

Responses to the Announcement of King Hussein of the Hejaz for the Caliphate in British and French Mandated Territories, 1924

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Abstract

This article discusses the responses to the announcement of King Hussein of the Hejaz for the caliphate in the French and British-mandated territories, which include Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine in 1924. This study uses a qualitative research method by analyzing the primary and secondary sources. This article finds that the announcement of King Hussein's caliphate in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine has provoked various reactions with strong support among the Arab populations in these regions. The findings also show that this support to restore the caliphate for the Arabs and the Quraysh was raised for proclaiming King Hussein as caliph. The most significant reaction of all, however, was in the French-mandated territories of Syria and Lebanon. This matter has caused an uneasy reaction from the French colonial to undermine support for King Hussein. His reign was short-lived. He lost his Hashemite kingdom and the caliphate in the same year, when the Saudi ruler, Ibn Saud immediately attacked his declaration as illegitimate and launched a military campaign in Hejaz. King Hussein went into exile to Cyprus, where he lived until he died in 1931.

Keywords: Arab Caliphate, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Western Colonials.

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1. Introduction

King Hussein's caliphate in 1924 emerged within a complex geopolitical landscape shaped by the aftermath of World War I, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, a central religious authority for Muslims and the rise of colonial mandates in the Arab world. The abolition of the Ottoman caliphate created a power vacuum and prompted various leaders to assert their claims to the spiritual authority of the Caliph (Khalifah, "successor"). The prominent leader who appeared was King Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashimi of the Hejaz, the former Sharif of Mecca (1908-1916) and also remembered as the man who launched the Arab revolt against the Ottoman during the First World War, which sought to establish Arab independence under an Arab Caliphate. His lineage, Hashemite or "Banu Hashem" was descended through the Sharifian branch of the lineage, signifying a descendant of the Arab chieftain Quraysh. As a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, he held significant religious and political legitimacy. He also believed, like several other Arab intellectuals and leaders of that time, that the caliphate was an Arab institution, which was forcibly seized by Sultan Selim I in 1517 after the takeover of the Mamluk dynasty, and should be returned to its rightful heirs, the Arab Hashemites (Johny,2018). This article discusses the responses to the announcement of King Hussein of the Hejaz for the caliphate in the French and British-mandated territories, which include Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

Following the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate, King Hussein declared himself the "Caliph of all Muslims". King Hussein termed his accession to the title the "return of the Khalifate to Arabia". He stated in an interview with a correspondent of the Manchester Guardian in March 1924 that the position of caliph had been forced upon him and he happened to be the ruler who possessed most of the qualifications necessary for the caliphate (Hassan,2016:171). However, it was unknown when King Hussein became interested in the caliphate. One reason was probably the treaty he had made with the British, which the British had promised him the caliphate after the conclusion of World War I. In early negotiations in 1914 and 1915, British representatives approached King Hussein and his son, Emir Abdullah with support for the idea of an Arab Caliphate to counter and supplant that of the Ottomans (Hassan,2016:180).

This was also alleged that the British officials mainly responsible for encouraging King Hussein to take over the caliphate were Lord Kitchener

(the British Agent in Cairo) and Ronald Storrs (Oriental Secretary to the British Representative in Cairo and later, Governor of Jerusalem) who visited Cairo in 1914, upon the Ottoman's entry into hostilities. In the official correspondence that began on 31 October 1914 and 1 November 1914, Lord Kitchener's messages through Ronald Storr to Emir Abdullah suggested the creation of an Arab Caliphate at Mecca and the independence of the Arab nation (Childs,1924). This assurance formed the starting point of the Arab movement, whose aim was to throw off the Ottoman by force of arms and to found an Arab state in Arabia and Syria. The British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir H. McMahon in the exchange of letters which followed on 30 August 1915, in his first letter to King Hussein, answered the latter's demand regarding the caliphate by repeating Lord Kitchener's message for Emir Abdullah as before. He interpreted it "as approval of the Arab Caliphate when it should be proclaimed" and added: "We declare once more that HMG would welcome the resumption of the caliphate by an Arab of true race" (Fromkin,2001:106). While King Hussein was lobbying for the title of caliph, the British were anxious to distance themselves from any involvement in Muslim affairs.

When King Hussein of the Hejaz declared himself Caliph on 5 March 1924, the reactions across the Muslim world were mixed. However, he received considerable support from Arab populations, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, as many saw him as a symbol of independent Arab nationalism and to resist British and French colonialism (Hassan,2016:173). Historically, the aftermath of World War I saw the imposition of French and British mandates over large portions of the Arab world. Palestine was assigned to the British while Syria and Lebanon were assigned to the French (Antonius,1934:525). Indeed, the geopolitical landscape after the First World War revealed a fundamental defect in the balance of power (Safavi,2023:255).

Support for the caliphate of King Hussein was pragmatic and seemingly reflected local opposition to French rule (Paris,2004:339). One study by Stephen Thomas Cox (2003) found that the initial responses to King Hussein's caliphate were reputedly positive in the region of Syria and Lebanon, but it was also said that they had been muted in anticipation of the French response. This article, however, confines its discussion to the Arabs in British and French-mandated territories, how they were affected and their reaction to the proclamation. His proclamation was viewed positively in

states like Damascus, Aleppo, Beirut, and Jerusalem, where Arab populations were seemingly the majority of the Muslims. Additionally, the British and French who had significant influence in the region due to their mandates over Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine did not support King Hussein's caliphate.

The most interesting immediate reaction was in Syria and Lebanon, which were under the French mandate. His caliphate was encouraged by covering the caliphate for the Arabs and the Quraysh. This led them to make the public pronouncement on the caliphate within the weeks after King Hussein's announcement. In this context, for them, King Hussein stood out as a suitable caliph because he was a descendant of the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh. Information on support and opposition in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine for King Hussein's caliphate comes from the following sources: Arab newspapers. Many Arab newspapers observed that the news reports of King Hussein's acclamation for the caliphate had been received with pleasure by most Arab Muslims at that time. His proclamation also faced significant challenges not only from the French but also from his rival, Sultan Abdul Aziz of Nejd, also known as Ibn Saud, who viewed King Hussein's claim as illegitimate. Therefore, this article will analyze the reactions, highlighting support and opposition to King Hussein's proclamation in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

2. Research Background

This article focuses on the development of King Hussein and the caliphate after the Ottoman Caliphate was abolished, specifically the responses in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Writing on the development of King Hussein and the caliphate has been a topic of discussion among several writers. As Joshua Teitelbaum (2000,2016) observes in his articles King Hussein was an aspirant to the caliphate seat for years after his declaration of the Arab revolt in 1916 and his involvement with the British during the war years was based on his understanding that the British would later support a united Arab state with him as caliph, in which the Arabs, led by the Hashemites family, as rightful heirs to the Islamic Caliphate succeeding the Ottoman family. This writing only focuses on the assumption of King Hussein on the transfer of the caliphate from Turkey to Arabia. This study addresses significant gaps in the existing research on King Hussein's caliphate, particularly the limited focus on specific regional responses to his proclamation.

In another respect, scholars such as Saad Omar Khan (2007) mentioned the literature on the caliphate abolition and its aftermath. He argued in his study on how the British views and policy on the Caliphate at the beginning of the 20th century and its implications toward Pan-Islamic politics at the end of the Ottoman Caliphate. However, this study only describes the consequences for Indian Muslims. One area that had not been examined closely enough is how these Arabs of the French and British Mandates responded to King Hussein's caliphate. Mona Hassan's writing entitled "Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History" discusses the myriad meanings of the caliphate for Muslims around the world through the analytical lens of two key moments of loss in the thirteenth and twentieth centuries. She also entailed Muslim responses to the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 as part of a longer trajectory of transregional cultural memory, revealing commonalities and differences in how modern Muslims have creatively interpreted and reinterpreted their heritage (Hassan,2016). Through extensive primary-source research, her study does not explore the archival documents contained in the Foreign Office records, most of which provide useful insight into King Hussein's caliphate and evidence on the widening sources of valuable information.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach, a method commonly used in library studies, which involves examining primary sources, such as Foreign Office (FO) records and secondary sources. The material sources used for this article included archival documents obtained from the National Archives, United Kingdom. There are several books, theses, and articles examining King Hussein's positions on the title of caliph. For the archival documents, the file contains mainly dispatches received by the Foreign Office, giving information on support in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine for King Hussein's caliphate. Within the FO 684/2/24/file 111 was particularly illuminating in this area. The main correspondents were the British Consul in Damascus, W. A. Smart and the Governorate in Jerusalem-Jaffa, Ronald Storrs. They reported the reaction and King Hussein's acceptance of the caliphate in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. The file also contains a memorandum outlining British commitments made to King Hussein by the Foreign Office. There were news articles published in *Alif Bā'*, *Fatā al-'Arab*, *al-Muqtabas* and *al-Umran* in Damascus, *al-Mufeed* in Beirut, and *al-Muqattam* in Cairo.

Subsequently, the documents were excerpted, evaluated and interpreted accordingly to construct the historical narrative.

4. Result and Discussion

4-1. Reaction of the Arab Community in Syria and Lebanon on the Announcement of King Hussein of the Hejaz for the Caliphate

Several religious leaders in the states of Damascus, Aleppo, and Beirut were the first to give hearty support to King Hussein as the new caliph succeeding Abdul Mejid II (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 April 1924). This support was widely reported in various newspapers, highlighting the anticipation among the Arab public for a new caliph following the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate. The most important Arab newspapers, such as *Alif Bā'* (ألف با), *Fatā al-'Arab*, and *al-Muqtabas* in Damascus, *al-Mufeed* in Beirut, *al-Muqattam* in Cairo, *Filastin* in Jaffa, and the local French newspaper such as *al-Umran* in Damascus responded positively to the events following King Hussein's declaration of the caliphate. Within weeks after King Hussein's announcement, the chief mosques in Damascus, Aleppo, and Beirut organized public prayers, reinforcing the legitimacy and importance of King Hussein's leadership within the Arab community (Paris, 2004:339). This period marked a critical moment for Arabs under French Mandatory Syria and Lebanon.

On 7 March 1924, King Hussein was proclaimed as the new caliph, as the first Friday prayer sermon in the Chief Mosque of Damascus was delivered in his name, symbolizing his legitimacy for leadership in the Muslim world (British Consulate in Damascus, 10 March 1924). *Alif Bā'*, *al-Mufeed*, and *Fatā al-'Arab* chronicled this event extensively, highlighting the widespread acclamation of King Hussein in Damascus with all its details.

The British reported that Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Khatib, the Chief Preacher of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, was the first and most enthusiastic to do his homage to King Hussein after the Ottoman Caliphate was abolished (British Consulate in Damascus, 10 March 1924). Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Khatib delivered a speech (*Khuṭba*, sermon in mosque on Fridays) at the mosque, attended by over 30,000 congregants, where he expressed his loyalty to King Hussein (British Consulate in Damascus, 10 March 1924). He felt nervous when the moment for action came and was encouraged by younger Arab nationalists to ascend the pulpit, he would skilfully walk throughout the congregation, leading them in a response that brought the

general acclamation of the Sharifian Caliphate (British Consulate in Damascus, 10 March 1924). The Arab newspaper in Damascus, *Alif Bā'* on 8 March 1924, entitled "The Arab Caliph" described the scene at the Umayyad Mosque during the Friday prayer in which King Hussein's caliphate was proclaimed (British Consulate in Damascus, 10 March 1924). One of the publications in *Alif Bā'* also published a speech by Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Khatib pronounced at the Umayyad Mosque. In his address, Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Khatib highlighted the responsibility of the Muslim community to maintain a leader called "a caliph would preserve both religious and civil order and protect the honor of the Muslims" (Translation of an extract from *Alif Bā'*, 8 March 1924). At that point, everybody present agreed with that leader with respect to the rightful caliph leadership, affirming, "This is true and we must look into the case" (British Consulate in Damascus, 10 March 1924). He also delivered a speech about the Islamic legal stipulation that a caliph had to be descended from the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh. All the multitude present listened to a presentation by himself about the selection of a caliph according to Islamic law. He explained the qualifications of King Hussein to be caliph, as follows:

"This Caliph should be from the Kureish Tribe. (Here are quotations from Bukhari and other Authorities as maintaining the necessity of the Caliph being of the Kureish). Mohamed said the Caliphate should be confined to the Kureish Tribe even if only two men from this tribe existed. Therefore, I say to you my friends that there is the King of the Arabs, Hussein Ibn Ali in whom all the conditions of the Caliph exist. I do homage to him by virtue of the book of GOD, will you do homage to Him? (Translation of an extract from *Alif Bā'*, 8 March 1924)."

This was observed when he tried to convince the congregations that King Hussein was highly suitable for the position of caliph. He called upon the congregation to pledge allegiance (*bay'ah*) to King Hussein's caliphate. Following Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Khatib's request, the multitude present paid their homage to King Hussein, affirmed it together, and acknowledged him as caliph. As the French authorities refused to give him a passport to proceed to Amman, Transjordan to congratulate King Hussein, he sent telegrams to King Hussein expressing support and acknowledging him as the new caliph (British Consulate in Damascus, 10 March 1924).

News from Beirut newspaper al-Mufeed published on 8 March 1924 reported that King Hussein received allegiance from the Arab Muslims of Damascus, largely due to the recommendation of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar, a member of the Arab Executive from Palestine. He played a crucial role in pledging allegiance to King Hussein as caliph in place of the last Ottoman caliph, Abdul Mejid II. A wireless communication from Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar in Amman emphasized that:

“As the Caliphate has been annulled in Turkey, the lands of Hedjaz, Transjordan, and Iraq have telegraphed to King Hussein proclaiming him as the Caliph. Thus, King Hussein has accepted. All the influential Muslims should hasten also to proclaim King Hussein as Caliph, because this acclamation depends on the efficacy of all their religious practices and the restoration of the Glory of the Arabs (Caliph) and the welfare of the Muslims (Translation of an extract from al-Mufeed, 8 March 1924).”

This was clear that Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar made a great impression on the people of Damascus who all approved the acceptance of the caliphate by King Hussein, especially because the Turks had annulled the Ottoman Caliphate and ordering the last Ottoman caliph, Abdul Mejid II and all members of the Ottoman royal family were ordered to leave Istanbul. Istanbul is the largest city in Turkey and its cultural and economic centre (Shamai and Others, 2014:116). He supported King Hussein’s caliphate, believing that the caliphate had to be revived because it was the one institution that could provide for the Muslim community and that control of the institution should be returned to its rightful heirs, the Arab Hashemites.

The second allegiance came from Beirut and Aleppo, where the mosque preachers (Khaṭīb, mosque functionary responsible for Friday sermon) hastily dedicated the first Friday prayer to King Hussein and planning to recognise King Hussein’s caliphate after the congregational prayers (Hassan, 2016:174). Reports indicated that the mosque preachers at two of Beirut’s mosques mentioned the name of King Hussein as caliph during the Friday prayers, particularly encouraging the congregation to support this stance (Hassan, 2016:174). Additionally, on 10 March 1924, there was a rally by an estimated 15,000 people gathered at the Great Mosque of Aleppo, where the mosque preacher acknowledged King Hussein as caliph to the congregations during Friday prayer (Hassan, 2016:174).

A news item in *Fatā al-‘Arab* reported that on 11 March 1923, various Ulemas (religious scholars) and the notables of Damascus, including the

Chief of the Ulema of Damascus, Qadi (judges), and the Naqib al-Ashrāf (the chief of all al-Ashrāf) signed a formal declaration that they had done homage to King Hussein as caliph (British Consulate in Damascus, 15 March 1924). This was even reported on 14 March 1924 regarding the plans for proclaiming King Hussein as caliph, where a group of scholars from Damascus had consulted together to proclaim him as caliph. Fatā al-'Arab also published the text of the declaration in favour of King Hussein's caliphate, which was signed by various religious scholars and the notables of Damascus. The declaration in question reads as follows:

“As the Turks have abolished the Caliphate and departed from Constantinople, the last Ottoman Caliph it becomes the urgent duty of the Muslims to do homage to an Imam, if they do not wish to die as infidels.

On this basic, we held a meeting and after careful consideration, we did not find anybody who is more worthy of being the Legal Imam than our Lord His Majesty the King of the Arabs, Sherif Hussein Ibn Ali who is from the Hashemite family of Kureish and the descendant of el-Hassan and the servant of the two Holy Places (Mecca and Medina).

Therefore, we men of Authority, we have done homage to King Hussein legally, by virtue of God's Book and the law of the Prophet, and promise to obey him and have acclaimed him as the Commander of the Faithful and the Caliph of the Muslims (Translation of extract from Fatā al-'Arab, 14 March 1924).”

This was clear that parts of the declaration prepared for the allegiance ceremony were conveyed to them, emphasizing the importance of consultation between the religious scholars and notables. In most of the opinion pieces that appeared in *Alif Bā'* and the *Fatā al-'Arab*, the condition that the person selected by the Arab Muslims should be from the Qurasyh family was mentioned. *Alif Bā'* was one of the newspapers that frequently gave space to the legitimacy of the Arab Caliphate. In general, public sentiment in geographical Syria and Lebanon seemed favourably inclined to recognise King Hussein as caliph. They were most enthusiastic to support King Hussein as caliph. King Hussein's position as a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad provided him with religious credibility among the Arab community in Syria and Lebanon.

4-2. Reaction of the Arab Community in Palestine on the Announcement of King Hussein of the Hejaz for the Caliphate

In Mandatory Palestine, strong support for King Hussein's caliphate came from politically active clerics and the notables. On 7 March 1924, a group of Muslim scholars in Jaffa informed the Muslim and Christian Association's Centre, including the Vice President, Sa'īd Abū Khaḍrah that they conveyed their homage to King Hussein, who was in Ash-Shunih by the telegram (Hassan,2016:177). Additionally, a wide range of responses to King Hussein's caliphate were reported by British agents.

British Governor in Jerusalem, Ronald Storrs reported that on the morning of 10 March 1924, the delegations from all over Palestine, including the electors, urban notables, Qadis (judges), and certain officials of the Law Courts gathered in Jerusalem for public meeting took place at the Supreme Muslim Council (al-Majlis al-Islāmī al-A'lā) building (Governorate, Jerusalem-Jaffa,14 March 1924). The objective of the meeting was to discuss the question of succession to the caliphate was vacant where a heated discussion took place in regard to the form of the decision to recognize King Hussein as caliph. However, the delegations unanimously decided to nominate and make a 'pledge of allegiance' (bay'ah) to King Hussein on behalf of all the Muslims.

Despite this, a delegation from Nablus and their representative on the Supreme Muslim Council refused to do this. The principal opposition to King Hussein was manifested by Abd al-Latif Salah, Tawfiq Hammad, and Kazen Agha Nimr (Governorate,14 March 1924). Consequently, they suggested that the whole question be postponed for two further months to enable them to consider the opinions of Muslims in Egypt. While a member of the Palestinian Supreme Muslim Council and a lawyer from Nablus town, Abd al-Latif Salah proposed that he should get in touch with the Muslims in Egypt, but his proposal was rejected by the majority who participated. Thus, no results had been achieved from them and it was decided to hold another meeting later that evening. During the reconvened session, the Palestinian representatives ultimately voted to support a conditional pledge of allegiance to King Hussein, on the condition that he defend the Arab cause and consult the Palestinians before deciding any question affecting their country (Wilson,1987:81; Governorate,14 March 1924). The mandates were seen by many Arabs as a form of colonial rule that fuelled nationalist sentiments.

After considering all of the discussions, a document of allegiance was drawn up and signed by the majority of delegates in favour of acknowledging King Hussein's caliphate. They issued a proclamation announcing their intention to pay their homage, "That he observes Kitab Ullah (the Book of God) and the tradition of the Prophet" (Governorate, 14 March 1924). On the other hand, a delegation from Nablus remained silent on their expressed desire regarding the caliphate and awaiting the decision of a Congress on the caliphate to be held in Cairo. However, the delegates from Jenin and Tulkarem had separated themselves from the Nablus delegation, remained aloof from the views of the remaining delegations, and joined the rest of Palestine. This meeting lasted until late in the evening.

On the same day, the representatives of the Arab National Party (Al-Hizb Al-Watani or the National Party) and the Arab Agricultural Society of Jerusalem (Hizb Az-Zurra' or the Party of Cultivators) sent a telegraph supporting King Hussein. In that telegraph, they stated that they accepted King Hussein's caliphate in a big ceremony. King Hussein had accepted the Palestinian's allegiance back then, thanking them for selecting him (Governorate, 14 March 1924).

A delegation of 50 representatives, including the mayors and members of city councils from Palestinian towns and villages decided to go to Jeriche and then to Ash-Shunih to submit the Declaration to King Hussein. Among them was a delegation from Jerusalem, which included Aref Pasha al-Dajani, Ragheb Bey al-Nashashibi, and the Mayor of Jerusalem, Musa Kazim al-Husseini (Governorate, 14 March 1924). The following day, on Tuesday, 11 March 1924, they set off to Ash-Shunih and participated in the ceremony of allegiance to King Hussein as caliph (Ayyad, 1999:106). There was no doubt that this event was a 'historic event', when King Hussein received homage from delegations representing prominent political figures, including the Muslim notables and the religious groups in Ash-Shunih.

However, in connection with a general acclamation of King Hussein as the rightful caliph, a delegation from Nablus joined the rest of Palestine in recognising King Hussein's caliphate (Governorate, 14 March 1924). On Friday, 15 March 1924, a delegation from Nablus, including the Mayor of Nablus, Tawfiq Hammad, Mufti of Nablus, Muhammad Tufaha al-Husayni, the member Supreme Muslim Council, Amin al-Tamimi, and Amin Abd al-Hadi proceeded to Ash-Shunih to express their support and participating in the ceremony of the allegiance. Upon the arrival of its delegation, King

Hussein warmly welcomed them and stated thanks. In conclusion, the reactions from the Arabs of Palestine to King Hussein's caliphate were mixed, influenced by the political, religious, and geopolitical factors of the time.

The declaration came at a time when the British mandate was rising. The British Government's decision to pursue a policy of non-intervention in response to events. On 12 March 1924, a lengthy internal memorandum on British commitments to King Hussein was prepared and widely circulated to absolve the British Government of any obligation to acknowledge and support these caliphal claims that they regard the "Caliphate Question" as a purely Muslim affair, without causing King Hussein to doubt their goodwill towards his aspirations in the matter (Hassan,2016:180). Despite this, the British never again openly supported King Hussein after he laid claim to the caliphate, as they saw him as a potential threat to their interests.

At the time, the British held the mandate over Palestine and had significant strategic interests in the region. They were concerned about the stability of their mandate. The British mandate and the ongoing tensions regarding Jewish immigration had created a sense of urgency around national issues. Any movement that threatened to unify Muslims under the caliphate institutions was viewed as a direct challenge to British authority and interests in the region. The British were also concerned about the Syrian situation as King Hussein's popularity was seen as a direct threat to their allies' newfound mandate, namely the French.

4-3. French Reaction to the Caliphate of King Hussein in Syria and Lebanon

Eventually, King Hussein's acceptance of the caliphate in Syria and Lebanon was positive, but the French response to the caliphate of King Hussein was largely negative. King Hussein's caliphate was not welcomed by the French, who held mandates over Syria and Lebanon, as a direct challenge to their authority and influence in the region. They feared that the British might attempt to subvert their occupation of Syria by superimposing the spiritual or religious suzerainty of the Sharifian Caliphate over their rule, as they considered King Hussein to be under British influence (Laurence,2011:111). In response, the French authorities took various measures to suppress any support for King Hussein's caliphate within their mandated territories. In mid-March 1924, they continued their strategy of pressure, repression, and propaganda against anyone who overtly supported King Hussein as caliph (Cox,2003:289).

In Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus, the district governors ordered the monitoring of the Muftis, Ulemas, and mosque preachers to prevent the acclamation of King Hussein from the pulpits of mosques (Cox,2003:289; March,2019:62). There was a rumour that the French authorities had summoned the mosque preachers and forbidden them to pronounce the name of King Hussein as caliph at sermons in the mosque on Friday prayers. On Thursday, 13 March 1924, the Mufti of Damascus, Muhammad Atta al-Kasim issued a confidential instruction “by virtue of an order received from His Excellency the Governor of Damascus” to the mosque preachers in the town (British Consulate in Damascus,15 March 1924). In it, they declared that:

“I inform you that the prayer tomorrow should be only in the name of the Caliph of the Muslims without mention of any particular, as has been ordered in Beirut and Aleppo. The above prescription should be observed pending further notice from the Governor (Mufti of Damascus to preachers in the town,13 March 1924).”

This was observed that the district governor forced Muhammad Atta al-Kasim to forbid the mention of any caliph’s name at the Friday prayer throughout the mosques in Syria and Lebanon. Reportedly angered at the government’s interference, the city bazaars were closed, apparently as a silent protest against this order. The machinations upset enough locals that an armed mob materialized to pressure the mosque preachers (Laurence,2011:111). On 14 March 1924, tens of thousands gathered at the Umayyad Mosque, where the mosque preachers dedicated themselves to the Sharifian caliph at the Friday prayer.

Besides, the French authorities forced the telegraph administration to cut all declarations for King Hussein in the telegraph within their jurisdiction (Cox,2003:289). As the Damascus Consul reported, these events were described by the Arab nationalist newspaper in Damascus, *al-Muqtabas* of 15 March 1924, published a complaint that all messages from Damascus, Homs, and Amman recognising the caliphate of King Hussein had been stopped by the telegraph administration (British Consulate in Damascus,15 March 1924).

According to news from the British Consul in Damascus, a French Communique was reported to the local press regarding King Hussein’s caliphate. An issue of the *Alif Bā’* published on 15 March 1924 reported that the French Press Department sent to the local Press, *Alif Bā’*:

“The news received from Beirut and the news brought by the travellers who recently arrived from Palestine is to the effect: The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Supreme Muslim Council have decided not to hasten acknowledging King Hussein as caliph and have determined to proceed to Cairo where a Conference of the Ulemas was to be held for the decisions of this caliphate question and that the religious Notables in the Egyptian Muslim World together with the Ulema of the Azhar Mosque were on the side of the Caliph Abdul Mejib and that the Chief of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Arab, Mosa Kazim Pasha al-Hussein who was inclined to declare King Hussein as caliph had received strong protests from the Members of the Said Committee in this respect and consequently, he decided as well to proceed to Cairo with the members of the Executive Committee to partake in the Conference to be held there. Therefore, King Hussein who says in his declaration that he owns the Holy Places together with the Mosque of Omar of Jerusalem, has claimed something that was not yet certain, because the Ulema and the educated men in Palestine do not acknowledge this (Translation from Alif Bā’,15 March 1924).”

However, this was ultimately revealed to be a mere propaganda ploy and the response to which had not been encouraging for King Hussein. Jaffa newspaper, Filastin also firmly rejected the veracity of the reports published in some Syrian and Lebanese newspapers to the effect that the Palestinians had been divided about the acknowledgment of King Hussein’s caliphate, with a group severely criticizing the leaders of the Supreme Muslim Council and the Arab Executive for fait accompli, questioning King Hussein’s capacity to resist the British (Tezcan,2020:10).

The mosque preachers were repeatedly instructed to refrain from mentioning King Hussein’s name during the Friday prayer, with the looming threat over them (British Consulate in Damascus,22 March 1924). Besides, there was a rumour that the Government had summoned the mosque preachers and forbidden them to pronounce the name of the caliph during Friday prayer. Following the governor’s insistence, Muhammad Atta al-Kasim issued another circular instruction repeating the official directives on Thursday, 20 March 1924 to the mosque preachers of the Damascus mosques, forbidding to use of any name for the caliph at sermons in mosque on Friday prayers and rendering the mosque preachers was responsible for any further breach of the order (British Consulate in Damascus,22 March

1924; Wilson,1987:81). Consequently, the city bazaars were closed, as a protest against this.

Besides, on the same day, the district governor summoned the Chief of the Ulema or the *raīs al-‘ulamā*, and ordering him to withdraw the declaration of allegiance to King Hussein (British Consulate in Damascus,22 March 1924). However, the Chief of the Ulema did not heed the wishes of the French authorities to the contrary and refused categorically. The governor told him to resign from his position. He also refused to do any such thing again. After consulting the Delegate of the French High Commissioner, the governor informed the recalcitrant priest that the post of “Chief of the Ulema” was abolished (British Consulate in Damascus,22 March 1924). It was observed that considerable feelings had been roused among the Arab populations by the interference of the French and the Arab people translated their resentment into action that inconvenienced the French authorities (British Consulate in Damascus,22 March 1924).

Additionally, *al-Umran* in Damascus reported on the events at the Umayyad Mosque during the Friday prayer on 21 March 1924. At the appointed time of prayer, huge crowds of people proceeded to the Umayyad Mosque. Shaykh Abd al-Qadir addressed the congregation and his speech was published in the Damascus newspaper *al-Umran* as follows:

“Oh! Men, you know that homage to the Caliph has been paid and this cannot be denied. The KORAN says: He who denies what he previously confessed must suffer, and the Prophet said: He who dies without having done homage to an Imam will die as an infidel. Notwithstanding all this, the Government has seen fit that the name of the Caliphate should not be mentioned in the Friday prayer, but this will not affect the homage we did, because the prayer will only be directed to the Caliph to whom homage has been done”. Then, he added: “Oh Lord! Grant Victory to the Caliph of the Muslims-- The Guardian of the Two Sacred Cities (Translation of an extract from *al-Umran*,22 March 1924).”

However, the name of King Hussein was not mentioned in the Friday prayer; instead, he only mentioned “Caliph of the Muslims” (i.e., the generic term ‘commander of the faithful’). He presumably referred to his prayer to King Hussein as “The Guardian of the Two Sacred Cities”, without mentioning the proper name. The congregation left the mosque very quietly and no trouble took place. The city’s bazaars remained closed the whole day. A gendarme circulated through the streets of Damascus, presumably to

affect the populace, and was confined to “silent protest” against the order by the French authorities (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 March 1924). Despite this order, King Hussein’s name was mentioned as caliph in the Friday prayers by the preacher of Damascus’s principal mosques in at least one or two mosques in Damascus (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 April 1924).

The people of Homs and Hama followed the example set by the people of Damascus, including the name of King Hussein as caliph in their Friday prayers (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 April 1924). The French authorities in both these towns put a stop to this practice. The city’s Bazaars were closed in protest. Though the mosque preacher obeyed the Government’s orders that the prayers be dedicated to the Caliph of the Muslim instead of to King Hussein, when the mosque preacher mentioned the “Commander of the Faithful”, the congregations responded by interjecting in unison “Al Hussein Ibn Ali”, which happened in some of the other mosques. However, British intelligence officers viewed these manifestations as no doubt organised by extreme nationalists.

When news of the event reached the French authorities, they were furious with anger and quickly summoned the muftis and Ulemas, who continued to ignore the orders emanating from the French authorities for audiences and consultations. On the same day, it was reported that the district governor summoned the preacher of the Umayyad Mosque, Shaykh Abd al-Qadir who had proclaimed the Sharifian Caliphate and enjoining him strongly the necessity of avoiding any further disobedience of the Government’s orders (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 March 1924). Shaykh Abd al-Qadir gave way and obeyed his instructions, though in a way that could hardly have pleased the French. On the other hand, the preacher of the Tawocsigh (Tawawsiya) Mosque, Shaykh Teufiq in Damascus had been compelled to resign from his post because he persisted in mentioning the name of King Hussein during the Friday prayer (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 April 1924).

The French authorities were concerned that King Hussein’s declaration could inspire nationalist movements and destabilize their control. They closely monitored political activities to prevent any uprisings or movements that might align with King Hussein’s caliphate. On 12 April 1924, the French Delegate, Monsieur Schoeffler proceeded to Homs, where there was considerable tension between the French authorities and the Arab

population's development (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 April 1924). The involvement of the French administration with Christians and Arab Muslims became ever more intense. The local Muslims established a partial commercial boycott of Christians to show their resentment. The protests of reformist Muslim scholars against these interventions of the French colonial state in the religious sphere increased. They advocated not only a need for the caliph but also King Hussein's caliphate. The report was received by British representatives in Beirut that several recalcitrant supporters of King Hussein's caliphate had been arrested and deported from Beirut to Palestine, as well as other activists were arrested and expelled from the towns of Homs and Hama (Hassan, 2016: 178).

Besides, Monsieur Schoeffler's visit to Homs resulted in the arrest of several agitators who had been deported to Tripoli and were imprisoned there. Others of them were put in prison for a night and released. It would seem the French's anxiety was about Hashemite dominance in Syria and little likelihood of any serious internal reaction against this repression (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 April 1924). The attitude of the French was dictated by their determination to prevent any activity in his favour that let Syria "fall into the Sharifian orbit" through a religious movement to the effect of political effects (British Consulate in Damascus, 22 April 1924). They have hitherto carried out their policy with resolution and without compromise. There would seem to be little likelihood of any serious internal reaction against this repression.

The French authorities continued to "repress energetically" in the state of Damascus all manifestations in favour of the caliphate of King Hussein. The Damascus newspaper *Fatā al-'Arab* of 24 April 1924 reported that "We learn that General Welgand had asked the Mufti of Damascus, Muhammad Atta al-Kasim to attend a ceremony for the dedication of the mosque in Paris. The Mufti of Aleppo and the Mufti of the Alawites state have been asked to attend the ceremony as well. These three will most probably proceed to France on the Sphinx next week" (British Consulate in Damascus, 28 April 1924). On 25 April 1924, Muhammad Atta al-Kasim received notification from a Chef De Cabinet Civil of General Welgand, Monsieur Giscard that the Mufti should postpone his visit pending further notice.

This was reported that the Chief of Naqshbandi Section, Shaykh Assad al-Saheb who was on good terms with the French and represented Monsieur Giscard, said that before the latter's departure to France, the Mufti did not

adequately represent the people of Damascus. He was alleged to have suggested that he and another Shaykh should be selected as carrying greater responsibility in the religious circles of Damascus (British Consulate in Damascus, 28 April 1924). Another reason given for the postponement was that the French authorities were preparing a Declaration to be signed by the Ulema of Damascus opposing the caliphate of King Hussein in favour of the French Mandate in Syria. The Damascus Delegate presumably took these accounts with him to Paris. Whatever may be the real reason for the postponement, it also appeared that some representatives of Damascus eventually went to Paris for the Dedication ceremony to present at the mosque paid for by the local Government (British Consulate in Damascus, 28 April 1924).

While aiming to undermine support for King Hussein's caliphate in greater Syria, the French government needed an occasion to install a caliph under their direct control. Therefore, the French authorities attempted to promote the candidacy of other prominent figures in his stead. This was reported in both *al-Muqattam* and *al-Muqtabas* with all details. In May 1924, rumours were spread in the Egyptian press that the French authorities were considering offering Abdul Mejid II the post and himself a residence in Damascus to counter a claim of King Hussein (British Consulate in Damascus, 17 May 1924). In the past, Abdul Mejid II chose his new abode in exile in Territet, Switzerland. The French government considered offering asylum to Abdul Mejid II. In this context, for France, Abdul Mejid II stood out as the preferred candidate of the Arab Muslims for the caliph's post because he was a person whom the Muslims would accept, as he would have gained recognition from the general public, especially the Muslim public's recognition.

It had already been stated that rumours in a Cairo newspaper, *al-Muqattam* had published an article regarding the further rumours that Abdul Mejid II would take up his residence at Damascus and be supported by the French authorities as a rival candidate to the caliphate against King Hussein (British Consulate in Damascus, 17 May 1924). According to the *al-Muqattam* with the headline "France and Abdul Mejid":

"According to news from Paris, the Secretary of the ex-caliph, Abdul Mejid II, Saleh Karamat Bey had been negotiating with French representatives, Monsieur Poincaré for Abdul Mejid II to proceed to Paris and stay there. That was probable that this was quietly decided. The correspondent of the

Arab nationalist newspaper al-Muqtabas in Paris said that the French Government will help Abdul Mejid II to continue to be caliph, and a French man-of-war will bring him over to Damascus with the idea of making the Syrians renounce their homage to King Hussein and do homage to Abdul Mejid II besides he will reside in Damascus (Translation of an extract from al-Muqattam, 10 May 1924).”

Meanwhile, another member of the Ottoman dynasty who was expelled from Turkey and took up residence in Beirut as well as the son of the late Ottoman caliph, Sultan Abdulhamid II who was overthrown by a group of political elites known as the Young Turks, who was a member of the C.U.P or Committee of Union and Progress, came to power in 1908 in order to prevent the collapse of the empire (Naseri and Others, 2023:331), Prince Selim was rumored to be singled out as potentially the next caliph under the French influence in Greater Syria to further his political ambitions. On 22 May 1924, al-Muqtabas published an article titled “Emir Selim and the Caliphate” regarding the rumour that Prince Selim would be proclaimed as caliph in Syria and take up his residence in Damascus (British Consulate in Damascus, 23 May 1924).

4-4. The Decline of King Hussein’s Caliphate

Although King Hussein organized a Muslim congress in Mecca to gain support for his caliphate, he faced protests from many participants, particularly those from India and Egypt (Kramer, 1986). Additionally, this proclamation intensified the war between the Hejaz and the Saudi Sultanate of Nejd. Sultan Abdul Aziz of Nejd, popularly known as Ibn Saud, was vehemently opposed to King Hussein’s claim to the post. The lack of support that King Hussein’s proclamation elicited perhaps encouraged Ibn Saud to think that the Muslim world would do little to save him in the event of the Saudi attack on the Hejaz (Wilson, 1987:82). Ibn Saud’s campaign against King Hussein began in late August 1924, leveraging local tribal alliances and military tactics to consolidate power in Hejaz. His forces, composed of the Ikhwan, launched a final assault on the Hijaz, which ultimately led to King Hussein’s abdication. King Hussein fled from Mecca to Jeddah and then to Aqaba, eventually settling in Cyprus while his son, Ali continued to fight for Jeddah, which was the last major city under Hashemite control. The Saudis successfully occupied the Hejaz in December 1925, marking the end of the Hashemite kingdom of the Hejaz and establishing Saudi control over the two Holy Places (Teitelbaum, 2001).

The fall of the Hejaz kingdom significantly undermined King Hussein's legitimacy and power, culminating in his eventual exile. Ironically, King Hussein spent much of his remaining time in exile in Cyprus, a British colony (Strohmeier,2019:12). He went into exile in Cyprus, where the British kept him prisoner until his health deteriorated. While he was in exile, he still used the title of caliph until he died in Amman. Ibn Saud founded the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Jafari Valdani and Jafari,2016:194).

5. Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire lasted until 1924, when the caliphate was abolished by Kemalist Turkey. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and caliphate left the Middle East without Islamic governance in which political and religious leadership was united, and the head of state (the caliph) was a successor to the Prophet Muhammad. To fill this power vacuum, leaders such as King Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashimi of the Hejaz, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, have claimed the title of caliph or leader of the Islamic community. King Hussein's caliphate was considered a legitimate caliphate by the vast majority of the Muslims around the Levant. The vast majority of Arabs in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine support the restoration of the caliphate, as they have an interest in returning to its rightful heirs, the Arab Hashemites. However, King Hussein's caliphate was also weakened by internal conflicts and rivalries, particularly with figures like Ibn Saud, who ultimately established the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The caliphate quickly came to an end when King Hussein was driven out of the Hejaz by Ibn Saud in 1924, preventing any long-term establishment. The rise of Ibn Saud and the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia posed a direct challenge to King Hussein's authority. Ibn Saud claimed the title of King of the Hejaz and later consolidated power, ultimately diminishing King Hussein's influence in the region. In the context of shifts in regional power, the fall of King Hussein and the rise of the Saudis marked a significant shift in power dynamics in the Arabian Peninsula. The outcome of Ibn Saud's campaign and the establishment of Saudi control over the Hejaz laid the foundation for the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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