

The Rif Rebellion in Morocco: A Nationalist-Religious Revolt

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Spain's modern military and diplomatic involvement with Morocco began in 1859 when troops sent by General Leopoldo O'Donnell crushed a revolt by Moroccan tribesmen against Ceuta, a Spanish *presidio* since 1578.¹ Following this brief six-month war which resulted in a series of Moroccan defeats, Spain was forced by Great Britain and its own tenuous international position, to accept a series of treaties which, while extracting concessions from the Moroccan sultan, limited its territorial ambitions and restored some degree the antebellum stability. This stability remained intact until the early 1890s. Moreover, Spain was able to secure the city of Tetuán until a monetary indemnity was paid off by the Moroccans. Tetuán would later become the capital of the Spanish protectorate.²

The next Spanish-Moroccan military conflict occurred in 1893, outside the boundaries of Melilla when some laborers were building a small fort near the city on Spanish territory. Local Riffian tribesmen killed some workers because they considered the construction a violation of local sovereignty. Spanish troops engaged the tribesmen, but were repelled with losses. Before reinforcements could be brought in to the fight, the tribesmen attacked and inflicted further losses on the Spanish including the death of their commander, General García Margallo. General Arsenio Martínez de Campos required 15,000 men to repel the Riffians and restore order.³

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1. For more on the 1859-1860 campaign, see Robert Rezette, *The Spanish Enclaves in Morocco*, trans. Mary Ewalt (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1976), 50; Ignacio de Abenia Taure, *Memorias Sobre el Riff* (Zaragoza: Imprenta de Antonio Gallifa, 1859); J. Hardman, *The Spanish campaign in Morocco* (Edinburgh, 1860); Shannon E. Fleming, "North Africa," in *Spain in the Nineteenth-Century World: Essays on Spanish Diplomacy, 1789-1898*, ed. James W. Cortada (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 91-102; *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, 1958 ed., s.v. "Marruecos;" and R. Gil Grimau, *Aproximación a una bibliografía española sobre el Norte de África (1850-1980)* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores. Dir. Gral. de Relaciones Culturales, 1982).

2. Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 261. See the following for details of the peace agreement between the Sultan and Spanish government regarding territory, The Army War College, Course at the Army War College, *The Present Situation of Spain in Morocco*, by Brigadier General Allison Owen, La. N.G., Memorandum for the Director, G-2 Division, The Army War College, October 11, 1924 (Washington Barracks, D.C.), The Army War College Curricular Archives, File #288A-80, 2.

3. Rezette, 51. In 1893, the Riffian chieftain, Maimon, chased Spanish forces under the command of General García Margallo, all the way back to the town of Melilla just as Abd-el-Krim would do to General Silvestre's forces in 1921.

Spain's loss of her overseas empire to the United States in 1898 left Spain with only her Moroccan *presidios*, and Rio de Oro, Ifni, and Equatorial Guinea in northwestern and central Africa, respectively. At a time when overseas possessions were a mark of a great, powerful nation and Great Britain, France, Germany, and even Italy, Belgium, and Portugal had colonies abroad; Spain had lost most of hers. This international humiliation had a powerful impact on Spain's psyche as a nation, but was most strongly felt within the ranks of the armed forces. This national disgrace strengthened the nation's resolve to hold on to what was left in Africa with great tenacity and vigor.

France, the major player in the Maghreb, was slowly but methodically expanding from Algeria into Morocco. The French government realized that in order to proceed with this expansion it was necessary to recognize Spain's interests in Morocco and its strategic position between North Africa and France. In 1904, France, with British encouragement, decided that Spain should join her in the self-appointed assignment of protecting the sultan of Morocco. Spain was to be permitted to expand into the area surrounding Melilla and Ceuta, and in October, Liberals and Conservatives in the Spanish parliament approved this French-Spanish treaty. By this agreement, two of Europe's major powers, France and Great Britain, recognized Spain's interests in Morocco. France made it possible for Spain to play an active role in Moroccan affairs, while at the same time keeping her place in the concert of Europe.⁴

The situation in Morocco once again heated up on 9 July 1909 when a force of Riffian tribesmen attacked a military outpost protecting Spanish workers building a railway to serve the iron ore mines outside Melilla.⁵ Four workers and one sentry were killed. This was the chance that Spanish colonialists had been anticipating. On 13 July, 6,000 Riffians attacked a force of 2,000 Spaniards; ten days later, the tribesmen engaged Spanish forces for a third time. In the *presidios* at the time, only 15,000 soldiers could be called upon for combat so the government

4. For an in-depth study of Spain's policies vis-à-vis Morocco during the early years of the 20th century, see Shannon E. Fleming, "The Disaster of Annual: Spanish Colonial Failure in Northern Morocco, 1902-1921," Master's Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1969; and George Hills, *Spain* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 114. For more on the treaties between France and Spain (1902-1904), see Shannon E. Fleming, *Primo de Rivera and Abd-el-Krim: The Struggle in Spanish Morocco, 1923-1927* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 22-28.

5. For information on Spanish and German iron ore mining interests in the Rif, see Pessah Shinar, "Abd al Qadir and Abd al Krim: Religious Influences on their thought and action." *Asian and African Studies*, I, Annual of the Israeli Oriental Society (Jerusalem, 1975), 161; James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (New York: Longman, 1984), 132; and J.D. Fage and Roland Oliver, eds., "Morocco," *The Cambridge History of Africa*, (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 7, 300.

decided to reinforce its meager colonial forces with 40,000 reserves.⁶

With the arrival of thousands of fresh troops in Melilla during 1909-10, Spanish forces were able to move from Melilla and occupied an enclave that stretched from Cape Tres Forcas to the southern shore of Mar Chica, and ranged about ten kilometers into the interior. Moreover, this campaign had gained new territory for Spain, which had been losing it around the world for the last 200 years, as well as providing the Spanish Army an opportunity to gain glory, respect and promotions.⁷ However, these African adventures were extremely costly in lives and resources.

After 1910, the situation in Melilla calmed down and the focus of attention shifted to the Western sector. In mid-1911, the French tried to seize the area of Larache which was clearly in the Spanish 'sphere of influence.' They were, however, dissuaded by the arrival of two Spanish warships which disembarked troops. On 8 June, they occupied Larache without bloodshed. Spain proceeded to occupy large portions of territory around Ceuta by peaceful means and through agreements with local chieftains.⁸

The situation in Morocco quickly shifted back to Melilla on 24 August 1911, when Riffian tribesmen on the eastern bank of the Kert River attacked a General Staff cartographic unit. The local sheikh, El Mizzian, declared *jihad* against the Spanish Christians. Spanish forces moved westward from Melilla and crossed the Kert River which was about twenty miles east of Melilla. Poor weather and enemy resistance which led to a Spanish retreat back to the *presidio* halted the campaign. Again, Riffian tribesmen threatened Melilla itself. The war continued until the spring of 1912 when Spanish forces pushed the Riffians across the Kert River and El Mizzian died in battle leaving his men without an effective leader.⁹

6. Hills, 114. See also, Rezette, 53-54. F.H. Mellor, *Morocco Awakes* (London: Methuen Publishers, 1939), 37-38; Joaquín Arraras, ed., *Historia de la Cruzada Española* (Madrid: Ediciones Españolas, 1939), 38-42. See also, Alal al-Fasi, *The Independence Movements in Arab North Africa*, trans. Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh (New York: Octagon Press, 1970), 92; Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*, vol. I (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1975), 402; and Chapter X of Tomas García Figueras, *Marruecos: La Acción de España en el Norte de África* (Barcelona: Ediciones Fe, 1939).

7. Fleming, "Disaster of Annual," 17-18.

8. Fleming, "Disaster of Annual," 25; Mellor, 38; Rezette, 54; and Arraras, ed., (1911), 52-58.

9. David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif: Abd El Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), 44; Stanley G. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), 113-114; and Fleming, "Disaster of Annual," 26-28.

The Moroccan Sultan, Moulay Abd-al-Hafid, was forced to sign the Treaty of Fez in 1912, which established the French and Spanish Protectorates. Spain received the northern one-fifth of Morocco to administer with Tangier being declared an international city. The Protectorate consisted of roughly 18,000 square miles inhabited by sixty-six indigenous tribes which were subdivided into various clans and sub-clans that constantly fought among themselves. The two most warlike of these tribes, especially when it came to resistance to colonial domination, were located within the Spanish zone. They were the tribes of the Yebala in the West under the rule of Sherif Muley Ahmed el Raisuli and of the Rif in the East. Hypothetically subordinate to the khalif, the Sultan's deputy in Tetuán, capital of the Spanish Protectorate, the protectorate's rural tribes basically ignored the Sultan and were even more opposed to domination from foreign "infidels."¹⁰

Having acquired this new colony, Spanish forces attempted their first pacification of it in 1913 when they moved to occupy the region around the "sacred city" of Xauen in the Western Zone of the Protectorate. In bitter combat with the tribes of the Yebala, Spanish troops were forced back to Tetuán where they remained until an armistice could be hammered out with the Raisuni.¹¹ Under the leadership of General Felipe Alfau Mendoza, the Protectorate's first High Commissioner, and Colonel Manuel Fernández Silvestre, Spanish forces advanced into the Yebala and engaged in numerous small-scale battles with el Raisuni's forces. El Raisuni was clearly a worthy adversary who kept the Yebala tribes in line through a combination of charisma and terror. Eventually, Spanish Protectorate officials and el Rasuini reached a *modus vivendi* and he became a temporary friend of Spain's.¹²

10. Ron Vaughan, "The Forgotten Army: The Spanish in Morocco," *Savage & Soldier*, XVI, 2, (April-June 1984), 2. See Fage and Olive, 288-289. Walter B. Harris, *France, Spain and the Riff* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1927), 59, described the tribes of the Spanish Protectorate as follows: "The people of the Riff and the Jibala are considered to be the best fighting-men in all Morocco." Therefore, in the Franco-Hispano Agreement of 1912, Spain got the worst agricultural terrain and the most bellicose subjects to deal with. El Raisuni has been described by some as a brigand and a kidnapper, but it could be said that he was also a survivor. In 1908, he backed Mulay Hafid for the sultanate of Morocco and was richly rewarded for that support. He swore an oath to him and the new Sultan reinstated him as Governor of the Yebala and part of the Lukus, as well as Pasha of Arcila. He was both feared and respected by the tribesmen of the Yebala. With his wealth and power, he had palaces built in Tangier, Tetuán, Xauen, Arcila, Larache, Zinat, and Tazarut. He was a power to be reckoned with, by both the Spaniards and the tribesmen of the Yebala, until his capture by Abd-el-Krim. See Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 48 and 50-53. For more on Ahmed er Raisuli, see Rosita Forbes, *El Raisuni, the Sultan of the Mountains. His Life as told to Rosita Forbes* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1924). For more on the establishment of the Protectorate, see Ch. XI of García Figueras. For the nine main articles of the Treaty of Fez, in the original French, see Mellor, 41-43; and Victor Morales Lezcano, *España y el Norte de África--El Protectorado En Marruecos (1921-1956)* (Madrid: U.N.E.D., 1986), 226-227.

11. al-Fasi, 92; Arraras, ed., (1913), 66-67; and Morales Lezcano, 227.

12. Payne, 116-122; Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 55-67; Fleming, *Primo de Rivera*, 36-46; Morales Lezcano, 227.

By 1920, Spain had conquered and pacified less than a quarter of her Moroccan Protectorate.¹³ And while the High Commissioner, General Dámaso Berenguer Fusté, advanced cautiously in the Western Zone, General Manuel Fernández Silvestre set out from Melilla in the Eastern Zone without similar preoccupation. His goal was to advance towards Alhucemas Bay as quickly as possible setting up blockhouses along the way. Alhucemas Bay was situated on the Mediterranean coast of Morocco and the Rif, part of the Atlas Mountain range, were the Beni Urriaguel tribe lived. In the Central Rif, the Beni Urriaguel was the most powerful and bellicose tribe, having never been conquered.¹⁴ It was to this tribe that Mohamed Abd-el-Krim el Khattabi, the man who would lead the Rif Rebellion belonged. The father of brothers Mohamed and M'hamed Abd-el-Krim had been a *faqih*, or religious leader, who had become quiet wealthy dealing with Spanish and German mining companies in the Rif prior to the end of the First World War.¹⁵

Mohamed, the older of the two brothers and the one who would become internationally famous, was born around 1882 at Ajdir. He first attended the Koranic school in Ajdir, then studied in Tetuán, and attended the prestigious Qarawiyyin University in Fez for two years. According to the Israeli scholar Pessah Shinar, “It is not likely that his relatively short stay at Fes enabled him to acquire a solid Arabic and Islamic culture,....” Yet his spell of studies at this most renowned institution, coupled with an intelligence of no mean order, were sufficient to establish his reputation as a savant among the ignorant Rifi tribesmen and confer on him status and prestige.¹⁶ In 1906 at the age of twenty-four, Abd-el-Krim obtained his first job editing the Arabic supplement of *El Telegrama del Rif*, Melilla's Spanish daily. The following year, he became a secretary in the Bureau of Native Affairs, and by 1914 had risen to the post of *qadi l qudat'* or chief *cadi* (supreme religious judge [in both civil and criminal matters]) for the entire Melilla area. By 1915 he was serving as an editor for *El Telegrama del Rif*. He was respected by both Spanish government officials, and by natives alike.¹⁷ However, Abd-el-Krim's opinion of his Spanish employers began to change when he became aware of the Rif's mineral potential, which the Spanish hoped to develop for their own benefit, as well as the corruption and exploitation of the Protectorate by Spanish administrators. In addition, for his pro-German and

13. David Woolman, “In Spanish Morocco, two Berber brothers became a legend in their guerrilla war against two European powers,” *Military History*, February 1994, 12.

14. Woolman, “In Spanish Morocco,” 12; and Shinar, 160.

15. Shinar, 161; and Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 74-76.

16. Shinar, 162. Mohamed's younger brother, M'hamed, was likewise an excellent student and was sent at the expense of the Spanish government to study mining engineering in Madrid in 1917. During the three years he lived in Spain, he studied mineralogy and military engineering. In his brother's government, M'hamed would ably serve as War Minister. See, Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 76.

17. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 76; C. Richard Pennell, *A Country with a Government and a Flag: The Rif War in Morocco 1921-1926* (Wisbech, Cambridgeshire: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1986), 54; and Rupert Furneaux, *Abdel Krim--Emir of the Rif* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967), 46.

anti-French sentiments expressed in his newspaper articles during the Great War, Abd-el-Krim served a jail sentence of eleven months at Rostrogordo, located north of Melilla.¹⁸ Following his release from prison, Abd-el-Krim returned to his job at *El Telegrama del Rif*. Shortly thereafter, convinced of the mounting threat of Spanish occupation of the Rif forced him to realize that resistance was called for and unavoidable. As he said of the Europeans: “They will never consider us as equal; they will always treat us like dogs.”¹⁹

It was during this time that Abd-el-Krim was influenced by the nationalist sentiments of one his former classmates, Idris Sa`id, who later served as Abd-el-Krim's negotiator with the Spanish during the Rif Rebellion.²⁰

In January 1919, Abd-el-Krim requested a twenty-day leave from his post in Melilla to return to the Rif and never returned. He contacted his brother M'hamed in Madrid and easily convinced him to leave his studies and return to the Rif. The two brothers, along with their father, began to enlist support of the other Riffian tribes for their revolt against the Spanish. What made the Abd-el-Krim brothers so successful in uniting tribes which had traditionally mistrusted and feuded for so long?

According to Woolman, the brothers Abd el Krim held no official power in Beni Urriaguel. Their background, experience, and skill at organization gave them an effective superiority, and they attained leadership through sheer force of personality and intellect. Abd el Krim was not just another *marabout* conducting a *jihād* and promising paradise--he was a local leader who had enlarged his ambitions to include the idea of a national state. The Rifians listened to him because they thought he had the three qualities necessary in a true war leader--audacity, courage, and the ability to size matters up quickly. The brothers intended to do much more than merely resist the encroaching Spanish troops. They had a vision of an aggressive war--a carefully planned and coordinated effort far greater than anything either the Rif or Spain had ever seen before. They would use their natural advantages to the full, and Abd el Krim would exploit the propensity of his Rifians to rise against outside domination.²¹

In the Eastern Zone of the Protectorate, the daring and impetuous General Silvestre was operating, trying to pacify the region that extended from Melilla to Alhucemas Bay. Under his

18. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 77-78; Shinar, 163; and Furneaux, 48. Pennell, 54, noted that although Abd-el-Krim was arrested in 1915, “He was eventually acquitted, but although the judge said that he had committed no crime he went on to declare that his real loyalties were hard to discover and impossible to prove.” He remained incarcerated until 1916 when his father severed his ties with the Germans and Abd-al-Malek.

19. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 77. This quote can also be found in Baron Jacques G.P.M. Benoist-Méchin, “Lyautey et la guerre du Rif.” *Miroir de l'Histoire* (April 1967): 82-91.

20. Shinar, 163; and Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 77.

21. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 79.

command, General Silvestre had an army of 25,700 men, with 20,600 being Spaniards, and 5,100 Moroccan *Regulares*. By early 1921, General Silvestre had crossed the Kert River and had taken Annual on 15 January and Sidi Dris on 15 March. Also in March, the High Commissioner, General Berenguer, visited the Melillan front and, after meeting with some of the tribal chiefs on the beach at Alhucemas, came away feeling that the situation was favorable and that Silvestre was accomplishing his goal admirably. However, as has been noted, not all the tribes of the Rif were willing to submit to Spanish control. The first step towards the liberation of the Rif and ultimately of Morocco was to destroy the army of General Silvestre, and the general was playing straight into Abd-el-Krim's hands.

In late May, Silvestre decided to move deeper into the Rif against the expressed wishes of Berenguer crossing the Amekran River and setting up a position on Monte Abarran in early June. Abarran was located eighty miles from Annual. Militarily, Abd-el-Krim welcomed the Spaniards advancing deeply into the Rif since this would bring them farther from Melilla and thus lengthen their supply lines, and making them more vulnerable. In addition, the incautious Spaniards “neglected to crush the tribes behind them, or even to disarm them. Instead, the Spaniards dotted the mountainous region between Melilla and the approaches to Al Hoceima Bay with dozens of small blockhouses, with now and then a larger, sandbagged depot clinging to a cliff or hillside.”²² As Ricardo Fernández De La Ruguera and Susana March observed in *El Desastre De Annual*: “the general had dug his own grave. All they [i.e., the Riffians] had to do was throw dirt on top of him.”²³ What followed next was a series of minor defeats which inevitably led to the Annual debacle. First, the Spanish outpost at Abarran was attacked by a thousand Riffian tribesmen acting in concert with a number of native *Regulares* who betrayed their Spanish officers. The Spaniards, and the *Regulares* who remained loyal, were no match for the Riffians. The position was wiped out with nearly 200 killed, and most importantly, an artillery battery was captured along with small arms and ammunition. Emboldened by their success at Abarran, the Abd-el-Krim brothers attracted other Riffian tribesmen to their side with the promise of rifles and loot.

The next Spanish position attacked was Igueriben on 16 July. Situated three miles from Annual, it was quickly surrounded and cut off from the larger base. General Silvestre, in Melilla at the time, quickly gathered what forces he could and rushed by car to Annual to take personal charge of the relief operations. Several attempts were made to break the siege and deliver desperately needed supplies, including two cavalry charges personally led by Silvestre, but withering machine gun and artillery fire from the Riffians repelled all attempts. Igueriben fell to the Abd-el-Krim's *harka* (war party) of roughly 4,000 men, thus sealing the fate of Annual for

22. Woolman, “In Spanish Morocco,” 14.

23. Ricardo Fernández De La Ruguera and Susana March, *El Desastre De Annual* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1968), 37.

Annual was located in a valley and Igueriben overlooked it. General Silvestre, with a force of 4,000 men, was also cut off at Annual. Silvestre fired off three radiograms in a row to General Berenguer asking for major reinforcements. With ammunition for small arms and cannons, as well as food and water running dangerously low, Silvestre, along with his officers, saw the possibility of having to abandon the major position in the Rif. After convening a council of officers to decide the fate of Annual, a vote was taken to withdraw. On the morning of 22 July, Silvestre gave the order to abandon Annual and to try to reach Ben Tieb en route to Monte Arruit. What should have been an orderly, fighting withdrawal, quickly turned into a rout as panic-stricken conscripts dropped their weapons and ran for their lives. The Riffians slaughtered those they caught, with soldiers and civilians alike being put to the knife. In the end, Spanish casualties numbered from a conservative 8,000 to a high of 15,000, with another five hundred or so taken prisoner and held for ransom. General Silvestre perished at Annual, although it was never fully established if he was killed by the enemy, or died by his own hand. What had taken twelve years of blood and treasure to conquer, had now been lost in a few days. Spain's ignominious rout at the hands of Riffians tribesmen was the greatest defeat suffered by a European power in an African colonial conflict in the 20th century.²⁴ Carr summed up the situation of the Melillan Command in late July as follows:

In a few days five thousand square kilometers had been lost. What remained of the demoralized army was either cooped up with defeatist civilians in Melilla or shortly to be slaughtered in the surrounding posts like Monte Arruit; it had lost its guns and equipment, and only the arrival of troops from the western zone and the fortunate accident that Abd el Krim could not use his captured guns saved Melilla itself.²⁵

The Annual disaster had two major ramifications for Spain: It was militarily humiliated

24. Annual was the greatest colonial defeat for a European power since the Italian defeat at Adowa at the hands of the Ethiopians on 1 March 1896. Spanish losses vary depending on the source. Official Spanish reports claimed 13,192 dead, but figures range from as low as 8,000 to as high as 19,000. For more on the life of Abd-el-Krim, the Rif Rebellion, and the Annual disaster, see: Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*; Fleming, "Disaster of Annual" and *Primo de Rivera*; Furneaux; Payne; Vincent Sheean, *An American Among the Riffi* (New York: The Century Co., 1926) and *Personal History* (Garden City: Country Life Press, 1934-35); J. Roger-Mathieu, *Memoires d' Abd-el-Krim* (Paris: Librairie des Champs-Élysées, 1927); Germain Ayache, *Les Origines de la Guerre du Rif* (Rabat, Maroc: SEMER, 1981); Pennell; Shinar; Ramón Salas Larrazábal, *El Protectorado De España En Marruecos* (Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, S.A., 1992); García Figueras; Asprey; Emilio Ayensa, *Del Desastre De Annual A La Presidencia Del Consejo* (Madrid: Rafael Caro Raggio, 1930); Hills; Sir Charles Petrie, *King Alfonso XIII and His Age* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1963); Indalecio Prieto, *Con El Rey O Contra El Rey: Guerra de Marruecos*, vol. I, (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1990); Basil Davidson, *The People's Cause--A History of Guerrillas in Africa* (Longman Studies in African History, 1981); al-Fasi; and Abdallah Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib: An Interpretive Essay*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

25. Carr, 521.

with the annihilation of its 20,000-man army in the eastern zone of the Protectorate by a poorly armed force of no more than 3,000 Riffian tribesmen, and it would lead to the fall of the government in 1923, and to the military Dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera. For Abd-el-Krim and his followers, it was the beginning of his rise to power and goal of liberating Morocco of European domination.

While the Spanish military began the herculean task of creating a new army in the hopes of reconquering the territory which had been lost, Abd-el-Krim consolidate his power base. One principal task was to forge a united guerrilla army to resist the Spaniards, this was particularly difficult given the fact that the tribes of the Rif mistrusted each other and held long-standing grudges.²⁶ As Shinar wrote,

Within a short time he [Abd-el-Krim] managed to lay the foundations of an embryonic state, put an end to tribal anarchy and create a measure of political solidarity based on the common desire to oust the invader. He set up a government which, however rudimentary, represented a mixture of both traditional and modern features. His main concern was with the creation of a modern army and the construction of roads and bridges for its use.²⁷

Abd-el-Krim's concept of modern nationalism began to coalesce shortly after the Annual victory when he attained the independence of his tribe. However, this was just the first step. His next step was the collection of taxes. Taxation (1 *duro* per capita) had a dual purpose: it not only brought in needed revenue to purchase arms (especially airplanes) and fund his propaganda machine, but it confirmed Abd-el-Krim's political authority.²⁸

In 1923, Abd-el-Krim took his greatest step towards independence when he brought together a national assembly made up of the chief of the Berber tribal councils and compelled it to declare the independence of the Rifi Republican State, with himself as president, in addition to president of the Assembly.²⁹

26. In *Great Guerrilla Warriors* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 102, Carleton Beals noted that, "Adhesion was demanded of all the Rifian Caids. Only three heads of strong tribes, long at odds with the Beni Uriaghel, refused to join up. Mohand [Mohamed] Abdel Krim quickly seized and executed them." See, Pennell, 99.

27. Shinar, 164.

28. Pennell, 101.

29. Shinar, 164. Pennell, 133, noted that Abd-el-Krim had promised to create both a government and a flag. "The flag, a red background with a white diamond or square in the middle of which is a green six-pointed star and a green crescent moon, ... The use of the colour green--the favourite of the Prophet--and the crescent moon is a clear religious statement,..." In addition, the battle flag of the Rif, like the flag of Ibn Saud in Arabia bore the words-- 'There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.' Abd-el-Krim was declared *Amir al-Mu'minin* in February 1923, a caliphal title.

As Shinar observed:

The choice of the label 'republican,' as he [Abd-el-Krim] explained later on, was not meant at the time to convey the notion of representative government with an elected parliament--which was not possible for the fledgling state--but merely to denote a body politic composed of a confederation of independent tribes.³⁰

It has also been stated that he chose the term "republican" hoping to win recognition and support from Western democracies. The brothers were convinced that world opinion and particularly, Western recognition and sympathy were crucial to their goal of Riffian independence. M'hamed, as Minister of Defense, was dispatched to Paris and London to negotiate for recognition.³¹ In France, the Left stirred for the Rifi cause, while in Britain, a committee of support for the Rifis was established, which constantly lobbied the government to recognize the Rifi 'state.'³²

Hoping to maintain his modernist and nationalist beliefs, Abd-el-Krim strongly rejected the notion that his was a religious war. He declared that: "The time of holy wars is past; we no longer live in the Middle Ages or in the time of the Crusades."³³ Yet when replying to comments made about him by the Spanish dictator, General Primo de Rivera, he stated: "I am not a fanatic, because I am proud of being a Muslim. Only I do not care about other people's beliefs...As for nationalism, I am a nationalist."³⁴ Yet it is interesting to note that during the Rif Rebellion, the American journalist (*Morning Post*), Vincent Sheean, had the unique opportunity to travel throughout the Rif and interview Abd-el-Krim at Ajdir. He came away with the impression that religion (i.e., Islam) played a greater role in the rebellion than it actually did. He wrote:

...he [Abd-el-Krim] has now definitely assumed the rôle of Islam's leader against Christian invasion. His appeal to Islamic consciousness has been succinct and forceful; he has attacked France [9 April 1925] in the name of the common religion of all northern Africa, and his significance by far transcends the local

30. Shinar, 164.

31. Beals, 102.

32. Pennell, 2. Harris, 278, wrote:

"It was only natural that the foreign military occupation of any small country, and the deprivation of what any small race considered to be its birthright, should awaken sympathy far and wide. In this case sympathy, which was in principle justified, was increased by skillful propaganda. The material was there, it needed only the match being put to it to raise a little blaze of pity and commiseration for the victim of two great Powers [i.e., France and Spain]. The match was applied by little groups of people in various parts of the world, more especially in England and in Paris."

33. Léon Gabrielli, *Abd-el-Krim et les événements du Rif (1924-1926): Notes et souvenirs recueillis et présentés par Roger Coindreau* (Casablanca: Éditions Atlantides, 1953), 85.

34. Gabrielli, 88.

importance of a frontier war. He has become, whether he consciously endeavored to do so or not, the champion and hero of the revolt of Islam in the western half of the vanished Islamic empire; he has become one of the important exemplars of that racial and religious movement which everywhere is pitching subject Asiatic populations against their Western conquerors.³⁵

While Abd-el-Krim was trying to establish the Rif State, Mustafa Kemal, Atatürk, was achieving great success and world attention working under similar circumstances in Turkey. For this, Abd-el-Krim was a fervent admirer of the great Turkish reformer and of his policy of eliminating religious fanaticism in his country. However, it would be imprudent to infer from what has been previously noted that Abd-el-Krim “shared Atatürk's secularist conception of the modern state. He claimed that his state was to be founded on the principles of the Qur'an and the best achievements of the West in science and industry. He insisted that there was no contradiction between the Qu'ran and modernization.”³⁶

In the end, questions regarding nationalism and religion assumed a secondary role in Abd-el-Krim's world as the war against Spain took a decided turn. Encouraged by some of his followers to extend the holy war against the other colonial power in Morocco, France, on 9 April 1925, he sent his army against French positions along the Uarga River. French outposts, like Spanish ones four years earlier were overwhelmed by the Riffians and they suffered massive numbers of casualties. It was a fatal mistake for Abd-el-Krim and his “Rif Republic” as the French, who had stayed out the conflict between the Riffians and the Spaniards, now joined with them against their common foe. The beginning of the end came in September 1925 with the combined Spanish-French amphibious landing at Alhucemas Bay, located at Abd-el-Krim's front door.³⁷ With Spanish ground forces moving from Alhucemas Bay towards his capital at Ajdir, while French troops did the same from the south, Abd-el-Krim fled into the interior of the Rif. He tried negotiating, but it was too late. Knowing what fate awaited him if he were to fall into the hands of the Spaniards, he agreed to surrender, along with his brother and closest advisors, to the French at Targuist on 27 May 1926. In September of the same year, they were exiled to

35. Sheean, xii.

36. Shinar, 167. In an e-mail exchange with the writer on 21 January 1999, Professor C. Richard Pennell of the University of Melbourne (Australia) stated that Abd-el-Krim used religion to serve his political needs. He gave as an example his attacks on sufi orders and marabouts which had strong followings in Morocco. According to Pennell, Abd-el-Krim found them to be “obstructive,” but “that didn't make him ANTI-religious - quite the contrary[,] he talked of the brotherhoods as deviations from true Islam.”

37. For more on the Alhucemas Bay landing see, José E. Alvarez, “Between Gallipoli and D-Day: Alhucemas, 1925,” *The Journal of Military History* 14, 1 (January 1999): 75-98.

Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean.³⁸

In conclusion, as Woolman noted:

The Abd el Krims were the first true Moroccan nationalists. They substituted orthodox Islam for tribal traditionalism, and they established central control over a large area that had never before known it--and thus made it infinitely easier for the Spanish overlords to govern, according to the Rifian pattern.³⁹

38. Woolman, "In Spanish Morocco," 85. Epilogue: While being relocated to France [from Reunion Island] in 1947, the Abd-el-Krims escaped at Port Said, Egypt. The Egyptians allowed them to live in style and comfort. The eldest brother died in Cairo in 1963 from a heart attack at the age of 81; the younger brother died four years later in Rabat also of a heart attack.

39. Woolman, "In Spanish Morocco," 85.