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## **Futile Efforts to Create an Arab Kingdom of Syria**

### **From the Idea of Greater Syria to Syria Partitioned under the French Mandate (1915–1922)**

The real chances of the establishment of Greater Syria basically ended during the British-French Mandate period in the Middle East. The efforts of Syrian nationalists and Arab royalists to unite the historical region of قُطُنَيْدَة (قُطُنَيْدَة) (Sūrīyah al-Kubrā) as one kingdom (state) were repeatedly hindered by the policy of the great Western powers.

However, the project of Greater Syria went only into abeyance and this idea was never forgotten. Since regaining independence, Syrian nationalists constantly revived the ideas of 'pan-Syrianism' and Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad (1930–2000; president of Syria in 1971–2000) adopted it as a kind of official policy of the Syrian state.<sup>1</sup> It was clearly shown in the symbolic sphere. Syria's

1. A. Groiss, *Communalism as a Factor in the Rise of the Syria Idea in the 1800s and the Early 1900s*, in: *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. A. Beshara, New York 2011, pp. 30–54; C. Farah, *The Dilemma of Arab Nationalism*, in: "Die Welt Des Islams" New Series vol. 8/3 (1963) pp. 140–164; N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London 2006; Y. Chaitani, *Post-Colonial Syria and Lebanon: The Decline of Arab Nationalism and the Triumph of the State*, London 2007; Y. Choueiri, *Arab History and the Nation-State: A Study in Modern Arab Historiography 1820–1980*, New York 1989; W. Cleveland, M. Bunton, *History of the Modern Middle East*, Boulder 2013; J. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, 3rd ed., Oxford 2011; N. Hajjar, *Between Patriotism and Nationalism: Ameen Rihani's Vision for Lebanon and Syria*, in: *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, New York 2011, pp. 163–189; P. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920–1945*,



Map 1. One of territorial plans for Greater Syria<sup>2</sup>

boundaries with Lebanon and Jordan were presented as “regional,” not international borders.

In official Baathist propaganda, Israel did not even exist and mass media stressed a reality of the Palestinian state. On the world’s maps, Palestine was separated from Syria only by a line designated a “temporary” border. Moreover, the present-day Turkish province of Hatay (part of Turkey since 1939) was marked there as an integral part of Syria.<sup>3</sup> Although efforts aiming at uniting all the regions of Greater Syria were unsuccessful and did not seem realistic, being rather a resentment, the fascination with Pan-Syrianism or Pan-Arabism ideas is actually still vital in the Middle East.

The historical Greater Syria and the birth of the “Syrian question” during the First World War  
 The “Syrian question” during the First World War focused on the borders Syria could and should have. Interestingly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Syria did not have definite territorial borders. It was rather considered a geographic entity, known at various times as “Greater Syria” (مَرْبُكْ أَلْأَيْرُوسُ, *Sūrīyah al-Kubrā*), “Geographical Syria,” “Natural Syria” (أَيْرُوسُ أَلْأَيْرُوسُ, *Sūrīyah at-Ṭabī‘iyah*), or “Northern Land” (مِشْلُ أَدَالِب, *Bilād ash-Shām*).

Geographical Syria – depending on the author – consisted of a number of Ottoman vilayets (administra-

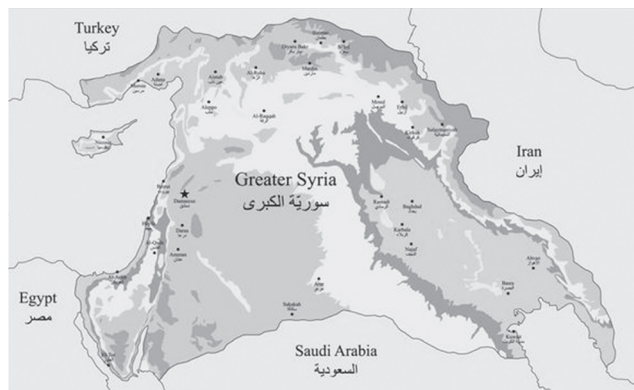
Princeton 1987; D. Pipes, *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition*, Oxford 1990; M. Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, Austin 2006; B. White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria*, Edinburgh 2011.

2. Greater Syria, *The Weichert Report*, [https://theweichert-report.com/2016/07/13/stabilizing-the-situation-in-syria/modern-times-arab-revival\\_syria\\_greater\\_map\\_03/](https://theweichert-report.com/2016/07/13/stabilizing-the-situation-in-syria/modern-times-arab-revival_syria_greater_map_03/), [accessed 22/04/2020].
3. *Ḥarīṭat Sūryā*, Dimašq: Idārat al- al-Mašlaḥah al-'Askariya 1971; *Ḥarīṭat Sūryā*, Dimašq: Idarat al-Maslaha al-'Askariya 1977.

tive divisions). Usually, Greater Syria was delimited by Aqaba and Sinai in the south, the Taurus Mountains in the north, the Syrian Desert in the east, and the Mediterranean Sea in the west – currently comprising Jordan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria.

The contemporary territorial division of the Middle East with all the consequences for Syria caused the fall of the Ottoman Empire, which had been defeated by the end of the First World War. At this time, Syria was in a state of disintegration. Although official claims against the Ottoman territory were formally addressed in the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), in the Conference of San Remo (1920) and finalized in the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the idea of division and new organization of the Ottoman legacy began much earlier, assuming a dynamic and dramatic character.

In 1916–1920, the former Ottoman provinces were systematically transformed. Ironically, some of the problems associated with these changes have survived throughout the century and continue to be sources of recent conflicts in the Middle East. With the exception of the then non-existent Israel, the map of the Middle East that emerged in the 1920s looked much as it does today. However, it was relatively easy to draw boundaries round the conference table. Suffering long-term consequences and catastrophic repercussions is quite another thing.



Map 2. “Greater Syria” according to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (*al-Hizb as-Sūrī al-Qaumī al-Iḡtimā’ī*)<sup>4</sup>



Map 3. The Ottoman Empire on the eve of the First World War (1913)<sup>5</sup>

4. *Utopia called "Greater Syria"*, [https://twitter.com/shell\\_blog/status/950728249876860928/photo/2](https://twitter.com/shell_blog/status/950728249876860928/photo/2), [accessed 22/04/2020].
5. *Territorial changes of the Ottoman Empire 1913*, [https://kylarsroleplay.fandom.com/wiki/World\\_War\\_1\\_\(Ottoman\\_Empire\)?file=Territorial\\_changes\\_of\\_the\\_Ottoman\\_Empire\\_1913.jpg](https://kylarsroleplay.fandom.com/wiki/World_War_1_(Ottoman_Empire)?file=Territorial_changes_of_the_Ottoman_Empire_1913.jpg), [accessed 22/04/2020].

Many Arabs believe that 1920 was the key moment for modern Syria, when the territory of Greater Syria was changed into mandates by the new League of Nations and ruled under fictions of conditional sovereignty under the control of the victorious powers: France and Great Britain.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, it is worth analyzing events directly preceding this key date and determining the consequences for the political activities of Syrians in 1916–1919.

### The “Ottoman jihad” and the Arab partners of the British forces in the Middle East

August 2, 1914, when the Ottoman Empire joined the war on the side of the Central Powers, was a turning point in the history of the British-Turkish relations. This circumstance instantly overturned the age-old policy of Great Britain towards the Ottoman Empire and resulted in abandoning the strategy of having an integral empire as a buffer against the Russian influence in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> Between 1914 and 1918, both the Ottoman Empire and Germany engaged in a propaganda campaign to foster jihad amongst the Muslims all over the world, whose religious head was claimed to be the Ottoman sultan. Jihad was declared on 14 November 1914, in the form of a fatwa (Turkish *Fetva Emini* – a judicial opinion or ruling).<sup>8</sup> The proclamation was in many ways unusual, especially that it declared a holy war against *all enemies of the Ottoman Empire, except the Central Powers*.<sup>9</sup> It is no surprise that this declaration was controversial from the start in the whole Muslim world.<sup>10</sup> From the beginning, its proclamation was portrayed by the Allies as a pillar of the German scheme to revolutionize Muslim populations

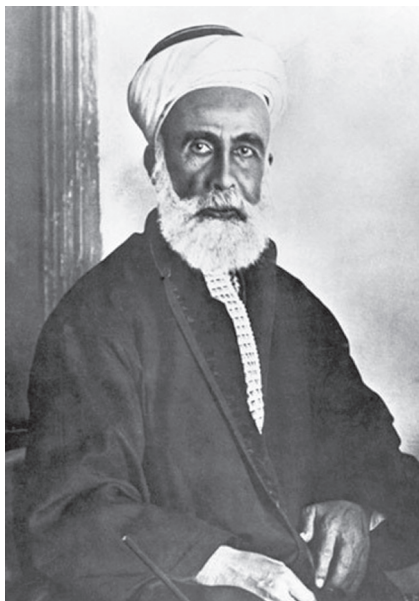
6. I. Friedman, *The Question of Palestine: British-Jewish-Arab Relations, 1914–1918*, New Brunswick–London 1992, pp. 97–118.
7. D.W. Lesch, *Syria*, Cambridge 2019, p. 23.
8. *İslam Mecmuası* (“The Journal of Islam”), published in Istanbul on 19 November 1914 contained a number of documents related to the Ottoman proclamation of Jihad: the Jihad proclamation itself, the call to Jihad by Sultan Mehmed V Reşad (1844–1918), the fatwas issued by the *sheikhülislam*, the statement of military commander, Enver Pasha. *Cihad-i Ekber İlanı ve Fetva-yi şerif*, in: “İslam Mecmuası” 6 Teşrin-I Sani 133, Sayı 10, pp. 440–441.
9. E. Rogan, *Rival jihads: Islam and the Great War in the Middle East, 1914–1918*, “Journal of the British Academy” 4 (2016), pp. 1–20.
10. E.J. Zürcher, *The Ottoman jihad, the German jihad and the sacralization of war*, in: *Jihad and Islam in World War I. Studies on the Ottoman Jihad on the Centenary of Snouck Hurgronje’s “Holy War Made in Germany”*, ed. E.J. Zürcher, Leiden 2016, pp. 13–14.

in the territories of the Central Powers' enemies.<sup>11</sup> This opinion, however, has been criticized as a cliché which does not take into consideration a deeper Ottoman historical context.<sup>12</sup> The Ottoman attempt to turn the Great War into a jihad failed to provoke a mass Muslim revolt against France, Great Britain, and Russia.



Map 4. The Middle East Fronts during the First World War<sup>13</sup>

11. W. Schwanitz, *Euro Islam by 'Jihad Made in Germany'*, in: *Islam in Inter-War Europe*, eds. N. Clayer, E. Germain, New York 1998, pp. 271–286; A.R. Sinno, *The Role of Islam in German Propaganda in the Arab East during the First World War: Aims, Means, Results and Local Reactions*, in: O. Farschid, M. Kropp, and S. Dähne (eds.), *The First World War as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean*, eds. O. Farschid, M. Kropp, S. Dähne, Beirut 2006, pp. 391–414.
12. M. Aksakal, "Holy War Made in Germany?" *Ottoman Origins of the 1914 Jihad*, "War in History" 18/2 (2011), pp. 184–199.
13. *And that's the way it was international affairs, politics, history*, <https://attwiw.com/2017/04/20/this-week-in-middle-eastern-history-the-second-battle-of-gaza-1917/>, [accessed 22/04/2020].



Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-Hāšimī (1853-1931), King of Hejaz, Sharif and Emir of Mecca (photo taken in 1916)<sup>15</sup>

The war soon revealed the weakened position of Great Britain in the world. The 1915 military actions damaged the reputation of the British army, which did not win a single decisive battle on land or sea, and mostly suffered heavy defeats. The situation practically did not change in 1916, although the Triple Entente offensives of 1916 had rocked the Central Powers. The British attempt to win a cheap success in the Middle East also ended in a defeat in the First Battle of Kut (7 December 1915 – 29 April 1916), which sometimes is referred to as "the worst defeat of the Allies in World War I."<sup>14</sup>

In 1916, Britain's dangerous position forced it to seek an alliance with the Arabs against the Turks. The British armies in the Middle East were forced to cooperate more closely with the local political actors taking advantage of the anti-Ottoman sentiments. Starting from 1915, they began to organize a military uprising of the Arab forces against the Ottoman Empire. In historiography, this successful British-Arab project is known as the Great Arab Revolt (1916–1918). Above all, it was a British counteraction against the Ottoman declaration of jihad against the Allies.

The leadership of the Arabs at this time was held by the most active Arab politician Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-Hāšimī (1853–1931), King of Hejaz, Sharif and Emir of Mecca. Although Hejaz was officially administered by the Ottomans, the position of emir was one of prestige and provided a certain measure of autonomy. The ruler of this region ensured the safety of the holiest places of Islam and controlled the course of pilgrimages. That is why Ḥusayn's personal ambitions were somewhat broader. They included

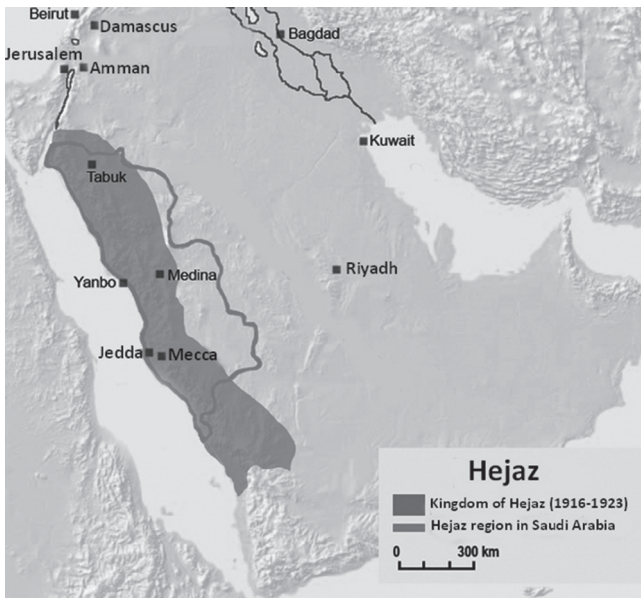
14. Ch. Catherwood, *The Battles of World War I. Everything You Need to Know*, London 2014, p. 51, <https://books.google.com/books?id=gMmMAwAAQBAJ&pg=PT51#v=one-page&q&f=false>, [accessed 22/03/2020].
15. *Sharif Hussein and the Arab Revolt that Created the Modern Middle East*, <https://historycollection.co/sharif-hussein-arab-revolt-created-modern-middle-east/>, [accessed 22/04/2020].



extending his autonomy and securing the hereditary right to the office of the emir of Hejaz for his family.<sup>15</sup>

Ḥusayn's plans, implemented by the activities of his two sons (the second 'Abdallāh [1882–1951] and the third Fayṣal [1885–1933]), also contributed to the success of the Great Arab Revolt. Furthermore, to a large extent, his sons became the architects and planners of the revolt against the Ottoman rule and they themselves led guerilla raids on Turkish garrisons.

Before the revolt, however, the many existing political actors in the region created new interactions and challenges. It is worth noting three factors in particular. Firstly, Ḥusayn had every reason to fight against the Ottoman sultans, who as Caliphs appointed an official known as the Sharif of Mecca. The aversion of the Haṣemite emirs of Mecca to the Ottomans intensified the traditional Sultans' support of inter-familial rivalries in Arabia.



Map 5. The Kingdom of Hejaz (1916–1923) under the Ottoman control<sup>16</sup>

16. *Hejaz*, <https://educalingo.com/en/dic-en/hejaz>, [accessed 22/04/2020].

Secondly, paradoxically enough, at the beginning of 1916, the Sharifian Army, also known as the Arab Army or the Hejazi Army, still fought with the Ottoman troops. Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-Hāšimī played an interesting diplomatic game so that it was unclear whether he would support the British forces. This is evidenced in the 1914 political efforts of Herbert Kitchener (1850–1916). Although Kitchener's meeting with Ḥusayn's son 'Abdallāh on 5 February 1914 has been extensively discussed, the correspondence of the Secretary of State shows further aspects of the British-Arab military cooperation.<sup>17</sup> This collaboration was theoretical and required clarifying and financing the Arab side.

Thirdly, at the beginning of WWI several groups of nationalists and royalists made efforts either for greater Arab autonomy or the establishment of an Arab state. Contrary to popular belief, Arab nationalism was neither widespread nor crystallized at the time. However, although some nationalist initiatives had limited impact, it revealed the range of expectations and ideas of the elite about Greater Syria or the Arab kingdom. It also became a symbol for the next generations of Syrians.

### Reward for cooperation: the British promises of an Arab state. Proposals and negotiations

One of the first specific plans of the Arab state included so-called Damascus Protocol. This document was given by the members of the Arab secret societies *al-Ġam'iyya al-'arabiyya al-fatāh* (the Young Arab Society) and *al-Ġam'iyyat al-'Ahd* (the Covenant Society) to Fayṣal (1885–1933), third son of Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī (the future king of Iraq) on 23 May 1915. The secret societies declared that they would fully support the revolt of King Ḥusayn against the Ottomans if the protocol proposals were submitted to the British diplomacy. These political expectations of the Arabs defined the territory of an independent Arab state after WWI.<sup>18</sup>

17. *Lord Kitchener to Sir Edward Grey*, F.O. 6672/6672/14/44 (no. 22.) Secret. Cairo, D. February 6, 1914. R. 14 February 14, 1914; *Sir L. Mallet to Sir Edward Grey*, F.O. 13871/4688/14/44. (no.193) Constantinople, D. March 18, 1914, R. March 30, 1914; *Lord Kitchener to Sir Edward Grey*, F.O. 15883/4588/14/44. (no. 58.) Confidential. Cairo, D. April 4, 1914. R. April 11, 1914; *Lord Kitchener to Sir W. Tyrrell*, Grey MSS., vol. 9. British Agency, Cairo, April 26, 1914. in: *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, eds. G.P. Gooch, H. Temperley, L.M. Penson, London 1938, pp. 824–838.
18. J. Schmeer, *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, New York 2010, p. 91.



At this moment, the nationalists might have understood that they were not very influential in Arab politics and they acknowledged Ḥusayn, King of Hejaz, as the most recognizable advocate of the Arab state in the West. They also knew that Ḥusayn had already been involved in correspondence on the same subject with the British through ‘Abdallāh.

Ironically, the original version of the first specific territorial plan of the Arab state after the fall of the Ottomans has not survived. Historians must rely on the English translation of a copy of the protocol given to the Lebanese-Egyptian diplomat, one of the first historians of Arab nationalism, Ğūrġ Ḥabīb ‘Anṭūnyūs (1891–1941) by Fayṣal:

The recognition by Great Britain of the independence of the Arab countries lying within the following frontiers:

North: The Line Mersin-Adana to parallel 37N. and thence along the line Birejek-Urga-Mardin-Midiat-Jazirat (Ibn ‘Unear)-Amadia to the Persian frontier;

East: The Persian frontier down to the Persian Gulf;

South: The Indian Ocean (with the exclusion of Aden, whose status was to be maintained).

West: The Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea back to Mersin. The abolition of all exceptional privileges granted to foreigners under the capitulations.

The conclusion of a defensive alliance between Great Britain and the future independent Arab State.

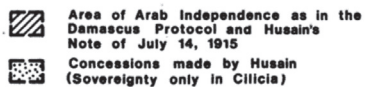
The grant of economic preference to Great Britain.<sup>20</sup>



Fayṣal ibn Ḥusayn (1885–1933)<sup>19</sup>

19. *Man of the moment. A revisionist history of an Iraqi king*, <https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2014/02/11/man-of-the-moment>, [accessed 22/04/2020].

20. The English translation of the Damascus Protocol (1938), based on a copy of the protocol given to Ğūrġ Ḥabīb ‘Anṭūnyūs by king Fayṣal: *Damascus Protocol*, in: G. Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, London 1938, pp. 157–158.



Map 6. The Arab Kingdom envisioned in the Damascus Protocol<sup>21</sup>

According to the Damascus Protocol, the Arab nationalists had very ambitious expectations concerning “the recognition by Great Britain of the independence of the Arab state” after the war, which would include the Arabian Peninsula, Palestine, and what is now Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.<sup>22</sup> In exchange for the British support, the future government of the Arab State committed itself to ‘the grant of economic preference to Great Britain.’<sup>23</sup>

This extremely important document reflects the vision of the Arab world after the First World War in the main currents of Arab nationalism.

It is significant to recognize the territory of Greater Syria and the Arabian Peninsula as a homogeneous whole.

Although Fayṣal expressed doubts as to the fulfilment of these demands by the Allies, the Damascus Protocol formed the basis of Sharif Ḥusayn's claims for an enlarged Arab Kingdom during the Ḥusayn-McMahon correspondence that initiated the Arab Revolt in June 1916.

From July 1915 to March 1916, a series of letters were exchanged between Sharif of Mecca Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī al-Hāšimī and the British High Commissioner to Egypt Lieutenant Colonel Sir Henry McMahon (1862–1949). This correspondence of ten letters includes a proposal of the recognition of Arabs' independence after the war in exchange for Ḥusayn launching an Arab Revolt against the Ottoman forces.<sup>24</sup> Ḥusayn, who claimed the right to

21. *The End of World War One in the Middle East*, [https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/5gc8jq/askhistorians\\_podcast\\_076\\_the\\_end\\_of\\_world\\_war/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/5gc8jq/askhistorians_podcast_076_the_end_of_world_war/), [accessed 22/04/2020].
22. *Damascus Protocol*, in: G. Antonius, *The Arab Awakening...*, p. 157.
23. *Ibid.*, p.158.
24. The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (July 15 – August 1916) includes: No. 1: *The letter from Sharif Husayn of Mecca to Sir Henry McMahon, His Majesty's High Commissioner at Cairo*, July 14, 1915; No. 2: *The letter from McMahon to Husayn*, August 30, 1915; No. 3: *The letter from Husayn to McMahon*, September 9, 1915; No. 4: *The letter from McMahon to Husayn*, October 24, 1915; No. 5: *The letter from Husayn to*

represent all Arabs, consistently worked for independence for all Arab-speaking regions east of Egypt. He knew the main problems of the British armies in the Middle East. In a letter of July 14, 1915 he wrote:

Whereas the whole of the Arab nation without any exception have decided in these last years to accomplish their freedom, and grasp the reins of their administration both in theory and practice; and whereas they have found and felt that it is in the interest of the Government of Great Britain to support them and aid them in the attainment of their firm and lawful intentions<sup>25</sup>

The Ḥusayn-McMahon correspondence Ḥusayn basically repeated the territorial expectations expressed earlier in the Damascus Protocol:

England will acknowledge the independence of the Arab countries, bounded on the north by Mersina and Adana up to the 37<sup>th</sup> degree of latitude, on which degree fall Birijik, Urfa, Mardin, Midiat, Jezirat (Ibn 'Umar), Amadia, up to the border of Persia; on the east by the borders of Persia up to the Gulf of Basra; on the south by the Indian Ocean, with



Sir Henry McMahon (1862–1949),  
British Indian Army officer, diplomat,  
High Commissioner in Egypt (1915–1917)<sup>26</sup>

*McMahon*, November 5, 1915; No. 6: *The letter from McMahon to Husayn*, December 14, 1915; No. 7: *The letter from Husayn to McMahon*, January 1, 1916; No. 8: *The letter from McMahon to Husayn*, January 25, 1916; No. 9: *The letter from Husayn to McMahon*, February 18, 1916; No. 10: *The letter from McMahon to Husayn*, March 10, 1916; in: *Jewish Virtual Library, Pre-State Israel: The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (July 15 – August 1916) I*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hussein-mcmahon-correspondence-july-1915-august-1916#1>, [accessed 12/05/2020].

25. *Translation of a letter from Sharif Husayn of Mecca to Sir Henry McMahon, His Majesty's High Commissioner at Cairo*, July 14, 1915, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hussein-mcmahon-correspondence-july-1915-august-1916#1>, [accessed 12/05/2020].
26. *Henry McMahon*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_McMahon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_McMahon), [accessed 22/04/2020].



Map 7. Arab Kingdom as agreed in the McMahon-Husayn Correspondence (1915–1916)<sup>27</sup>

the exception of the position of Aden to remain as it is; on the west by the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea up to Mersina. England to approve the proclamation of an Arab Khalifate of Islam.<sup>28</sup>

McMahon believed that some areas should fall within the French sphere of influence. These were the districts of Mersin and Alexandrietta as well as the areas west of Damascus (Ḥimṣ, Ḥamāh and Aleppo; i.e. Modern Lebanon):

The two districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo cannot be said to be purely Arab, and should be excluded from the limits demanded.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, McMahon suggested that British influence in Baghdad and Basra should not be weakened:

With regard to the vilayets of Bagdad and Basra, the Arabs will recognise that the established position and interests of Great Britain necessitate special administrative arrangements in order to secure these territories from foreign aggression, to promote the welfare of the local populations and to safeguard our mutual economic interests.<sup>30</sup>

27. *World Future Fund, British Lies to the Arabs in World War I*, <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/Reports/Imperialism/britainlies.html>, [accessed 22/04/2020].
28. *Translation of a letter from Sharif Husayn of Mecca to Sir Henry McMahon, His Majesty's High Commissioner at Cairo*, July 14, 1915; *Translation of a letter from McMahon to Husayn*, August 30, 1915, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hussein-mcmahon-correspondence-july-1915-august-1916#1>, [accessed 12/05/2020].
29. *Translation of a letter from McMahon to Husayn*, October 24, 1915; <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hussein-mcmahon-correspondence-july-1915-august-1916#1>, [accessed 12/05/2020].
30. *Translation of a letter from McMahon to Husayn*, October 24, 1915; <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hussein->

October 24 1915

1. Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sherif of Mecca.

2. Great Britain will guarantee the Holy Places against all external aggression and will recognise their inviolability.

3. When the situation admits, Great Britain will give to the Arabs her advice and will assist them to establish what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government in those various territories.

I am convinced that this declaration will assure you beyond all possible doubt of the sympathy of Great Britain towards the aspirations of her friends the Arabs and will result in a firm and lasting alliance, the immediate results of which will be the expulsion of the Turks from the Arab countries and the freeing of the Arab peoples from the Turkish yoke, which for so many years has pressed heavily upon them.

A. H. McMahon  
*A. McMahon*

Letter of McMahon dated on 24 October 1915 from the so-called McMahon-Ḥusayn Correspondence<sup>31</sup>

Ḥusayn, who worked for the territorial unity of the new state, agreed only to some concessions for the French. He believed that British activities in Baghdad and Basra must be subjected to certain rules,<sup>32</sup> which McMahon refused. Eventually, the discussed issues were postponed. The importance of this correspondence should not be overstated.

mcmahon-correspondence-july-1915-august-1916#1, [accessed 12/05/2020].

31. *The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence*, <https://sites.google.com/site/worldwariclass3a/war-in-the-middle-east/the-hussein-mcmahon-correspondence>, [accessed 22/04/2020].
32. *Translation of a letter from Husayn to McMahon*, January 1, 1916; <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hussein-mcmahon-correspondence-july-1915-august-1916#1>, [accessed 12/05/2020].

This highly ambiguous correspondence cannot be treated as a formal treaty, and some key questions remained unresolved.

### Cooperation and betrayal or just contradiction? The myth of the Great Arab Revolt and the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement

When in early June 1916 the Ottoman government demanded that Husayn cooperate closely with Turkish Hijazi troops and issue a call for jihad from Mecca in support of the Ottoman engagement in World War I, Husayn asked for a greater autonomy for Hejaz. The Ottoman authorities rejected his request, which definitely sealed the fate of the reorientation of the Arab actors in the Middle East.

The British promises to establish an independent Arab state strengthened the cooperation of the Hashimite dynasty of Hejaz with the British. In the beginning, the Hashimites were inclined to trust the British declarations of rulership of the royal family of Hejaz over

the former Arabic Ottoman provinces. Nevertheless, the so-called Great Arab Revolt was not "a spontaneous revolution of Arabs against Ottoman tyranny." It strictly depended on Husayn's policy and the Sharifian Army of Hejaz. These forces had a significant potential. For example, in 1917, the Ottoman troops in the Hejaz consisted of 20,000 men.<sup>33</sup>



Units of Sharif Husayn, and main forces of the Great Arab Revolt, which helped British to create the Modern Middle East (1916–1918)<sup>34</sup>

33. D. Murphy, *The Arab Revolt 1916–18 Lawrence sets Arabia Ablaze*, London 2008, p. 24.

34. *Centenary of the Great Arab Revolt*, <http://www.rasheedsworld.com/centenary-of-the-great-arab-revolt/>, [accessed 22/04/2020].

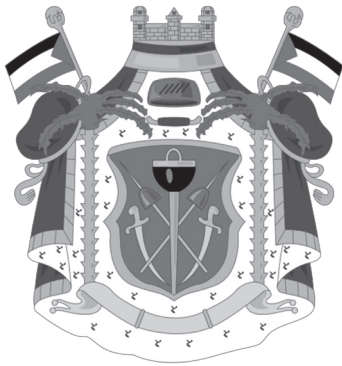


Their opponents numbered definitely more. Although the Arab forces varied, the core of the regular Sharifian Army consisted of about 4,000–5,000 soldiers<sup>35</sup> but together with irregular units, it numbered ca. 30,000 (usually divided into four groups led by Ḥusayn's sons).<sup>36</sup>

In modern Arabic historiography and many Western studies, the Great Arab Revolt is uncritically viewed as a symbol of Arab nationalism. For many authors, like Ğürğ Ḥabīb 'Anṭūnyūs, it was simply a culmination of the "Arab awakening," which had been developing in the Middle East for several decades.<sup>37</sup> It seems to be a typical mistake resulting from forgetting the meanders of Ḥusayn's policy and his version of "nationalism."<sup>38</sup> Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-Hāšimī spent most of his life in Constantinople. Supposedly, he spoke Turkish better than Arabic, and until 1916 he was seen as a loyal Ottoman official. Prior to 1914, Arab nationalism was a marginal phenomenon. Historians have determined that out of approximately ten million Arabs living in the Ottoman Empire, only 350 were involved in various rebellious nationalist groups. Moreover, most of them sought autonomy, not independence.

In fact, Ḥusayn started to use certain postulates of Arab nationalism only after he began a revolt against the Ottoman government in June 1916. However, even then Arab nationalism was exclusively one of the many arguments that he basically used to make claims of a more pan-Islamic character. Ḥusayn actually wanted to build a state within the framework of a Muslim Umma rather than as a civil, secular society.<sup>39</sup> Besides, historians disagree when exactly Arab nationalism began.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the vagueness and ambiguity characterizing the ideology of Arab nationalism made the movement

35. D. Murphy, *The Arab Revolt 1916–18 Lawrence sets Arabia Ablaze...*, op. cit., p. 36.
36. D. Murphy, *The Arab Revolt 1916–18 Lawrence sets Arabia Ablaze...*, op. cit., pp. 20–23.
37. For example, according to George Antonius, Arab nationalism was born under the rule of the Ottoman Empire but erupted with the Arab Revolt from 1916 to 1918. G. Antonius, *The Arab Awakening...*, op. cit., pp. 216–242.
38. E. Karsh, I. Karsh, *Myth in the desert, or not the Great Arab Revolt*, in: "Journal Middle Eastern Studies" 33/2 (1997), pp. 267–312.
39. E. Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*, New Haven 2006, pp. 128–129.
40. G. Antonius, *The Arab Awakening...*, op. cit., pp. 217–240; A. Ayyad, *Arab Nationalism and the Palestinians, 1850–1939*, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 33–66; H. Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918*, Berkeley 1997, pp. 36–50; B.M. Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism, and the Palestine Question 1908–1941, a Political History*, United Kingdom: Ithaca Press 1998; Ch. Saint-Prot, *Le nationalisme arabe*, Paris: Ellipses 1995; D.S. Thomas, *The First Arab Congress and the Committee of Union and Progress, 1913–1914*, in: *Essays on*



Emblem of the Hashemite  
Kingdom of Hejaz 1916–1925<sup>44</sup>

unreliable in many fronts such as the struggle with Zionism (which clearly transpired during the Arab Congress in Paris in 1913).<sup>41</sup>

It is also difficult to find many selfless figures fighting for pan-Arabism among the participants of the Great Arab Revolt, especially in the early days of this uprising. Fayṣal's forces consisted mainly of Bedouins, who only formed loose allied units. Loyalty to the tribe's interests prevailed over the ruler's policy. Moreover, the Bedouins fought as mercenary soldiers for golden coins or other forms of payment rather than because of political motives.<sup>42</sup> For example, by the end of 1916, the French spent 1.25 million gold francs to finance the rebellion and in September 1918, the British used £ 220,000 to subsidize the uprising.<sup>43</sup> Fayṣal's plan to convince the Arab troops serving in the Ottoman Army to support the Great Arab Revolt failed. These units were simply sent by Turkish command to the Western front-lines of the war.

Looking through the prism of sources, it seems that Ḥusayn was the creator of the "Hashemism" trend rather than a follower of "Arabism." His diplomacy was not marked by a rhetoric of necessity in the vein of "liberation of the Arab people after centuries from the chains of Ottoman slavery." According to some authors, in contrast to the Arab nationalist mythology, there was not anything like "the Great Arab Revolt," but first of all

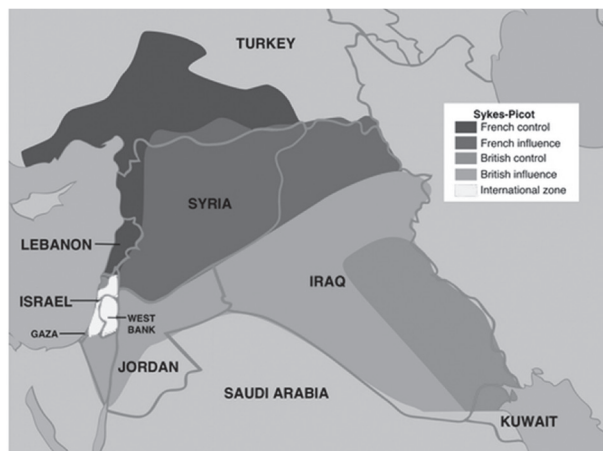
*Islamic Civilization*, ed. D.P. Little, Leiden 1976, pp. 317–328.  
Tibi, Bassam. *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry*, New York 1981.

41. A. Ayyad, *Arab Nationalism and the Palestinians, 1850–1939...*, op. cit., p. 56.
42. D. Murphy, *The Arab Revolt 1916–18 Lawrence sets Arabia Ablaze...*, op. cit., p. 21; M. Korda, *Hero: The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia*, New York 2010, p. 19.
43. D. Murphy, *The Arab Revolt 1916–18 Lawrence sets Arabia Ablaze...*, op. cit., pp. 21–24.
44. *Coat of arms of Kingdom of Hejaz*, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat\\_of\\_arms\\_of\\_Kingdom\\_of\\_Hejaz.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_arms_of_Kingdom_of_Hejaz.svg), [accessed 22/04/2020].

Ḥusayn's personal ambitions to build a new state.<sup>45</sup> Anyway, at that point Arab nationalism was rather an elite ideology in the process of crystallization.

The British promises given to Fayṣal were incompatible with the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, secretly concluded between Britain and France<sup>46</sup> (16 May 1916). The agreement involved the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire between Triple Entente and Russia.<sup>47</sup> Retrospectively, the Sykes-Picot agreement with Britain's Balfour Declaration of 1917 became shorthand for the whole narrative of the Western betrayal and conspiracy in the Middle East.<sup>48</sup>

According to the agreement, the Ottoman provinces outside the Arabian Peninsula would be divided by the so-called Sykes-Picot line. The secret deal gave the French control over an area extending southeast from today's Turkey, across northern Iraq and Syria and all the way to Libya.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand,



Map 8. French and British zones of influences according to the Sykes-Picot agreement (1916)<sup>49</sup>

45. E. Karsh, I. Karsh, *Myth in the desert, or not the Great Arab Revolt...*, op. cit., p. 126.
46. I. Pappé, *Sir Alec Kirkbride and the Making of Greater Transjordan*, in: "Asian and African Studies" 23 (1989), p. 46.
47. The adopted negotiating directives, the subsequent conduct of negotiations and the conclusion of the negotiations can be traced by a refined causal link analysis based on *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, series 1, vol. IV, eds. E.L. Woodward, R. Butler, London 1947, pp. 241–251.
48. A.T. Anghie, *Introduction to Symposium on the Many Lives and Legacies of Sykes-Picot*, in: "American Journal of International Law" 110 (2016), pp. 105–108.
49. *The Sykes-Picot Agreement*, <https://historyfortomorrow.wordpress.com/2016/05/12/the-sykes-picot-agreement/>, [accessed 22/04/2020].
50. F.W. Brecher, *French Policy toward the Levant 1914–18*, in: "Middle Eastern Studies" 29/4 (1993), pp. 641–663; E.P. Fitzgerald, *France's Middle Eastern ambitions, the Sykes-Picot negotiations, and the oil fields of Mosul, 1915–1918*, in: "Journal of Modern History" 66/4 (1994), pp. 697–725.

the agreement allocated to Britain the control of a region which is today's southern Israel and Palestine, Jordan and southern Iraq, and an additional small area that included the ports of Haifa and Acre to allow access to the Mediterranean.

The area between the two — that is, present Syria, Jordan, western Iraq and the north-eastern portion of the Arabian Peninsula — was to become an Arab kingdom under a joint French-British mandate. In modern Syrian and Palestinian discourse, Sykes-Picot became a watchword. In any case, for a long time it was “a shorthand explanation for the latest upheaval in the Middle East that rolls easily off every tongue.”<sup>51</sup> In fact, the Sykes-Picot agreement established artificial borders which failed to reflect the demographic, cultural and social identity of the varied communities that had lived under the Ottoman suzerainty for centuries.<sup>52</sup>

The Arab revolt, which began in June 1916, definitely ended with the conquest of Aleppo in October 1918.<sup>53</sup> In 1918, Fayṣal I, full of hope, continued a revolt against the Turks as a fairly good leader and an astute diplomat systematically occupying new areas of the Levant, effectively ending the Ottoman rule there. Fayṣal tried to convince the Great Powers, particularly Britain, to live up to their promises of Arab self-determination in the Middle East.

He referred to the previously presented plan to create a great Arab kingdom which would unite all Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia (Iraq). The Hāshimites did not make claims to Egypt, since from 1914 this country declared Egypt's independence from the Ottoman Empire and the protectorate of the United Kingdom.

In fact, the plans of France and England for the region, which were literally determined by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, had a profound economic and strategic background. The Arab oil fields as well as other economic and political motivations caused them to break their promises given

51. S. McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908–1923*, London: Allen Lane 2015, *Introduction: The Sykes-Picot Myth and the Modern Middle East*, p. 8.

52. R. Khalidi, *British Policy towards Syria and Palestine 1906–1914, a study of the antecedents of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Balfour Declaration*, London 1980; T. Dodge, *The Danger of Analogical Myths: Explaining the Power and Consequences of the Sykes-Picot Delusion*, in: “American Journal of International Law” 110 (2016), pp. 132–136.

53. D. Pipes, *Greater Syria: the History of an Ambition*, New York 1990, p. 23.

to Fayṣal. The emir quickly came to understand the double standards of the Great Powers' policy and finally tried to negotiate realistically the creation of some form of state of Greater Syria.

Fayṣal, as military leader who with the help of Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888–1935), organized the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire, did not squander the strength of the Arab units in direct attacks on fortified Turkish positions.

The guerrilla tactic of the Arab revolt has been the subject of serious military studies.<sup>55</sup> Fayṣal's forces were unsuited to pitched battles with the Turks but ceaselessly raided extended Turkish lines of communications. As a result, the Ottoman offensives against the Hāshimite troops often faltered due to supply problems rather than defeats in regular battles.<sup>56</sup> Most of the Arabs' actions took place along the axis of the Hejaz railway. Although it was originally built to transport pilgrims from Damascus to Medina during WWI, the Turks used it for military purposes.<sup>57</sup>

When the Arab Revolt gradually spread northwards to the gates of Damascus, the British troops stopped in front of the capital of Syria allowing the Arab units of Fayṣal to capture the city and form the Arab Military Government in Syria. In this way, when the Turkish rule



The flag of the Ottoman Empire, design officially adopted in 1844<sup>54</sup>

54. *Flags of the Ottoman Empire*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flags\\_of\\_the\\_Ottoman\\_Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flags_of_the_Ottoman_Empire), [accessed 22/04/2020].
55. H. Leach, *Lawrence's strategy and tactics in the Arab revolt*, in: "Asian Affairs" 37/3 (2006), p. 337–341; D. Murphy, *The Arab Revolt 1916–18 Lawrence sets Arabia Ablaze*, London 2008; S. Anderson, *Lawrence in Arabia. War, deceit, imperial folly and the making of the modern Middle East*, London 2014; G. Antonius, *The Arab awakening. The story of the Arab national movement*, London 1938; J.L. Gelvin, *Divided loyalties. Nationalism and mass politics in Syria at the close of empire*, Berkeley 1998.
56. D. Murphy, *The Arab Revolt 1916–18 Lawrence sets Arabia Ablaze...*, op. cit., p. 24.
57. H. Leach, *Lawrence's strategy and tactics in the Arab revolt*, in: "Asian Affairs" 37/3 (2006), p. 337.



Map 10. The Great Arab Revolt (1916–1918)<sup>58</sup>



Syrian flag

30 Sep 1918 – 8 Mar 1920  
(in fact it was the flag  
of the Kingdom of Hejaz)<sup>59</sup>

ceased in Damascus on 30 September 1918, Arab flags were hoisted, and a committee of Arab notables assumed control of the city before the arrival of any British allied troops. This British gesture was purely symbolic. The British seemed to favor Arab over French administration in Damascus, which probably resulted from earlier coalition promises.

In fact, when the allied powers entered Syria, they found the provincial administrative divisions of the Ottoman Empire (the territorial borders of Syria were virtually non-existent during the late Ottoman period). The British troops under Marshal Edmund Henry Allenby (1861–1936) were also restricted by the secret Sykes-Picot agreement. On the other hand, until the last moment, the Arabs were receiving promises of an independent state.

Along these lines, the British command and diplomats found themselves in an awkward position, being forced to take into account several claims by various political actors. That's why the British decided to divide the seized Ottoman territories into three military administrations (Arab, French, and Zionist) called the Occupied Enemy Territory Administrations. All of the three military zones were commanded by Marshal Edmund Henry Allenby.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, General Allenby assigned to the Arab administration only the interior regions of Syria (the eastern zone). Palestine (the southern zone) was reserved for the British, and on 8 October, French troops disembarked in Beirut and occupied all the Lebanese coastal region up to Naqoura (the western zone), replacing the British troops there. The French immediately

58. *The Arab Revolt*, <https://awayfromthewesternfront.org/campaigns/egypt-palestine-syria-arabia/arab-revolt/>, [accessed 22/04/2020].
59. *Pan-Arab Colours. Arab Revolt Flag, Arab Liberation Flag*, <http://www.flagchart.net/flags/arabcol.html>, [accessed 22/04/2020].
60. D. Pipes, *Greater Syria: the History of an Ambition...*, op. cit., p. 23.



dissolved local Arab governments in the region. The French demanded a full implementation of the Sykes–Picot Agreement and the placement of Syria under their control. On 26 November 1919, the British withdrew from Damascus to avoid confrontation with the French, leaving the Arab government face to face with the French.

### The end of World War I and the 1919 Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey (The King–Crane Commission)

World War I, with its important implications for Syria, officially ended at 11 a.m. on 11 November 1918, but for the Middle East it ceased 11 days earlier with the armistice of 31 October 1918, which put an end to the hostilities between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies. Almost six months later, a treaty and a protocol were signed at Versailles on 28 June 1919. After a few months, the treaty was registered by the Secretariat of the League of Nations on 21 October 1919. In turn, the process-verbal of the first deposit of ratifications was accepted in Paris on 10 January 1920. This transitional period between 11 November 1918 and 10 January 1920 did not bring stability or peace to Syria, which, along with Palestine and Mesopotamia (Iraq), was under British control in 1918. At the same time, British, French and Greek forces stood ready to march across the Bulgarian border and to occupy the Ottoman Thrace and Constantinople (Sultan Mehmed VI Vahideddin, 1861–1926 even feared that he would be deposed).<sup>61</sup>

During the Paris Peace Conference, the U.S. President Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) recommended a commission of inquiry concerning the disposition of areas within the former Ottoman Empire. It was officially called "the 1919 Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey," nowadays it is more commonly known as the King-Crane Commission. Initially, the delegation was supposed to be led by French, British, Italian, and American representatives. However, it ended as an investigation conducted solely by the American government after the other countries withdrew to avoid – as it was well-expressed by Anthony Nutting (1920–199) – the risk of being "confronted by recommendations from their own appointed delegates which might conflict with their policies."<sup>62</sup>

61. M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*, New York: Random House 2002; A. Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking After the First World War, 191–1923*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York 2008; A. Swayze, *The End of World War I: The Treaty of Versailles and its Tragic Legacy*, New York 2014.

62. A. Nutting, *The Arabs: A Narrative History from Mohammed to the Present*, London 1965, p. 68.

The King-Crane Commission, formed after the failure of attempts at creating an Anglo-French group, was headed by the Oberlin College President Henry Churchill King (1858–1954) and the Chicago businessman Charles Richard Crane (1858–1939). The delegation wanted to visit many areas of the Ottoman provinces, focusing on the non-Turkish regions of Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Cilicia, and Armenia, which would almost certainly be separated from Turkey. However, as the Paris Peace Conference was just to begin, the Commissioners decided to limit their fact-finding to Syria and Palestine. Between 10 June and 21 July 1919, the commission received numerous delegations and processed petitions from various

religious and political groups of Greater Syria. The King-Crane Commission tried to identify the wishes of the inhabitants of the region as their future was being determined by the major powers at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>63</sup>

Regarding the idea of Greater Syria, the King-Crane Commission found that the vast majority of Arabs favored an independent Syria, free of

any mandate. Furthermore, out of about 1,875 petitions received, 72 percent presented a clearly negative attitude



Map 11. The King—Crane Commission recommendation for the peace negotiations in Versailles 1919<sup>64</sup>

63. See anonymous document, labeled as "Secret," which established the purpose and guidelines for the Commission: *Instructions for Commissioners, 25 March 1919. Future administration of certain portions of the Turkish Empire under the mandatory system*, in: Henry Churchill King Presidential Papers, Record Group 2/6, box 128, folder 1, Oberlin College Archive, <http://dcollections.oberlin.edu/cdm/ref/collection/kingcrane/id/230>, [accessed 22/02/2020].

64. *The King-Crane Commission*, <http://www.robswebstek.com/2016/05/the-king-crane-commission.html>, [accessed 22/04/2020].

towards the Zionist plan for a Jewish national home in Palestine. Such findings led the commission to advise a serious modification of the Zionist immigration program in Palestine.

As already mentioned, until 1920 the word "Syria" referred to a region much larger than the Syrian Arab Republic of today. For this reason, in 1919–1920 the local elites believed that the region stretching from the borders of Anatolia to Egypt, from the edge of Iraq to the Mediterranean Sea, could form a single state.

Anyway, the King-Crane Commission itself postulated a single mandatory power to a unified Greater Syria and the United States as a partner which would help steer Syria towards democracy and independence.<sup>66</sup> At that time, the majority of the Palestinian population strongly opposed the separation of Palestine from Greater Syria.<sup>67</sup> The US suggestion that an international commission should determine whether the population wanted an Arab kingdom (Greater Syria) or being submitted to the French and British mandates was controversial from the very beginning of the commission's operation.

The findings of the King-Crane Commission showed support for an Arab kingdom, but it was painfully obvious that the French and British would reject any arrangements that could destroy the Sykes-Picot Agreement.



The King-Crane Commission at the Hotel Royal, Beirut, July 1919 (Oberlin College Archives) Seated at table, Commissioners King (left) and Crane (right). Standing, left to right: Sami Haddad; Captain William Yale, Albert H. Lybyer and George R. Montgomery; Donald M. Brodie; and Laurence S. Moore.<sup>65</sup>

65. *An Expose of the Biases and Inaccuracies regarding the issue of Zionism and Palestine in an American Report dated 1919*, <http://www.jewishmag.co.il/169mag/king-crane-report/king-crane-report.htm>, [accessed 20/04/2020].
66. A. Patrick, *America's Forgotten Middle East Initiative: The King-Crane Commission of 1919*, London—New York 2015, pp. 176–177.
67. S.P. Duggan, *The Syrian Question*, in: "The Journal of International Relations" 11/4 (1921), p. 583.

Naturally, the Arab elites, especially the Syrian nationalists grouped in the society *al-Fatat* (the Young Arab Society), realized that, historically, Greater Syria was immeasurably characterized by its political and cultural diversity. This pluralism, however, was considered actually an advantage, a kind of a spiritual handicap that so many groups could contribute to build a new Syrian/Arab national identity. The main goal of Syrian nationalists was to gain independence and unify various Arab territories that were then under the Ottoman rule. This idea indeed found adherents in many areas of Greater Syria despite the arrangements of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, which became apparent in the French and British politics in the Middle East.<sup>68</sup> It is interesting how England and France played the Syrian case. According to the Anglo-French declaration of 8 November 1918, *al-Fatat* received the first opportunity to present its ideological lines.<sup>69</sup>

It is true that the majority of the Syrian nationalists pinned their hopes on Fayṣal, the victorious hero of the Arab Revolt of 1916–1918 (see below the information about the briefly-lived Syrian kingdom). They advocated complete independence for an Arab Kingdom that would unite Arabs under one king. That was also exactly the point of the King-Crane Commission in 1919.<sup>70</sup> However, the claim of "one Arab nation" had to be confronted with the bitter reality of the active presence of the Great Powers in the Middle East. Exactly, the attitudes towards the European influence divided *al-Fatat* into roughly three factions when the King-Crane Commission operated in the Middle East. The first faction, known as "the dissenters" (*al-rāfiḍūn*), rejected any European control over Syria questioning not only the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, but also a Jewish homeland in Palestine, especially the 1917 Balfour Declaration.<sup>71</sup>

This faction gathered many great intellectuals and activists, like Muḥammad 'Izzat Darwaza (1888–1984),<sup>72</sup> Muḥammad Rafīq al-Tamīmī (1889–1957),<sup>73</sup>

68. J. Zdanowski, *Historia Bliskiego Wschodu w XX wieku*, Wrocław 2010, p. 17; J. McHugo, *Syria. From the Great War to the Civil War*, Londyn 2014, pp. 50–55; J. Żebrowski, *Dzieje Syrii od czasów najdawniejszych do współczesności*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 156–161.

69. E. Tauber, *The Formation of Modern Iraq and Syria*, London 1995, p. 11.

70. A. Patrick, *America's Forgotten Middle East Initiative...*, op. cit., p. 176.

71. J.L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1998, p. 62.

72. M.Y. Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism*, New York 1989, pp. 193–196.

73. B. Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900*, Berkeley 1995, p. 127.

Aḥmad al-Muraywid (1886–1926)<sup>74</sup> and Muḥammad Kamāl al-Qaṣṣāb (1853–1954).<sup>75</sup> The second faction of *Al-Fatat* was closely linked with Emir Fayṣal and the Hashemites. It strongly supported the British influence instead of the French control, advocating modifications of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Finally, the third faction unrealistically argued for an American supervision over Syria.<sup>76</sup>



Muḥammad 'Izzat Darwaza (1888–1984, seated centrally), the Ottoman official in Palestine and Lebanon, activist of Arab nationalism and follower of the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire in 1916, member of the nationalist *al-Fatat* society<sup>77</sup>

The paths delineated by the King-Crane Commission were not taken in the post-Ottoman Middle East. When the final report of the 1919 Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey was passed to the Paris Peace Conference and communicated to Washington, it was initially ignored. Political orientations at the conference went in a different direction than the wishes of the people of Greater Syria. The King-Crane Commission proposals became unacceptable, which was most evident in the Syrian Palestinian project (the expectations of the inhabitants of Palestine):

74. M. 'Ubaydā, *Aḥmad Maraywid, 1886–1926: qā'id tawrat al-Ġawlān wa-ġanūb Lubnān wa-šarq al-Urdun*, Beirut 1997.
75. A.A. Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq*, New Haven 2014, pp. 260–261.
76. J.L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria...*, op. cit., p. 62.
77. *Istiqlal circa 1932. Al-Abboushi standing third from left*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fahmi\\_al-Abboushi#/media/File:Istiqlal.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fahmi_al-Abboushi#/media/File:Istiqlal.jpg), [accessed 22/04/2020].

The Moslems constitute about four-fifths of the actual population of Palestine, according to a recent British census. Except for certain official groups they were practically unanimous for the independence of United Syria, and were responsive to the current political influences. The organizations met at Jaffa took the position that Syria is capable of self-government without a mandatory power, but if one should be insisted upon by the Peace Conference, they preferred the United States.<sup>78</sup>

The Arab opinions and aspirations in the aftermath of the Great War were not taken into account. In 1919, the Allied Powers: England and France, agreed on a final shape of modern Syria. A boundary was drawn roughly halfway across Syria from east to west, dividing the traditional Great Syrian rectangle into two parts. The birth of modern Syria as "a reduced version of Greater Syria" was to be strictly associated with the French mandate. However, before France fully took control over Syria, some circumstances and events led to grave consequences.

Emir Fayṣal ibn Ḥusayn participated at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and demanded Arab independence:

The country from the line Alexandretta-Persia southward to the Indian Ocean is inhabited by "Arabs" — by which we mean people of closely related Semitic stocks, all speaking the one language, Arabic. The non-Arabic-speaking elements in this area do not, I believe, exceed one per cent, of the whole.<sup>79</sup>

Fayṣal portrayed himself as the representative of Syrian/Arab nationalism:

The aim of the Arab nationalist movements (of which my father became the leader in war after combined appeals from the Syrian and Mesopotamian branches) is to unite the Arabs eventually into one nation. As an old member of the Syrian Committee

78. *Report of the American Section of the International Commission on Mandates in Turkey*, Paris, August 28, 1919, in: *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, the Paris Peace Conference*, 1919, vol. XII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv12/d380>, [accessed 22/04/2020].

79. *Memorandum by the Emir Feisal, January 1st, 1919, document No 250*, in: *My diary at the Conference of Paris, with documents*, ed. D.H. Miller, New York 1924, p. 297.





Fayçal  
ibn Ĥusayn  
at the Paris  
Peace  
Conference  
in 1919<sup>80</sup>

I commanded the Syrian revolt, and had under me Syrians, Mesopotamians, and Arabians.<sup>81</sup>

The Emir tirelessly presented the Hashemites' plan in the document entitled *Territorial Claims of the Government of the Hedjaz* (January 29th, 1919):

As representing my father, who, by request of Britain and France, led the Arab rebellion against the Turks, I have come to ask that the Arabic-speaking peoples of Asia, from the line Alexandretta-Diarbekr southward to the Indian Ocean, be recognized as independent sovereign peoples, under the guarantee of the League of Nations. The Hedjaz, which is already a sovereign State, and Aden, which is a British dependency, are excluded from the Arab demand. The confirmation of the States already existing in the area, the adjustment of their boundaries with one another, with the Hedjaz, and with the British at Aden, and the formation of such new States as are required, and their boundaries, are matters for arrangement

80. *History of Iraq part I: the British legacy*, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2003-02-11/history-iraq-part-i-british-legacy>, [accessed 22/04/2020].

81. *Memorandum by the Emir Feisal, January 1st, 1919, document No 250...*, op. cit., p. 297.

between us, after the wishes of their respective inhabitants have been ascertained. Detailed suggestions on these smaller points will be put forward by my Government when the time comes. I base my request on the principles enunciated by President Wilson (attached), and am confident that the Powers will attach more importance to the bodies and souls of the Arabic-speaking peoples than to their own material interests.<sup>82</sup>

Fayṣal received some support from the USA for his ambitious plan but finally a treaty and protocol, which was unfavorable to Syria, was signed at Versailles on 28 June 1919. Several days after the King-Crane Commission arrived in Damascus, on 2 July 1919, the Arab nationalists organized a meeting called "General Syrian Congress," which included representatives from Lebanon and Palestine. It adopted a resolution to be presented to the Commission. The document, which partially had the form of a declaration, requested full independence for Syria (including Lebanon and Palestine) and rejected any form of foreign influence, mandate or control. Nowadays the Syrian nationalists consider this resolution as the first declaration of Syria's independence.

The 2 July 1919 resolution is worth a deeper consideration since it contains some fundamental claims which have been repeated many times by the Arab nationalists in the modern history of Syria. "We desire full and absolute political independence for Syria," proclaims the first paragraph of this resolution. The sixth paragraph continues even more emphatically: "we do not recognize to the French Government any right to any part of Syria, and we reject all proposals that France should give us any assistance." The document stresses that Syria should be "a constitutional monarchy," nonetheless it has to be based "on principles of democratic and broadly decentralized rule which shall safeguard the rights of minorities" (para. 2). In addition, this text clearly presents the Syrian attitude towards a Jewish state: "we reject the claims of Zionists for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in that part of southern Syria which is known as Palestine and we are opposed to Jewish immigration into any part of the country." Finally, referring to the Sykes-Picot, the resolution refers to

82. *Territorial Claims of the Government of the Hedjaz, January 29th, 1919*, document no 251, in: *My diary at the Conference of Paris, with documents*, ed. D.H. Miller, New York 1924, p. 300.

"the basic principles proclaimed by President Wilson in condemnation of secret treaties" (para. 10).<sup>83</sup>

83. *Resolutions of the General Syrian Congress Syria, July 2, 1919*, in: J.C. Hurewitz, *Middle East and North Africa in World Politics. A Documentary Record*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 180–182 (*Documenting Modern World History*), [https://bcc-cuny.digication.com/MWHreader/Resolutions\\_of\\_the\\_General\\_Syrian\\_Congress\\_1919](https://bcc-cuny.digication.com/MWHreader/Resolutions_of_the_General_Syrian_Congress_1919), [accessed 22/03/2020]. The whole text:

*We, the undersigned, members of the General Syrian Congress assembled in Damascus on the 2nd of July, 1919, and composed of delegations from the three zones, namely the southern, eastern, and western, and furnished with credentials duly authorizing us to represent the Moslem, Christian and Jewish inhabitants of our respective districts, have resolved to submit the following as defining the aspirations of the people who have chosen us to place them before the American section of the Inter-Allied Commission. With the exception of the fifth clause, which was passed by a large majority, the Resolutions which follow were all adopted unanimously:*

- 1. We desire full and absolute political independence for Syria.*
- 2. We desire the Government of Syria to be a constitutional monarchy based on principles of democratic and broadly decentralized rule which shall safeguard the rights of minorities, and we wish that Amir Faisal who has striven so nobly for our liberation and enjoyed our full confidence and trust be our King.*
- 3. In view of the fact that the Arab inhabitants of Syria are not less fitted or gifted than were certain other nations (such as the Bulgarians, Serbs, Greeks and Rumanians) when granted independence, we protest against Article XXII of the Covenant of the League of Nations which relegates us to the standing of insufficiently developed races requiring the tutelage of a mandatory power.*
- 4. If, for whatever reason that might remain undisclosed to us, the Peace Conference were to ignore this legitimate protest, we shall regard the mandate mentioned in the Covenant of the League of Nations as implying no more than the rendering of assistance in the technical and economic fields without impairment of our absolute independence. We rely on President Wilson's declaration that this object in entering the War was to put an end to acquisitive designs for imperialistic purposes. In our desire that our country should not be made a field for colonization, and in the belief that the American nation is devoid of colonial ambitions and has no political designs on our country, we resolve to seek assistance in the technical and economic fields from the United States of America on the understanding that the duration of such assistance shall not exceed twenty years.*
- 5. In the event of the United States finding herself unable to accede to our request ... we would seek [assistance] from Great Britain, provided always that it will not be allowed to impair the unity and absolute independence of our country and that its duration should not exceed the period mentioned in the preceding clause.*
- 6. We do not recognize to the French Government any right to any part of Syria, and we reject all proposals that France should give us any assistance.*
- 7. We reject the claims of Zionists for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in that part of southern Syria which is known as Palestine and we are opposed to Jewish immigration into any part of the country. We do not acknowledge that they have a title, and we regard their claims as a grave menace to our national, political, and economic life. Our Jewish fellow-citizens shall continue to enjoy the rights and to bear the responsibilities which are ours in common.*

Two months later, on 15 September 1919, French troops took control of the Syrian capital and the Syrian nationalists' "resolution of independence" became wishful thinking. However, the resolution had an immense influence on the formation of the Syrian patriotism and nationality. Ultimately, because of France's military presence, the project of the King-Crane Commission proved to be more of a mirage than a realistic plan. It collapsed definitively on 9 October 1919, when the French government named General Henri Gouraud (1867–1946) the High Commissioner of Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon.<sup>84</sup> Even under these circumstances, however, the Syrian nationalists did not give up their ideals of an independent Syria.

### Another lost struggle for Greater Syria (1919–1920)

What favored the positions of the Syrian nationalists at that time were the French problems connected with the disastrous French-Turkish war. The negotiations between Emir Fayşal and the French held in January 1920 concluded that France would not take military action in Syria but provide advisers, counsellors and technical experts for the Syrians.

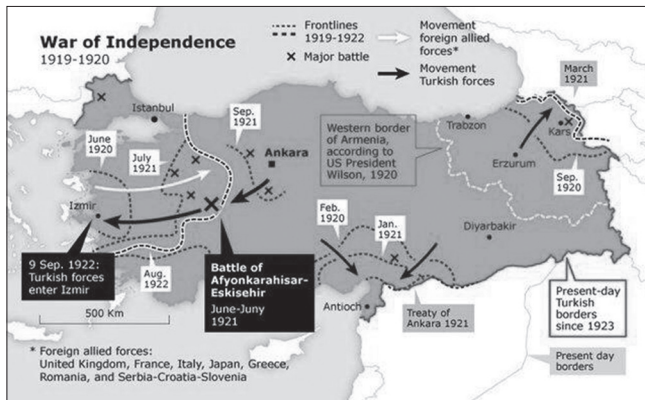
Between 20 January and 10 February 1920, Henri Gouraud had to support the French forces in Anatolia. The French forces occupied Maraş, where the first major battle during "the Turkish War of Independence" took place. The Great Powers underestimated the determination of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) and the "Association for Defense of Rights for Anatolia and Roumelia (*Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti*)."

*8. We desire that there should be no dismemberment of Syria and no separation of Palestine or the coastal region in the west or the Lebanon from the mother country...*

*10. The basic principles proclaimed by President Wilson in condemnation of secret treaties cause us to enter an emphatic protest against any agreement to provide for the dismemberment of Syria.*

*The lofty principles proclaimed by President Wilson encourage us to believe that the determining consideration in the settlement of our own future will be the real desires of our people; and that we may look to President Wilson and the liberal American nation, who are known for their sincere and generous sympathy with the aspirations of weak nations, for help in the fulfilment our hopes.*

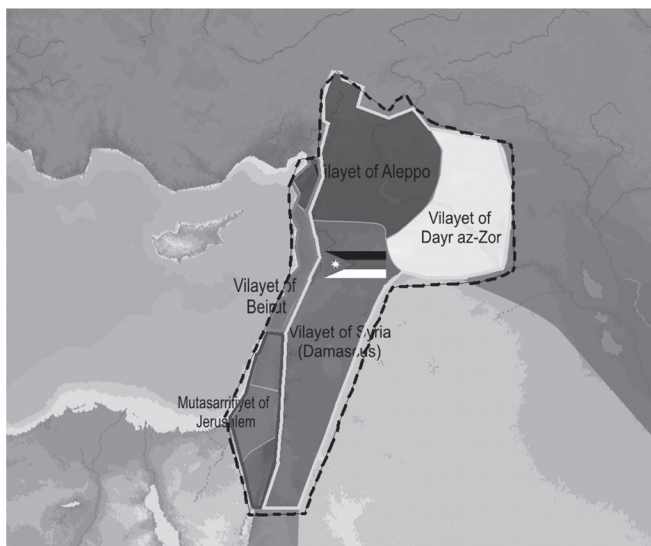
84. D. Chevallier, *Lyon et la Syrie en 1919: les bases d'une intervention*, in: "Revue historique" 1(1960), pp. 275–320.



Map 12. The Turkish War of Independence 1919–1920<sup>85</sup>

In this context, it is worth mentioning that after the surrender of the Ottoman Empire to the Allies in October 1918, Maras had come under the joint British-French occupation by the British and French armies (the latter largely composed of Armenians from the French Armenian Legion).<sup>86</sup> Little more than a year later, the three-week-long engagement in Maras (21 January – 13 February 1920) ultimately forced the French to withdraw their army back to Syria<sup>87</sup>, causing a new tragedy for Armenians.<sup>88</sup>

85. *Map of the Turkish War of Independence, 1919–1920*, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Turkey/comments/7c9ar3/map\\_of\\_the\\_turkish\\_war\\_of\\_independence\\_19191920/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Turkey/comments/7c9ar3/map_of_the_turkish_war_of_independence_19191920/), [accessed 22/04/2020].
86. T. Vahé, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute-Mésopotamie. Aux confins de la Turquie, de la Syrie et de l'Irak (1919–1933)*, Paris 2004; R. Sahaguian, *Les relations franco-turques et la Cilicie en 1919–1921*, Erévan: Académie des Sciences de l'Arménie Département des Etudes orientales 1970.
87. Z. Sarihan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı günlüğü: açıklanmalı kronoloji; 1: Mondros'tan Erzurum Kongresi'ne, 30 Ekim 1918 – 22 Temmuz 1919*, Yenişehir-Ankara 1982, pp. 320–332; R.G. Sahakyan, *Թուրք-Ֆրանսիական հարաբերությունները և Կիլիկյան, 1919–1921 թթ.* Yerevan 1970.
88. *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. 7, p. 303; P. Kinross, *Atatürk: a biography of Mustafa Kemal, father of modern Turkey*, New York 1992, p. 235; M. Muré, *Un épisode de la tragédie arménienne: le massacre de Marache (février 1920)*,



Map 13. The Ottoman provinces which comprised the Arab Kingdom of Syria, according to declaration on 8 March 1920<sup>89</sup>

The French involvement in Anatolia fueled, however, the Arab resistance groups, which successfully acted against the French presence in some region of Greater Syria. Whether at that time the Syrian nationalists cooperated with the Turks remains an open question.

The Syrian nationalists declared the independence of Greater Syria as the Arab Kingdom of Syria on 8 March 1920. The creation of this state was associated with the Arab Revolt and the British promises, as a reward for the Arab resistance against the Ottomans in the Levant. The official pro-

clamation of Fayṣal ibn Ḥusayn I as “King of Syria in its natural boundaries from the Taurus mountains in Turkey to the Sinai desert in Egypt” took place on 11 March 1920.<sup>90</sup>

In fact, this kingdom existed only for four months in 1920 (from 8 March until 24 July), with its theoretical territory reaching far beyond the borders of modern Syria, including the former Ottoman lands in today’s northern Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan.

The term “theoretical” territory with regard to the Arab Kingdom of Syria was used because of its brief existence and the fact that this kingdom never established any stable forms of governance, in particular beyond Damascus. A basic government created in and around Damascus was in possession of relatively small

“Le Flambeau: revue belge des questions politiques et littéraires” 4/1921/1 Brussels 1921 (*Classic Reprint, French Edition – French, Paperback* – August 14, 2018 pp. 1–36).

89. *Map of the Arab Kingdom of Syria, declared on March 8, 1920*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Syrian\\_War#/media/File:FEaisalKingdom.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Syrian_War#/media/File:FEaisalKingdom.png), [accessed 22/04/2020].

90. S.P. Duggan, *The Syrian Question...*, op. cit., p. 585.

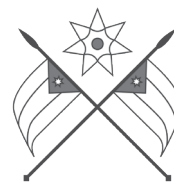


forces, which were the troops of the Arab Revolt turned into a national army.<sup>91</sup> As early as April, the Syrian proclamation of independence was rejected by the French and the British. The political division and shape of post-war Syria were ultimately confirmed during the San Remo conference held from 19 to 26 April 1920, which agreed on the establishment of a French mandate of Syria. It definitively split up King Faisal's newly-created Arab Kingdom. The territories, being essentially equal to today's Syria and Lebanon, remained under the French control, while Palestine (nowadays Israel, Palestine, and Jordan) was under the British rule.

In July 1920, the French troops invaded and occupied Damascus, forcing the king to flee abroad and thus the interim Great Syrian Kingdom ceased to exist.

### The early French Mandate divisions and conflicts (1920–1925)

Several weeks later, during the San Remo Conference of 19–26 April 1920, the Supreme Council of Allied Powers (SCAP) granted the French government the Syrian territory as class "A" mandate.<sup>93</sup> The class "A" mandates were considered as the territories which eventually would become self-governing and independent. Let us remind that the mandate system was established under Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, entered into on 28 June 1919 as Part I of the Treaty of Versailles.



Emblem and flag  
of the Arab Kingdom of Syria  
11 March 1920 – 25 July 1920<sup>92</sup>

91. N. Zeine, *The struggle for Arab independence Western diplomacy and the rise and fall of Faisal's kingdom in Syria*, Beirut 1960 pp. 118–137.
92. Arab Kingdom of Syria, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/26/Emblem\\_of\\_the\\_Arab\\_Kingdom\\_of\\_Syria\\_%281920%29.svg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/26/Emblem_of_the_Arab_Kingdom_of_Syria_%281920%29.svg), [accessed 22/04/2020].
93. "(c) Les mandataires choisis par les principales Puissances allies sont: la France pour la Syrie, et la Grande Bretagne pour la Mesopotamie, et la Palestine". *Documents Diplomatiques Francais: 1920–1921 – Annexes (10 Janvier 1920 – 31 Decembre 1921)*, Bruxelles 2005, p. 179.



Map 14. The French and British mandate in 1920<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, the League of Nations' mandate was a legal status for certain territories transferred from the control of one country to another, or the legal instruments that contained the internationally agreed-upon terms for administering the territory on behalf of the League. Three categories of mandates, "A, B and C," were applied "according to the stage of the development of the people, the geographical situation of the territory, its economic conditions and other similar circumstances."<sup>94</sup>

After World War I, the League of Nations believed that these territories in the Middle East needed the experience and resources of Great Britain and France because (according to the famous Article 22 of the Covenant) they were "peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world." The Peace Conference of 1919 decided that these territories should be ruled by mandate.<sup>96</sup> The British Empire, France and Belgium were entrusted with the governance of the mandated territories. It is difficult to answer whether Syria was envisioned at that moment as an independent country rather than a French Mandate. However, the vision of dual power in Syria as well as its own political interests prompted France to evict the Arab government.<sup>97</sup>

94. Article 22, *The Covenant of the League of Nations (Including Amendments adopted to December, 1924)*, in: [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp), [accessed 22/08/2019].
95. *British and French Mandates*, <https://www.jpost.com/blogs/arabisraeli-conflict/british-and-french-mandates-482251>, [accessed 22/04/2020].
96. Under Article 22 of the Covenant, "... the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization ... The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who, by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position, can best undertake this responsibility ... this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League."
97. J.D. Mizrahi, *Genèse de l'État mandataire. Service des renseignements et bandes armées en Syrie et au Liban dans les années 1920*, Paris 2003.

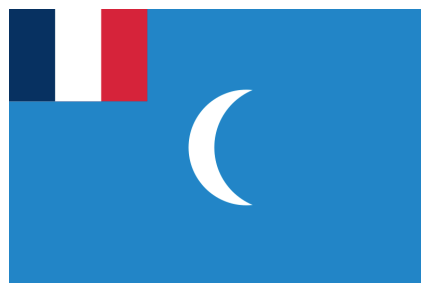
Gouraud's ongoing attempt to control King Fayṣal I provoked a new round of conflict. On 14 July 1920, the General issued a surrender ultimatum to King Fayṣal I, who shortly surrendered to the French authorities. The French troops took control of the city of Aleppo on 23 July 1920. The French military corps commanded by General Mariano Francisco Julio Goybet (1861–1943) clashed with Syrian rebels commanded by Yūsuf al-'Azma (1883–1920) near the town of Maysalun on 23–24 July 1920, resulting in the death of some 400 Syrian rebels and 42 French soldiers. The French troops took control of the city of Damascus on 25 July 1920. King Fayṣal ibn Ḥusayn formally relinquished the throne of Syria on 25 July 1920, was expelled from Syria and went to live in the United Kingdom in August 1920.

Fayṣal's father, King Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, foresaw these difficulties. He refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. Consequently, he did not sign the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), explaining in 1921 that he could not be expected to "affix his name to a document assigning Palestine to the Zionists and Syria to foreigners."<sup>98</sup> Finally, Fayṣal became king twice (the second time as king of Iraq), but he was probably one of the unluckiest monarchs in history.

After promising independence to the Arabs, Britain and France betrayed them, dividing the ex-Ottoman Middle East into weak states run from London and Paris. Admittedly, after WWI, T.E. Lawrence, the famous "Lawrence of Arabia," arrived at Versailles determined to overturn the Sykes-Picot Agreement, but failed to do that. It was clear that Great Syria was by no means a part of any



The conqueror of the Arab Kingdom of Syria, General Henri Joseph Eugène Gouraud (1867-1946), the High Commissioner of Mandate for Syria and Lebanon<sup>98</sup>



Flag of French mandate after the abolition of the Arab Kingdom July – August 1920

98. French general Henri Joseph Eugène Gouraud (1867–1946) in 1923, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Gouraud\\_\(general\)#/media/File:G%C3%A9n%C3%A9ral\\_Gouraud\\_1923.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Gouraud_(general)#/media/File:G%C3%A9n%C3%A9ral_Gouraud_1923.jpg), [accessed 22/04/2020].
99. S. Mousa, *A Matter of Principle: King Hussein of the Hijaz and the Arabs of Palestine*, in: "International Journal of Middle East Studies" 9/2 (1978), pp. 184–185.



Coat of arms of the Kingdom of Iraq (1921–1958)<sup>100</sup>



Seal of the states under the French mandate after WWI (including Syria). The text is *Douane des Etats sous mandat français* (Customs of the states under the French mandate).<sup>101</sup>

political plan of the rival Great Power. Fayṣal was to have been made king of Syria, but France managed to snatch Syria away from Britain. It was not a secret that Fayṣal, who had led the Arab Revolt, was the most important Arab figure, a pro-British player in the Middle East politics.

On the other hand, Fayṣal's misfortune turned out advantageous for the British. At the time, oil was discovered in the northern areas around Mosul in the Kurdish tribal territory and in the southern marshes bordering Iran. Iraq was created to secure oil for Britain, and Fayṣal became a puppet king on the throne. However, he was an influential figure in the making of the modern Middle East not only as the military leader who, with the help of Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888–1935), organized the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire. He was also a representative of the Arab cause, alongside with Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell (1868–1926), at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the founding father and king of the first independent state of Syria and finally, the first king of Iraq. In every position he had to overcome innumerable crises and opposing currents while striving to build structures of a modern state.

Experiencing intense resistance both from the king and the Syrian nationalists, General Gouraud established the French Mandate of Syria as a final stage of the French policy towards *Bilād aš-Šām* during 1914–1920.<sup>102</sup> He acted in the context of the inadequate policy

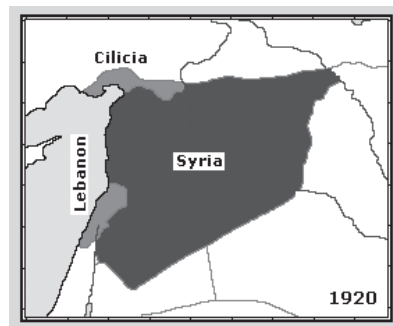
100. *Iraq – Kingdom Of Iraq Arab Kingdom Of Syria Coat Of Arms Of Iraq*, [https://favpng.com/png\\_view/iraq-kingdom-of-iraq-arab-kingdom-of-syria-coat-of-arms-of-iraq-wikipedia-png/P3Kt7iwH](https://favpng.com/png_view/iraq-kingdom-of-iraq-arab-kingdom-of-syria-coat-of-arms-of-iraq-wikipedia-png/P3Kt7iwH), [accessed 22/04/2020].
101. *Seal of the states under French mandate*, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seal\\_of\\_the\\_states\\_under\\_French\\_mandat.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seal_of_the_states_under_French_mandat.svg), [accessed 22/04/2020].
102. More details in V. Cloarec, *La France et la question de Syrie, 1914–1918*, Paris: CNRS Éditions 2002; J.L. Gelvin, *Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire*, Berkeley 1999; M. Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars. Imperialism, Politics and Society*, Manchester 2005;

of Édouard Brémont (1868–1948), who was the administrator of Cilicia in 1919–1920. Finally, the French part of Great Syria was transformed at the international level and in the framework of the mandate.

Firstly, as already mentioned, by early 1920, neither Gouraud's troops nor the Armenians were able to withstand the Kemalist incursions into Cilicia. On 20 October 1921, French envoy Henry Franklin-Bouillon (1870–1937) signed a pact with Mustafa Kemal's counter-government in Ankara, thus stopping all the military operations of the French-Turkish war.

According to Articles 3 and 8, the French forces were to evacuate all of Cilicia up to Payas, Meydan, Ekbès and Kilis. They would maintain control only over the sanjak (county) of Alexandretta.<sup>103</sup> In this way, the idea that French Syria would be "integral" or "Great" Syria, including the richer northern and cotton growing areas of Cilicia, was ruined.<sup>104</sup>

Secondly, as concerns the internal politics of the French mandate, the most famous Gouraud's decree was the creation of the State of Greater Lebanon on 1 September 1920, which was one of the most serious paradoxes



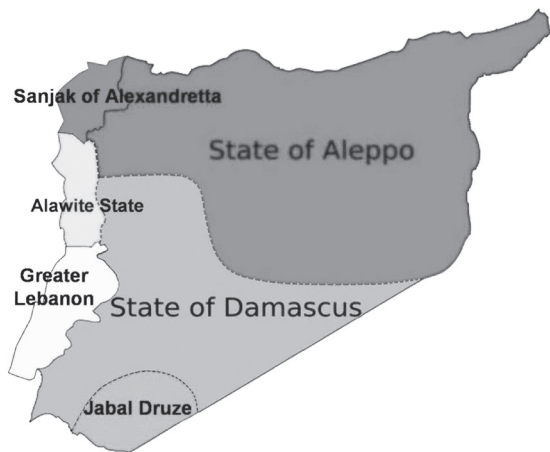
Map 15. Great Syria's losses in 1920<sup>105</sup>



Flag of Great Lebanon in 1920<sup>106</sup>

K.D. Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class*, Princeton 2006.

103. R.G. Sahakyan, *Թուրք-Ֆրանսիական հարաբերությունները և Կիլիկյան, 1919–1921 թթ. ...*, op. cit., p. 235; E. Brémont, *The Brémont Mission, Cilicia in 1919–1920*, part I: "Armenian Review" 29 (Winter 1976–77), pp. 340–372; part II: "Armenian Review" 30 (Spring 1977), pp. 34–72; R.F. Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurus. The French in Cilicia and Vicinity, 1918–1922*, Ankara 2005, p. 157.
104. S. Jackson, "What is Syria Worth?" *The Huvelin Mission, Economic Expertise and the French Project in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1918–1922*, in: "Monde(s)" 2/4 (2013), p. 28.
105. *Syria French 1919–1921*, <https://www.zum.de/whkmla/hist-atlas/arabworld/haxsyria.html>, [accessed 22/04/2020].
106. *French Mandate of Greater Lebanon 1920–1943 (Lebanon)*, <http://fotw.fivestarflags.com/lb-frm20.html>, [accessed 22/04/2020].



Map 16. Syria's divisions in 1920–1922<sup>109</sup>

in the conception of the creation of a new "Great Syria" (*Bilād aš-Šām*).<sup>107</sup> Since then, both regions (Lebanon and Cilicia) were not only lost for Syria but became political centers of repeated regional conflicts, including the Syrian Civil War (2011–).

The Syrian nationalists were forced to surrender part of Greater Syria to the British, a part to the newly-born Turkey and a part to Great Lebanon. Between 1920 and 1922, the French imposed further divisions on Syria to preserve their authority over this mandate.

Although the League of Nations Mandate of Syria and Lebanon under French Administration formally entered into force on 23 September 1923,<sup>108</sup> France established the states of Damascus and Aleppo along with the autonomous Alawite territory on 1 December 1920. Another state was established as the autonomous Druze territory in the southern part of the state of Damascus on 1 May 1921. The French troops suppressed a rebellion in the Alawite state led by Shaykh Saleh al-Ali on 15 June 1921. On 4 March 1922, the French government transformed the autonomous Druze territory into the Souaida state (Jabal Druze state).

107. G. Khoury, *La France et l'Orient arabe. Naissance du Liban moderne, 1914–1920*, Paris 1994; D. Pipes, *Greater Syria: the History of an Ambition...*, op. cit., pp. 66–69.

108. *League of Nations Official Journal*, vol. 3, London 1922, [August 1922], p. 1013.

109. *Syria in the cross-hairs*, <https://alethonews.com/2011/02/02/cia-related-groups-are-gearing-up-to-attack-syria-with-%E2%80%9Ccolor-revolution%E2%80%9D/>, [accessed 22/04/2020].



THE FLAGS OF SYRIAN STATES IN 1920 – 1922



Flag of Alawites state  
1920–1924<sup>110</sup>



Flag of the state  
of Jabal al-Druze 1921–1936<sup>111</sup>



Flag of Damascus state  
1920–1924<sup>112</sup>



Flag of Aleppo state  
1920–1924<sup>113</sup>



Flag of the Syrian Federation  
1922–1932<sup>114</sup>

After the Syrian nationalists' demonstrations in Damascus on 8–12 April 1922, France established a loose federation between the four Syrian puppet states (Da-

110. *Flag of the Alawite State / Sanjak of Latakia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French\\_colonial\\_flags#/media/File:Latakia-sanjak-Alawite-state-French-colonial-flag.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_colonial_flags#/media/File:Latakia-sanjak-Alawite-state-French-colonial-flag.svg), [accessed 22/04/2020].
111. *Druze Mountains, Jabal ad-Duruz*, <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/sy-druz.html>, [accessed 22/04/2020].
112. *Flag of the State of Damascus*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_the\\_State\\_of\\_Damascus.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_State_of_Damascus.svg), [accessed 22/04/2020].
113. *Flags of the World – Autonomous State of Aleppo 1920–1924 (Syria)*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State\\_of\\_Aleppo#/media/File:Flag\\_of\\_the\\_State\\_of\\_Aleppo.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_Aleppo#/media/File:Flag_of_the_State_of_Aleppo.svg), [accessed 22/04/2020].
114. *Flag of the State of Syria*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag\\_of\\_Syria#/media/File:Flag\\_of\\_Syria\\_French\\_mandate.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Syria#/media/File:Flag_of_Syria_French_mandate.svg), [accessed 22/04/2020].



The Stamp Issuers:  
Alexandretta 1923–1937<sup>115</sup>

mascus, Latakia, Aleppo, and Jebel Druze) on 1 July 1922. Just two years after its creation, Lebanon was more and more considered a separate entity in the international arena (the Maronites hoped to create a Christian state with a French-influenced culture), even though the Sunni Muslims within the newly formed mandate wanted to reunite Lebanon with Syria into Greater Syria.

The partially Turkish populated Alexandretta was turned into a sixth division within the French mandate on 4 March 1923. The Sanjak of Alexandretta was an autonomous sanjak from 1921 to 1923 as a result of the mentioned French-Turkish treaty of 20 October 1921. Subsequently, it was attached to the State of Aleppo, and finally in 1925, it was directly attached to the State of Syria, however, with a special administrative status.

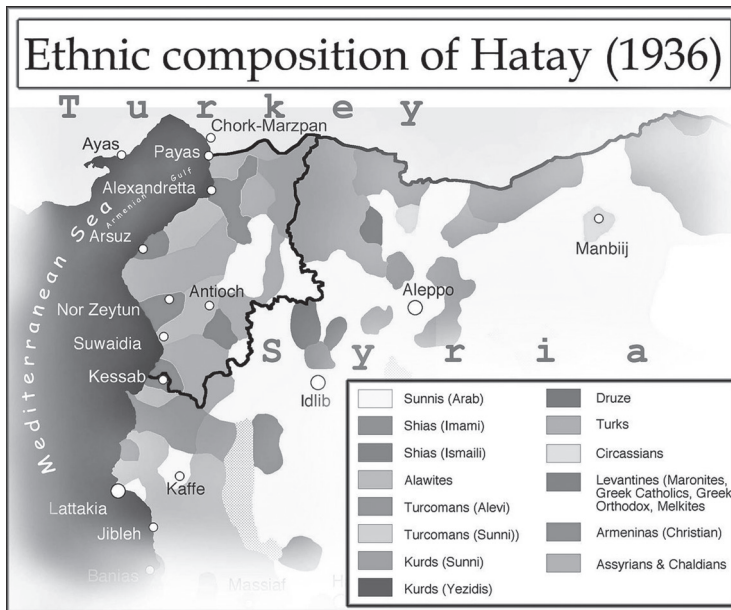
According to the Ankara Agreement (1921), Turkey obtained special privileges to the Turkish elements in this sanjak and established a local government there.<sup>116</sup> In 1921, the Arabs dominated in the sanjak, and there were also 87,000 Turks amid a population of 220,000.<sup>117</sup>

The Sanjak of Alexandretta (currently the Hatay province in Turkey) was a region that mirrored Syria's key ethnic divides. For ages the region has been inhabited by ethnic Turks, Alawite Arabs (co-religionists of the contemporary Bashar Assad government), Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Circassians, Armenians, and Arab Christians. It is also of great importance that Alexandretta's (Hatay's) Alawite and Sunni Arabs have been connected with Syrian Alawites and Sunnis through familial and tribal links.

115. *Collecting Worldwide, stamp issuers*, <https://philatelicpursuits.wordpress.com/2015/07/09/the-stamp-issuers-alexandretta/>, [accessed 22/04/2020].

116. *Dispatch from His Majesty's Ambassador at Paris, Enclosing the Franco-Turkish Agreement Signed at Angora on October 20, 1921*, London 1921, p. 6.

117. A.F. Khater, *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*, Boston 2010, p. 177.



Map 17. Ethnic composition of Hatay (1920)<sup>118</sup>

The French helped stop the mass exodus of the Armenian population, allowing them to settle in Syria, Lebanon; some of them chose to live in the sanjak of Alexandretta. Despite the collapse of the Franco-Armenian collaboration after 1921, Ankara systematically accused the French Mandatory administration of manipulating the ethnographic proportion of the sanjak to the disadvantage of the Turkish element.<sup>119</sup> Thus began the Alexandretta and Hatay's questioning of the Syrian-Turkish relations during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>120</sup> This is also one of the important factors of the Syrian Civil War. For

118. *Ethnic composition of Hatay*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatay\\_State#/media/File:Ethnic\\_composition\\_of\\_Hatay\\_\(1936\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatay_State#/media/File:Ethnic_composition_of_Hatay_(1936).jpg), [accessed 22/04/2020].

119. H.L. Kieser, *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, London—New York 2006, pp. 60—61.

120. M. Khadduri, *The Alexandretta Dispute*, "The American Journal of International Law" 39/3 (1945), pp. 406—425.

example, in 2013, the international public opinion feared that the Syrian War could inflame the Hatay Province in Turkey.<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusions

The 1916–1922 period was one of the most important and decisive times for the modern history of Syria, provoking a much-needed reflection on the set of decisions taken by the Great Powers in 1919–1920, which to a great extent shaped the modern history of the Middle East.

Firstly, the dynamics and variability of political options and alliances as well as the empty promises of the Brits were perceived by Fayṣal and the Arab nationalists as a betrayal. It was a kind of official validation of the Western policy towards Syria in which the external interests of the Great Powers took priority over the Syrians' internal affairs. For the inhabitants of the Levant, it meant the Western practice of ignoring Arab opinions and aspirations in the aftermath of the Great War, which was sealed in the Treaty of Versailles. The findings of the King-Crane Commission of 1919 proved to be useless.

Secondly, in 1916, the Great Powers launched the tradition of deals, declarations and treaties, which systematically changed the modern Middle East. The new post-Ottoman order ignored local identities and political preferences. The new borders were created artificially and determined arbitrarily.<sup>122</sup>

Thirdly, according to many Middle Eastern authors, hundreds of thousands were killed as a result of the Sykes-Picot treaty, which may have created "all the problems" of this region.<sup>123</sup>

Fourthly, the mythology of the Great Arab Revolt was born, which was fed on Syrian nationalism over the next decades.

Fifthly, both Jewish and Palestinian expectations for an independent state in historical Palestine can be traced to World War I, as the United Kingdom attempted to shore up support against the Ottoman Empire and the Central Powers.

121. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Syria's War Could Inflame Turkey's Hatay Province*, in: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syrias-war-could-inflame-turkeys-hatay-province>, [accessed 22/10/2019].

122. J. Barr, *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914–1948*, New York 2012, p. 7.

123. R. Wright, *How the Curse of Sykes-Picot Still Haunts the Middle East*, in: "The New Yorker" (April 30, 2016), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-the-curse-of-sykes-picot-still-haunts-the-middle-east>, [accessed 22/07/2019].

Sixthly, for a century, a steadfast reaction to the Sykes-Picot process has been reflected in all of the most influential political ideologies, e.g. Nasserism, Baathism in Iraq and Syria, and recently in the propaganda of the Islamic State. Since 1916, the dream of Greater Syria has been reappearing in numerous versions. As regards the Syrian Civil War, Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced in 2014, 'This blessed advance will not stop until we hit the last nail in the coffin of the Sykes-Picot conspiracy.'<sup>124</sup>

Seventhly, the competing Western powers took advantage of the local minorities, fueling dislike and strengthening sectarianism. According to the investigation of the King-Crane Commission in 1919, the inhabitants of Greater Lebanon were deeply divided over its future. On the Christian side, almost all the Maronites, Greek Orthodox and Catholics supported the French mandate and the separation between Syria and Lebanon. On the Muslim side, almost all the Sunnis wanted incorporation into an independent Syria; the Druze, led by two powerful families in Lebanon: the Jambalats and the Arslans, were strongly against a French-dominated Lebanon; while the Shiis of Jabal Amil in the south were afraid of both the Sunnis and Christians and wanted to have a loose connection with Syria.

Eighthly, in 1919–1920, the Pan-Syrianism as an intention to piece together the nation of Greater Syria solidified and took a distinct form. The resolutions of the General Syrian Congress of 2 July 1919 provided timeless premises for the political orientation of the Syrian nationalists, which strongly influenced politics in the Middle East in the following decades.

Finally, the partition of Greater Syria after World War I proved to be one of the worst of many political traumas experienced in the Middle East at that time. Pan-Syrianism was systematically weakened by the conflicting aspirations among the Syrians, the Lebanese, the Palestinians, and Jordanians. Since 1919, Pan-Syrianism has systematically been generating complex interactions between the Pan-Arabists, the Palestinian nationalists and state authorities.

124. S.L. Foster, *The Sykes-Picot Agreement at 100*, "The historical implication of defining sovereignty in the Middle East" (January 19, 2016), <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2016/1/19/the-sykes-picot-agreement-at-100>, (accessed 24/03/2020).

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# Abstract

Krzysztof Kościelniak

*Futile Efforts to Create an Arab Kingdom of Syria. From the Idea of Greater Syria to Syria Partitioned under the French Mandate (1915–1922)*

The text presents the dynamics and variability of the political options and alliances which shaped the borders of modern Syria in the most crucial period of World War I and the first years of post-war reality in the Middle East. The researchers show how the external interests of the Great Powers took priority over the Syrians' internal affairs. For the inhabitants of the Levant, it meant the Western practice of ignoring Arab opinions and aspirations in the aftermath of the Great War, which was sealed in the Treaty of Versailles. Despite the positive solutions proposed by The King-Crane Commission (1919), the new post-Ottoman order ignored local identities and political preferences. The new borders were created artificially and determined arbitrarily. The Sykes-Picot agreement reinforced both conspiracy theories in the Middle East and the mythology of the Great Arab Revolt. The competing Western powers took advantage of the local minorities, fueling dislike and strengthening sectarianism. In the years 1919–1920, Pan-Syrianism solidified and took a characteristic form of striving to consolidate the fragmented nation of the Greater Syria. The resolutions of the General Syrian Congress of 2 July 1919 provided timeless premises for the political orientation of the Syrian nationalists, which strongly influenced politics in the Middle East in the following decades. However, the partition of Greater Syria after World War I proved to be one of the worst of many political traumas experienced in the Middle East at that time. Pan-Syrianism was systematically weakened by the conflicting aspirations among the Syrians, the Lebanese, the Palestinians, and Jordanians.

**Keywords:**  
Syria, Greater Syria, French mandate for Syria and Lebanon, Kingdom of Hejaz, First World War, King-Crane Commission, Ottoman jihad, Arab nationalism, Sykes-Picot Agreement, Arab Revolt, Arabism, Damascus Protocol, Syrian Congress 1919, Faisal of Iraq (1883–1933)

# Abstrakt

Krzysztof Kościelniak

*Daremne starania utworzenia arabskiego Królestwa Syrii.*

*Od koncepcji Wielkiej Syrii do Syrii podzielonej mandatem francuskim (1915–1922)*

**Słowa kluczowe:**  
Syria, Wielka  
Syria, francuski  
mandat dla Syrii  
i Libanu, Królestwo  
Hidżazu, I wojna  
światowa, Komisja  
Kinga-Crane'a,  
dżihad osmański,  
arabski nacjo-  
nalizm, umowa  
Sykes-Picot,  
powstanie  
arabskie, arabizm,  
protokół  
damasceński,  
Syryjski Kongres  
Narodowy 1919,  
Fajsal I (1883–1933)

Tekst przedstawia dynamikę i zmienność opcji politycznych oraz sojuszy, które ukształtowały granice współczesnej Syrii w decydującej fazie pierwszej wojny światowej oraz w pierwszych latach powojennej rzeczywistości na Bliskim Wschodzie. Badacze przedstawiają sposób, w jaki zewnętrzne interesy mocarstw przeważyły nad wewnętrznymi sprawami Syryjczyków. Dla mieszkańców Lewantu wiązało się to z praktyką ignorowania przez Zachód opinii i aspiracji Arabów w następstwie pierwszej wojny światowej, przypieczętowaną w Traktacie Wersalskim. Mimo pozytywnych rozwiązań zaproponowanych przez komisję Kinga-Crane'a (1919), nowy post-osmański porządek wprowadzono bez względu na lokalne tożsamości i preferencje polityczne. Nowe granice zostały utworzone sztucznie i ustalone w sposób arbitralny. Umowa Sykes-Picot sprzyjała nie tylko teoriom spiskowym na Bliskim Wschodzie, lecz także kształtowaniu mitologii powstania arabskiego. Rywalizacja zachodnich mocarstw odbywała się kosztem lokalnych mniejszości, podsycając niechęć i wzmacniając sekciarstwo. W latach 1919–1920, pansyrianizm umocnił się i przyjął charakterystyczną formę dążenia do poskładania rozbitego narodu Wielkiej Syrii. W uchwałach Kongresu Syryjskiego z 2 lipca 1919 r. zawarto ponadczasowe założenia orientacji politycznej syryjskich nacjonalistów, co miało znaczący wpływ na politykę na Bliskim Wschodzie w ciągu następnych kilkudziesięciu lat. Jednak podział Wielkiej Syrii po pierwszej wojnie światowej okazał się jedną z najgorszych spośród wielu politycznych traum, jakich doświadczył w tamtym czasie Bliski Wschód. Pansyrianizm ulegał systematycznemu osłabieniu przez kolidujące ze sobą aspiracje Syryjczyków, Libańczyków, Palestyńczyków i Jordańczyków.