

July 2, 1919

Resolution of the Syrian General Congress at Damascus

Citation:

"Resolution of the Syrian General Congress at Damascus", July 2, 1919, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Translation from J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, vol. 2: British-French Supremacy, 1914-1945 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 180-182. Annotated by Cyrus Schayegh. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/291012>

Summary:

In the last two years of World War I, British Empire troops based in Egypt succeeded in occupying Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria, roughly present-day Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan), which had been Ottoman from 1516/17. They were accompanied by the militarily weak but politically important Sherifian (also Arab or Hejazi) Army, troops loyal to the Hashemite rulers of Mecca and Medina. That dynasty, in place since the tenth century, had risen against Ottoman rule in 1916; Britain had made promises about a postwar Arab Kingdom, which were contradicted by the secret 1916 Franco-British Sykes-Picot Agreement, however. In October 1918, the Sherifian Army entered Damascus, followed by the British army. A Hashemite, Faisal (1885-1933), effectively became King of Syria with the consent of Britain and the support of Arab nationalists from all classes, including Ottoman-educated officials and officers, as Michael Provence's *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (2017) shows.

From January to May 1919, Faisal attended the Paris Peace Conference. Neither then nor during a second stay, later in 1919, did he succeed in convincing France to recognize his rule and abandon its claim to Syria. Moreover, he lost the backing of Britain, which in September 1919, following an agreement with France, withdrew its troops from Syria. The way was now open—though still winding—to France's eventual occupation of Syria, in July-August 1920. This move contrasted the (exceedingly vague) Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918, with which the war's victors had sought to reassure postwar Middle Easterners about their intentions; and it contravened the wishes of the Syrian General Congress (also known as the Syrian National Congress).

Convened from May 1919 to July 1920, the Syrian General Congress functioned as a parliament with representatives from across Greater Syria and interfaced with bottom-up national demands, as James Gelvin's *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (1999) showed. Led by nationalists, it inter alia declared the independent Arab Kingdom of Syria, headed by Faisal, in March 1920. And

in July 1919, as the below text shows, it published clear recommendations to the King-Crane Commission (also the 1919 Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey; in the text referred to as the American Section of the International Commission). Created by the Allies but soon feared to contravene their wishes and led only by US-Americans, that commission canvassed public political opinion in parts of Anatolia and Greater Syria in June-July 1919. Despite the demands issued in the text below, its final recommendation, which the Allies allowed to become public only in 1922, were for a Mandate.

Original Language:

Arabic

Contents:

Translation - English

We the undersigned members of the Syrian General Congress, meeting in Damascus on Wednesday, July 2nd, 1919, made up of representatives from the three Zones, viz., the Southern, Eastern, and Western, provided with credentials and authorizations by the inhabitants of our various districts, Moslems, Christians, and Jews, have agreed upon the following statement of the desires of the people of the country who have elected us to present them to the American Section of the International Commission; the fifth article was passed by a very large majority; all the other articles were accepted unanimously.

1. We ask absolutely complete political independence for Syria within these boundaries: The Taurus System on the North; Rafah and a line running from Al Jauf to the south of the Syrian and the Hejazian line to Akaba on the south; the Euphrates and Khabur Rivers and a line extending east of Abu Kamal to the east of Al Jauf on the east; and the Mediterranean on the west.

2. We ask that the Government of this Syrian country should be a democratic civil constitutional Monarchy on broad decentralization principles, safeguarding the rights of minorities, and that the King be the Emir Feisal, who carried on a glorious struggle in the cause of our liberation and merited our full confidence and entire reliance.

3. Considering the fact that the Arabs inhabiting the Syrian area are not naturally less gifted than other more advanced races and that they are by no means less developed than the Bulgarians, Serbians, Greeks, and Roumanians at the beginning of their independence, we protest against Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, placing us among the nations in their middle stage of development which stand in need of a mandatory power.

4. In the event of the rejection by the Peace Conference of this just protest for certain considerations that we may not understand, we, relying on the declarations of President Wilson that his object in waging war was to put an end to the ambition of conquest and colonization, can only regard the mandate mentioned in the Covenant of the League of Nations as equivalent to the rendering of economical and technical assistance that does not prejudice our complete independence. And desiring that our country should not fall a prey to colonization and believing that the American Nation is farthest from any thought of colonization and has no political ambition in our country, we will seek the technical and economical assistance from the United States of America, provided that such assistance does not exceed 20 years.

5. In the event of America not finding herself in a position to accept our desire for assistance, we will seek this assistance from Great Britain, also provided that such assistance does not infringe the complete independence and unity of our country and that the duration of such assistance does not exceed that mentioned in the previous article.

6. We do not acknowledge any right claimed by the French Government in any part whatever of our Syrian country and refuse that she should assist us or have a hand in our country under any circumstances and in any place.

7. We oppose the pretensions of the Zionists to create a Jewish commonwealth in the southern part of Syria, known as Palestine, and oppose Zionist migration to any part of our country; for we do not acknowledge their title but consider them a grave peril to our people from the national, economical, and political points of view. Our Jewish compatriots shall enjoy our common rights and assume the common responsibilities.

8. We ask that there should be no separation of the southern part of Syria known as Palestine, nor of the littoral western zone, which includes Lebanon, from the Syrian country. We desire that the unity of the country should be guaranteed against partition under whatever circumstances.

9. We ask complete independence for emancipated Mesopotamia and that there should be no economical barriers between the two countries.

10. The fundamental principles laid down by President Wilson in condemnation of secret treaties impel us to protest most emphatically against any treaty that stipulates the partition of our Syria country and against any private engagement aiming at the establishment of Zionism in the southern part of Syria; therefore we ask the complete annulment of these conventions and agreements.

The noble principles enunciated by President Wilson strengthen our confidence that our desires emanating from the depths of our hearts, shall be the decisive factor in

determining our future; and that President Wilson and the free American people will be our supporters for the realization of our hopes, thereby proving their sincerity and noble sympathy with the aspiration of the weaker nations in general and our Arab people in particular.

We also have the fullest confidence that the Peace Conference will realize that we would not have risen against the Turks, with whom we had participated in all civil, political, and representative privileges, but for their violation of our national rights, and so will grant us our desires in full in order that our political rights may not be less after the war than they were before, since we have shed so much blood in the cause of our liberty and independence.

We request to be allowed to send a delegation to represent us at the Peace Conference to defend our rights and secure the realization of our aspirations.