

- 19- Ralph E. Crow, *op.cit.* Also E. Koury, *op.cit.*
- 20- M. Curtis ed., *op.cit.* p. 229.
- 21- Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East* (Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1981), p. 69.
- 22- *Ibid.* p. 70.
- 23- *Ibid.*
- 24- P.E. Haley and L.W. Snider, *Lebanon in Crisis* (Syracus University Press, 1979), article by Halim Barakat. p. 6.
- 25- *Ibid.*
- 26- *Ibid.*
- 27- Quoted in B.M. Borthwick, *op.cit.* p. 127.
- 28- U.S. Government, *Area Handbook for Lebanon* (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 213.
- 29- Halim Barakat, *op.cit.* p. 10.
- 30- *Ibid.* p. 11.
- 31- David C. Gordon, *The Republic of Lebanon...* *op.cit.* p. 66.
- 32- Michael Hudson, "The Lebanese Crisis: The Limits of Consociational Democracy", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring-Summer 1976, pp. 109-122.
- 33- David C. Gordon, *op.cit.* p. 77.
- 34- *Ibid.*
- 35- Elie Salem, "Cabinet Politics in Lebanon", *Middle East Journal* 21 (Fall 1967). p. 496.
- 36- David C. Gordon, *op.cit.* p. 85.
- 37- *Ibid.* p. 88.
- 38- *Ibid.*
- 39- David C. Gordon, *Lebanon. The Fragmented Nation* (Croom Helm, London, 1980), p. 91.
- 40- David E. Long and B. Reich, ed., *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North America* (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1980), p. 226.
- 41- *Ibid.*
- 42- *Ibid.*
- 43- Quoted in P.E. Haley and L.W. Snider, *op.cit.* by John K. Cooley; p. 23.
- 44- Halim Barakat. *op.cit.* p. 19.
- 45- *Ibid.* p. 20.

SYRIA UNDER THE FRENCH MANDATE: PART II

True Stakes and False Motives

FAGHROUR Daho

INSTITUT D'HISTOIRE

U . D'ORAN

1920 is referred to in Arab annals as the " Year of the Disaster " (Am al-Nakba). This year had seen the uprising of the Arabs in Syria and their defeat by Gouraud [similarly] the occupation of Palestine and Iraq by Great Britain .

The question of the Mandate, as we have seen, was settled at the San Remo Conference on the 24th of April 1920. The map was drawn delimiting the spheres of influence for each of the powers in a joint Franco-British agreement. Some further territorial adjustments were made on April 1, 1924. It is to be mentioned also that the Supreme Council of the League of Nations approved the decisions of the San Remo Conference on July 21, 1922, within which Great Britain and France were predominant .

From the very beginning France sought to establish in Syria a political machinery for complete French control in all areas. France's policy in Syria was based on the old imperialistic rule "divide et impera" . In general the history of the French Mandate in Syria falls into three parts : the first from 1920 to 1926, the second from 1926 to 1936, and the third from 1936 to 1946. We shall examine each of these periods separately .

The First Period : 1920 - 1926

These years are referred to in the annals of history as the " period of military dictatorships". During this period three generals held office as high-commissioners exercising their power under martial law. The result was the 1925 Revolt that broke out in Jabal Al-Druz. This uprising, which many people prefer to call a revolution, started as a demonstration against the local governor

and ended up as a national uprising when nationalists from inland Syria joined the rebellion. The rebellion spread to Damascus, Homs, Hamah and went as far as Tripoli. Retaliation soon came from the French who carried out massive bombing of entire villages and cities, including the ancient city of Damascus after the revolt had spread to it. The revolt did not come to end until the Spring of 1927. Its immediate result was the establishment of Lebanon as an independent republic in 1926 .

Second Period : 1926 - 1936

In August 1926 Mr. Ponsot was appointed as High Commissioner for Syria; he remained in office for seven years. His was the first civilian administration since the establishment of the Mandate. Even if only partial success was met during his tenure of office, he made serious attempts to improve the administrative machinery of Syria. It was during his term that in 1930 Syria was proclaimed a " republic ". But due to political manipulations and deliberate slowness, it was only on June 1932 that a constitutional government came to office. On October 1933 de Martel replaced Ponsot in Syria. De Martel - a man of the old school - wanted to handle Syria with an iron hand. Because he could not get any response to his innovative views on economic development from the Chamber of Deputies, he resorted to harsh measures such as freezing all discussions over political matters, and embarking on purely economic policies. But these policies of de Martel could not pass without reply from the nationalist forces. The response came suddenly in 1936 when a general strike was called immobilizing economic activity throughout the country. The mandatory regime at first resorted to arrests and other punitive measures which, however, only hardened popular will. The strike lasted for six weeks and was brought to an end only when de Martel announced that his government was ready to negotiate with the nationalists in order to reach a common treaty. This proclamation brought Syria into its third phase under the mandatory system .

Third Period : 1936 - 1946

In 1936, after the strike was brought to an end, the nationalists extorted from the French permission to send a delegation to Paris. At that time the Front

Populaire was in power in France. This government showed a more sympathetic attitude towards Syrian demands. An agreement was reached on a draft treaty closely modeled on the Anglo - Iraqi Treaty of 1930. This treaty, which was to last for twenty years, recognized Syrian independence and called for France's support for Syrian admission into the League of Nations; Syria, however, was to remain bound to France through the retention of two military bases within the country plus a military presence in Djebel al Duruz and Latakia for five years. However, this treaty was not ratified by the French parliament because of situations that were developing in Europe at that time. In fact, France continued to have the upper hand in Syrian affairs, so proved when in 1939 the High Commissioner suspended the Syrian Constitution and appointed a Council of Directors to rule under his own order .

At the outbreak of World War II, France also went so far as to dissolve a number of nationalist organizations believed to be sympathetic to the Axis. However, the general feeling among the nationalist Arabs during the war was that of skepticism. There was nothing to admire in Fascism, just as there was nothing to make them feel sorry for their oppressors. So the position of the Arabs at the outbreak of the war was that of " wait and see " .

In 1941, General Catroux of the Free French Forces, promised that the mandatory regime in Syria was to be brought to an end, and that she was to be declared a free and independent state at the end of the war. However, no major concessions were made to support this promise for independence. Exiled nationalists reluctantly were allowed to return in 1943, elections were permitted and the National Bloc, led by Shukri al Kuwwatly won an overwhelming majority. This victory of the National Bloc was a hard blow to the French for they had hoped for a puppet government and were stunned by the victory of the very radical nationalists. By 1946, however, counter measures were taken by France in Syria. General Charles de Gaulle, now head of the provisional government in France, sent additional military reinforcements to Syria. As a result the frustrations of the Nationalists broke out into riots and violence. The French reply was the bombing of Damascus just as they had done in 1920 when they entered

Syria. Britain, afraid that violence would damage the supply lines, because the war with Japan was still going on, urged France to reach a quick compromise with the Syrians. France saw in this move an anti-French policy deliberately set up by Britain to oust her from her position in the Levant. Syria on the other hand appealed to the Security Council of the United Nations for mediation . France found herself compelled to accept an American compromise - resolution which ended up with her military withdrawal from Syria in 1946 .

Now that we have followed the evolution of the Mandate from 1920 to 1946, let us see how this mandate was operated. In general the first years of the Mandate were characterized by a mutual study. Material improvement of the region was reached through the stabilization of the national budget. However, this does not change the reality that France was still the unwanted power that came to divide the country and encourage local minorities (Christians) in their separatist claims .

In the administrative field, several " independent " states were created, each modeled on the French pattern - a chamber of deputies would elect a president for a five-year term, the president would then appoint a prime minister and a cabinet. However, this system was totally unrepresentative in a way, because it remained subservient to the French High Commissioner who very often resorted to acts such as suspending the constitution, dissolving the national assembly, manipulating the elections and suppressing the opposition .

Another peculiar trait of the French administration was its military characteristic. The administrative divisions inherited from the Turks were preserved in Syria with a very little change; in that the higher posts were now filled by French rather than Turkish military officers. Inefficiency and maladministration are also " qualities " of the French in Syria. The French administration suffered also from a shortage of suitable personnel. Most of the administrators were brought from Morocco to Syria. Because of their previous experiences in Morocco, these administrators tried to apply in Syria the same rules they applied to the less educated, less developed people of North Africa. Another criticism of the French administration is that little advance was made in " the Syrianization "

of the higher posts or in the passing of greater responsibilities to the people. All this shows " that what France really wanted was to stay in Syria 'for good ' " .⁽¹⁾

France may also be reproached for having deliberately dismembered the Syrian territory. In fact, starting in 1920, France issued a decree acknowledging the establishment of the Separate State of Lebanon. What was left of Syria was divided into three administrative districts (Sanjaks). In the creation of the different districts, the concentration of the minorities such as Maronites, Sunis, Mutawallis, and Druzes was taken into account. However by doing so, France only exploited the situation to create internal tensions in order to gain the necessary valuable time to establish her authority in the area. The interior of Syria was also divided into several districts such as Aleppo, Damascus, and Alexandretta. Local councils were " elected " under French supervision to serve as intermediary links with the military advisors. However, the Councils of the States were without power. Their views were constantly revised, corrected, or ignored by the French .

In 1925, through the federation of the districts of Aleppo and Damascus, there was created a united Syria with Damascus as its capital. This unification of Syria was made at the expense of a great loss of territory. Lebanon was lost forever when the Republic of Lebanon was created. Also the Alawi State and Alexandretta were not included in the new State. While in 1936 the State of the Alawis was joined to Syria, Alexandretta developed into a big question .

From the very beginning of the French Mandate both Syria and Turkey claimed rights over Alexandretta. However in 1932 France yielded to the Turkish claim and accepted a joint Franco-Turkish administration over the Sanjak. With the threat of World War II, Turkish friendship with France was so important that Alexandretta became completely Turkish in 1939. This act was to create a very complex problem for Syria. The Armenian population of the Sanjak, because of its bitter past under Ottoman rule, fled the Sanjak into the interior of Syria upsetting the labor market in the country .⁽²⁾

As a first act in her economic policies in Syria, France imposed the Franc currency on Syria and Lebanon despite its depreciation and its instability. By

doing so France deprived " the people of the mandated territory of the stable currency which they had previously enjoyed, and caused them to experience the losses and uncertainties of depreciation by making their currency dependent on that of France ". (3) The paper money that France introduced in Syria was aimed at depleting Syrian gold reserves, making the Syrian economy unstable. The Table of French expenditures in Syria shows also that the military expenditures outnumbered in value, civilian expenditures by two to three times each year. Syria, as we had noted previously, in the period before World War I sold more to France than they imported from her. The opposite became the situation after the establishment of the mandate.

The total value of French investments was of the magnitude of one milliard Francs; it had not increased to any great extent since the War of 1914 - 1918. French capital which before the mandate was mainly in railways, extended to land in small amounts and to utilities to a larger extent. Utilities such as electric power, waterworks were almost all owned by French capital. France also had a hand in financial capital. " The Bank of issue, the Banque de Syria et du grand Liban, had its headquarters in Paris, and of its twenty five and half million Francs of share capital, over 20 million were in French hands, while twelve of its sixteen directors were French, the remainder being Syrians and Lebanese ". (4) The bank was given the exclusive right of issuing Syro - Lebanese Currency .

The mandatory system encouraged the transition of Syria from a medieval society to a modern one. This was reached through the equipment of Syria with fairly good communication system which resulted into the strengthening of the centralized government over the regional provinces. Also, the countryside was integrated to some degrees into the economic life of the city, ending a long period of nomadic raids on the settled land .

Another of the most urgent problems that faced the mandatory power in Syria was agriculture. Knowing rightfully, that modernization of a country's economy has to deal with modernization of agriculture in general and land tenure in particular, the French mandate established a new system of land-registration and land survey. As a result, the number of freeholders was in-

creased by the sale of public domain and the encouragement of the permanent partition of land held communally on the " musha " basis. However, no direct assault was made on the position of the big semi-feudal land-owners. What resulted from the Agricultural censations is that by 1938 France imported from Syria and Lebanon 105,834,000 francs in the form of agricultural products, However, the truth still remains that France by insisting on developing Syria's agriculture neglected to industrialize the country. In the same year mentioned above (1938), France exported to the area 195,818,000 worth of finished goods such as machinery, chemical products... This brings us to the question of how altruistic and kind was France in her attempts to develop the country ? The sad truth is that France had never forgotten her imperialistic designs. The development of Agriculture was aimed only at supplying herself with products she needed, but when it came to industry all she wanted was a market in Syria. This is clearly shown by her monopolistic of Syria's foreign trade .

In the educational field, France continued her cultural invasion of Syria which had started long before the mandate. But while this cultural invasion aimed, before World War I, at establishing friendly elements in the area in order to safeguard her influence, during the mandate, however, it reveted a new character. The promotion of French culture was aimed mainly at undermining the Arab cultural evolution and Arab revival that were at the basis of Arab nationalism. "The institution of the mandate gave greater freedom to France in this effort. In some ways the position of French culture was improved in the years between the Wars. France was one of the official languages (Arab is the second), and knowledge of it was an indispensable qualification for holding most of the higher offices of the administration ". (5)

French was not only the main foreign language taught in official schools, it was a sign of " enlightenment " and " culture ". French education meant also to the Syrians the acceptance of the French System of examination among other things. However, despite the fact that France had tried hard to promote French culture to a possible position to challenge if not overwhelm the Arab culture, this harmed rather than helped the position of French culture. " The political

grievances and discontents of those years, and the almost continuous opposition of the greater part of the Syrian and Lebanese people to their French Master's, shook the ascendancy of France over men's spirits. In 1939, there were more who spoke French than there had been in 1918, but perhaps fewer who loved and believed in France ". ⁽⁶⁾ The Syrians, however, ought to be grateful to France for they established a state system of schools from almost nothing. Even though this system lacked in its beginning, the Standard of good education supplied by private schools, it must be admitted that it included every grade of school, from primary up to the Syrian University in Damascus .

Under the French Mandate, the Syrian Judicial System was also remodeled. The organization and procedure of the law-courts, was based upon French models, and the system of laws which they dispensed, although basically islamic, was deeply influenced by the French codes. Matters such as marriage and divorce continued to be subject to the jurisdiction of the tribunals of the religious communities, when all other matters were subject to the jurisdiction of the civil courts, administering " a system of law based partly upon Islamic jurisprudence and partly upon modern European codes ". ⁽⁷⁾

The cases in which only citizens of the mandated territories were concerned, the personnel of the courts was almost wholly indigenous. But cases involving citizens of foreign states or their interests were taken before the mixed courts of which the personnel was partly French and only partly indegenous. We have to notice here that this duality of law-courts is not an innovation in France's jurisprudence but only an expansion of her practices in the Arab countries of North Africa. Matters, such as marriage and divorce, continued to be subject of the tribunals of the religious communities.

CONCLUSION

Now we arrive at a point where some conclusions have to be made on the whole question of the French Mandate in Syria. The major element that appears to me is that the French experience in Syria has to be condemned. If the Mandatory system was, in the minds of some idealists, a humanitarian act aimed at bringing backward people up to a certain level of civilization and development, the mandate as applied by France in Syria was mainly aimed at exploiting the feelings of the minorities in order to undermine the nationalist fever which gripped the Syrian people after World War I .

From the very beginning no goodwill existed between mandatory and mandated. By obstructing the way in front of nationalist aspirations for Constitutional life, unity and self government, France not only alienated the majority people from her, but also contributed to the downfall of all the idealism of exporting western institution to the third world .

As a final note, I can say that the Mandate system was only a hypocritical way to reach old goals by new means. At that time the rising voice of the people against colonialism made the imperialistic European powers think about new channels in order to reach their ends. The idea of the Mandate came its way and so colonialism was transformed into Neo-Colonialism .

FOOTNOTES

- 1- Eliahu Ben Horin, *The Middle East Crossroads of History*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1943, p. 76.
- 2- About 80,000 Armenians hurriedly fled to Syria leaving all their possessions behind.
- 3- Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Islamic World Since the Peace Settlement: Survey of International Affairs*, Vol. 1
London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1927 p. 101.
- 4- A.H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, London Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 154.
- 5- Longrigg, Stephen Hemsley, *Syria and Lebanon Under French Mandate*, London: Oxford University Press, 1956. p. 367.
- 6- A.H. Hourani. op. cit., p. 153.
- 7- Ibid., p. 153.

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THE ABC OF LIFE

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