



# HUDA MUN'25

HCC: Historical Crisis Committee

Study Guide



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## Letter from Under Secretary-General

يا عروس المجد تيهي واسحبي    في مغانينا ذيول الشهب  
لن تري حفنة رمل فوقها    لم تعطر بدما حر أبي

- عمر أبو ريشة

“O, bride of glory! Strut and trail behind,

In our meadows, the tails of shooting stars aligned.

You shall not find a handful of sand on this land,

That has not been perfumed by the blood of a free, noble hand”

- Omar Abu Risha

Most Esteemed Delegates,

It is with great honor and anticipation that I welcome you to HudaMUN’s Historical Crisis Committee. My name is Ilaf Bayazid, and I am privileged to serve as your Under Secretary-General.

First and foremost, I extend my most sincere admiration and thanks to those who made this conference possible: the dedicated secretariat and the never-resting organization team. Furthermore, I am particularly grateful for the trust they placed in me to create this committee.

The Land of a Thousand Civilizations, the Pearl of the East, the home of Damascus, the oldest continuously inhabited capital in the world, once stood at the mercy of imperial powers who saw the entire region as nothing more than a prize to be claimed. Its borders were carved by foreign knives, foreign treaties, and native blood.

But from injustice always rise those who uphold righteousness, and from colonization always rises a people who refuse to be erased. From the halls of Damascus to the mountains of the Druze, leaders from every corner in Syria put their religious, territorial, and political divisions aside in the name of resistance. The Syrians, the rightful owners of this land, held on to their history and raised a new flag that honored it: green for the Rashidun, white for the Umayyads, black for the Abbasids, and three red stars for Aleppo, Damascus, and Deir Ez-Zor.

In November 2011, free Syrians returned to this very same flag, once again, in the name of resistance. On December 8, 2024, the world had no choice but to recognize it.

We were able to free ourselves of our oppressors over seventy years ago. And when we found ourselves in chains once more, we rose again. But our struggle does not end in our liberation; it



extends to those whose skies are still foreign and whose voices are still censored: beyond Arabism, beyond ethnicity, and beyond religion.

If I want you to take anything from this committee, let it be this: oppression never lasts. It cannot outlive righteousness. All it takes is for a few people to speak up to spark a revolution. Let that revolution begin here, with you.

I started this letter with a poetry verse, and I end it with one:

اغضبْ فقد حان الغضبْ

- فايز أبو جيش

“Be angry, for the time of anger has come.”

- Fayez Abu Jaysh

For the land perfumed with noble blood,  
Ilaf J. Bayazid  
Under Secretary-General, Historical Crisis Committee



### 3. Syria, Interrupted

#### 3A. Islamic History

Islam radically transformed the entire Levant region with its arrival during the 7th century CE. Under the Rashidun Caliphate, Syria was a central core of *Bilad Al-Sham* (the Levant), an administrative region that not only encompassed Syria, but also modern-day Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and parts of Southern Türkiye.

The Islamic conception of Syria could not be any more different than the modern day nation-states<sup>1</sup> in its place. It existed as a unified, diverse frontier of the empire. It was subdivided into *ajnad* (military districts) for purposes of governance and defense, with cities like Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo serving as critical centers of Islamic administration, education, and culture.

Although the Rashidun Caliphate was centered in Medina, Damascus eventually asserted itself as one of the great capitals of the Islamic world. This laid down the foundation for its significance throughout Islamic rule: from the Rashidun Caliphate to the Umayyads as a capital, to the Abbasids.

Shared identity is a cornerstone for nationalist discourse... And what more indisputable, undeniable argument can be made than religion? Naturally, one of the great Islamic capitals birthed a shared Islamic identity across Bilad Al-Sham, an identity which would become a key aspect of early nationalist discourse in the region.

#### 3B. Umayyad Caliphate & Damascus as a Capital

The Umayyad Caliphate marked a defining era for Syria, especially for Damascus which rose to political and administrative prominence as it was chosen by the Umayyads as the imperial capital of their dynasty.

As the capital, Damascus became a hub of culture, innovation, economy, and political power as it oversaw an empire that stretched from Al-Andalus (the Iberian Peninsula) in the west to the borders of India in the east. The city was endowed with a geographic location of utmost strategic importance: it connected important trade routes, which means it served as a crossroad for political influence, cultural exchange, economic trade, and military strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Nation-state: a sovereign state in which most of the citizens are homogenous in terms of being united by factors that define a nation, such as language or common descent.





It was during this period that Arabic was consolidated as the empire's administrative language, and Islam further spread throughout the region. The word "Damascus" became synonymous with the Islamic Golden Age in Bilad Al-Sham.

### 3C. Abbasid, Mamluk, and into Ottoman Control

Subsequent to the Umayyad period became the Abbasid Caliphate, which shifted the Islamic world's political capital eastward to Baghdad. Needless to say, this diminished Damascus's status as capital but nevertheless left Syria a distinguished province within the empire.

Although the Abbasids held control over Bilad Al-Sham, their governance was often indirect or decentralized. Naturally, this allowed local dynasties and military powers to gain significant local influence.

By the 13th century, the Mamluks rose to power, defeating the Mongols and the Crusaders, and establishing their dominance over Syria. Under Mamluk rule, Syria witnessed renewed stability and prosperity, notably due to its role as a link between Egypt and the Levantine coast. Despite the region's division into provinces, it remained culturally and economically connected.

In 1516, the Ottoman Empire infamously conquered Syria, and incorporated it into one of history's longest-standing empires. The Ottomans maintained much of the pre-existing administrative structure but integrated the region into their broader system. This period would last for four centuries, and would shape Syria's social, political, and economic realities.



## 4. *Syria Under Ottoman Rule*

### 4A. Ottoman Administration and Provincial Identity

The Ottoman Sultan Selim I seized Syria after defeating the Mamluks at the Battle of Marj Dabiq. When incorporating the region into the empire, it was not treated as a single, unified province, but rather as a group of administrative units, each with its own identity and governance.

Syria was divided into several eyalets (administrative divisions, provinces) including Damascus, Aleppo, Tripoli (modern Lebanon), and later Sidon and Acre. Of course, the purpose of those divisions was administrative ease, as local elites (religious leaders, tribal chiefs, etc.) often acted as intermediaries between the central Ottoman government and the people, preserving a degree of local autonomy<sup>2</sup>. Although it was ruled from Istanbul, Syria retained a strong sense of regional identity tied to its major cities, religious communities, and historical significance.

That is to say, “Syria” as a national concept *did not formally exist yet*. Identities were tied to cities, to religious sects, to family lineage, and to the Arabic language.

Over time, Ottoman reforms, notably the 19th century Tanzimat, began to increase centralization with the intent of consolidating Ottoman control. Inadvertently, this laid the foundation for new ideas about the Arab identity and autonomy. This tension between imperial authority and local identity would slowly evolve into full-fledged nationalist sentiment.

### 4B. Intellectual Revival

By the late 19th - early 20th century, a cultural and literary revival movement flourished in the Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire, notably Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia. This movement would soon be known as the *Nahda* (“the Awakening”), the Arab Enlightenment, or the Arab Renaissance.

It is commonly thought to be sparked by as a response to internal Ottoman reforms alongside increased exposure to European ideas, with traditional scholars seeing it as a reaction to the cultural shock brought by Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt. Regardless of its origins, it would transform the Levant into a cradle of political thought, literary production, and journalistic activity.

Centers like Damascus, Aleppo, and Beirut (historically part of Greater Syria<sup>3</sup>) witnessed a surplus of Arabic newspapers, salons<sup>4</sup>, and educational institutions. Thinkers debated the concepts of modernity, reform, constitutionality, and eventually, *nationalism*. This revival did not reject religion or heritage; rather, it reimagined and reimaged the identity of being Arab and Muslim in a changing world.

Missionary schools, secular colleges, and printing presses allowed for greater literacy and access to foreign texts, which were translated into Arabic. Figures like Butrus al-Bustani, Francis Marrash, and Abd Al-Rahman Al-

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<sup>2</sup>Autonomy: the right to self-govern.

<sup>3</sup> Greater Syria: term used synonymously with the Levant. Used here to refer to the historical region, and *not* the modern-day political aspirations.

<sup>4</sup> Salon: used to refer to a conversational gathering in which political topics and aspirations would typically be discussed.



Kawakibi advocated for civil liberties<sup>5</sup>, civic education<sup>6</sup>, and the idea of a shared Arab identity, transcending sect and ethnicity.

It is worthy of stating that this intellectual awakening was not explicitly anti-Ottoman. Yet, it still managed to challenge the empire's ideological monopoly. It introduced the concept that Arabs had a distinct cultural and political legacy worthy of revival; therefore, it set the stage for the organized nationalist movements and revolution in the years to come.

#### 4C. Rise of Arab Nationalism

The power of literary and cultural awakening soon proved itself when it sharpened into political consciousness. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Arab intellectuals, officers, and reformists began to question their place within the Ottoman Empire.

The shift was gradual: at first, it called for greater decentralization, cultural autonomy, and Arabic as an official administrative language. Even so, the empire held its stance, especially during World War I. This pushed many Arabs to demand full independence.

In Syria, Arab nationalism became more organized and militant. Societies like *Al-Fata*<sup>7</sup> (the Young Arab Society) and *Al-Ahd*<sup>8</sup> (the Covenant Society) operated in secrecy to unite Arab officers, students, and thinkers across cities. These groups would later become key in mobilizing support for the Arab Revolt of 1916 and even for postwar aspirations of a united Arab kingdom.

At its core, Arab nationalism blended a shared language, a common heritage, and the memory of Islamic greatness with anti-colonial sentiments. Syria was no exception. In mosques, in schools, in coffeehouses, and in military barracks: nationalism was turning into an agenda.

#### 4D. Arabs & WWI

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers, involving its Arab provinces in the war. Thousands of Arab soldiers fought under the Ottoman banner, whether out of loyalty or fear.

As the war dragged on, Ottoman paranoia intensified. In Syria, prominent Arab figures were arrested, exiled, and even executed. The most well-known example is set in 1916, when *Jamal Pasha* ordered the execution of nationalist leaders in Beirut and Damascus. These occurrences shocked the Arab public.

Simultaneously, the Arab nationalist underground took bold steps. Al-Fatah, alongside Al-Ahd, negotiated with *Sharif Hussein of Mecca*, promising to support a revolt in exchange for an independent Arab state. This built up to the *Arab Revolt of 1916*, famously led by *Faisal Ibn Hussein* and *T.E Lawrence*<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>Civic liberties: guarantees and freedoms that protect civilians from government overreach, usually guaranteed by a constitution

<sup>6</sup> Civic education: the concept of schools preparing young individuals to be active and engaged citizens through classes in civics, government, history, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Fata: also known as the Young Arab Society; an underground Arab nationalist organization in the Ottoman Empire

<sup>8</sup> Al-Ahd: also known as the Covenant Society; a political group consisting mainly of Iraqi officers serving in the Ottoman military. Most of these officers would serve in Sharif Husayn's army during the Arab Revolt and later in Faisal's Syrian army.

<sup>9</sup> T.E. Lawrence: "Lawrence of Arabia"; a British Army officer who played a major role in the Arab Revolt, largely agreed to have had intentions of weakening the Ottoman Empire and no real regard for Arabs.



The Revolt garnered support particularly in the Hijaz and parts of Southern Syria. In 1918, Damascus was captured, claiming a British-Arab victory.

T.E Lawrence, commonly known as Lawrence of Arabia, was a British intelligence officer turned guerrilla “ally” who supported the Arab Revolt alongside Sharif Hussein and his sons, promising Arab independence in return. His collaboration with Arab fighters became the symbol of British-Arab “unity” during the war. That image of unity would not last, as after the war it became clear that the British had no intention of honoring their promises, and only saw the Arab cause as an opportunity to weaken the Ottomans.

## ***5. Lines Drawn in Blood***

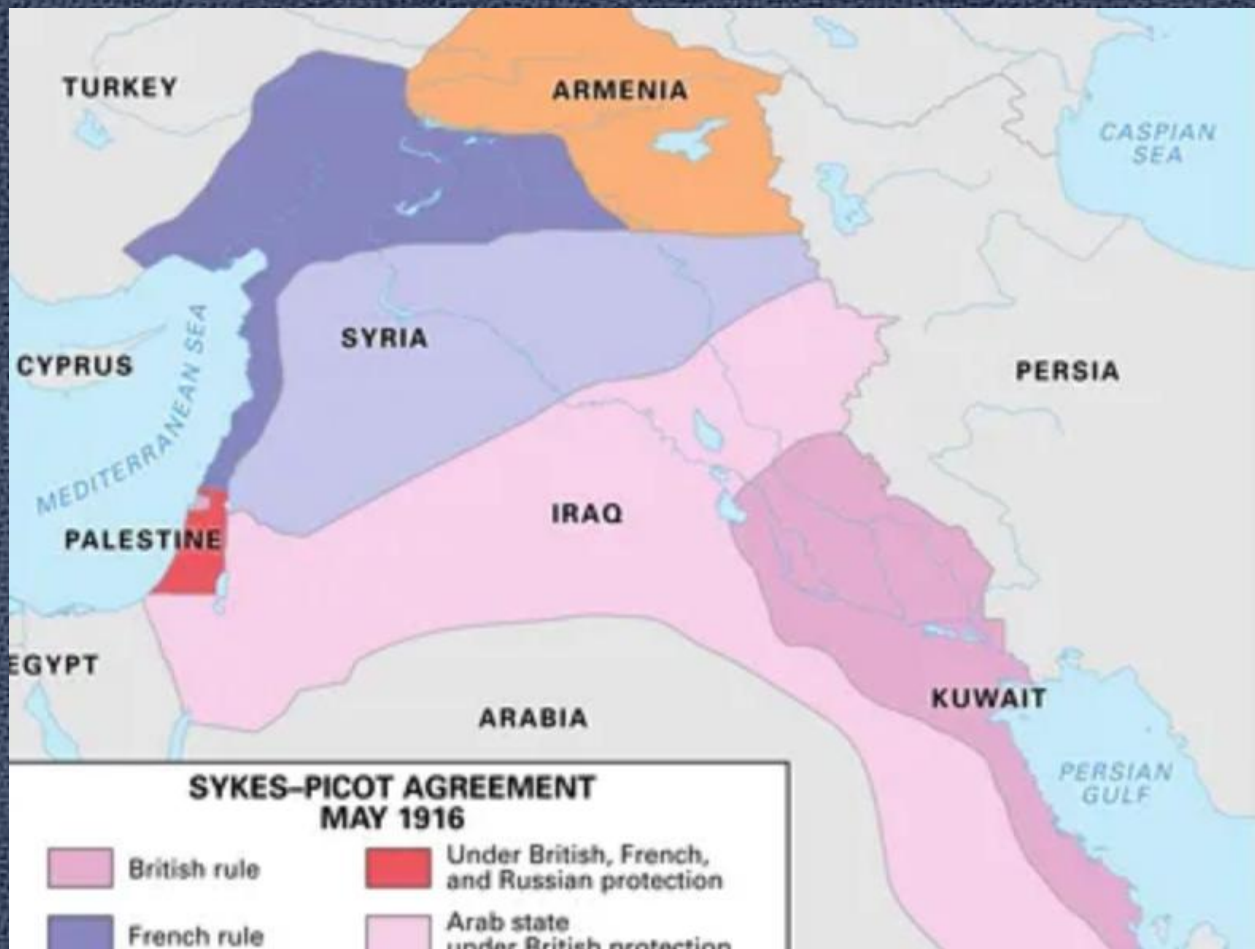
### **5A. Sykes-Picot Agreement (1915)**

While Arab fighters battled Ottoman troops across the desert with promises of future independence, Britain and France quietly drew lines through Arab lands. As in, literally drew lines, using pens and rulers, over Arab territories.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement, negotiated in 1915 and revealed by the Bolsheviks in 1917, was a secret understanding between the British and French governments (with Russian consent) that divided the Ottoman Arab provinces into spheres of colonial influence. They split up Arab provinces as follows: France would control what is now Syria and Lebanon, while Britain claimed Iraq and Palestine.

This betrayal destroyed the dream of post-war Arab sovereignty and fed the general disdain towards foreign powers on Arab land.





### 5B. McMahon-Hussein Correspondence (1915-1916)

Going two for two: Britain was also engaged in a series of letters with Sharif Hussein of Mecca. Through the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence, Britain promised to support the creation of an independent Arab state in exchange for an Arab revolt against the Ottomans.

The wording of the correspondence is, indeed, ambiguous, and scholars have reason to believe that was intentional, as many Arab leaders (including those in Syria) were led to believe that they would have sovereignty after the war.

### 5C. San Remo Conference and the Battle of Maysalun (1920)

The San Remo Conference, held in April 1920 by the victorious Allied powers, formalized the division of the former Ottoman territories. Despite prior British promises to Arab leaders, the conference awarded the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon to France.

In Damascus, the Arab Kingdom of Syria had been declared under King Faisal. The conference entirely dismissed its existence.

The decision, and dismissal of the Kingdom's existence, sparked outrage across Syria. Syrians had studied, and fought, and killed, and bled, in the belief that independence would follow.

Mere months after the conference, French forces invaded.



In July 1920, as French forces prepared to advance to Damascus, the Minister of War Yusuf Al-Azma gathered a modest and poorly equipped force. He confronted the French at the Battle of Maysalun on July 24th, 1920. Outnumbered and outgunned, his army was swiftly defeated, and Al-Azma was killed.

Although a military loss, the battle became an enduring symbol of resistance. Yusuf Al-Azma knew what the outcome of the confrontation would be; therefore, his decision to fight was a declaration and a war cry.

By the end of July, French troops entered Damascus.

The first independent Arab government in modern history was overthrown.

## 6. *Berets on Syrian Soil*

### 6A. Mission Civilisatrice

They came with chalk and rifles, to civilize the very cradle of civilization.

The French occupation of Syria, like other colonial projects, was cloaked in a self-proclaimed moral mission: the “Mission Civilisatrice”<sup>10</sup>.

This doctrine portrayed France as a benevolent force bringing enlightenment, modernity, progress, and civilization to “less developed” societies. In reality, it was a justification for cruelty.

In the eyes of the French colonialists, Syrians were not equals seeking independence. Only a few elites were worthy of even being reshaped and assimilated. French administrators, educators, and military officials framed their presence as a gift: uplifting Syria from its backwardness into a Europeanized future.

To Syrians, this was hypocrisy at its finest. The French occupied lands older than their republic, ruled by empires that had once overshadowed Europe. Damascus had been a capital when Paris was a forest. It was as clear as day that this was not about progress or civilization, but about power.

### 6B. Divide & Conquer: Creation of Mini-States

If the occupier knows anything, it is this: a united population is dangerous. The Syrian case was no exception. To the French occupiers, a united Syria was a dangerous Syria.

So they carved it up.

Under the guise of administrative efficiency and cultural accommodation, the French Mandate split Syria into mini-states, deliberately inflaming sectarian and regional divides to keep nationalist sentiments under control.

In just a few years, the historical unity of Bilad Al-Sham was reduced to an imperial jigsaw puzzle:

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<sup>10</sup> Mission Civilisatrice: French for “civilizing mission,” the political rationale and justification of colonization; “We are here for their own good, to civilize them.”



- The State of Damascus (1920)
- The State of Aleppo (1920)
- The Alawite State (1920)
- The State of Jabal Al-Druze (1921)
- The State of Greater Lebanon (1920, later Lebanon)
- The Sanjak of Alexandretta (now Hatay, handed over to Türkiye in 1939)



Each division played into religious and ethnic identities: Alawites, Druze, Maronites. They isolated communities, built bridges amongst communities that previously not only co-existed but also worked together towards pan-Arabism, and encouraged dependence on the French for protection.

The divisions were intentional and targeted. They aimed to divide the land to dilute the resistance and easily conquer the land.

Where the Ottomans had ruled loosely and provided autonomy, the French ruled with an iron fist.



### 6C. Sectarian Manipulation

French colonial strategy did not simply exploit existing sectarian identities; instead, it deepened and institutionalized them. Under the banner of protection, France portrayed itself as the guardian of minorities: the Druze, the Alawites, and the Christians.

The French purposely dealt with local elites along religious lines, placing certain sectarian communities into positions of power while preventing others from reaching those same positions.

### 6D. Economic Exploitation & Favoritism

Under French rule, Syria's economy was rerouted to serve imperial interests. Trade agreements and concessions disproportionately benefited French industries and French citizens. Local Syrian merchants, landowners, and farmers were more often than not excluded from any meaningful participation in national economic decision-making.

French companies dominated key sectors, notable railroads, banking, and even agriculture. On the other side, the rural poor and nationalist-aligned businessmen were denied credit, permits, and opportunities. Urban centers favored by the French saw investment while the rest were neglected.

Even infrastructure projects served French military logistics more than local prosperity. Economic disparity was a weapon to the French to silence opposition.

### 6E. Indoctrinal Education

French colonial schools were built to do anything but empower and educate the Syrian youth. The French brought forward a new curriculum, one that put French language and history at the center, marginalizing Arabic and dismissing Syrian heritage as secondary and inferior.

While access to education expanded under the mandate, it was done with ideological and strategic intentions. Nationalist teachers were dismissed, critical thinking was discouraged, and the goal of this educational expansion was the production of a Syrian youth that looks favorably towards the French, and dismisses revolutionary thought.

Ironically, the French exposed Syrians to their French revolutionary ideals: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (liberty, equality, fraternity). The education Syrians were subject to collided with the realities of the occupation they witnessed.

### 6F. French Military Presence

France's mandate over Syria was enforced through relentless military occupation. Thousands of French troops, along with colonial forces from Senegal, Algeria, and Morocco, were deployed to patrol cities, crush revolts, and guard French interests.

The presence of foreign soldiers on Syrian soil goes beyond oppression into humiliation. It was a symbol and a reminder of the denial of Syrian sovereignty.

Military courts punished dissent, military checkpoints were common, aerial bombardments silenced uprisings, and brutal reprisals targeted entire villages suspected of even nationalist sympathies.



## ***7. The Great Syrian Revolt***

### **7A. Cultural Resistance & Syrian Nationalism**

Syria's revolt was preceded by decades of culture agitation. Writers, poets, and thinkers fought with their words long before any Syrian picked up arms.

Newspapers such as Al-Qabas and Al-Ahrar became platforms for dissent and a tool for spreading nationalist ideas. Nationalist clubs emerged in Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus. Arabism was no longer an intellectual ideal, it was a moral duty. Any symbol of unity, even the Arabic language itself, was used as a war cry against colonialism.

### **7B. The Hananu Revolution (1919-1921)**

Led by Ibrahim Hananu, a former Ottoman parliamentarian, the Hananu Revolt was Syria's first large-scale attempt to resist French colonialism through military organization.

Operating in Northern Syria, primarily in Aleppo and Idlib, Hananu's forces launched guerilla attacks on French convoys, supply lines, and administrative outposts.

Unlike later revolts, the Hananu Revolution received limited external support and was crushed in 1921. Hananu was captured and put on trial in Aleppo, where he utilized the courtroom to declare anti-colonial rhetoric. He was acquitted, and the trial merely cemented his reputation as a symbol of dignified resistance.

The revolution failed militarily, but succeeded politically.

### **7C. Jabal Al-Druze (1925)**

In 1925, Sultan Al-Atrash, a respected Druze leader and veteran of the Arab Revolt, ignited the spark that would become the Great Syrian Revolt.

His call to arms began in Jabal Al-Druze, where the French had attempted to divide and dominate the Syrian Druze population, and failed miserably.

Al-Atrash's uprising quickly spread from the mountains to Damascus, Homs, and Hama. The revolt wasn't Druze, it was Syrian. Sunnis, Druze, Christians, and Alawites united in defying French Mandate rule.

### **7D. The Bombardment of Damascus (1925)**

In retaliation for the revolt's spread into urban centers, French forces unleashed unrelenting firepower on the capital of Damascus. Damascus was under heavy fire from French airplanes and tanks. The oldest inhabited capital in the world was shelled from the air and the ground. Whole neighbourhoods, like Al-Hariqa, were destroyed and hundreds of its inhabitants were killed. Civilians were massacred.

The French had made it undoubtedly clear that any further calls for independence or liberation would be answered with force.

### **7E. Aftermath**

By 1927, the Great Syrian Revolt was effectively over. Thousands were martyred, and hundreds were imprisoned or exiled. The French reasserted control brutally.



Although the revolt was crushed, it transformed Syrian nationalism from a vision or an intellectual concept into a lived, shared experience.

Networks of ex-rebels went on to become political leaders, writers, and architects of future struggle. The revolt failed only militarily, but it succeeded in forging a collective identity: one that would drive the next two decades of resistance, and eventually win independence in 1946.

From the revolt, the National Bloc would rise.

And from the mountains and blood of 1925, the Syrian nation would never forget what resistance means.

## 8. The National Bloc

### 8A. Formation and Ideology

After the military loss of the Great Syrian Revolt, its ideological victory proved itself over the next two decades.

Formed in 1928, *Al-Kutla Al-Wataniyya* (The National Bloc) was a coalition of former revolutionaries, intellectuals, and urban nobles who understood that if France could not be expelled by force, they must be defeated through their own means.

Figures like Hashim Al-Atassi, Jamil Mardam Bey, Shukri Al-Quwatli, and Sa'dallah Al-Jabri were committed to the Bloc's diplomatic and political approach. Their strategy was calculated: nonviolent resistance, economic boycotts, mass mobilization, and political negotiation. It was an effort to exhaust and destroy the mandate system from within.

Many of those who had previously held up arms supported the Bloc. They framed the previous armed struggle as justified, and their current non-violent struggle as moral and legal, appealing to French republican values, and more importantly, to international pressure.

Of course, opinions differed. Some criticized them as being elitist, or succumbing to the values of the oppressor. Nevertheless, their popularity increased across cities and provinces.

### 8B. The 1936 Fraco-Syrian Treaty of Independence

In 1936, after years of general strikes, boycotts, and growing pressure, France finally agreed to enter into negotiations with the National Bloc.

Jamil Mardam Bey and Hashim Al-Agassi traveled to Paris, where after intense deliberation, the *Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence* was signed.

The treaty promised Syrian sovereignty over internal affairs, a phased withdrawal of French troops, and Syrian entry into the League of Nations within three years.

In return, France would retain economic privileges and military bases for a transitional period.

Nevertheless, the French parliament refused to ratify the treaty. They cited domestic political turmoil and growing tensions in Europe. Syrian demonstrations erupted, and the National Bloc leaders returned to Syria as symbols of another broken French promise.



Despite that, the treaty marked a change in the way Syrians viewed diplomatic and political work. It proved that Syrians could negotiate with the colonial empire as a near-equal, and potentially a full-equal in the future. The failed treaty did not isolate the National Bloc; rather, it resulted in the complete opposite. It united the people under the National Bloc's leadership, paving the road for the final push towards independence in 1946.

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