

IMPERIAL POLITICS AND FEISAL'S ARAB GOVERNMENT IN SYRIA, 1918-1920

Murat Abuş

1. Radical and urgent reforms are needed in the Ottoman Empire.
2. It is important to guarantee the Ottoman Arabs the exercise of their political rights by making effective their participation in the central administration of the Empire.
3. It is important to establish in each of the Syrian and Arab *vilayets* a decentralized regime suitable to their needs and aptitudes.
10. These resolutions shall also be communicated to the powers friendly to the Ottoman Empire.
11. The Congress conveys its grateful thanks to the Government of the [French] Republic for its generous hospitality.
Resolution of the Arab-Syrian Congress
at Paris (18-24 June 1913)¹

France has no interest in precipitating the disintegration of Asiatic Turkey....However, if our Syrian policy is not one of political ambition, it must be a policy of precaution.
Report of the
Commission des affaires syriennes
to Pichon, 3 March 1913.²

All action threatening to provoke a sort of internationalization of the reform question in Syria must be carefully avoided. It thus seems to be in our best interests to delay as long as possible the moment when we will have to take a position on this subject.
Report of the *Commission des affaires syriennes*
31 March 1913.³

French Claims to Syria and the Emergence of Arab Nationalism

Understanding the basis of French claims to Syria in the period following the First World War the French policy on one hand took for granted the truth of its claims

and on the other, tried to provide further justifications for it to be the sole power to be responsible for things Syrian.

French claims to Syria rested on three pillars, moral, political and economic.⁴ French moral influence predated its political and economic interests and thus the French had a misconception about the unrest taking place in Syria being related to sectarianism.⁵ Starting from 1901 up to 1914, the extent of the French protectorate started to diminish in Syria and Lebanon, but the French persisted in making no distinction among the demands voiced by the Muslims and Christians, and presupposed that the ideas that stemmed from the “numerically weak but culturally superior” Christians represented the Syrians as a whole. This had the effect of preventing a proper understanding of collective Arab aims on the eve of the First World War.

But before advancing too far, a look at the collective Arab aims and the emergence of the Arab nationalist movement in the same period is needed. The depression of the 1870s was followed by a period of stability and prosperity in Syria. During the decades of stability which coincided with the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II, Syrians took government posts in the throughout the empire and greater autonomy was awarded to the provinces. The tranquility was also helped by the fact that Abdülhamid surrounded himself with Syrian advisers. In this period, a bureaucratic-landowning class⁶ comprised of urban notables who would jealously guard the status quo against the upcoming developments, emerged.

The Young Turk revolution in 1908 and the suppression of the counterrevolution in 1909, after which Abdülhamid II was dethroned, started a process of rigorous centralization and Turkification. Government employees in Istanbul lost their jobs, some sacked and let go during a streamlining of the bureaucracy. Because attendance in professional schools had increased with the formation of the urban notable class, most of the graduates from these schools saw that they had no chance of getting government posts.

It was in this context that the Arabist movement, which had started as a literary reform and revival effort, started to take on a different configuration, as the formation of the al-Ahd and al-Fatat suggest. But these groups and the separatist demands of some extremist factions should not be taken as an indication of the strength of the nationalists in Syria. In fact, the main effort of the urban notables in Syria was geared towards maintaining their status.

In handling the demands of extremists the French sought to contain these elements and discourage them from their endeavor. In fact, the bulk of the notables and the populace did not want separation, but simply wanted decentralization along the lines of what had been previously established. The French, however, misunderstood the real claims of the Syrians and based their policy on the incorrect perception that the Syrians sought separation from the Ottoman Empire.

During the years leading up to the First World War, therefore, France was trying to solidify its claim to Syria on the assumptions of imperialist logic. The Arab Government of Feisal and then the mandate period amply demonstrated the unpopularity of the French among the Syrians. The French believed themselves to be popular among Syrians, but as Shorock writes, this is not only besides the point, but “ignores and obscures the fact that based upon the old diplomacy France had solid claims to Syria and the Lebanon.”⁷ In fact, when had popularity previously been required? If the French had fancied that remarks by Christian Lebanese and

Syrians to be representative of all Syria, were they to blame? Had the "Scramble for Africa" of the previous decades been undertaken on the principle of being popular in a land rather than simply being the first to grab it, even if by a tiny detachment of soldiers and missionaries? Were not the respective "Oriens" of the great powers in urgent need of the *selfless* "civilizing mission" of the white man? Was it not worthwhile for the French to try to push the notion of "progress" among the "fanatical and intellectually underdeveloped" Muslims? Yes, urged the imperialist logic, provided that other benefits, such as colonies and subsequent benefits, were forthcoming.

If we read the history of the period backwards, we may be mistaken and may reach the conclusion that French designs on Syria were doomed to fail and meet resistance from the start. My contention is that it was not. Even if we follow the French thinking, we still see that nationalism was not to be the dominant ideology in Syria until well into the mandate period.⁸ One other reason is that the urban notables had the upper hand in Syria until the advent of the mandate.⁹ Until the end of the war a crushing majority of the notables supported the Ottoman Empire, simply because they had more to lose and had more experience in government. Going forward a little more in time, I want to argue that although southern part of Anatolia adjacent to Syria forms a geographical extension of Syria, with the arrival of French troops a credible resistance was offered to the occupation forces, whereas this did not occur in the same manner and scale in Syria.

In the post-1909 era, the agitation among the notables for decentralization and reform in Syria began. The Turko-Italian war of 1911-1912 over Libya marked a turning point in the sense that the Ottoman Empire's ability to protect Muslim territories came under questioned among the notables.

If this war had the effect of changing the Syrian attitude toward reforms, the Balkan Wars had the effect of forcing the French to be more on their guard regarding the internationalization of the reform question. Here they were formulating policy on the old assumptions of carving up territory for themselves. In fact, it seems they were trying to control everybody, but giving undue weight to the separatists' aspirations.

The 1913 Young Turk *coup d'état* in the face of the defeats in the Balkan provinces and the subsequent victory in Edirne strengthened the Unionists' hand in dealing with the demands for reform. The formation of the *Comité des réformes de Beyrouth* in January 1913 and the enthusiasm this caused was dampened by the coup in Istanbul. The report was not separatist and emphasized decentralization.¹⁰ It was after the demands of the members of the Committee for a French occupation of Syria that the reports, parts of which are quoted at the beginning of this paper, were prepared. On 8 April 1913, the CUP dissolved the Beirut Committee of Reforms. After this event, the separatist propaganda increased. It was still negligible, but was enough to induce France to host a Syrian-Arab Congress in Paris.

The main reason for France's allowing this Congress stemmed from an earlier message received in 1912 from the British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey to the effect that Britain definitely had no territorial ambitions in Syria helped stem the tide of the attempts to link Syria to Egypt under British control.¹¹

The Arab-Syrian Congress was attended by twenty-four official delegates, nineteen of whom were from Lebanon and Syria, three of whom were from the United States, and two of whom were from Mesopotamia.¹² The resolution was

similar to the program adopted earlier by the Beirut Committee of Reforms. One important difference in the resolution was an explicit effort made to separate Syria from the other Arab provinces .

The cause of the reform program adopted by the Congress was taken up by the French government with respect to Istanbul, and was later to be dropped altogether. Thus, the French severance of any ties to moderate reformists and extremist separatists were complete. As mentioned earlier, these ties should not necessarily be included as among the determinants of French policy, because it was an imperialist policy. With Britain out of the way, there were two Great Powers that needed to be persuaded about the French claim for supremacy in Syria: the Ottoman Empire and Germany.

The opportunity presented itself with the German ambitions in the Baghdad Railway scheme and the Ottoman Empire's chronic financial problems. The loan negotiations were carried out together with the question of railway concessions, and on 9 April 1914, a settlement was reached in which, to the dismay of the Syrian activists, not a word of the reform program was mentioned. There was no need for it, because France now saw the appropriate time to make public its view on the reform question. With the agreement on the economic sphere in hand, France became the most likely candidate to be called to restore order in case of an outbreak of violence.¹³ In this sense, France had prevented first the internationalization of the reform program and then laid the foundation, which was to be recognized with a mandate in 1920.

Of course, this settlement created indignation among the Syrians. Shorrock argues that, "the negative reaction of the Syrians to the French assumption of the mandate after the war for that country should have been foreseen."¹⁴ I disagree with this view of the development. In imperial politics, the deals with the Great Powers were carried through diplomacy and the relations with the subjects were those of unequal relations. It was perfectly natural for the French policy makers to drop the reform issue once its usefulness had ended. The fact that this created problems after 1918 does not mean that they should have acted in a different manner.

This was again related to France and Britain's Great Power illusions, , which would survive until the end of the Second World War. France was not the only country that was formulating policies from within an imperialist outlook, though. The Egyptian Expeditionary Force commander Allenby would be implementing the British imperial strategy on the field with the force of arms and this would be a great complicating factor for the fate of the Arab nationalist movement. This is what we must turn to now.

Imperial Aims and Military Strategy: The Transjordan Raids of March-May 1918

Starting with his appointment as the commander of the EEF after that force suffered defeats at the hands of the Turks in the First and Second Battles of Gaza, Allenby incorporated imperial strategy dictums into his war planning. This was to be seen most clearly in the Transjordan Raids mounted by the EEF in 1918, and the capture of Damascus on 1 October 1918 following the Battle of Megiddo in September 1918.

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According to Hughes, Britain fought the Palestine campaign in order to maintain the Empire as much as to win the war.¹⁵ The pace of his movement and his assumption that the Hashemite Revolt might collapse if the war extended to 1919, when coupled with the fact that, for the Turks, the Palestine campaign was peripheral in the war, provided Allenby with the tools to implement the British imperial strategy in the whole of the Middle East.

But the making of imperial strategy was not a smooth or a foregone conclusion. In fact, the prompts of the strategy were being fought over in London, the Arab Bureau, and the War Office. One instance of this was the views on the Hejaz Revolt by various leading players in the British bureaucracy. For instance, while the Arab Bureau emphasized the reluctance of Feisal's Northern Arab Army to advance in the absence of clear British victories, Sir Mark Sykes for some time stayed bound to the alliance with Hussein and continued to express the view that the Hejazi troops were making an important contribution to the war effort.¹⁶ The wider context of the Arab Revolt lies beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear that a change of perception towards Feisal and Hussein during 1918 added to the formulation of the imperial strategy, which will be outlined below.

The roots of the different perceptions offered to Feisal and Hussein can be traced back to Feisal's Northern Arab Army being deployed progressively far away from the Hejazi lands, a process that Fromkin argues brought him into more direct contact with the British and led to his estrangement from his father, who was harder to deal with.¹⁷ Of course, one other factor was that Feisal's NAA was a military unit in the EEF and that Feisal was technically a lieutenant-general under Allenby's command.¹⁸

So what were the non-military concerns that Allenby incorporated into his war strategy? To begin with, the Hashemite Arabs of the Hejaz, under the sponsorship of Britain, represented the indirect means of extending British influence in the region. It was hoped that in a world changed by Wilsonian ideals of self-determination, local allies would be an easier way of control. Zionism was hoped to achieve the same in Palestine. Hughes writes,

The make the scheme work, the EEF had to conquer the Levant and install Zionism in Palestine and the Hashemites in Syria. By doing this, Britain could "unmake" the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 that had internationalized Palestine and allowed French control of the area from Beirut to Mosul.¹⁹

One of the reasons for the Transjordan Raids was that the Arabs were unable, despite their efforts, to break the Hejaz Railway. The other and more important reason was to establish direct contact with Feisal's army. After the failure of the First Transjordan Raid, which started in 21 March 1918, in late April preparations were made for a second offensive, which took place until May 1918. The result was again not successful.

It is useful to note that for the second raid, Allenby developed his plan to take Amman independently of the Arabs, the role of the Arabs was one of political control after the Turks had been expelled. The reversals that the EEF saw in the Transjordan Raids shook Feisal's resolve and it became all the more apparent that Feisal's support required British military successes against the Turks.

Britain's aim was to secure the whole of the Middle East and to negotiate in the post-war era from a position of strength.²⁰ In its imperial strategy the conquest of

strategic territory either directly or indirectly was of paramount importance. The perception was that the French would be at least as dangerous for the British as the other Great Powers. In this context of imperial policy, the Hashemite Arabs and especially Feisal's NAA were invaluable allies for the British in blocking the French claims in the Middle East.

The orders issued about the treatment of the local Arab population once the EEF left the Sinai Peninsula and the contrast in the actual behaviors towards the Arabs are also instructive. A similar order was issued on the eve of the Transjordan Raids. No doubt these were meant to placate the Arabs regarding the coming prospect of Hashemite rule in their land under British auspices.

Therefore, Hughes' conclusion about the relationship between Feisal and Britain seems to hold: "Britain and Feisal had a symbiotic relationship: Britain needed Feisal politically, while Feisal needed them militarily."²¹

Britain thus failed in its imperial endeavor in the Transjordan Raids, but the era after the Battle of Megiddo would culminate in the implementation of the imperial strategy in giving Feisal the government of Syria, which had been promised wholly to France in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, and partly promised to the Arabs in the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence of 1915-1916.

The Capture of Damascus, 1 October 1918

One of the foremost British imperial aims was to prevent the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 from forming the basis upon which the post-war settlement would be based. This agreement indeed would be put off by the force of British arms. This involved declarations by the Entente Powers and Lloyd George's actions at the Paris Peace Conference during the first half of 1919. But the clearest expression of the coordination between the EEF and the imperial strategy became manifest during the events that happened at the capture of Damascus, and these events irreparably damaged the Sykes-Picot Agreement.²² This section will briefly discuss those events and the next section will deal with the question of Arab nationalism during Feisal's Arab government with reference to the internal and external tensions and contradictions of its brief existence.

Following the Turkish defeat at the Battle of Megiddo in September 1918, Allenby, ever mindful of further military losses, was reluctant to order a full attack on the retreating Turkish Army. After it became apparent that Turkish retreat was more of a melee than an orderly withdrawal, the EEF marched quickly. After the Battle of Megiddo, the Syrian hinterland was excluded from the French sector, which was limited to the Syrian littoral as part of the British imperial strategy.

The advancing troops were told not to enter the city before Feisal's troops could arrive. For the British, it was essential to give the appearance of an Arab entry into Damascus and then a facade of Arab control of the city. For the Foreign Office, an Arab civil administration was essential to exclude French claims on Syria.²³ However, the person to accept the surrender of the city from Emir Said, who had been appointed by Cemal Paşa on 30 September, was Major Olden of the 10th Australian Light Horse Regiment. Emir Said belonged to the Kadir family, which would briefly challenge Feisal for the rule of Damascus.

After the administration was handed over to Feisal, the questions of legitimacy surfaced and it was clear that for Feisal to establish his government with

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the whole of his diverse entourage the Kadirs' power base had to be destroyed. The officer who would handle the task was Lawrence. Because of their French leanings, five members of the Kadir family were executed by the Turks during the war. In a bloodbath on 2 October, the Kadirs' attempt to grab power in a coup in Damascus was prevented by Lawrence.

Over the objections of Lawrence, Chauvel marched his troops through Damascus on 2 October to show that he was the real conqueror of the city and not the Arabs. It was clear that the political officers and the military officers did not share the same perception, but it was the task of the political officers to set up Feisal's government. Because this might undermine Feisal, whom the British had installed as the ruler of Syria, an official realignment of facts was needed. The fact that the military administration had to be kept to purely military concerns prompted the War Office to begin transforming the facts along lines dictated by imperial concerns with a communiqué on 3 October: "At 6.00 a.m. 1 October Damascus was occupied by a British force and by a portion of the Arab army of King Hussein."²⁴

On the same day, Allenby arrived in Damascus to give substance to Feisal's rule. In their meeting at the Hotel Victoria, Allenby told Feisal that he would control Syria except for the Levant seaboard.²⁵ A French official was present in Feisal's entourage, but this appointment was a token gesture as the zone in which he would operate lay within the area of supreme command of Allenby and he was bound to obey orders from him. Britain had succeeded in excluding France from Syria.

The brief Arab dash for the Lebanese littoral showed that the Arabs arriving in Damascus with Feisal did not necessarily agree with Britain's wish to manipulate Hashemite political ambitions.²⁶ And this group of Arab nationalists would clash with the established urban notables, who had not withdrawn their support from the Ottoman Empire until the very end to formulate the path of Feisal's administration. The brief life of Feisal's Arab Kingdom in Syria was beset with these clashes, the Great Power rivalry, and Feisal's attempt to find a middle road amidst the insurmountable problems engendered by these. To a discussion of them we must turn now.

International Relations and Domestic Politics in Feisal's Arab Government

In order to carry out these intentions, France and Great Britain are at one in encouraging and assisting the establishment of *indigenous governments and administrations* in Syria and Mesopotamia, now liberated by the Allies, and in the territories the liberation of which they are engaged in securing and recognizing as soon as they are actually established.²⁷

In our opinion, if our independence be conceded and our local competence established, the natural influences of race, language, and interest will soon draw us together into one people; but for this the Great Powers will have to ensure us open *internal* frontiers, common railways and telegraphs, and uniform systems of education. To achieve this they must lay aside the thought of individual profits, and of their old jealousies. In a word, we ask you not to force your whole civilization upon us, but to help us to pick out what serves us from your experience. In return we can offer you little but gratitude.²⁸

We also have the fullest confidence that the Peace Conference will realize that we would not have risen against the Turks, with whom we had participated in all civil, political, and civil privileges, but for their violation of our *national rights*, and so will grant us our desires in full in order that our *political rights* may not be *less* after the war than they were before, since we have shed so much blood in the cause of our liberty and independence.²⁹

Before entering into a discussion of internal and external developments between October 1918 and July 1920, when Syria was invaded by the French army and Feisal was ousted from power, it will be useful to note some points against which these developments should also be read.

A continuity in the application of political power in Syria did take place, in the sense that the power always emanated from the city outwards to the settled countryside and the semi-nomadic tribes. That is why the basic building block of political influence in Syria remained the same during Feisal's kingdom: urban leadership.³⁰ This is important because the urban leaders rarely sought to overthrow the government; rather they always strove to establish or maintain the delicate balance between government and society. Although the framework of political collaboration between the major Syrian towns of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama was under construction by the First World War, it was only with the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and its replacement with the Arab state in Syria that there emerged an explicit demand among these cities to link up politically. And during the brief existence of Feisal's Kingdom of Syria, the authority of the government did not really extend beyond these four towns.³¹

This brings us to the discussion of the main characteristic of Syria at the time. As will be argued below, before General Gouraud's ultimatum to Feisal demanding unconditional acceptance of the Mandate provisions that were set out by the San Remo Conference, the Arab nationalists were encouraged and assisted by the Turkish nationalists, who were struggling successfully against the French and, in turn, the Arab nationalists had obstructed French movements along the railways. But in their upcoming brief struggle with the French, the Syrian Arabs would suffer acutely the absence of something that the Turks to the north had: a state tradition.

While the Ottoman Turks had the tradition of being the dominant factor in an empire centuriesold, the Syrians lacked this. The institutional framework withdrew with the retreating Turkish armies. The government posts were left without much substance of a power even though the implementation of political power showed continuity.

In the Turkish case, there was also the remnant of the Ottoman Army that was utilized in the initial stages of the struggle. Pushing things a little bit, I want to argue that there was a class of Turkish officers who were angry, indeed incensed, at what they saw was happening to their land; this also was lacking in the Syrian case. So, even if Feisal had had a Western education and had been of Mustafa Kemal's caliber, he still would not have been able to pull it off. These factors should be kept in mind during following discussion of the internal tensions of the Arab state within the wider context of a resurgent Great Power rivalry.

At the end of the war, with Germany's colonies captured, the Middle East occupied, and the French excluded from it, British imperial aims were satisfied and the hundred of thousands of British imperial troops stationed in the area were used by Lloyd George as a bargaining chip. But the settlement Britain sought in the area

proved to be elusive and the fact of British improvisation during the proceedings did not help the situation.

Towards the end of the war, a declaration was issued to address the concerns of seven Syrian nationalists.³² This text, known as "The Declaration to the Seven," dated 16 June 1918, did as much to clear as to muddle the issue of Arab independence. The Arab lands that had been independent prior to the war and the areas emancipated by the Arabs themselves were set aside as areas of "complete and sovereign independence" of the Arabs. The other categories of lands mentioned in the document, namely the former Ottoman lands that were occupied during the war and areas still under Turkish control, were reserved for future designs, based in the previous case on the consent of the governed, and in the latter, the wish for their independence. It was in this context that Feisal was given the task of governing Syria. To make the imperial scheme work, Britain needed Feisal politically as much as Feisal needed Britain militarily. Below it will be argued that the symbolic importance of Feisal led the nationalists to force him to adopt a stance in their struggle with the urban notables and the French.

Feisal's rule in Syria was characterized by his diplomatic efforts to secure some form of independence for his country, the internal problems of his country, and especially the struggles between the urban notables and nationalists. These were all to be engulfed in a resurgent Great Power rivalry in the region, which would be decisive in the end after the United States again adopted an isolationist stance.

What follows is a brief discussion of this web of events. It must necessarily start with the Declaration to the Seven that was agreed on by Britain and France on September 30 and was issued on November 7, 1918. With this document, Britain applied self-determination to those areas that it did not want to rule directly and had local Arab support. Syria was one example for this.³³ It is beyond doubt that the Arabs of the region should have read in the declaration a promise of a genuine independence. With the November declaration and the EEF's installation of Feisal in Syria, the British imperial aim was satisfied, but all through the first half of 1919 Lloyd George would be advancing on the issue against Clemenceau.

One of the most important reasons for British pressure on France over Syria was the British wish to have French acceptance of the inclusion of Mosul and Palestine, which had been excluded from the British sphere in the Middle East by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916.

This the British got in the informal Anglo-French Settlement of 1-4 December 1918, in which Mosul, including Iraq, was given to Britain along with an extended Palestine. The French willingness to make concessions in the Middle East can be explained by its desire to form as hard a deal as possible against the Germans. While France was entitled to occupy Syria in the December 1918 Agreement, Lloyd George obstructed the French occupation of Syria. At the same time, British concern over Syria was exacerbated by turmoil in the Transcaucasus region. The alliance of the war years was to be briefly damaged until November 1919, when the trappings of the Great Power rivalry would force Britain to reassess the relative importance of its allies.

Meanwhile, during Feisal's Arab regime in Syria, Damascus became a magnet for Arab nationalists from Iraq, Hejaz, Palestine and elsewhere in Syria. While he tried to establish an acceptable administrative framework, he sought ways to form a diplomatic position in Europe to ensure that the British continued to back

his government's independence in the face of French ambitions. In Syria, the urban notables were more or less excluded from the daily functioning of the government, but Feisal would have to turn to them in 1920.

In a memorandum presented to the Supreme Council at the Paris Peace Conference, Faisal first pointed to the justification for unity, but then pointed out the difficulties of incorporating the various provinces of Arab Asia into one frame of government. The best part of his memorandum dealt with the need to give Syria its independence in its unity and rejected Jewish immigration to Syria.

Because Lloyd George tried to bring Wilson to the discussions regarding Syria, the King-Crane Commission was sent to Syria to gauge the sentiments of the local populace. However, ignoring the commission suited the interests of both France and Britain and the commission's report, which was published in August 1919, was not taken into consideration. In the meantime, the British position was losing its strength because of the agitation for demobilization and the great revolt in Egypt, which required the deployment of a great number of troops. The need to demobilize was paramount for Britain. With the establishment of soldier councils in Egypt, the fresh memories of soldier soviets haunted the British. Also, it was impossible for the British to cut their military commitments in the Middle East without withdrawing from Syria.

Before the beginning of the King-Crane Commission's work, a General Syrian Congress was convened and passed a resolution on 2 July 1919. In this, complete independence for Syria was demanded, the wish for a Constitutional Monarchy was expressed, the assumption of mandate was defined to be of the nature of assistance, and the Jewish pretensions for a national home in Palestine was rejected.

Feisal, perhaps aware of this, tried to convince the British that there would be a great revolt should any French soldier set foot on the Syrian hinterland. But Syria was not the only country in which opinion was hardening at the urgings of the nationalists, in France the colonial party demanded a tangible gain from the war effort in the name of national prestige: Syria as a colony.

Lloyd George, who had pushed the issue for a long time, suddenly changed course and on 15 September 1919 in an agreement accepted to leave the Cilicia and Lebanon garrisons to the French and the Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama garrisons to Feisal. Clemenceau accepted the principle of British withdrawal. The important result for him was the removal of the EEF as a buffer between himself and Feisal.

In January 1920, an agreement was reached between Feisal and Clemenceau, but Clemenceau's subsequent loss of power to Millerand prevented this agreement from implementation. In March 1920, the San Remo Conference awarded the mandate of Syria to France, which was a crown achievement for the realization of French claims to Syria. In response, the nationalists effectively grabbed power in Syria and in the same month, reconvened the Syrian Congress, which earlier had been replaced by Feisal with a Committee. His turn to the conservative urban notables and the formation of a moderate party proved to be unsuccessful. The Congress declared independence and proclaimed Feisal as the King of Syria.

Through the subsequent months, French troops were massed along the Syrian border and in July, General Gouraud issued an ultimatum, demanding acceptance of the mandate, which was accepted by Feisal on July 20. But seeing his followers

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would fight anyway, he decided to fight on July 21. On July 24, French troops defeated the Syrian Arab army at Maysalun and on the 25th, entered Damascus. Feisal had left the town for the outskirts on the 24th. On the 27th, he was forced to leave and, on August 1, reached Haifa, where he was received by the British Commissioner with official honors.

Conclusion

The French decision to unseat Feisal's government in Damascus was dictated by imperialist concerns, just as the British decision to withdraw from Syria was motivated by similar concerns. Britain's global strategy and the need to entrench forced them see that France was a more valuable ally in the long term. France, on the other hand, was concerned with the maintenance of its empire. These concerns were dictated by long-term strategy, security of the empire, and the need to check the rising tide of nationalism. When the improvisation of Lloyd George was combined with the long-running French claims to Syria, the result was a replay of Great Power rivalry where the respective Orients of the great powers were up for grabbing on the map.

Feisal's Kingdom formed the second stage of Arab nationalism. When the French arrived in Damascus, they found a body of conservative urban notables whose interests prompted them to cooperate with the French. However, in the Mandate period, nationalism in Syria would come into its own and the nationalists would be able to oust the French in 1946.

Notes

- ¹ From the Resolution of the Arab-Syrian Congress at Paris, 18-24 June 1913). J.C. Hurewitz (ed.) *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, A Documentary Record: 1914-1956*. Two Volumes (Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1956), pp. 268-269.
- ² From the report of the *Commission des affaires syriennes* to Pichon, 3 March 1913. William I. Shorrock, *French Imperialism in the Middle East: The Failure of Policy in Syria and Lebanon, 1900-1914* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), p. 88.
- ³ From the report of the *Commission des affaires syriennes*, 31 March 1913. Ibid., p. 88.
- ⁴ Khoury argues these pillars at some length. My presentation of this point here is brief as I am primarily interested in demonstrating the effect of these claims (which are imperial in nature) on the relationship of France with the nascent Arabist movement in Syria. Philip S. Khoury, *Urban notables and Arab nationalism: The politics of Damascus 1860-1920* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 28.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 53.
- ⁷ Shorrock, p. 9.
- ⁸ Antonius argues that the definite turning point came with the 1925-1926 rebellion, after which the nationalist leaders became more outspoken and had a landslide in the 1928 elections for the constituent assembly. (1934, p.529).
- ⁹ Khoury points out that although from the suppression of the counterrevolution in 1909 until the outbreak of the war in 1914 the differences widened between the CUP and the Syrian-Arab notables, the main point of contention was the ideology of Ottomanism, which had gained its ideological content before the Arabist movement. Khoury, p.58.
- ¹⁰ Shorrock, pp. 86-87.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 83.
- ¹² The text of the resolution can be found in, Hurewitz, pp. 268-269.
- ¹³ Shorrock, p.101).
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East 1917-1919* (Frank Cass, 1999), p. 89.
- ¹⁶ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (Avon Books, 1988), p. 328.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 329.
- ¹⁸ Hughes, p. 83.
- ¹⁹ Hughes, p. 89.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 92.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 95.
- ²² Kedourie, p.141.
- ²³ Hughes, p.101.
- ²⁴ Text quoted in Hughes, p. 103.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 105.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 109.
- ²⁷ From the Anglo-French Declaration of 7 November 1918, italics mine. The text is provided in Hurewitz , vol. 2, p. 30.

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²⁸ From Feisal's Memorandum to the Supreme Council at the Paris Peace Conference, 1 January 1919, italics mine. The text is provided in Hurewitz, vol. 2, pp. 38-39.

²⁹ From the Resolution of the General Syrian Congress at Damascus, 2 July 1919, italics mine. The text is provided in Hurewitz, pp. 63-64.

³⁰ Khoury, p. 3.

³¹ Ibid., p. 19.

³² Hurewitz, vol. 2, p.29.

³³ Hughes, p. 116.

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