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Arab Liberation Movements During the Two World Wars: A Simplified Reading of Recent Writings

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Abstract

General Background: The Arab region experienced profound political transformations during the First and Second World Wars, shaping the emergence of liberation movements and modern national consciousness. **Specific Background:** The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of the Great Arab Revolt, and the imposition of the mandate system in Iraq and the Levant framed the trajectory of Arab nationalist struggles, later reinforced by the weakening of European colonial powers during the Second World War. **Knowledge Gap:** Existing studies vary in interpreting these movements, whether as outcomes of internal social and intellectual developments or responses to international geopolitical shifts, necessitating a synthesized analytical reading. **Aims:** This article aims to provide a simplified analytical review of recent writings on Arab liberation movements, focusing on their historical development, interpretive approaches, and interaction with global powers. **Results:** The findings indicate that Arab liberation movements emerged through a combination of intellectual awakening, socio-political mobilization, and international transformations, manifested in political organizations, revolutions, and resistance against Ottoman and colonial authorities, ultimately contributing to the gradual independence of Iraq and Syria. **Novelty:** The study offers an integrated perspective linking internal dynamics of Arab nationalist thought with external geopolitical changes through a descriptive-analytical synthesis of recent scholarship. **Implications:** These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the formation of modern Arab states and highlight the significance of sustained national resistance in shaping political sovereignty within both regional and international contexts.

Highlights:

- Intellectual Elites and Print Media Accelerated Early Nationalist Awareness
- Diverse Resistance Strategies Ranged From Reformist Discourse to Armed Uprisings
- Colonial Agreements Exposed Contradictions Between External Agendas and Regional Aspirations

Keywords: Arab Liberation Movements, Arab Nationalism, World Wars, Mandate System, Independence Trajectories.

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Introduction

The Arab world witnessed profound political transformations during the two World Wars (1914–1918 and 1939–1945), which contributed to the rise of liberation movements and the formation of modern national consciousness. World War I coincided with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the outbreak of the Great Arab Revolt, and the subsequent imposition of the League of Nations mandate system on most Arab territories, particularly Iraq and the Levant. World War II deepened the crisis of colonial legitimacy and provided national movements with an opportunity to reorganize, capitalizing on international shifts and the rise of the discourse of self-determination.

The importance of this study stems from its aim to provide a simplified overview of the most prominent modern studies that have addressed Arab liberation movements during this period, focusing on their methodologies and interpretive approaches. The research problem is represented in the following question:

To what extent can the Arab liberation movements during the two world wars be interpreted as a product of internal development in the Arab social and intellectual structure, or were they a direct response to international changes and the reshaping of the colonial system in the region?

Previous Studies

Recent studies interpreting Arab liberation movements during the two World Wars fall into three main categories. The first focuses on the nationalist dimension, considering these movements an extension of the development of Arab consciousness since the late Ottoman era, particularly after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. In this context[1], explained the social and intellectual roots of the Committee of Union and Progress and its impact on the rise of Arab nationalism. Similarly[2], demonstrated the repercussions of the Young Turk Revolution in Iraq (1908–1914) on the formation of Arab political discourse.

The second category focuses on socioeconomic factors, emphasizing that liberation movements were not limited to elites but involved broad social groups[3]. study on the Greater Syria project highlights the role of education, the press, and the growing middle class in deepening national consciousness. The third approach focused on the impact of international transformations after World War I, particularly the decisions of the San Remo Conference, which enshrined the mandate system in the Arab Levant[4]. examined the political and military role of Prince Faisal bin Hussein within the context of these transformations, while [5] analyzed the policies of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and their impact on the rise of Arab independence movements. These studies thus reveal a multidimensional approach to liberation movements, combining national, social, and international factors in explaining their emergence and development.

Methodology

The article is based on the descriptive analytical method, where it describes the content of recent studies related to the subject of the Arab nationalist movement, then analyzes them in a simplified manner, with the aim of clarifying their general trends and their contributions to understanding the development of Arab nationalist thought during that period.

Result and Discussion

First - The Arab Struggle Against the Ottoman State (The Committee of Union and Progress) 1908-1919

Several factors crystallized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading to the emergence of Arab nationalist ideas. These included the collapse of the feudal system, which had isolated Arab societies intellectually, socially, and economically. Following the demise of feudalism, cultural and intellectual exchange emerged, demanding the rights of individuals within society. Furthermore, an intellectual class, or middle class (bourgeoisie), arose, leading national movements to liberate themselves from feudalism and foreign colonialism, and to demand the establishment of national governments. The beginnings of Arab nationalism were concentrated in Iraq and the Levant, specifically because they were under the rule of the central Ottoman state, while the rest of the Arab provinces were under foreign occupation [6]. Thinkers and writers also played a role in disseminating Arab nationalism and Islamic identity, such as Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883) and Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1855-1902). The spread of printing and journalism in the Levant also contributed to the formation of the beginnings of Arab nationalism, as... Knowledge was confined to libraries and mosques, but thanks to printing, knowledge was made available to all members of Arab society, and it created a unified public opinion to demand Arab nationalism[7]. The first private newspaper in the history of Iraq was the Baghdad newspaper in 1908, and the most prominent intellectuals contributed to its editing. It helped in the growth of reformist ideas, as publications spread and ideas were awakened, especially new Arabic writings calling on Arabs to rise up and progress by reforming the fields, the most important of which is science. Intellectuals took on the responsibility of educating people to increase their awareness and advance them [8].

Arab intellectuals who were immersed in modern European culture understood the meaning of freedom, equality, constitutional rights, and self-governance, and sought to apply them to the Arab nation, specifically the educated class in the Levant, given their geographical location as a station for receiving Hajj caravans to Mecca and Cairo, thus creating conditions for cultural exchange among the sons of the Arab nation, as well as the exchange of scientific visits between

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students and scholars of the Arab East and West. Syrian scholars were the most Arab in their love of travel and seeking knowledge, and the Levant became a home for men of knowledge. The Ottoman authorities were keen on centralizing Ottoman rule over the Levant at a time when multiple nationalities and separatist movements emerged[9].

Turkish and Arab nationalist thought emerged clearly in the nineteenth century, which was called the era of nationalisms, which began in Europe and later moved to the Islamic East. After the intellectual awareness of the people of the nationalities matured, national movements calling for liberation emerged, led by the peoples subject to the Ottoman state, aspiring to independence. This provided a pretext for European countries to intervene to protect these nationalities, especially in the Balkans. Likewise, Arab nationalism developed as a result of the conflict with Turkish nationalism and Turanist ideas led by the Unionists at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century [10].

During the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) of the Ottoman state, Arab and Turkish nationalist thought grew, which made nationalist movements among Turks, Arabs and various nationalities a tool to destroy the unity of the Ottoman state and weaken it (Ismail, 2019-2020, page 80). The beginnings of national consciousness were a cultural and literary movement aimed at reviving the Arabic language, literature and history. With the development of political events and the emergence of Turanian nationalism, nationalist movements developed into political demands calling for freedom and expression of opinion, and developed into demands for independence and separation and calls for the formation of an Arab entity. This was a period that followed the declaration of the constitution until the declaration of the World War[11].

The beginning of Arab opposition appears in the participation of the Committee of Union and Progress (a secret society founded in 1889 by an Albanian student named Ibrahim Timo in Salonika) to oppose the tyranny of Sultan Abdul Hamid. The Committee of Union and Progress opened branches in several Arab provinces, including a branch in Baghdad in 1908, which was joined by a number of employees and members of the army. It gained popular support to demand the restoration of the constitution[12]. The Committee of Union and Progress carried out a coup against the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1908 and issued an ultimatum to him to restore the 1876 constitution. Indeed, the Sultan issued an order to grant the constitution to the Ottoman state on July 14, 1908. However, the disturbances and conspiracies continued, leading to the removal of Sultan Abdul Hamid from the throne of the Ottoman state and the installation of Sultan Reshad as Mehmed V in his place [13].

A clear Turkish-Arab rapprochement emerged after the constitutional revolution, represented by the establishment of the Arab Brotherhood Association in 1908 in Istanbul, as it was decided to establish branches of it in the Arab capitals. The Arabs were optimistic about the Committee of Union and Progress, as the victory of the Unionists and the revival of the constitution provided relative freedoms for the press and political organization, as it allowed the issuance of newspapers and magazines in the Arab states such as the Levant and Iraq, as (70) newspapers were issued in Iraq discussing new topics related to nationalism, freedom and loyalty in the modern state[14].

A dispute arose between Arabs and Turks when the first elections were held to form the House of Representatives under the constitution. These elections were managed by the Unionists in a way that ensured the success of most Unionists at the expense of the other nationalities, including the Arabs. This was in addition to other legislation that reinforced centralization in power, administration, education, and the army[15]. The Unionist government followed a policy of exclusion of other nationalities, especially the Arabs, and did not consider them brothers in faith but rather as subjugated slaves. It tried to ensure that most of the elected representatives were supporters of the Unionists. It redrew the electoral districts in a way that would guarantee the arrival of the Turkish element, as it obtained 150 seats, while the Arabs obtained (60) seats. Only (3) out of (40) senators were appointed to the Senate. In addition, most of the employees in senior positions who were not Turks, especially Arabs, were purged[16].

The Unionists followed a centralized system in managing the state, as well as pursuing a policy of Turkification that alienated the Arabs. Newspapers loyal to the Unionists actively promoted Turanian nationalism at the expense of other nationalities. In the second year after the declaration of the constitution, the Unionist government witnessed a fierce war of words between the Turkish press, which glorified Turanism, and the newspapers of other nationalities, which demanded the justice and equality upon which the Ottoman state was built. Among the most prominent Arab newspapers that resisted the Turanist campaigns were Al-Nahda newspaper in Baghdad, Al-Muqtabas in Damascus, and Al-Mufid in Beirut [17]. One manifestation of this conflict was the emergence of a group of movements calling for equality or autonomy. Even associations that supported Arab-Turkish unity, such as the Arab Brotherhood Association, were ordered to be dissolved by the Unionists after the deposition of Sultan Abdul Hamid. The period of Unionist rule is considered more despotic and centralized, especially in the Arab regions, which caused the Arabs to resent the Unionist government [18].

The Committee of Union and Progress, with its political approach and centralist tendencies in governance, gave impetus to the maturation of national consciousness. The Unionist revolution played a distinctive role in reorganizing the Middle East. The Arab states of the Levant began to unite to demand the rights of the Arab nation. Arab opposition emerged in the organization of political parties and national clubs, demanding independence and the establishment of a suitable constitution to organize the administration of the Arab nation's government[19]. These secret and public societies became active after the Unionists dissolved the Arab Brotherhood Society between 1909 and 1914. They began to spread Arab nationalist ideas through cultural clubs and societies. These societies were run by intellectuals and students who had learned about constitutional rights in Europe. They also established numerous branches in various Arab states. The work of each society complemented the work of the other, aiming to demand justice and equality against the centralist policy adopted by the Unionists [2].

The first convincing work, seemingly literary but with a hidden political agenda, was the Literary Forum in Istanbul. It was

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founded by an elite group of employees, deputies, students, and scholars who inherited the finances of the Arab Brotherhood Society. They established a library, a lecture hall, and a guesthouse. It gained many members and established numerous branches in Arab cities, becoming a meeting place for Arabs arriving from all countries. As for the Qahtani Society, it was a secret society founded in 1909 in Istanbul. It was known for its courageous approach, which aimed to establish a dual Arab-Ottoman kingdom with a parliamentary council and local administration, similar to the Austro-Hungarian Empire[20]. Another important Arab society was the National Scientific Club in Baghdad, founded by a number of employees and deputies in the Ottoman Council. The society published the newspaper Al-Nahda to spread the principles of Arab nationalism. Only 12 issues of the newspaper were published before the Unionists ordered its closure and the persecution of its owners. In addition, the Decentralization Party was formed in the Levant, and they established numerous branches. The party demanded autonomy for the Arab provinces, linked to the Ottoman state[21].

The Arab associations agreed to hold a national conference to express their demands, and arrangements were made to hold that conference in Paris, the capital of France, in 1913. It was chaired by Abdul Hamid Al-Zahrawi and attended by (25) representatives of various Arab associations in Istanbul, the Levant, Iraq, and Arab immigrants in America and Mexico[22]. The conference attendees presented their demands for Arab political rights, such as participation in the central administration, and that a decentralized administration be established in each Arab province to consider its needs. They also demanded that Arabic be made an official language in the Arab provinces, and that military service be local in the Arab provinces. The conference concluded with the conference members approving their demands and informing the Ottoman government of them. The conference members also expressed their thanks and praise to the French government for welcoming its guests[4].

The demands of the conference confirmed that the liberals and intellectuals had no intention of separating from the state, as their demands were for a decentralized Arab administration with recognition of the Arabs' right to some of their legitimate demands and emphasis on their Arab identity. It was a call to create a group of Ottoman-Arab reformers who would rise to the public interest. After the conference ended, the resolutions were handed over to the Ottoman ambassador in Paris, and negotiations took place between the two parties. They came out with an agreement to teach higher education in Turkish and everything else in Arabic, and that employees be appointed by the local authorities, except for the judiciary, in addition to appointing (3) ministers from the Arabs and appointing (2) Arabs in each province from the Council of Notables [22].

The Unionists adopted a hostile stance towards the National Congress in Paris and attempted to incite the French government to prevent its convening. However, the Arab will proved stronger than the Unionists' provocations, and the Congress succeeded, forcing the Unionist government to implement the Arab national demands. Therefore, they resorted to numerous tactics to mislead the Congress's outcome, including approaching the Congress's president, Abdul Hamid al-Zahrawi, and persuading him to grant him a seat in the Senate as a price for his silence[22]. Negotiations between the Unionists and the Congress members continued for two months, after which a decree was issued to implement the Paris Agreement. However, the decree amended some of the national demands, obscuring their true nature. The Arabs felt deeply disappointed by this decree, and a wave of despair and hopelessness arose regarding reaching an understanding with the Unionists and convincing them of the Arabs' political rights. After the failure of peaceful means to achieve their demands, they were left with no option but to revolt against the Unionists to seize their rights by force. The Ottoman state confronted all these movements and associations with various methods, such as repression, arrest, and even... Executions, as well as sending military campaigns to some cities to pursue a number of political figures, were carried out by military campaigns that practiced looting and sabotage [23].

The conditions were ripe at the beginning of World War I for a convergence of two Arab forces disgruntled with the Young Turks: the members of the Arab societies whose demands had been thwarted at the 1913 Paris Conference, and the religious authority of the Emir of Hejaz and its influence on the Arab and Islamic world. The Sharifian system was an old one, retained by the Ottomans after their conquest of the Hejaz in the 16th century. The Hejaz had enjoyed a semi-autonomous status at that time, and the position of Sharif was hereditary within the Hashemite family. However, the centralized policies pursued by the Young Turks negatively impacted the relationship between the Sharifian families and the Young Turk government. Wahib Pasha was appointed governor of the Hejaz and granted powers that concentrated both civil and military authority in his hands, aiming to eliminate the religious authority of the Sharifian families. This sparked animosity between the Sharifian families and the Young Turks. In 1908, Sharif Hussein was appointed the new Emir of the Hejaz. He sought to restore the Sharifian authority and prestige of the Hejazi tribes. When the Young Turks imposed a centralized administration and conscription on Sharif Hussein, he rejected this centralized system. This was opposed by the Unionists, which made them think about isolating him and appointing a suitable person other than him. At that time, the Emir of Hejaz began to look for a strong ally to support him against the tyranny of the Unionists[24].

The position of the Arab powers became neutral at the beginning of the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918), and Britain's declaration of war on Germany, as the Ottoman state allied with Germany against Britain, the Arab powers realized that the outbreak of the First World War might be a suitable opportunity to obtain independence after they despaired of the federal government granting them independence, as the events of the World War provided a new ally to help them obtain the independence of the Arab nation, and this new ally was Britain, which supported the separatist movements led by the various nationalities in the Ottoman state in order to weaken and dismantle it [25].

The Levant suffered from the oppression of the Unionist policies during the World War. Iraq became occupied by Britain after the declaration of war, and direct protection was imposed on Egypt. In the Levant, the Minister of the Navy, Ahmed Jamal Pasha, was appointed commander of the Fourth Corps and given absolute authority to rule the Levant. Ahmed Pasha was a fanatic for the Turks and hated the Arabs. The Unionist government began to flatter the Arab forces and deal with them with leniency at times and with violence at other times until the events of the World War developed. It followed the

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policy of Turkification firmly and paralyzed the national movements, dissolved the Arab parties and clubs, and made every effort to eliminate the rebellious nationalities[26].

Britain and France supported nationalist movements in the Ottoman state, especially France, which exploited its influence in the Levant thanks to missionary missions and French institutes and the formation of a generation influenced by the pioneers of the European and Turkish Renaissance. It began spreading rumors to create discord between Arabs and Turks, such as the establishment of an Arab movement in the Levant against the rule of the Unionists. This terrified the government of Ahmed Pasha, and he carried out a campaign to liquidate the nationalist forces in the Levant and executed them. He issued a statement in which he explained the reasons for the execution because of the establishment of a party hostile to the Ottoman state, and that its goal was to separate the Levant and Iraq from the Ottoman authority and make it an independent emirate[27].

Second - The Great Arab Revolt of 1916

The Unionists were pressuring Sharif Hussein, the Emir of Mecca, to declare Islamic jihad in support of the Ottoman Empire against the Allied Powers after the outbreak of World War I. Letters and telegrams poured in from senior Unionist politicians urging the Arabs to call for jihad and to prepare an army from the tribes of the Hejaz to participate in the war. However, Sharif Hussein's stance at the beginning of the war was neutral. He responded to the Unionists' letters by stating that he was morally and sincerely inclined to support the Ottoman Empire. He explained to the Ottoman authorities that he hesitated to declare jihad due to the proximity of the British fleet and its control of the Red Sea and the Hejaz coast. He feared that declaring jihad might lead to a British military blockade of the Hejaz. Britain and France were paying close attention to the Hejaz's position on the war because of Sharif Hussein's religious influence over Muslims in Africa, India, and Central Asia. They feared that a call for jihad might incite Muslim uprisings against their rule in India and Africa. Sharif Hussein was thus faced with two options: either to respond to the call for jihad and support the Sultan The Ottoman Empire or the alliance with the European colonial powers. At that time, Sharif Hussein was trying to find out Britain's position on the Arabs' desire to revolt against the Ottoman state in exchange for obtaining the independence of the Arab nation[28].

The Federal policy of terror that he pursued in the Levant and the Sharif Hussein's dispute with the Federal government over central authority led to coordination between the Arab forces in the Hejaz and the Levant to carry out an Arab independence movement. Sharif Hussein made contact through his son Abdullah to communicate with Lord Kitchener, the British Political Agent in Egypt in 1914, to learn Britain's position in the event of a revolution against the Ottoman state. A series of correspondences began between Sharif Hussein and Kitchener, who had become Minister of War at that time. The two parties agreed to arrange for the declaration of the Great Arab Revolt of 1916 against the Ottoman state. Britain's position was supportive of Sharif Hussein's policy for several reasons, including that the outbreak of the Arab Revolt would keep part of the Ottoman forces in the Arab countries, as well as shattering Germany's hopes of using the Arabian Peninsula as a bridge of communication between the German colonies in East Africa[24].

The nationalist forces in the Levant and Iraq despaired of obtaining their rights and independence from the Ottoman state. Therefore, the founders of the parties and the Arab officers in the Ottoman army agreed to contact Sharif Hussein, as he held the highest religious authority over the Muslims, to convey to him their desire to launch a revolution against the Ottoman state to wrest freedom and independence for the Arabs. They chose Sharif Hussein to lead that revolution and expressed their readiness to communicate and prepare for the revolution. Extensive contacts were made between the Young Arab Society and the Covenant Society, and the Damascus Charter of 1915 was signed. Faisal bin Hussein represented his father, Sharif Hussein, whom the nationalists nominated as a future leader. Sharif Hussein sent his son Faisal to the Levant to learn about the desire of the nationalist forces in the Levant and Iraq. Prince Faisal arrived in the Levant and learned about the nationalist fervor that demanded an end to the oppression of the Unionists. They prepared the Damascus Charter, which was a set of conditions for Britain to ally with it against the Ottoman state. It emphasized (Britain's recognition of the independence of the Arab countries, the cancellation of all privileges granted to foreigners, and the conclusion of a defense treaty between Britain and the independent Arab states). They agreed that Prince Faisal should be tasked with carrying the terms of the charter and conveying them to his father, Sharif Hussein, as they were the least of the demands that would satisfy them in order to declare a revolution against the Ottoman state [29].

The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence began with the first letter from Sharif Hussein to Sir Henry McMahon (High Commissioner in Egypt) in 1915 and ended with the last letter from Sir Henry McMahon to Sharif Hussein in 1916. The correspondence emphasized the need for an Arab revolt and an alliance with Britain and France against the Ottoman state, which oppressed Arab nationalism. However, Sharif Hussein stipulated that they receive a certain price in return for the support of the allies (Britain and France). This price was the establishment of an independent Arab state and an Arab caliphate separate from the Ottoman caliphate. The correspondence continued from July 1915 to March 1916, totaling (10) letters: five from Hussein and five replies from McMahon[30].

Sharif Hussein demanded specific guarantees to ensure the future of the Arab countries and the fate of the Caliphate. The British Cabinet tasked Sir McMahon with issuing a public statement to reassure the Arab nation in achieving the Arabs' political aspirations. Britain pledged to include in the terms of the peace the recognition of the Arabian Peninsula as an independent state with full sovereignty over the Muslim holy places. In addition, Sharif pledged to declare the Arab Revolt and denounce the Ottoman state, describing them as enemies of Islam. Britain also pledged to recognize the Arab Caliphate first, and to recognize the independence of the Arabs and protect that independence second [31].

Sharif Hussein declared the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire on June 10, 1916, firing the first shot at the Ottoman fortress in Mecca, thus signaling the start of the Great Arab Revolt. He further bolstered his movement with a proclamation

broadcast to the Arab people, accusing the Young Turks of violating Islamic law by unjustly executing and confiscating the property of free men in the Levant. He stated that the aim of the revolt was complete separation from the Ottoman Empire and the declaration of independence. Within three months, the revolt had seized control of the cities of the Hejaz, and Sharif Hussein was proclaimed King of the Arabs. Britain thus succeeded in winning over the Arabs to its side by promising to establish a unified Arab state. This came after the Arabs had abandoned their support for the Ottoman Empire, disgusted by the Young Turks' oppressive and centralized policies. Instead of confronting colonialism, Britain dragged the politically and economically troubled Ottoman Empire into a devastating war. Moreover, the war's course deteriorated badly for Britain and France, as Britain suffered heavy blows from the Germans and its position in the Dardanelles and Iraq was precarious. Sharif Hussein seized the opportune moment to declare the Arab Revolt[32].

The news of the Arab Revolt was met with astonishment in international circles, as they believed the Arabs were incapable of revolting due to the policy of violence pursued by the Young Turks against Arab intellectuals, the exile of leaders, the displacement of their families, and the conscription of their sons into the war. Furthermore, Jamal Pasha launched a widespread campaign of reprisals in the Levant, imprisoning many free men and exiling others. However, the armies of the Arab Revolt, under the leadership of Prince Faisal bin Hussein, reached the Levant in September 1918. They clashed with the Ottoman army and were able to defeat it, leading to the collapse of the Ottoman army. The Ottomans then offered a truce to the Allies, which was concluded in October 1918. This date marks the end of Ottoman rule in the Arab lands. Prior to the truce, a British-French declaration was issued, offering the Arabs assurances regarding the future of the Arab region. In 1918, British leaders in Iraq and the Levant distributed an official statement in Arab newspapers announcing complete liberation from Ottoman oppression and the establishment of Governments that derive their authority from the independent will of the national people[24].

Third - The Arab struggle against the Mandate 1919-1920

The Great Arab Revolt of 1916 coincided with another revolution that exposed the falsehood of the agreements that Britain had concluded with Sharif Hussein, namely the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia. After the Bolshevik Party seized power in Russia, it published some of the secret documents kept in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the 1916 agreements (the Sharif Hussein-McMahon correspondence), which were obtained by the Unionists from members of the Bolshevik Party. The Unionists presented an offer to Sharif Hussein for an Arab-Ottoman alliance[33].

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 was concluded between Russia, France, and Britain. Russia was given a share in the lands of Anatolia and the banks of the Bosphorus. As for the Arab countries, they were divided into spheres of influence and colonies between France and Britain. France's share in the Levant was shaded by a blue balloon, and Britain's share in Iraq was shaded by a red balloon. The Sykes-Picot Agreement serves as a warning to the Arab nation not to be excessive in its hopes based on British promises, as stated in the McMahon letters. However, the Arab powers did not lose their confidence in Britain[34].

After the end of World War 1914-1918, which lasted four years, the victorious countries decided to hold the peace conference in Paris, as they were the countries most affected in terms of money and lives during the war. The conference was chaired by the victorious countries in the war: France, Britain, and the United States of America. France was represented by Prime Minister Georges Benjamin Clemenceau, Britain by Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and the United States of America by President Thomas Woodrow Wilson.

An invitation to attend the Peace Conference was sent to Sharif Hussein for his role in supporting the Allies, and a telegram was sent to Prince Faisal to participate in the conference. The Peace Conference held its first session in Paris in 1919, and Prince Faisal delivered his speech at the meeting held on February 16, 1919. He emphasized the rights of the Arab nation to independence and unity, and reminded them of the Arabs' position during the war and the sacrifices they made to support the Allies. He also referred with reproach to the Sykes-Picot Agreement and expressed his surprise. At the end of his speech, he thanked Britain and France for the assistance they provided to the Arabs to gain freedom and independence. Prince Faisal also called on the Allied countries to implement the promises they had made to the Arabs[35].

The Arab question was discussed in March 1919 at the Peace Council, and a clear disagreement emerged between French and British ambitions regarding the fate of Syria. France demanded control over all of Syria, while Britain opposed it by employing soldiers to fight the Ottomans, in addition to the Arab-British promises. In general, two trends prevailed in the atmosphere of the conference: the first was represented by the American President Wilson, who dreamed of establishing a world order dominated by freedom and peace, and the second trend was the colonial powers (Britain and France), which competed and plotted conspiracies to obtain greater gains from the spoils of war.

The American president proposed sending a commission to ascertain the Arab people's desire for self-determination and their preferred form of government. This proposal was met with enthusiasm by President Wilson, and a commission comprised solely of American members was formed after Britain and France withdrew their proposals to send delegates to conduct a referendum among the Arabs regarding their right to self-determination and the type of government they desired. This commission became known as the King-Crane Commission. Three days after its appointment, the commission arrived in the Levant, where they met with members of the Syrian Congress. The Congress members presented their demands to the commission, which included several points such as recognizing the independence of the Levant under the leadership of Prince Faisal, establishing a monarchy in Iraq, abolishing the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and rejecting political trusteeship or what is known as the mandate. After completing its work, the commission submitted its report to the Congress, which affirmed the Arabs' desire for the unity of their homelands: Iraq as one country and the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine) as one sovereign and independent country. The report also rejected... The Arab peoples rejected the mandate

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system and preferred American aid for a limited period instead of the mandate. However, the committee's report was neglected and not implemented due to President Wilson's illness, as well as the intrigues devised by Britain and France to create settlements that they would impose in order to obtain the greatest gains[36].

The national forces despaired of achieving the promised independence during the Peace Conference, due to the opposition of the colonial powers, Britain and France, as well as the disregard for the Arab desire for self-determination, supported by the American president. Shortly before the end of the war, Prince Faisal entered the Levant with the army of the Great Arab Revolt. The national forces proposed convening the Syrian Congress to discuss the Arab position. This Syrian Congress had been established in response to Faisal's wishes, as he had decided to call upon the people to elect representatives to form a council called the General Syrian Congress, according to the Ottoman electoral system. This council included delegates from all parts of the Levant and was tasked with representing the country politically, declaring Syria's independence, forming a state, and drafting a constitution in March 1920. The Congress also affirmed the complete independence of Iraq, with a political and economic union between the two countries. Therefore, the national forces in the Levant and Iraq decided to declare independence, presenting the Peace Conference with a *fait accompli*: the independence of the Levant and the constitutional installation of Faisal as king of Syria. The Congress rejected the British occupation of the Arab regions, affirmed the necessity of Iraq's independence, and called for a political and economic union. Between Iraq and the Levant, knowing that the Iraqi national forces had formed a conference similar to the Syrian conference headed by Tawfiq al-Suwaidi and made a decision in the name of the Iraqi people to declare independence and call for Prince Abdullah bin Hussein to be the constitutional king of Iraq. The declaration of independence is an expression of the popular will, as it proclaimed the principles of the Arab national movement and revealed to the world the falsehood of the joint declaration announced by the British and French governments in 1917, of which nothing was implemented[37].

Britain and France expressed their rejection of Syria's independence and their refusal to recognize it. In April 1920, the Supreme Council met in San Remo and imposed the mandate on the Arab regions. Iraq was placed under British mandate, and Syria was divided into three regions: Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Syria and Lebanon became under French mandate, and Palestine became under British mandate. The declaration of the mandate generated among the Arabs a feeling of contempt towards the Western countries for denying the Arabs' rights to independence and unity, and for their breaking of the covenants between the two sides. The year 1920 became an unlucky date in the history of the Arabs because of the many calamities that befell them, and that year was called the year of the Nakba [38].

Fourth - The Struggle of the Syrian National Forces Against the French Mandate Until Independence 1920-1939

The decisions of the San Remo Conference provoked the anger of the Syrian people, leading to demonstrations and widespread unrest throughout Syrian cities in protest against the Mandate. The Syrian people considered it a challenge to Arab nationalism, for which the Arab people had fought the Ottomans. The national opposition to the occupation of Syria went through several stages, the first of which was the national resistance during the reign of Faisal. The French government issued an ultimatum to Faisal's government in Syria to accept the imposition of the French Mandate on Syria. In July 1920, King Faisal received a lengthy letter from General Gouraud explaining the sequence of events, the Arab government's opposition to the French presence, and demanding acceptance of the French Mandate over Syria, the abolition of conscription, the disbanding of the army, and agreement to the French occupation of the Rayak-Aleppo railway, the trial of resistance fighters against the French, and the occupation of Aleppo, Baalbek, Homs, and Hama [39].

The Syrian people resisted this warning. The real confrontation began with the Syrian people, and national movements emerged to resist the usurper. Masses of people in Damascus rose up to defend the homeland, and an unequal battle took place, the Battle of Maysalun in 1920, which lasted two hours, and 800 martyrs fell, including the Syrian Minister of War, Yusuf al-Azm (Adwan, 2010, p. 5). Not many days passed before a French force led by General Allenby entered the Levant, overthrew the government of Faisal bin Hussein, and occupied the Levant as a French sphere of influence, as approved by the Allied Council in San Remo in 1920. The Levant became under French mandate, and it became clear that the Allies had reneged on the promises and statements given to the Arabs, which were nothing but a veil behind which France and Britain hid their ambitions to divide the Ottoman state into spheres of influence among the victorious countries of the First World War[40].

The mandate imposed on Syria, with the eastern and western regions going to France, and Palestine and Iraq to Britain, was endorsed by the Mandate Instrument approved by the League of Nations Council in July 1922. At that time, disturbances began on the borders of the eastern and western regions of Syria and in Palestine, and each of the two allies accused the other of supporting the rebels against it with weapons and equipment. France's arbitrary policy, which was internationally notorious, was based on the principle of divide and rule, as it divided the Levant into small states and feared their unification because they would constitute a force that would eliminate the French presence. It declared martial law, imposed a financial penalty as a war indemnity, disarmed the Syrian army, and handed over senior civilians and military personnel to appear before martial courts. It also sought to implant French culture in Syria by imposing the French language and making it official and imposing the French educational system. Arab culture and civilization were still being replaced by French culture and civilization [41].

Britain and France conspired against the Levant, dividing it into four countries: Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Palestine. Lebanon sought to maintain its borders and independence because they are Christian and friends of France. Palestine was subjected to the British Mandate and became a homeland for the Jews. As for the Emirate of Transjordan, which Britain carved out of the Levant, Abdullah bin Hussein was crowned its king. Despite his attempts to unify Greater Syria, he failed.

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As a result of this division, Syrian nationalism emerged on the basis of a shared history, which is considered the most prominent prerequisite for national existence[42].

The second phase of the Syrian resistance was the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927. At the beginning of the French Mandate, the French government issued a decree recognizing Jabal al-Druze as an independent government, headed by Prince Salim al-Atrash. This severed Jabal al-Druze's ties with the Syrian government and placed it under the authority of the French High Commission. The al-Atrash family was accused of rebellion, and a French detachment was sent to suppress them. The al-Atrash family united and defeated the French detachment. News of the revolt spread throughout Syria, including Damascus, Homs, and Hama. In Damascus, the national resistance, represented by the People's Party, seized upon the religious occasion of the Prophet's Birthday (Mawlid al-Nabi) and organized a massive demonstration that included all segments of the Syrian population against the French Mandate. This widespread popular uprising embarrassed the French forces and nearly annihilated the French soldiers. In response, the High Commissioner, General Sarrail, bombarded Damascus with artillery and mortars, inflicting heavy losses on the revolution. This act of brutality against the unarmed population angered European powers, and the French government ordered... By summoning him to France [43].

Count Henri de Jouvenel was appointed in his place. He was a civil delegate whose policy was based on understanding with the nationalists. He sought to organize friendly relations with France, improve France's arbitrary and repressive reputation towards Syria in front of European countries, and draw the curtain on the painful past. The nationalists were optimistic. Jouvenel pursued a policy of decentralization to isolate Damascus from the rest of the revolutionary regions. He tried to convince the Druze leaders to lay down their arms in exchange for obtaining the right to draft their own constitution and choose their leaders and government. During his term, the Syrian government was established, and he issued a decree appointing Damad Ahmad Nami as President of the Syrian State, in addition to establishing the People's Party in Damascus to lead the Syrian national movement. It was the first party established during the Mandate [44].

The revolution intensified and spread throughout the country until July 1926, including Jabal al-Druze. Therefore, the French forces resorted to force, contrary to the wishes of De Jefenel, who believed that he could resolve the revolution peacefully. They attacked the revolution's positions, and the revolutionaries retreated in disarray, and some of the leaders of the Al-Atrash family surrendered. What the national elite accomplished was to transform the masses' repression of injustice and hatred towards the French Mandate into a national movement that resisted the Mandate and demanded complete independence[45].

The third phase was the republican era. A new High Commissioner, Henri Ponsot, was appointed, who pursued a policy of divide and rule, procrastination, and stalling. The nationalists resorted to political methods, culminating in the creation of what was called the National Pact in 1926. This pact demanded that France recognize Syria's independence and establish a national government based on a constitution drafted by a constituent assembly elected by the people. Consequently, the French government was forced to adopt a more moderate political approach, leading to the formation of Sheikh Taj al-Din al-Husseini's government in 1928. This government called for general elections to form a constituent assembly to draft the fundamental law. After the assembly was elected, a committee was chosen to draft the country's constitution. The committee prepared a draft constitution that emphasized the National Movement's charter, establishing a parliamentary republic and a legislative body. It affirmed independence, territorial integrity, Islam as the religion, and Damascus as the capital. However, after the constitution was issued and proclaimed, it clashed with the Mandate government, which objected to some of its clauses, particularly those concerning independence. This confirms that the formation of the assembly was merely a deceptive tactic to draw the national movement into endless political maneuvering. Sheikh Taj al-Din al-Husseini's government resigned, and the High Commissioner established a transitional government headed by... Salomiak's delegate to complete the elections and implement the constitution[46].

The nationalists won the election of al-Abid as president of the republic with the approval of the French government. The High Commissioner then sought to conclude a treaty that represented the mandate on the basis of "take and demand." However, the nationalist leaders refused to accept the text of the treaty unless there was a clear and explicit clause on the independence of Syria. Thus, the efforts to conclude the treaty failed, and Syrian demonstrations, chaos, and unrest returned. In addition, the activity of the nationalist forces increased after France's attempts to annex the Sanjak of Alexandretta and give it to Turkey as part of the colonial settlements. The republican era ended with the resignation of President Hashim al-Atassi in 1939 due to his embarrassing position for two reasons: first, the position of the opposition from the National Bloc, despite the president's intervention to limit and mitigate it, was strong; and second, the position of the representatives of the mandate, the High Commissioner, who despaired of cooperating with the nationalist forces. Thus, the constitution and the cabinet were suspended following the resignation of the president. The republican era lasted for three years, during which the two sides failed to pass a treaty that established the mandate's connection with the Syrian people. The republic fell, and it was run by administrators [47].

Finally, the fourth stage was World War II, when Germany occupied France in 1940. France signed an armistice with Germany, splitting the French army into two factions. One faction, led by Marshal Pétain, who became president of the republic and moved his government's headquarters from Paris to Vichy, agreed to the armistice. His supporters became known as the Vichy supporters. The other faction, led by de Gaulle, refused to sign the armistice with Germany and allied with Britain and the United States. In London, they formed the Free French government, headed by General de Gaulle. The Vichy government appointed General Dentz as High Commissioner to Syria, replacing Puaux. In June 1941, planes flew over Damascus, dropping leaflets from General Catroux, representing the Free French, announcing, in the name of their leader General de Gaulle, the end of the mandate and the declaration of freedom and independence for Syria and Lebanon. This followed cooperation with the joint British-French forces to expel the Vichy forces from Syria. In September 1941, General Catroux presented the Syrian government with a declaration of Syrian independence, at which point a celebration was held

at the government building in Damascus. Declarations of Syrian Independence[48].

Fifth - The struggle of the Iraqi national forces against the British Mandate until independence 1920-1930

The British government had no intention of occupying Iraq, but during the outbreak of World War I and the entry of the Ottoman Empire on the side of Germany against British interests in the Arabian Gulf, Britain decided to occupy Basra to protect its strategic interests, its lines of communication, and its oil fields. Due to Iraq's importance to British interests, Britain demanded during the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence that Britain recognize its right to establish special administrative arrangements in the provinces of Basra and Baghdad. However, Sharif Hussein refused this and began to stall in demarcating the borders of the Arab Kingdom[49].

The national forces in Iraq opposed the British occupation, as the British government prepared Indian-British forces to enter Basra and Baghdad and fully occupy Iraq. The economic and living conditions of most of the Iraqi people deteriorated, with high prices, increased unemployment, scarcity of raw materials, and poor administrative systems. This led to disturbances and uprisings, such as the uprising of the people of Najaf, who attacked the British governor of Najaf, Captain Marshall, and killed him, inflicting heavy losses on the British forces in lives and money. The uprising was only quelled after the city of Najaf was bombed and a siege was imposed on it[50].

The British government proceeded to dismantle the Ottoman administration and replace it with Indian systems. Iraq was divided into political districts, each subject to a British officer, in addition to the introduction of Anglo-Indian laws such as civil and criminal law, as well as the use of the Indian rupee as a means of financial exchange and the beginning of the influx of Indians to join the army and police. In order to convince the Iraqi people of the British occupation under the pretext of liberating them from the oppressive Ottoman rule, they arranged to conduct a referendum in 1918 to clarify the opinion of the people regarding the type of government they preferred, and to clarify through it the extent of the Iraqis' desire for the continuation of British rule over Iraq. It was a failed attempt to deter Iraqi resistance. The sons of the national forces, represented by the religious men of different sects and religions, responded by rejecting British rule and demanding the complete independence of Iraq with independent sovereignty[51].

The referendum marked the beginning of the emergence of the national movement demanding independence. The Iraqi Covenant Society was founded in 1919, declaring its desire to establish a constitutional monarchy under the rule of one of the sons of Sharif Hussein. It also called for the unification of the Arab countries and pursued peaceful methods to demand its rights and negotiations to achieve these goals. In addition, a number of societies were formed to oppose the occupation authority, most notably the Independence Guard Society, which was founded in February 1919 by a number of Iraqi nationalists. The society's platform included the complete independence of Iraq, the formation of an Iraqi kingdom under the monarchy of the sons of King Hussein, and an emphasis on Arab unity and the unity of the Iraqi ranks in all its diversity. The society's headquarters was the Ahliya School, and many writers and religious figures from Baghdad and Najaf joined it[37].

The Iraqi people joined forces with the national forces to stand against the British occupation. Mosques and religious occasions provided a suitable opportunity for unity and resistance against the British occupation. The British felt the danger of these gatherings to their presence, so the military and political governor, Balfour, issued a statement in June 1919 prohibiting public meetings without a permit from the military governor, and requiring a permit 21 days before the event. These arbitrary measures against the Iraqi people coincided with the British government's announcement in May 1920 of the San Remo Conference resolution, which imposed the British mandate on Iraq. Popular and national forces agreed to spread the call in Baghdad for the establishment of a national government, and to use the month of Ramadan to hold political demonstrations under the banner of religious occasions. Sunni mosques at times and Shiite mosques at other times used various religious occasions, such as holidays, births, and mourning ceremonies, as a suitable opportunity to demand independence and the expulsion of the occupiers. The occasions began with religious ceremonies and ended with political speeches and national poems that stirred and roused the masses against the occupying authority[52].

The spark of the Great Iraqi Revolution was ignited in June 1920 from those religious occasions in the Haydar Khana Mosque and began to spread throughout the country. At that time, the British government felt that direct rule in Iraq was not useful and had cost Britain great losses in lives and money. In October 1920, Sir Percy Cox arrived in Basra to assume his responsibilities as High Commissioner in Iraq. He called for an end to the military administration, the drafting of a constitution in consultation with the Iraqi people, and the formation of a provisional government with an Arab president and a State Council. Abdul Rahman Al-Kilani, the head of the Baghdad Syndicate, was chosen to form the Iraqi government. The 1920 Revolution forced the British government to change its policy in Iraq. It realized that direct rule in Iraq had cost it many losses, and it was better to change that policy to the establishment of an Iraqi government linked to a treaty that would regulate British-Iraqi relations[53].

The British government sought to hold a conference in Cairo on March 12, 1921. The conference included British government delegates in the Arab countries, headed by Winston Churchill, the British Colonial Secretary, to organize Middle Eastern affairs. It was agreed to nominate Faisal bin Hussein as king of the throne of Iraq. At that time, the Iraqi government conducted a popular referendum, and the vote took place. Faisal received 96% of the votes and was installed as king of Iraq[37].

British-Iraqi negotiations began after Faisal became King of Iraq, to conclude a treaty representing British-Iraqi relations. The 1922 treaty was a stage for the country's transition from an explicit mandate to a covert mandate in the form of a treaty.

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The Iraqi government tried to give that treaty the character of an independent local government, which bears its internal responsibilities but takes British advice and supervision within the authority granted to it by the League of Nations[37].

The 1922 treaty faced strong opposition from nationalists and religious figures, who expressed their opposition through parties and the press, which denounced and condemned the treaty because it infringed on Iraqi sovereignty. Sheikh Mahdi al-Khalisi, a religious scholar, called for a conference attended by 200 dignitaries and tribal leaders in Karbala to unify the opposition to the treaty in the Middle Euphrates. This angered the British government, so the High Commissioner, Percy Cox, took advantage of King Faisal's illness and absence for treatment, and proceeded to ban the activities of the parties and close the newspapers [54].

Nationalist forces condemned the treaty, and the press emphasized the people's desire for independence and sovereignty, and for the downfall of any government that ratified a treaty incompatible with the aspirations of the Iraqi people. Demonstrations erupted in several Iraqi cities demanding independence. These demonstrations were renewed in 1922 on the anniversary of King Faisal's coronation, when a march towards the royal palace coincided with the arrival of High Commissioner Percy Cox to offer his congratulations to the king. The High Commissioner was displeased with the demonstrators, but the treaty was passed by the Constituent Assembly. The High Commissioner pressured the Assembly to ratify the treaty, forcing the government to summon the representatives from their homes for a vote before midnight. The result was 37 in favor, 24 against, 80 abstentions, and 31 absent. The 1922 Iraqi-British treaties were detrimental to the Iraqi people regarding British personnel, financial, military, and judicial affairs. They were imposed on the Constituent Assembly for ratification, in the hope that the British government would implement them. Some of her promises to the Iraqis regarding easing the financial burdens and making an appropriate adjustment that guarantees their demands[55].

Then came the 1926 treaty, which was linked to the Mosul problem. After the matter was settled and Mosul became part of Iraq, the British government stipulated that a new treaty be concluded to replace the 1922 treaty, with Mosul included as part of Iraq. At that time, the Iraqi people were enthusiastic about the Mosul settlement, so the government was forced to agree to conclude the 1926 treaty. Negotiations began for a month, which was approved by the Iraqi Council of Ministers and signed in January 1926[56].

The British government issued a declaration in 1929 calling for planning Iraq's nomination to the League of Nations and the granting of independence. A new political trend emerged, represented by Britain's call for Iraq's nomination to join the League of Nations and the granting of independence. Iraq entered into lengthy negotiations with the British government. The importance of the 1930 treaty lies in achieving gains for Iraq by ending the mandate, joining the League of Nations, and acquiring the trappings of an independent and sovereign state, despite containing some clauses opposed by national forces, such as protecting British communications and granting some airports to Britain. However, these were considered non-essential matters, subject to amendment over time, and did not conflict with national sovereignty. At the United Nations General Assembly meeting in Geneva in October 1932, Iraq was accepted as a member of the League of Nations by a unanimous vote of (52) members of the Assembly, and the 1930 Iraqi-British treaty became effective at that time. The British mandate, imposed by the San Remo Conference, ended [57].

Results:

- 1) The two World Wars contributed to creating the conditions for the emergence of Arab liberation movements as a result of the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the shift in the international balance of power.
- 2) The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a period of rising Arab national consciousness, fueled by the activities of intellectual elites, the press, and increasing colonial intervention.
- 3) The methods employed by liberation movements varied, ranging from political and intellectual activism to conferences and armed revolutions, such as the Great Arab Revolt and the 1920 Arab Revolt.
- 4) The Sykes-Picot Agreement and the San Remo Conference resolutions revealed the conflict between colonial interests and Arab aspirations for independence.
- 5) The continued national resistance in Iraq and Syria contributed to modifying mandate policies and paved the way for gradual independence and the formation of nation-states.

Conclusions

This recent study confirms that Arab national liberation movements were not born of a sudden circumstance, but rather the product of a long historical interaction between internal transformations and international changes. The policies of Turkification and centralization in the late Ottoman era, and the marginalization of Arab rights within the Ottoman administration, particularly during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the subsequent rule of the Committee of Union and Progress, contributed to deepening Arab nationalist sentiment. Furthermore, the experience of the Arab alliance with Britain and France during World War I revealed the disillusionment of Arab nationalist forces, which encouraged nationalists to unite with the people and resist occupation. This resistance took the form of establishing political parties, newspapers, and magazines that addressed the masses, as well as popular uprisings. The Arab revolutions demonstrated that national action, whether political or armed, was capable of effecting change in colonial policies and imposing a new reality. The path to independence in Iraq and Syria indicates that continuous struggle, alongside shifting international

circumstances, was a decisive factor in ending the mandates and establishing the modern nation-state in the Arab world.

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