take off.

²⁸ Air 213/142 which is an English translation of a French Intelligence Report.

The SSO from Mosul, who drafted the report, stated, "There are now 24 machines," in Diyarbakır.²⁹ While it is not my purpose here to give a detailed discussion of the Kurdish insurrections during the fall and winter of 1927, some figures of the Turkish troops involved suggest the seriousness of the Kurdish insurrections that continued unabated from the crushing of the Sheikh Said rebellion right up to the Mt. Ararat rebellions of 1927-30. These rebellions proved a splendid opportunity for the TAF to test the capabilities of their aircraft and pilots. In November and December 1927 3,969 troops were moved by rail to Mardin and 4,720 to Adana. Another 800 infantry possessing machine guns and cannons moved through Bireçik to Siverek. An additional battalion of 1,000 men with four machine guns and four canons of mountain guns passed through Nizip headed toward Siverek and the Iraqi border. Some of the troops at Siverek were to go on to Diyarbakır. Over 500 cavalry were needed to maintain security on the road between Siverek and Diyarbakır.

2. The Mt. Ararat Revolt (1927-1930)

Most histories of the Kurds dealing with the period 1925-1940 say little or nothing about the role of the TAF in crushing and defeating the Kurds.³⁰ One of the exceptions is the memoirs of General İhsan Nuri Paşa, the commander-in-chief of the Kurdish forces

²⁹ Air 23/142 dated 3 January 1928.

³⁰ For example, the first scholar to write a history of Kurdish nationalism, Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse University Press, Ph. D. Thesis, 1960), merely states that the Kurds shot down 12 planes during the Mt. Ararat rebellion. Jwaideh obtained this figure from Bletch Chirgoh, alias Celadet Badr Khan, *La Question Kurde, Ses origines et ses causes* (Cairo: Paul Barbey, 1930), p. 39 and Lucien Rambout, *Les Kurdes et le Droit. Des textes, des faits* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1947), p. 37. In a recently published book by a Kurdish nationalist Kadri Cemil Paşa (Zinar Silopi), *Doza Kânîstî: Kîrî Mîlletîni 60 Yîlkî Esavetîni Kurtulus Savaşî Hattîmları* (Ankara: Özgüç Publications, 1991), p. 115 states that in the battles of June and July 1930, the Kurds managed to shoot down eight TAF aircraft with machine guns (*mîtralyöz*) and rifle fire. Other than this one statement, he makes no mention of the TAF. Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh and State*, pp. 353-496 does not mention the role of the TAF in the Sheikh Said rebellion.

during the revolt, who mentions the significant role and effect of the TAF in crushing the rebellion and in demoralizing the Kurds.³¹ In the fall of 1927, Nuri noted the increase in TAF activity that increased steadily during the next three years. Nuri relates that one morning at the beginning of autumn 1927 while Turkish infantry attacked Kurdova, a village located two kilometers from the Iranian border, the TAF bombed Mt. Ararat indiscriminately (sans discernement). Nuri also considered the capabilities of the TAF when he equated Kurdish bravery with Turkish superiority of arms: "One Kurd would confront 100 Turks without considering the Turkish superiority in arms and of air power."³²

On six further occasions, Nuri Paşa mentions the devastation, destruction, and fear inflicted upon the Kurds by the TAF commencing in 1927 until their final defeat in September 1930.³³ The TAF played an important role in the Turkish pincer that grew tighter and tighter around Mt. Ararat. By late summer 1930, the TAF was able to bomb Kurdish positions from all directions. İhsan Nuri gives the impression that the capabilities of the TAF further demoralized the Kurds and expedited their capitulation.

There is another recently published work containing documents purportedly from the Turkish War Ministry's Historical Archives describing TAF activities during the Mt. Ararat revolt.³⁴ The section of the book dealing with the Ararat revolt is divided into several sections. The first discusses the Zeylan rebellion and its

³¹ General İhsan Nuri Paşa, *La Révolte de l'Agrdagh "Ararat" (1927-1930)* with a preface by Ismet Chériff Varly and translated by "Presh" (Geneva: Éditions Kurdes, 1985). This account is by the commander-in-chief of the Kurdish revolt in the region of Mt. Ararat (Ağrı in Turkish) and Lesser Ararat during the years 1927-1930. The book has also been published in Persian and Kurdish. Its Turkish title is *Ağrı Dağı İsyanı* (Istanbul: Med Publications, 1992). General Nuri's recollections of the Mt. Ararat revolt, even though written some 40 years after the events, are a valuable first hand account by the most important Kurdish participants in the revolt. Nuri's account is one of the few works dealing with the revolt to discuss the significant role of the TAF in demoralizing and defeating the Kurds.

³² Nuri, *La Révolte*, p. 98.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 131, 141, 156, and 164.

³⁴ Fark Duhut, *Devletin Gözetle Türkiye'de Kürt İsyânları* (Istanbul: Yön Publications, 1991). This book relies purportedly on documents from the Turkish War Ministry historical archives. The next few pages of text rely on pages 170-210.

suppression from 20 July to the first part of September. On 18 July, in the vicinity of Sari Çemen and Ternoşa Taşı, the TAF killed 18 people from the Halikânîh tribe and one animal. Six men and three women were killed and five women wounded; seven animals were also killed. From 18 to 21 July, 25 people from the Halikânîh tribe were killed with at least as many casualties in addition to many animals.³⁵

The TAF also saw action in the Oramar phase of the Ararat revolt which occurred from 16 July to 10 October. The TAF was called in on 16 July when a company (*bölük*) of Turkish troops had been surrounded by Kurdish forces for several days. The TAF bombardment resulted in a lifting of the siege. On 2 August the TAF bombed the Herki tribe and forced them to flee across the border into Iran. The village of Şat was bombed on the same day. From 2 to 29 August, the TAF bombed the rebel villages continually and made constant surveillance and demonstration flights (*hesif ve gösteriş uçuşları*).

The TAF was again used extensively during what Turkish commanders called the third stage of the Mt. Ararat operations, from 7 to 14 September 1930. The utilization of the TAF was announced in an order of the General Command to the General of the 9th Army Division that headed the operation. According to the order, aircraft were to be used for reconnaissance and communication (*hesif ve irtibat*) and to bomb all places where the Kurds sought shelter. When necessary, the TAF was to join the land forces by firing their machine guns. In order to prevent the Kurds from escaping from the İğdir region, aircraft were to follow and harass them.

The TAF was used again in the Pülümür phase of the Mt. Ararat operations from 8 to 14 November. The army Chief-of-Staff, Marshal Fevzi Çakmak, in a report that he submitted to the prime minister and interior minister as a result of an inspection tour he had made of the Erzincan province (*il; vilayet*) on 18 September

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 170; Kadri Cemil Paşa, *Doğu Kürdistanı*, p. 114, as stated above, mentions the TAF only once. In heavy fighting from 20 June to 27 July in the Zeylan valley, he states that the Kurds shot down 8 Turkish aircraft with machine guns and rifles.

1930, recommended that the villages of Aşkırık, Gürk, Dağbey and Haryı should be destroyed (*tahrip*). An TAF squadron was also to be used in the Danzig sub-district (*bucak; nahıye*) of Pülümür to assist infantry forces in surrounding the Kurds and to cut escape routes. This operation was to be completed on 24 October.

The TAF also was active in the second Pülümür operation from 1 to 14 November. It was determined that the second phase of the Pülümür operations was necessary because air bombing had not been successful in achieving the desired goals during the first phase. During the second stage of the operation, the TAF was to continue its reconnaissance flights and bomb the "bandits" (*eşkiya*) to aid infantry attacks. Perhaps because of the shortcomings of the TAF in the first phase of the operation, Turkish infantry forces were considerably strengthened. The force was increased to 74 officers and 1,664 soldiers armed with 1,271 rifles, 62 light machine guns, 23 heavy machine guns, six artillery pieces, and equipped with 379 draft animals. There is no mention of how many aircraft participated in the operation.

A third major source to determine the role of the TAF in the Mt. Ararat revolt is Turkish newspapers. In the following account, I rely especially on *Cumhuriyet* for the months of July and August 1930 when the TAF saw the heaviest action.³⁶ News reports concerning the bombing of the Kurds on Mt. Ararat appeared nearly daily from June through August. It was reported on 2 July that Kurdish positions were bombed extensively on 10, 11, and 12 June, forcing the Kurds to retreat up the heights of Mt. Ararat. On 7 July two sketches (not photographs) depicted an airplane hovering around the heights of Mt. Ararat illustrating that the Turks had the Kurds under heavy siege. On 8 July it was reported that the TAF was being very effective and was creating great confusion (*büyük bir telaş*) among the Kurds and forced some Kurds to withdraw across the border to Iran. On 9 July *Cumhuriyet* carried a map of the Mt. Ararat region in which the TAF was "raining down"

³⁶ The following few pages of text rely on *Cumhuriyet* for the months of July and August. Unless an account is especially worthy, I do not footnote.

bombs. Many Kurds were reported to have been captured alive when they were unable to escape because of TAF bombardment.

On 13 July, *Cumhuriyet* declared the rebellion in Zeylan had been suppressed. The TAF squadrons composed of "10-15 aircraft" were accorded great prominence in the crushing of the revolt, although the Kurds did manage to return fire. The fact that the Kurds were so well armed led the Turks to believe they had been equipped by air drops, presumably from Iran or Iraq. By 14 July, the TAF, now referred to as "our iron eagles," (*çelik kartallarımız*), were depicted (four aircraft) bombing Mt. Ararat.³⁷ On 16 July, as the Turkish pincers enclosed Mt. Ararat, Captain Zeki Bey, the TAF commander, told Saib Paşa, commander of the Mt. Ararat campaign, "I am pleased to have such officers. My friends, these officers mounted such a fierce attack against the rebels that it is difficult to imagine such fierceness. They flew four or five meters above the bandits and destroyed them by bombing them and with machine gun fire."³⁸ On the same day, it was reported that the TAF was bombing continuously (*bila fasıla*) and engaged in close operations against the rebels. Mt. Ararat was in constant explosion and the "Iron Eagles" were able to reach places that the cavalry could not and cleanse the mountain. The "bandits were compelled to seek mercy from the instruments of death uncoiling from the sky/*gökten sağılan ölüm parçaları eskeyanı imana getiriyor.*"³⁹ The Turks admitted to two downed aircraft; the pilots were reportedly mutilated by the Kurds.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Cumhuriyet*, 13 July 1930: "10-15 tayyareden mürekkep muhtelif filolar ağır bombardman bombalar ile hücum etmişler, büyük telefat veren şakileri şaşkın ve yılmış bir hale getirmişlerdir." (Various squadrons, composed of 10 to 15 aircraft, attacked with heavy bombardment; the bandits who suffered heavy casualties, became confused and were terrorized).

³⁸ *Cumhuriyet*, 16 July 1930: "Ben böyle zabıtlere mahkûm olduğum için habıyârım. Arkadaşlarım, âsiler üzerine öyle kahramanca ve müthiş akınlar yaptılar ki bu ateşin hareketi tasvir edebilmek bile pek güçtü. Şakilerin üzerine dört beş metre kadar inerek onları ve mitalyöz ateşi içinde mahvettiler."

³⁹ *Cumhuriyet*, 16 July 1930.

⁴⁰ The Kurds were reported to have cut off the pilots' noses and ears and to have gouged out their eyes. Subsequently, the Kurd who killed the two pilots was captured and his chief forced him to confess. He tried to escape from detention during the night, but when called upon to halt he did not and was killed.

On 16 July, the TAF bombed Mt. Ararat for three straight hours creating panic among the Kurds compelling them to raise the white flag. The TAF also bombed some *kızıbaş* tribes on the eastern slopes of Ararat that were helping the "bandits."⁴¹ İsmet İnönü, the Turkish prime minister, was so pleased by the operations that he sent congratulations to the top commanders, including the TAF commanders. During the next two days, the aerial bombing was so successful that the Kurds were forced to withdraw up to 3,000 meters; the Turks speculated that they might withdraw up to 5,000 meters. By 21 July, the aerial bombardment had destroyed many Kurdish forts (*tahassungâh*); the Kurds were forced to higher altitudes and to seek cover in caves. But the TAF did not let up on its attacks. Taking off from airfields at Karaköse and Bayazıt, everyday at different times so that the Kurds would not know when to expect them, the planes were able to reach the heights of Mt. Ararat in 46 minutes, drop their incendiary (*yangın*) bombs and return to base. It was reported on 23 July that new squadrons were being sent to the front from the larger airbases at Eskişehir and Diyarbakır.

In time, the aerial bombardment, especially with incendiary bombs, began to take its toll. On 30 July, one captured Kurd stated that in war there was always terrible danger. But now "There are airplanes like Ehabîl birds (the legendary birds that destroyed the army of Abrahâ, the Abyssinian commander, when he attacked Mecca in 570 AD)."⁴² The Turks interpreted such confessions to mean that the spirit and courage of the Kurds had been broken: "These devils (*habîs*) are now forced to live like wolves."⁴³ Every day the aerial bombardment as well as the snow and glaciers were forcing the Kurds to descend from the heights of Mt. Ararat.

In spite of the Turks' confidence that aerial bombing and the land campaign would soon defeat the Kurds, they admitted the skill with which the Kurds adapted their weapons to the rugged terrain. It was this Kurdish resilience that compelled Saib Paşa,

⁴¹ *Cumhuriyet* does not say whether the *kızıbaş* were Kurds or Turks, but most likely they were Kurds.

⁴² "Abrahâ," *K.T.*, I, pp. 102-3.

⁴³ *Cumhuriyet*, 30 July 1930.

the Turkish commander, to move his headquarters from Bayazid to an open headquarters on the southwestern foothills of Mt. Ararat where he commenced preparations for a major and sustained campaign. Part of the preparations included constructing an airfield from which 60 airplanes would be able to take off.⁴⁴ The building of such a large airfield was based on the assumption that the Kurds had dug themselves deeply into the mountain. The Turkish command was preparing for a long campaign for which they had reportedly mobilized 66,000 soldiers and 100 aircraft.⁴⁵ The reporter for *Cumhuriyet* quoted military sources as stating "This force has been enough to suppress the rebellion. The government is leaving nothing to chance."⁴⁶ The hugeness of the campaign was proving expensive and exacerbated further Turkey's already precarious finances. In spite of fog and heavy snows on Mt. Ararat during the first week of August, the TAF bombed whenever the weather lifted: "The rebels were besieged and unable to wiggle."⁴⁷ It was reported on 11 August that innumerable (*sayılamayacak kadar*) airplanes flew over the Ankara airport and after making some loops and flips they departed toward the east. Such air demonstrations and air shows contributed to increased public support for the campaign against the Kurds and especially the role of the TAF. Public collections for the recently formed Turkish Air League (*Türkkuşu*) gathered momentum during this period.

Throughout August and early September there was less reporting on the air war with the exception of reports that it was continuing unabatedly with devastating effects. The reason for the decreased reporting of the air war was that August 1930 was full of important political developments. The press was full of reports of potential war with Iran because of Iran's alleged aiding of the Kurds around Mt. Ararat. On 9 August, it was announced that Fethi Bey [Okyar], a former prime minister and one of Kemal

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, "Hududumuza müteveccih bir vadi üzerinde icabında 60 layfarenin uçabileceği geniş bir taran sahası meydana getirilmiştir." (In a valley facing our border an air field has been constructed from which 60 aircraft, if necessary, will be able to take off).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Cumhuriyet*, 7 August 1930.

Atatürk's closest political allies, was to create a new political party, the Free Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*) later shortened to Free Party. This was a development of such moment for the press that the story monopolized the bulk of the news throughout August and September. In addition, in August, Hajo Agha, the leader of the Kurdish Heverkan tribal confederation, railed into southeastern Turkey from his base in Syria in an attempt to divert some of the Turkish forces attacking Mt. Ararat. The press was also concerned about the activities of the recently organized *Khoybun*, a Kurdish nationalist organization, established in Bhandun, Lebanon in 1927 and its relations with the Armenian nationalist organizations. These developments were followed by political riots in Izmir on 5 and 6 September on the occasion of Fethi Bey's appearance. In late December 1930 a rebellion against Atatürk's policies took place in Menemen, a small town of some 28,000 people about 50 miles from the large provincial city of Manisa in western Turkey. The rebellion resulted in the death of some 16 people and over three hundred arrests. The "event of Menemen" shook the Kemalist regime and resulted in changes in policies and personnel.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Cumhuriyet*, 6 and 7 September 1930. There is extensive coverage of the riots in these issues. For the best interpretation of the Menemen rebellion see Hamit Bozarslan, "Messianisme et mouvement social: l'événement de Menemen en Turquie (Decembre 1930)" in a publication of Centre d'études sur le Moyen Orient, Turquie et Iran (*CEMOTI*), no: 11 (January 1991), pp. 73-88. There is no evidence that the rebellion in Menemen was connected to the Kurdish nationalist rebellions in the east of Turkey. But sheikhs and members of the Nakşibendi order (*nakşibendi*) who played such prominent roles in the Kurdish rebellions also played leading roles in the Menemen rebellion. It is noteworthy that the Menemen rebellion occurred just a few months after the crushing of the Mt. Ararat rebellion. It is also interesting to note that Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, the Kurdish Nakşibendi Sheikh who had played a role in Kurdish nationalist activities up to the defeat of Sheikh Said and who after 1925 was to become the founder of the Nurcu Islamist movement, had been expelled to western Turkey in February 1925 and was to remain there until his death in 1960. For a biography of Said Nursi and an interpretation of some of his work, see Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1989). For the role of the Free Party in inter-war Turkish politics see Walter Weiker, *Political Tutelage and Democracy in Turkey, the Free Party and its Aftermath* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973). For a shorter version see the same author's, "The Free Party, 1930," in *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey*, ed. Metin Heper and Jacob Landau (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), pp. 83-98.

On 17 September 1930, the Turkish government announced that the campaign against the Kurds on Mt. Ararat was over. Salih Paşa declared victory on 12 September. He made special mention of the role of the TAF in the closing days of the campaign. He stated that he found it difficult to express his thoughts and praise in a few words.⁴⁹

In the unstable and constantly rebellious atmosphere in eastern and southeastern Turkey from the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 to the Mt. Ararat revolt in 1930 and up to the Dersim rebellion of 1937-38, the Turkish government was constantly confronted with the problems of controlling, restraining, and crushing various Kurdish insurrections, rebellions, and revolts. On 27 January 1928, the SSO in Mosul, quoting from a French intelligence report, stated that the Turkish Air League had, up to that date, bought 200 airplanes to be used by the air force as it deemed fit. Thus within two years of the crushing of the Sheikh Said rebellion in the spring and summer of 1925 to the end of 1927, the number of air-planes that Turkey possessed more than doubled. Rather than the three or four planes employed against Sheikh Said and his forces, by the end of 1927 the Turks possessed more than 200 serviceable aircraft. There were probably 50 planes just at the Diyarbakir, Mardin, and Erzurum airfields.

It is difficult to estimate the number of aircraft the TAF possessed by the end of 1930. It seems likely that the number was around 300. The fact that Salih Paşa built, or intended to build, an airfield near Mt. Ararat that could accommodate 60 aircraft indicates the extent to which the TAF had grown by 1930. The fact that the TAF could station 60 aircraft on an airfield near the battlefield, and plan to deploy 100 aircraft, indicates the important role that it had been assigned in Turkey's military strategy against the Kurds. The 60 aircraft to be stationed at the airfield near Mt. Ararat, in addition to those at Bayazid and Karaköse, would not have included aircraft stationed at the large airbases at Diyarbakir and Erzurum.

What role did the TAF play in crushing Kurdish nationalist

⁴⁹ *Condüvînet*, 17 September 1930.

movements during the inter-war period? It is obvious that the TAF had a small part in the defeat of Sheikh Said and his forces in 1925. Its role in the defeat of the Mt. Ararat revolt was much more extensive and, perhaps, even decisive. There is no doubt that the ample use of air power during the Mt. Ararat revolt expedited the capitulation of the Kurds. Without the use of aerial bombing, it is probable that the Mt. Ararat revolt would have continued through the winter of 1930 and commenced again in full force in the spring of 1931.

The use of air power for bombing, especially night bombing with incendiary bombs, was a powerful instrument of terror. Air surveillance, and "air policing" were strong impediments to Kurdish organization, especially to fighting in open terrain. The fact that Mt. Ararat and Lesser Ararat (Tendürek Dağı) were chosen as the locations of battle had as much to do with the protection they provided from air attacks as for their proximity to the Soviet and Iranian borders. Aerial bombing also allowed the Turks to inflict collective destruction on Kurdish villages, crops and livestock without engaging the enemy. It is clear that the employment of extensive aerial bombing by the TAF, with what must have seemed massive power to the Kurds, influenced nearly every aspect of Kurdish military and political strategy during 1930 and for the remainder of the inter-war period. The possession of substantial air power by the Turks after 1925 and, especially after 1930, may well be one reason why there was only one more substantial rebellion by the Kurds during the remainder of the 1930s, that of Dersim in 1937-8.

3. The Dersim Rebellion

The Dersim rebellion of the 1937-8 was more localized, but fought just as fiercely as the rebellions of 1925 and 1930. The rebellion once again compelled Turkey to mobilize some 50,000 troops against the Kurds. Unlike the Mt. Ararat rebellion, the Dersim rebellion was closer to Ankara and to large airfields. In 1937-8 the TAF, bolstered by more and better airplanes and supported by a

stronger infrastructure, used air power with devastating effect.⁵⁰

One of the most striking examples of the proficiency and confidence of the TAF in 1937-8 was that Sabiha Gökçen. Kemal Atatürk's adopted daughter and allegedly Turkey's first female pilot and a model of the progressive, liberated, and modern Turkish woman, flew with the TAF on their bombing runs against the Dersim Kurds.⁵¹ Sabiha Gökçen provides a good example of the role of women from the majority ethnic group and the dominant class of Turkish society who served as models and symbols of progress for that group and class while simultaneously serving as the instrument of that group's and class' suppression of minorities. In his memoirs, the Kurdish author, poet and intellectual, Musa Anter, notes the role that Gökçen played in the air campaign against the Kurds in 1937 and the effect that it had on the Kurds. He records how the newspapers of the time eulogized the "Brave pilot Sabiha Gökçen."⁵² Gökçen is also an example of the role women played in a developing and non-Western state such as Turkey that followed imperialist European patterns of utilizing women for the purpose of securing state or imperial dominance in spite of the subordinate position they occupied in imperial and colonial hier-

⁵⁰ Bulut, *Türkiye'de Kürt İsyanları*, pp. 213-70; Kutschera, *Le Mouvement National Kurde*, p. 125; Vecihi Timuroğlu, *Dersim Tarihi* (Ankara: Yurt Kitap Press, 1991), pp. 72-112. İsmail Beşikçi, *Tunceli kırımını (1935) ve Dersim fitnesini* (İstanbul: Belge Press, 1990), states bluntly that the Turkish government's actions against the Kurds in Dersim fulfil the criteria for definition of genocide, see especially pp. 95-7. Martin van Bruinessen, "Genocide in Kurdistan?: The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-38) and the Chemical War Against the Iraqi Kurds (1988)," in George J. Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 148, considers that Turkey's actions against the Kurds in Dersim do not constitute genocide, but rather ethnocide, "the destruction of Kurdish ethnic identity." Neither Beşikçi nor van Bruinessen mentions the role of the TAF in squashing the Dersim rebellion. I wish to note that the focus and purpose of their studies dwell exclusively with other issues.

⁵¹ Kutschera, *Le Mouvement National Kurde*, p. 125; Nuri Dersimi, *Hatıratım*, with notes, translation into modern Turkish and photographs by Mehmet Bayrak (Ankara: Öz-Ge Publications, 1992). There are five photographs of Sabiha Gökçen in the photography section, two of them while she is in flight.

⁵² See İskender Özden's translation of Anter's memoirs in *Kurdistan Report*, no. 22 (1995), 37. Anter was assassinated in 1992 for his Kurdish nationalist views.

archies of power and in the Turkish state structure. Sabiha Gökçen's participation in bombing raids against the Dersim Kurds in 1937-8 can be seen as ancillary to the liberation attempts of the modern Turkish woman and to the Westernization of the modern Turkish republic in the inter-war period.⁵³ Gökçen's participation in the bombing raids, although it is unclear if she actually dropped bombs, certainly strengthened Turkish nationalism, especially among Turkish women.

Conclusion

In the inter-war period the Turkish Air Force was solely and consistently employed against the Kurds; there were no foreign military engagements during this period. The air operations against the Kurds proved to be as "splendid training ground for the Air Force" as Iraq had been for the RAF.⁵⁴ The 'Air Scheme' by which the British sought to use the RAF to conquer and control Iraq and of which the Turks had been the targets and victims, along with Kurds and Arabs, and its successful implementation by the British from 1922 onwards undoubtedly had a great influence on the Turks. They had been the target of Allied air power throughout WW I and of the RAF on the Iraq-Turkish front from 1918 onwards. The Turks understood that the successful use of air power by the British in consolidating and, perhaps prolonging their empire, could also be used by new nation states like Turkey to consolidate power in their newly proclaimed republic over such groups as the Kurds.

The rapid acquisition of an air force by Turkey presents one of

⁵³ For more on the role of women in imperial and colonial structures see Ann L. Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th Century Colonial Cultures," *American Ethnologist*, 16, no. 4 (1989), pp. 634-66; Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 208-48.

⁵⁴ Jafna L. Cox, "Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of Its Role in Iraq, 1919-1932," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 13 (1985), p. 175, n. 112 where Sir Percy Cox quotes L. S. Amery, the British Colonial Secretary on 30 June 1925 at the annual dinner of the Central Asian Society; Olson, *The Emergence*, pp. 53-53.

the most salient examples of how a new nation state can adopt techniques of war from an empire that formerly exerted great power over its destiny. The Turkish state utilized sundry means and methods but air power was principal among them to prevent a Kurdish state or autonomous region from coming about; at least in the territories that it desired to include within its new national boundaries. A declining empire like Great Britain after WW I and a new republic like Turkey were able to utilize air power to implement their respective policies: Great Britain to pursue a forward policy in the Middle East, and Turkey in order to pursue a forward policy against the Kurds in eastern Turkey. There are, however, differences in the policies that the British empire and the Turkish nationalist state pursued. The British used air power primarily to secure control of Iraq, crush militant Kurdish and Arab nationalism, and then encouraged the growth of a bland bureaucratic Kurdish nationalism and an obedient Arab nationalism in order to achieve wider imperial and global objectives. The Turks used air power primarily to secure control of eastern Turkey and to crush Kurdish nationalism. With the one exception of Cyprus in 1963, 1964 and 1974 and northern Iraq during the 1980s and 1990s, from 1925 to the early 1990s the TAF was employed unilaterally against no other state, enemy or peoples other than the Kurds. The TAF's bombing campaigns and raids over northern Iraq during the 1980s and 1990s were largely against the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Workers' Party), popularly known by the acronym PKK, a Kurdish guerrilla organization comprised largely of Kurds from Turkey that established bases in northern Iraq and northern Iran from which to launch attacks into Turkey.⁵⁶ By limiting the ability of Kurdish nationalist groups to engage in war and more effective armed rebellion, the TAF played a strong part in the suppression of Kurdish nationalism. As a result, the TAF played a major role in consolidating the emergent republic's power and in strengthening Turkish nationalism which still serves

⁵⁶ The TAF did participate, however, in NATO air forces' enforcement of the 'no-fly' zone over Bosnia Herzegovina in the early and middle 1990s, but did not engage in any military operations. The TAF also participated in the NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia in 1999.

as the main ideological basis of the state despite its strong challenge from Kurdish nationalism and the Islamist movements in the 1990s.

After the rebellions of 1925, 1930, and 1937-8, high Turkish officials made strident statements symbolizing the consolidation and increasing monodimensionality of Turkish nationalism. In April 1925 after the defeat of Sheikh Saïd, İsmet İnönü, the Turkish prime minister, made the following statement:

"We are frankly Nationalist ... and Nationalism is our only factor of cohesion. Before the Turkish majority other elements have no kind of influence. At any price, we must Turkify the inhabitants of our land, and we will annihilate those who oppose Turks or 'Je turkisme.' What we seek in those who would serve the country is that, above all, they be Turks and 'turquistes'. They say we lack solicitude for religious currents; we will crush all who rise before us to use religion as an instrument."⁵⁶

In 1930, five years after the Sheikh Saïd rebellion and while the Turkish government was engaged in crushing the Mt. Ararat rebellion, Mahmud Esad Bozkurt, the Turkish interior minister, made his well known declaration:

"Only the Turkish nation has the privilege of demanding national rights in this country. There is no possibility that other ethnic groups' demands for such a right will be recognized. There is no need to hide the truth. The Turks are the sole owners and the sole nobles of this country. Those who are not of Turkish origin have only one right: to serve and be the slaves, without question, of the noble Turkish nation."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ BİLAL N. ŞİMSİR, ed., *İngiliz Belgeleriyle Türkiye'de 'Kürt Sorunu' (1924-1938): Şeyh Saïd, Ağrı ve Dersim Ayaklanmaları*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1991) 2nd edition, p. 58. This quotation was included in a despatch from Sir Ronald Lindsay, British ambassador in Turkey to Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain dated 28 April 1925, no. 331 and is found in Foreign Office Confidential Print Series no. 424-262: 156-57. Forty years later, İnönü had still not changed his mind: "Rejimin kaderi, şark isyanında iç politikada ve silâh meydanında hehemen bir kesin ve misil bir netice elde etmeye başladı ... Böyle anlamistik meseleye biz ..." (The destiny of the regime in domestic politics and in the military arena was absolutely dependent on a definite and positive result in the rebellion in the East. This is how we understood the situation.) This is a quote from a long interview that Abdî İpekeçi had with İnönü. See Abdî İpekeçi, *İnönü Atatürk'ü Anlatıyor* (İstanbul: Cem Yayın Ev. 1981), p. 27.

⁵⁷ "Sadece Türk milletinin bu memlekette milli haklar isteğinde bulunma hakları vardır. Diğer ulusların böyle bir hak talebinde bulunmalarına imkan tanımaz. Gerçekleri saklamamızın gereği yoktur. Türkler bu memleketin yegane sa-

After the crushing of the Dersim rebellion in 1938, Atatürk, just a few months before his death, gave a speech stating he, "...was happy to announce...we have not allowed and will not allow any possibility that might create an obstacle able to prevent our nation from achieving the highest level of civilization and happiness that it merits."⁵⁸

The above statements made after the Turkish government's defeat of the three major Kurdish rebellions in the interwar period represent the great significance that Turkish leaders attached to the suppression of the rebellions in order to emphasize the Turkish ethnic base of Turkish nationalism and of Kemalism. In so far as the TAF played a strong role in suppressing the rebellions, especially those of 1930 and 1937-38, I argue here that the TAF made a strong contribution to the capabilities of the Turkish government to contain and to weaken Kurdish nationalism in the inter-war period. This in turn contributed to allowing Turkish nationalist discourse to develop unchallenged with increasing emphasis on Turkish ethnicity.

hipleri yegane efendileridir. Türk orjininden (ırkımdan) gelmeyenlerin bu memlekette sadece bir tek hakları vardır: asil Türk milletine kusursuz olarak hizmetkarlık ve kölelik etmek..." This is quoted from İhsan Nuri Paşa, *Ağrı Dağı İsyanı*, p. 103. Bozkurt's statement appeared originally in the *Milliyet* newspaper on 19 September 1930.

⁵⁸ Hamit Bozarslan, 'Le Kemalisme et le problème Kurde,' in *Les Kurdes delà l'exode*, ed. H. Hakim (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1992), p. 76 relying on Celal Kutay, *Celal Bayar*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Kenan Yayın Evi, 1938), pp. I, 354.