

Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean

Late 19th Century until the 1960s

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CHAPTER THREE

“LIBERAL COLONIALISM” AND MARTIAL LAW IN
FRENCH MANDATE SYRIA

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Introduction

Imperialism has dramatically returned to the Middle East. For many in the region, particularly in Palestine, the age of colonialism never ended, but some intellectuals in Europe and America have welcomed a new age of muscular imperialism. Niall Ferguson, for whom the principal lament of today’s neo-imperialism is that Winston Churchill can no longer lead its charge and Rudyard Kipling can no longer sing its praises, writes widely from his endowed Harvard chair.

Many glib commentators like to blame all the problems of the Middle East today on British and French imperial maneuvers to fashion dependencies out of the lost provinces of the Ottoman Empire—as if malicious European diplomats somehow invented the ancient fissures between Shiites and Sunnis, or willfully encouraged Jewish settlers to colonize Palestine.¹

European diplomats of the interwar Middle East may not have been malicious, but widespread ignorance, short-sighted incompetence, and self-delusion certainly bequeathed a miserable inheritance to the post-colonial era. Colonial authorities zealously exploited and deepened sectarian and class cleavages in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine. More than encouraging Jewish colonization, British politicians quite literally deeded Palestine to Europe’s Zionist movement, and in so doing gave the world the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the Middle East, endless suffering and misery are widely viewed as the colonial legacy of the twentieth century. American policymakers and academics, on the other hand, prescribe colonial occupation not as a source of the region’s real and imagined ailments, but as a cure, apparently confident that “Western

¹ Niall Ferguson, “History, Democracy and Iraq,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2005.

values” can only be conveyed, or indeed defined, by the self-appointed heirs of the Enlightenment, and delivered with military force and staggering violence. The Iraq adventure will do little to burnish the record of Euro-American imperialism in the Middle East.

The balance sheet for Middle East colonialisms, however, remains contentious. Beyond wars and borders, the enduring traces of colonial rule are more elusive. The Mandates of the former Ottoman Arab lands in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq were based in part on the evolving international legal structures of the League of Nations. Legal arguments not less than racialized theories of European supremacy legitimated the French and British presence in the Middle East between 1920 and the 1950s. The influence of European legal theory and so-called liberal imperialism on the post-colonial state is rarely examined, except in normative law codes or the presence of secular constitutions. This chapter examines a single episode in the history of mandatory Syria to suggest some of the more subtle traces of European occupation.

France occupied Syria and Lebanon in 1920. Agitation against the post-World War I Middle East settlement was widespread in the region, and each of the new French and British colonies, carved from the former Ottoman realms and euphemistically styled “Mandates” under nominal League of Nations supervision, was roiled by massive revolts. In every case the revolts were suppressed with the techniques of industrialized violence innovated during the war in Europe, including air power, poison gas, and mechanized artillery against civilian populations. The mandate states and the challenge posed by nearly continuous insurgencies also spawned large police-state intelligence structures, which the post-colonial states generally inherited after independence in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine.

In August 1925, during a major revolt in Syria, a revolutionary tract appeared in Homs, the Syrian Mandate’s third-largest city. The posters called for armed resistance against the French military authorities. Mandate intelligence quickly arrested and interrogated a number of well-connected boys and young men. Several were tried and convicted in a closed military court. The investigation and trial led to a lengthy secret file. The documents provide a rare look into the functioning of the colonial security state, as well as providing a glimpse into the production and dissemination of agitation against Mandate rule. During the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925–27 there were dozens of such tracts posted in public places in all Syrian towns and cities. They were usually anonymous, and Mandate intelligence rarely found anyone responsible

for such postings.² The appearance of the Homs tracts is thus a window into the thoughts and actions of those who rejected mandatory rule at a time during which such documentary traces are very scarce.

The normative sources for the Mandate in Syria are rich and include memoirs of colonial officers, the records of the League of Nations, and the proclamations of French Mandate authorities. Also now available are the voluminous reports and documents compiled and archived by the various mandatory intelligence services. The contrast between normative sources and secret intelligence documents illustrate what Ranajit Guha calls “domination without hegemony.” Colonialism in Syria and elsewhere was legitimated—or, more crudely, sold—to the metropolitan population by claims that it fostered a series of ideas like democracy, secularism, and freedom for the colonized population. In practice, colonial rule was based on a preponderance of force. Regarding British rule in India, Guha writes: “The metropolitan state was hegemonic in character with its claim to dominance based on a power relation in which the moment of persuasion outweighed that of coercion, whereas the colonial state was non-hegemonic with persuasion outweighed by coercion in its structure of dominance.”³ Colonial claims to rule were based on military domination rather than on consent. This chapter seeks to ask: what were the long-term prospects for “liberal” state institutions introduced in an atmosphere of profoundly illiberal rule, and designed to legitimate, or shroud, authoritarian military government?

French Mandate rule

A small but tenacious group of Frenchmen in government, politics, and business whose influence over imperial issues was far out of proportion to its size, capitalized on the “defensive patriotism” wrought by World War I to commit France to military occupation of Syria in 1920. But seizing Syria by force was one thing; governing the country was quite another.⁴

² See Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Archives Diplomatiques-Nantes (hereafter, MAE-Nantes), carton 1704, BR 140 Damas, August 3, 1925 and carton 1704, BR 155, August 28, 1925, for examples of other similar tracts. Some of the tracts turned up in newspapers in Cairo, Paris, London, and Detroit, as well as the British, French, and League of Nations archives. See for example, *L'Humanité*, September 9, 1925.

³ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge, MA 1997, xii.

⁴ Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987, 44.

By 1920 France had been busy for decades building an empire on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. The disruptions of World War I, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, and wartime agreements with Britain made the expansion of French rule possible in what became the French League of Nations Mandate of Syria and Lebanon. France had long had regional commercial and cultural influence in the silk and cotton trade, in railroad construction, in missionary educational institutions, and as the self-appointed protector of the Maronite Christians.

Many in France embraced the sense of imperial mission and destiny. Jacques Stern, an official in the French government defeated in 1940, wrote a fierce defense of France's colonial mission from exile at Princeton University. Stern had been minister of colonies from 1936 to 1940 in the Radical Republican government of Albert Sarrout, and while sharing the liberal and anti-clerical attitude of his party, he was also a defender of France's historical mission as cultural beacon and bearer of civilization. Stern's book sought to explain France's historical role as a colonizing nation and rebut American arguments that decolonization should follow the war.⁵

"France had been colonizing, in the noblest sense of the term, for a thousand years," he wrote. The Crusades had been an early expression of French Christian civilization on the march, and yet, in North Africa, Syria, and Lebanon, France had continued the crusade up to the present day.⁶ According to Stern, France's colonizing zeal had never been harnessed for the purposes of exploitation or aggrandizement, but had always aimed to "liberate populations subjected for centuries to the Black Flags, the Siamese despots, Turkish domination, or the slave merchants of Central Africa, and to raise them to the civilization of Pascal, Claude Bernard, Pasteur, [and] Branly."⁷ Furthermore, in Syria, North Africa, and elsewhere, French rule was necessary to stunt inborn fanaticism and protect the minority groups from the Muslim majority. It would bring rule of law, and respect for order. "The gratitude and

⁵ Jacques Stern, *Les Colonies françaises: passé et avenir*, New York: Brentano's 1943, trans. as *The French Colonies: Past and Future*, New York: Didier 1944. The translation had a new introduction attacking 1940 Republican presidential challenger Wendell Wilkie's popular book, *One World*, which called for decolonization, equality between nations, international cooperation, and an end to war.

⁶ Stern, *French Colonies*, 13–15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 263.

loyalty of the children of France's Empire would never fail her, not even after her defeat."⁸

Down the centuries, the peoples of Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, have repeatedly called upon the French and the British to help them, to free them from the Turkish yoke, from an inferno in which the only civilizing influence, from the time of the Crusades, was the French religious orders and their educational institutions.

What the French and British administration brought was order, freedom, honest finance, railroads, public works, and hygiene, not through brutal assimilationist methods, but with full consideration for native beliefs and traditions. They brought mutual understanding, also, and widespread employment. What these thousand-year-old nations need is to have their racial pride softened, their fanaticism and exacerbated nationalism silenced. Hastily granted independence would intensify their stubborn nationalism and bring pogroms and civil wars to their peoples. A real war of races would break out.⁹

Despite such cultural justification, French expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean was also driven by material aims, and the efforts of powerful advocates in Paris. Industrial lobbies, most particularly textile and cloth manufacturers, coveted Mount Lebanon silk and Cilician and Syrian cotton. Oil companies sought access to fields near Mosul. The political right, including much of the military, coveted the Eastern Mediterranean region for reasons of strategy and French national prestige. The sense of imperial mission was widespread, however, and even the socialist prime minister Aristide Briand claimed that possession of Syria was a matter of "life and death for France's Mediterranean policy," and declared that "the gulf of Alexandretta is an important thing in the Mediterranean; its possession is essential to the future of France." He further noted that it was the terminus of the Mosul oil pipeline, and that access to petrol had been the most important issue of the war.¹⁰ Right-wing French politicians argued that France required a durable military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean to match its presence in North Africa. Some went so far as to claim that the security of France

⁸ Ibid., 26. The translated text reads "The gratitude and loyalty of France's Empire [*sic*] children would never fail her, not even after her defeat."

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Briand in *Journal Officiel*, Depts., June 26, 1920, quoted in Stephen Henry Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy, 1870-1925*, London: P. S. King & Son 1929, 591-92.

itself depended on its possessions on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.¹¹

There was some informed opposition to French colonial policy. A few French academicians and orientalist argued that France should foster the development of a unified Arab national community, but the prevailing viewpoint among military and colonial officials dictated a sectarian system of fragmented religious populations.¹² Colonial advocates needed a reliable client population to make sense of and lend purpose to the imperial mission. Despite internal divisions of class, education, and ideology, Arabic-speaking Christians comprised this privileged client population. French colonial civil servants created Lebanon to reward the Christian population, and insure a reliable core for the French presence.¹³

Many Europeans recognized the role imperial competition had played in the catastrophe of World War I. New structures of international law emerged to delineate the relations between and constrain the behavior of existing states. Under pressure from American president Woodrow Wilson, the League of Nations was devised and charged with adjudicating disputes between the Great Powers and dulling the edges of their imperial contests outside Europe. The League of Nations agreed that some of the domains of the defeated Central Powers and Ottoman Empire would become League of Nations Mandates. Britain and France reluctantly agreed to accept the modest limitations imposed by the mandatory regime in return for the realization of their imperial goals and secret wartime agreements. Representatives of the victorious powers drafted the League of Nations Covenant covering the Mandates in mid-1920 in Geneva. At approximately the same time, in July 1920, French forces marched inland from Beirut to Damascus. The French colonial army met organized armed resistance, which it crushed at the battle of Maysalun outside Damascus, and disorganized opposition in all areas of the country. From this beginning, a gap appeared between the idealism of Mandate rule and its implementation.

¹¹ Ibid., 592.

¹² See for example, Gérard Khoury, "Robert De Caix et Louis Massignon: deux visions de la politique française au Levant en 1920," in Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, Leiden: Brill 2004, 165–84.

¹³ See Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1988, 130–31.

Among ordinary French citizens, who had suffered most in the recent war, the expansion of the French empire, whatever the current euphemism, was less popular. France had already invaded and occupied Algeria in the first half of the nineteenth century, Tunisia in 1881, and Morocco in 1912. Algeria had been annexed as a settler colony. Native functionaries and French military officers governed Tunisia and Morocco as protectorates. The Mandate for Syria was controversial from the start and calls to fulfill the colonial mission in the French states of the Levant were less compelling in the wake of World War I. Parliamentary leftists noted the absence of strong economic interests, and asked, "was France to be the gendarme of the world?"¹⁴ In the 1920s, during a series of massive anti-colonial insurgencies in North Africa and the Levant, the French left gradually abandoned its opposition to the colonial enterprise. Popular culture and film depicted the sacrifices of brave French couriers of civilization arrayed against uncomprehending and ungrateful savages. Such representations helped to sever the association between left-wing metropolitan politics and anti-imperialism, and cement a racist narrative of European civilization against the fanaticism and irrational violence of the colonies.¹⁵

The paternalistic ideal of the Mandate immediately confronted various forms of indigenous resistance. Mandatory legal and intelligence structures evolved under the imperative to employ mass violence against armed and generally hostile populations. The League charter had vaguely stated that the wishes of the people under Mandate were to be a primary concern of policy. The mandatory power was further required to submit yearly reports to the League Council, later to become the Permanent Mandates Commission. The Commission would "explicitly define the degree of control, authority, or administration exercised by the Mandatory."¹⁶ While relations between League of Nations members were theoretically constrained and adjudicated by international law and the new Permanent Court of International Justice, there were no structures for presenting the grievances of the populations under Mandate to the international bodies. The mandatory powers were able to filter

¹⁴ *Journal Officiel*, Deps., December 7, 1921, quoted in Roberts, *French Colonial Policy*, 593.

¹⁵ David Henry Slavin, *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919–1939: White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, and Settler Myths*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001, 4–5.

¹⁶ British Foreign Office, *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, London 1935.

out any indigenous opposition to their policies. Annual reports to the Permanent Mandates Commission naturally reflected French policy, and Syrian opinion was unrepresented.¹⁷

In July 1922 the League of Nations published a more detailed description of the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon. French colonial functionaries and officials drafted the terms of the Mandate without serious criticism or contribution from members of the League or the nine members of the Permanent Mandates Commission. The terms called for a constitution, “framed in agreement with the native authorities,” within three years, local autonomy, “as circumstances permit,” and the right of France to maintain military forces and raise local militias, the costs of which were to be supported by whatever unrestricted revenues the mandatory was able to extract from the territories under Mandate. France was free to use “ports, railways, and all means of communication for the passage of its troops and of all materials, supplies, and fuel,” and was entrusted with the “exclusive control of the foreign relations of Syria and Lebanon.” The mandatory power claimed unrestricted control over taxation and the granting of concessions for natural resource exploitation or any type of commercial development. The establishment of a judicial system in Syria and Lebanon was entirely under the control of France.¹⁸ Former British mandatory official Stephen Longrigg noted that the French were “prepared sincerely to spend life and treasure, and to face local unpopularity, in order to produce a regime which they and the world could approve and admire.” And yet, Longrigg wrote, the mandatory was invested with “virtually unlimited powers.”¹⁹ These unchecked powers would be used again and again.

The Mandate charter required the election of a constitutional assembly within three years, or by 1923. French authorities had little enthusiasm for elections or a constitution, but there was pressure from the Permanent Mandates Commission, and from Syrians themselves. The constituent assembly was postponed first by a succession of high commissioners committed to direct military rule, then by the outbreak and costly suppression of the Great Syrian Revolt between 1925 and 1927, and finally by fears that a constitution would diminish French control. Elections took place in summer 1928, but contrary to the wishes and

¹⁷ Stephen Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1958, 110–11.

¹⁸ League of Nations, *Official Journal*, August 1922, 103–17.

¹⁹ Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon*, 111–12.

efforts of the Mandate authority, they returned nationalist politicians, including assembly president and Homs delegate Hashim al-Atasi, rather than those favored by the high commissioner.²⁰ The assembly wrote a draft constitution unacceptable to the French government. Paris ordered the high commissioner to adjourn the assembly for a period of three months. The adjournment stretched to two years. The controversial articles included the right of the president to grant pardons, conclude international treaties, form an army, declare martial law, and the guarantee of the territorial integrity of Syria.²¹ The high commissioner finally accepted the constitution in May 1930, with the addition of a new article claiming France’s right to suspend any part of the law at will. The British consul in Damascus wrote, “The effect of this procedure is to endow Syria with a very liberal Constitution, which cannot fail to earn applause at Geneva, and will remain inoperative at the High Commissioner’s pleasure.”²² The constitution had arrived seven years late and the next day the high commissioner exercised his prerogative and dissolved the constituent assembly.

Mandate legal and intelligence structures

Advocates of the colonial mission claimed a special rationality in contrast to what they described as the arbitrary despotism of Ottoman rule. In the French conception, tyranny would be replaced by a system of law and order and defined rights and legal structures. It quickly became clear, however, that an elaborate Ottoman legal structure already existed, and that halting French efforts at reform would have to work through the existing structures.²³ France first created a legal justification for the partition of the various parts of the mandatory territory, based on the policy of dividing the region by sect and preventing the emergence of inter-sectarian nationalist opposition. Lebanon was separated from Syria, and Syria was divided into semi-autonomous “statelets” of the state of Jabal Druze; the state of the Alawites; the state of Syria, centered around

²⁰ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 336.

²¹ British Foreign Office (FO) 371/4310, 13548/69, Damascus, August 15, 1928.

²² FO 371/4310, 13843/156, Hole to Henderson, May 27, 1930.

²³ Youssef Takla, “Corpus juris du mandat français,” in Méouchy and Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, 63–100; Milen Petrov, “Everyday Forms of Compliance: Subaltern Commentaries on Ottoman Reform, 1864–1868,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, 4 (October 2004), 730–59.

Damascus; and the state of Aleppo. Most of the population opposed the partitions, but the policy evolved in order to manage and divide a hostile population, and because separation by sect conformed to French prejudices about Arab society.²⁴

Family and civil law retained its grounding in religious law—albeit with French intervention in areas of gender and communal rights.²⁵ Commercial law came to be adopted from French codes, and criminal law traced its origins to both French codes and, less prominently, Ottoman secular law or *nizāmiyya*. Judges were drawn from the ranks of Syrian and Lebanese lawyers and scholars, supervised by appointed justice ministers, and ultimately by French advisors. While a nominally liberal legal system was created and fostered by French colonial rule, under the stress of mass opposition to the Mandate regime, almost everything reverted to martial law, arbitrary secrecy, government decree, and the ever-present threat of state violence.

Martial law decrees rendered structures of liberal civil law inoperative. Early in 1925, months before the outbreak of the Syrian Revolt, High Commissioner General Maurice Sarrail signed a series of decrees extending military jurisdiction into all areas of life. From the time of the initial occupation of Lebanon and inland Syria, martial law and military jurisdiction had never actually been lifted, but Sarrail's decrees further codified military prerogatives. All local police forces and civil authorities were completely subordinate to the jurisdiction of the French military. The military authority had the right to search the home of any citizen, day or night, without prior notice or arrangement, to remove suspects from their homes or from local jurisdiction and detain them without charge or explanation, to seize arms and ammunition, to interdict rights of speech and of the press and of public association at will, and to seize the property of any citizen without explanation or compensation.²⁶ "All individuals who have committed an act against the security of the French army or its interests will be placed under the jurisdiction of the French military." Intelligence officers immediately referred the case of the tracts

²⁴ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, London: H. Hamilton 1938, 204–98.

²⁵ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York: Columbia University Press 2000, 115–16.

²⁶ Haut-Commissariat de la République française en Syrie et au Liban, *Recueil des actes administratifs du Haut-commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban*, vol. VI, 1925, Beirut 1925, Arrêtés nos. 4/S and 5/S, 6–11.

in Homs to military justice for prosecution in a military court under the martial law decree.²⁷

Military officers occupied a place of prominence in the theory and practice of French colonialism.²⁸ The Mandate *Service des Renseignements* (SR), or intelligence services, formed the elite among the colonial-military vanguard, but the Mandate was a military undertaking at nearly all levels; from the high commissioners down, most officials were current or former army officers. Metropolitan French officers led Syrian minority recruits and colonial troops drawn from other French possessions in policing the Mandate. Serious disturbances or major uprisings were suppressed by the Foreign Legion or, in truly dire situations, by emergency units of the regular French army. Actually running the Mandate, in times of calm, or during frequent revolts, fell to the self-contained and autonomous officers of the SR.

The investigation into the Homs tract occurred during the Syrian Revolt of 1925–27. The uprising was sparked in part by the policies and unsupervised actions of a single SR officer. In late July 1925, Captain Gabriel Carbillet helped to provoke a revolt among a religious minority in the south of the country. The Druze of Jabal Hawran rose in protest to a combination of arrogance and humiliating punishments meted out to local leaders. The uprising spread to most of the territories of the Mandate, and eventually incorporated various forms of the new language of nationalism and independence. It was suppressed with the harshest means imaginable, and when it was all over two high commissioners had been replaced in disgrace, the SR had expanded its staff, and the secret intelligence structures on which the Mandate relied were stronger than ever.²⁹

Liberal language and legal structures characterized French mandatory rule. From the beginning, however, there was an irreducible contradiction between liberal ideals and the imposition of a system of colonial rule by violence or threat of violence. When Mandate functionaries encountered resistance from the population, the predictable response was an abandonment of liberal theory and recourse to military

²⁷ MAE-Nantes, carton 1593, tracts divers, justice militaire, 1.012, August 19, 1925.

²⁸ Jean-David Mizrahi, "Pouvoir mandataire et insécurité en Syrie et au Liban dans les années 1920: le service des renseignements du haut-commissariat français au Levant," Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Paris, 2001.

²⁹ Martin C. Thomas, "French Intelligence Gathering in the Syrian Mandate, 1920–1940," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, 1 (2002), 11–12.

suppression, secrecy, and attendant undemocratic practices. Liberal language shrouded illiberal practice and established habits of rule that endured beyond the end of the Mandate. The idealism of French liberty and republicanism could not withstand the periodic imperative to employ mass violence against a hostile population. It was at such a moment that the boys from Homs were arrested, interrogated, secretly tried, and imprisoned.

Suppression

On the morning of August 14, 1925 intelligence officers working in the French League of Nations Mandate for Syria and Lebanon recovered the following poster, which had been pasted the previous night on walls in the market place in Homs, Syria's fourth largest town, in between Hamah and Damascus:

To all Patriots:

The time has come to rise from our slumber and cease our silence. The hour of vengeance, of sacrifice, and of liberty has arrived. We shall cast off the chains of silence and gain our liberty by spilling our blood to save our homeland from the clutches of the tyrants and give voice to independence and liberty...

Long live Syria, independence, and liberty.³⁰

The authorities immediately identified and sought seven boys for writing and posting the tract. The commander-in-chief of the SR received a telephone report from the SR chief of Homs:

Four young men, one of whom was 'Adnan, son of Hashim Bey al-Atasi, were arrested by local authorities for writing tracts posted in the town on the night of 13 August. Three other young men are implicated in the plot. All belong to the Atasi family. Four have confessed. Investigations continue. The *Mutaşarrif* has requested that the accused be transferred to his custody. [end transcription]³¹

³⁰ MAE-Nantes, carton 1704, BR 149, August 17, 1925. The individual entry in this intelligence bulletin was dated July 18, 1925, while all other entries are dated August 17. The date of July is probably an error, and other intelligence documents indicate that the accused were arrested in mid-August, days after the tract appeared.

³¹ Handwritten phone message, and typed transcription, August 17, 1925: MAE-Nantes, carton 1593, tracts divers, commandement superieur des troupes du Levant,

August had already been a desperate month for the Mandate authority. In July the revolt had broken out in the southern countryside, and on August 1, two weeks before the appearance of the Homs tract, insurgents had destroyed an entire French relief column of 3,000 heavily armed troops. They captured vast quantities of weapons including artillery and machine guns, and the column's second-in-command had killed himself on the field of battle when his troops fled the rebel charge. The Mandate government tried to seal the southern region, and prevent the news of the catastrophe from spreading, but the attempt was totally unsuccessful, and spectacular rumors of the French defeat spread through Syria, Lebanon, and beyond almost immediately.³² Military garrisons all over Syria and Lebanon were mobilized and transferred to the southern region around Damascus, and towns and villages like Homs enjoyed the first respite from military street patrols since 1920.

SR intelligence officers immediately investigated the revolutionary posters. The municipality, or *mutaşarrifiyya*, attempted to assert legal jurisdiction, but mandatory intelligence took control of the investigation. The local SR officer telephoned the Damascus SR chief, who conveyed the tract and initial report to Mandate SR headquarters in Beirut. Suspicions centered on young men of the prominent Atasi family, eight of whom the SR and police detained on August 15. Interrogations took place during the night of August 15–16, and police seized and interrogated five more suspects on August 16.³³ Several of the young men were questioned more than once, and the inquiries took place over the course of three days. Many interviews were conducted at night, and suspects were detained in the Homs police station. Intelligence officers took handwriting samples from several boys for comparison with the handwriting on the unsigned tracts.³⁴

The secret interrogation transcripts of the investigation were translated into French and preserved. The original Arabic transcripts were

Justice Militaire, no. 2993/J.M., April 29, 1926. This file is a 22-page documentary history of the case, including interrogation transcripts.

³² See Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, Austin: University of Texas Press 2005, 62–64.

³³ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1704, BR 149, August 17, 1925, pp. 4–5. The translated tract and initial telephone report was included in the general intelligence bulletin for August 17, 1925. The final intelligence file included also file MAE-Nantes no 1993/J.M.: see FN 31.

³⁴ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, "tracts divers," DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, p. 13 of 22.

not preserved, and while the documents contain what purport to be the actual testimony of the young men being questioned, the interrogators are silent; their questions, techniques, and actions are completely absent from the record. In many places, drastic changes in a single testimony are only separated by a paragraph break. The reader is left to wonder what made the young interview subject suddenly contradict all his preceding testimony. The breaks and dramatic reversals within many of the statements suggest torture or violent coercion, and while there is no direct evidence in the investigation record, such methods were a regular feature of Mandate rule.³⁵ There were no lawyers present.

The investigation illustrates the subversion of the supposed legal structures of the Mandate. In theory, investigatory jurisdiction lay with the *mutaşarrifiyya*, or local government, and the local police. When the governor, or *mutaşarrif*, determined that a crime had been committed, jurisdiction to prosecute lay with civilian criminal courts. The martial law decrees, however, had established military authority above civilian authority at the discretion of the high commissioner, and military courts above civilian courts, which had effectively ceased functioning for criminal cases during the revolt.³⁶ SR intelligence officers took custody of the Homs suspects from the municipal police, conducted interrogations without lawyers present, and tried the accused, without legal representation, in a secret military court. The local governor, and the boys' families, repeatedly requested that they be placed in civilian custody, but this request was merely recorded and ignored.³⁷

The investigation initially focused on law students from the Atasi family. It was summertime and students from Damascus University were home on holidays. Investigators targeted 'Adnan al-Atasi, son of nationalist politician Hashim al-Atasi, later president of the 1927 constitutional assembly, but the first interview was with 'Adnan's cousin, Murad Taq al-Din al-Atasi. Both were law students. During a series of interrogations, the students managed to avoid incrimination, and the

³⁵ See Bennett J. Doty, *The Legion of the Damned: The Adventures of Bennett J. Doty in the French Foreign Legion as Told by Himself*, New York: The Century Co. 1928; John Henry Harvey, *With the Foreign Legion in Syria*, London: Hutchinson 1928; Alice Poullea, *A Damas sous les bombes: journal d'une Française pendant la révolte Syrienne, 1924-1926*, Paris: [no publisher] 1926.

³⁶ Haut-Commissariat du mandat français, *La Syrie et le Liban sous l'occupation et le Mandat français, 1919-1927*, Paris [1928?], 51-57.

³⁷ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, "tracts divers," DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, August 17, 1925.

younger boys, especially members of the Atasi family, were at pains to shield their older cousins. Not all, however, shared the goal of deflecting attention from the more prominent boys.

Ahmad Chalabi, who worked at his father's shop, vigorously protested his innocence. Ahmad declared that he did not know who had distributed or posted the tract, and it was not he who did it. On Friday [Thursday?] night he had gone to the Sakar café. He stayed until 4:30, when he went home to sleep. He did not leave his house again till morning. If he had been seen on the streets, it was only while he walked from the café, where he spent every evening. His testimony consisted of insistent denials of any knowledge or role in the plot, and then suddenly and inexplicably, he admitted his involvement with other boys in printing and posting the fliers. Ahmad claimed not to know who had actually written the tract, but he suggested Murad or his brother 'Abd al-Hay. The interrogation transcript contains no explanation for Ahmad's abrupt confession, and the following paragraph is startling in its divergence from his initial account.³⁸

Last Wednesday, at 9:30, we met together at the al-Farah café. 'Abd al-Hay, Samih, I, and five or six Atasi family boys were there, one of whom was 'Abd al-Muhaymin and another was 'Adnan. Samih declared "on Friday night we will post the tracts in the closed quarters." Samih said 15 copies had been printed from the original identical to the polished negative Samih had. We left immediately. Thursday, at the same hour, we met again at the al-Farah café, and we chose a place for our meeting that night, during which we would paste the posters to the walls. At 2:00 a.m. Samih and 'Abd al-Hay came bringing with them 25 or 30 posters. We went together to the *sūq*. We went from the center to the Suq al-Hassa where we pasted close to 10 posters on the walls. We used a kind of glue from a bottle Samih brought. He coated the back of the posters with glue and I pasted them to the walls. We pasted others in various places [a list of locations]. While we were working one of my comrades passed by and advised me to leave, so as not to suffer bad consequences that might result. I took this advice.

I read the posters and I knew what they said. No one but myself, 'Abd al-Hay and Samih led me to take part in the operation. I don't know who instigated it, and I understood from Burhan that the desired goal was to remove the military regime at Damascus. On Friday morning I met Samih, 'Abd al-Hay, Burhan, 'Abd al-Muhaymin, and the other Atasi boys at the Grand Mosque. We left together to see the posters, but they had all been

³⁸ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, "tracts divers," DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, 14–15 of 22.

<i>Order</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Education/ vocation</i>	<i>Sentence</i>
1	Murād al-Atāsī	25	Taqī al-Dīn	Law student	Released
2	‘Abd al-Ḥay al-Atāsī	18	Taqī al-Dīn	Agricultural student	3 years and 3,000FF
3	Aḥmad Chalabi	20	Muṣṭafā	Apprentice merchant	2–1/2 years and 3,000FF
4	‘Adnān al-Atāsī	20	Hāshim	Law student	Released
5	Samīḥ al-Atāsī	16	Badī‘a	Carpenter	2 years and 3,000FF
6	Riyaḍ al-Atāsī	15	Hāshim	Preparatory school student	Released
7	‘Abd al-Muḥaynim al-Atāsī	12	‘Ādil	Preparatory school student	Released
8	Sayyid al-Atāsī	17	Ibrāhīm Muḥammad	Preparatory school student	Released
9	‘Abd al-Razzāq Khānkhān	17	Muḥammad	Preparatory school student	Two years and 3,000FF
10	Nadīm al-Mūṣalī (<i>Nazīm</i>)	25 (17)	Ibrāhīm	Law student (<i>Preparatory school</i>)	Released*
11	‘Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Malūḥī	18	Najīb	Preparatory school graduate	Released ³⁹

* Figures in parentheses indicate SR biographical details. Nadim Ibrahim al-Musali evidently convinced SR officers he was his younger brother. According to Jurj Faris’ biographical dictionary, he was 25 or 26 years old in 1925. He was born in 1899, and graduated as a lawyer from the College of Law in Damascus in 1926. Like ‘Adnan al-Atasi, Nadim went on to become a professor of law at Damascus University. His brother, Nazim Ibrahim al-Musali was a 17-year-old secondary school student. For Nazim see [no author], *Mawsū‘a a’lām Sūriyya fī l-qarn al-‘ishrīn*, Beirut 2000, 302.

³⁹ Table based on biographical information found in MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, MAE-Nantes and Jurj Faris, *Man huwa fī Sūriyā, 1949*, Damascus: Maktab al-Dirāsāt al-Sūriyya wa-l-‘Arabiyya 1950, 435–36.

removed and we learned that the police had peeled them off the walls. That is the reason we never pasted the remaining posters.

As the plot began to unravel, interrogators went back to work on boys interviewed earlier. 'Abd al-Hay tried gallantly to protect his companions and himself. He admitted that he and Ahmad had posted a few tracts in various places in the town, but he insisted he posted the tracts only for fun and laughs. They were, after all, he said, written and posted by children.

I do not know who drafted the original, or who printed them, but I [copied] one in my own hand that evening at the house of [Samih's father]. The gelatin negative had already been prepared and used. At that time, Wednesday evening, only Samih and I were in the house.

The next day, I found myself at al-Farah café. Also there were Ahmad Chalabi, Burhan al-Atasi, 'Abd al-Muhamaymin, and others I did not know. I was playing billiards when Samih came and told me to make him a copy of this tract. So I went with him to his house and [copied] it. We had no goal for the posters apart from fun and amusement. We were not instigators.

My brother Murad was never a part of the group. The handwriting on the posters is mine, not his. I can prove it by writing a copy that you can compare with the tract.⁴⁰

The SR officers conducting the investigation had a particular interest in privileged young law students and yet they failed to collect evidence against any of these young men. Interrogators next interviewed 20-year-old 'Adnan al-Atasi, who like Murad, was a student at the college of law at Damascus. Despite the zeal of the SR officers in pursuing him he was not charged and was released shortly afterwards.⁴¹

Interrogators next questioned Samih Badi'a al-Atasi, a 16-year-old carpenter. Samih was from a less prominent branch of the Atasi family than either Murad or 'Adnan. Ahmad Chalabi had already implicated Samih, and he provided new details.

⁴⁰ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, "tracts divers," DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, 16 of 22.

⁴¹ For background on the more prominent members of the Atasi family see Faris, *Man huwa fi Sūriyya*, 13–16. Hashim and 'Adnan have the longest entries. See also 'Abd al-Ghani al-'Itri, *'Abqariyyāt wa-i'lām*, Damascus: Dār al-Bashā'ir 1997, 11. Valuable information and family trees are found at <http://alatassi.net/familytree.php>.

Every day we had a meeting between the people you already know of, with the exception of ‘Adnan and Murad al-Atasi, who are not in our group. We met at the al-Farah café. Wednesday, while I was with ‘Abd al-Hay, Ahmad Chalabi, Burhan, Riyad, son of Hashim Bey, and ‘Abd al-Muhaymin, we conferred about pasting the posters on walls in the town. ‘Adnan and Murad were always together in the café, but they are older than we, and they never have anything to do with us. We each agreed to draft a poster and paste it on the walls Friday night.

Ahmad Chalabi drafted the tract. ‘Abd al-Hay al-Atasi copied it onto a gelatin negative. I printed it at my house. ‘Abd al Hay brought the negative. Some of the tracts were finished Wednesday, the rest on Thursday. The poster was made by all of us and we all approved of it. Our goal, as Burhan declared, was to help in the removal of the military government in Damascus, and the closure of the armory and garrison at Homs. 25–30 were printed. While [others] put up posters, I was busy opposite the shop of Sharabati. Ahmad and ‘Abd al-Hay put up posters in other places, unknown to me. I saw them put up one in Bab Hud street near the municipal ovens. I brought the jar, and ‘Abd al Hay and Ahmad brought the paste. On Friday we went to the mosque for mid-day prayers and found that our efforts had been for nothing, since all the posters were gone. ‘Adnan and Murad did not attend the meetings on Wednesday or Thursday and no one forced us to make the posters and put them up. It wasn’t I who brought the gelatin negative, but rather ‘Abd al-Hay. Ahmad wrote the draft and ‘Abd al-Hay copied it and we all contributed. ‘Abd al-Hay and Ahmad kept the ones we didn’t put up.⁴²

Samih apparently shared with other Atasi boys a determination to protect ‘Adnan, and Murad. Notably, Ahmad Chalabi, who was not a member of the Atasi family, and who had a more modest mercantile and educational background than the others, placed ‘Adnan with the plotters at the al-Farah café, and suggested that Murad had written the tract. By contrast, Samih claimed Ahmad had written it—a claim that seems unlikely given his education, since he was the only boy to have received only an elementary traditional religious schooling.

More interrogations followed during the night, and more boys blamed Ahmad for writing the tract. As investigators questioned a succession of boys ranging from 12 to 17 years old, the details of the plan gradually unfolded. Twelve-year-old ‘Abd al-Muhaymin ‘Adil al-Atasi declared he was at home with his parents during all the times in question. He had never visited the al-Farah café, and he reminded investigators that a

⁴² MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, 7 September 1925, 18 of 22. Testimony of Ahmad Chalabi.

café was not a place for a child. He had heard of the posters, but knew nothing more.

The interrogation transcript concludes with a summary of the case. The investigators surmised that the idea for the posters was launched during a heated discussion at the city park on Wednesday. Three boys at the park convinced two of the younger Atasi boys to produce and distribute a revolutionary tract with the goal of encouraging a revolution and aiding the rebels of the south in expelling French forces from Syria. “They came and told us, ‘At this moment there are no soldiers in the town. It is the perfect time to raise a revolution.’ They requested that we meet in the café and prepare a poster to put in the town.”⁴³ A number of boys then attended a series of meetings at the al-Farah café. The planning for the posters took place at these meetings. ‘Abd al-Hay al-Atasi, Samih al-Atasi, and Ahmad Chalabi printed and then affixed the posters in the early morning hours of Friday, August 14, 1925. Among the conspirators, only Ahmad placed the young law students ‘Adnan and Murad al-Atasi at the planning meetings.

SR officers suspected law students of inspiring and planning the agitation in Homs. They were, however, unable to incriminate any of the three young lawyers questioned and accused—only two of whom were actually known to Mandate intelligence. The boys questioned insisted that the law students had played no role in the plot. Apparently unknown to investigators was the fact that one of those present at the garden at the beginning of the plot was 25-year-old law student Nadim al-Musali, who they mis-identified as his younger brother, a 17-year-old preparatory student. It follows, then, that law students were present at each of the crucial meetings involving the inspiration and planning of the posters, despite the fact that younger boys had actually produced and posted the tracts. The investigation uncovered nothing about who had actually written the tracts.

Ultimately four boys were tried, and all the others were released “due to lack of evidence and in consideration of their young ages.”⁴⁴ A closed military court found ‘Abd al-Razzaq Khankhan, Samih al-Atasi, Ahmad Chalabi, and ‘Abd al-Hay al-Atasi guilty of acts of provocation against the Mandate. Notably the boys tried and jailed were clearly from

⁴³ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, 18–19 of 22; testimony of 17-year-old Sayyid Ibrahim Muhammad al-Atasi.

⁴⁴ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, August 17, 1925, 22 of 22.

the most modest families among those questioned. Only 17-year-old ʿAbd al-Razzaq Khankhan was still a student; all the others, including 16-year-old carpenter Samih al-Atasi, had been working in trades. They were each sentenced to between two and three years in prison and fines of 3,000 francs.

The trial took place on December 3, 1925, by which time they had already been in prison for three-and-a-half months. The court was convened under article 150 of the French Code of Military Justice, which covered crimes committed under martial law and allowed for the suspension of civil law with its attendant legal guarantees. The boys were charged with crimes under articles 87, 89, and 91 of the French Penal Code, number 24, of the Law of July 29, 1881. These articles covered crimes against internal state security—specifically, efforts to overthrow the government by incitement to armed revolt against the state, punishable by imprisonment; and incitement to civil war, massacre and pillage, punishable by death.

In late April 1926, after eight-and-a-half months in jail, the four boys were released. Commander-in-chief of the French Army of the Levant, General Maurice Gamelin, had written to the minister of war and the director of the Bureau of Military Justice, arguing that the political interests of the mandatory government would be best served by releasing the four prisoners. The political prominence of their relatives doubtlessly played a role, and the timing of the release request corresponded with the launch of a massive French counterinsurgency campaign in the regions held by rebel forces south of Damascus. The release of the four prisoners was approved shortly thereafter by a presidential request conveyed via the minister of war in Paris.⁴⁵ The sentences were commuted, but their families had already paid the 3,000 franc fines, which was a colossal sum of money in 1925, sufficient to finance tuition, room, and board for four years at Damascus University.⁴⁶ While the case of the Atasi boys had obviously received special attention, hundreds of other Syrians received perfunctory military trials in late 1925 and 1926.

In 1926 alone the Damascus military court sentenced, condemned, and executed 355 Syrians without any legal representation. Public hangings were a regular spectacle. Hundreds were tried and sentenced

⁴⁵ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” Commandement Superieur des Troupes du Levant, Justice Militaire, no. 2993, April 29, 1926.

⁴⁶ See Abdul-Karim Rafeq’s chapter in this volume.

to death in absentia. Scores more were sentenced to varying terms including life at hard labor.⁴⁷ Between 1925 and 1927 Mandate troops summarily executed hundreds and perhaps thousands of Syrians in their villages, towns, and urban quarters. Mandate military forces publicly displayed the mutilated corpses of “bandits” in the central square in Damascus and in villages throughout Syria.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Mandate intelligence blamed the appearance of the Homs tracts on privileged young law students. And while the investigation and trial eventually focused on younger boys of more modest origin and education, the law students and the elite families of Homs remained in the background. It would appear from other information, apparently unavailable to Mandate intelligence that three young law students were more intimately involved with the tracts than authorities realized. It is impossible to say if the investigation and trials were part of a government campaign to silence and terrorize some among its most prominent critics, or conversely, if the very prominence of the Atasi family served to protect its young men from harsher punishment. Perhaps some deal was struck to offer up younger boys for punishment, and protect the town’s most promising young men.

All the Middle East Mandates of the interwar years were challenged by revolts. The uprisings mobilized humble members of society, particularly former Ottoman army officers and conscripts. All the revolts featured eloquent appeals to nationalist struggle, human rights, and patriotic sacrifice in the form of anonymous postings and leaflets. Many of the leaflets evoked the Rights of Man, the ideals of the French Revolution, rights of free association and religion and the wish for constitutional law.⁴⁹ At the same time as the appearance of the Homs tracts, Mandate

⁴⁷ Haut-Commissariat du mandat français, *La Syrie et le Liban*, 53. See the Great Revolt Mixed Court files at the Syrian National Archive, al-muḥākamāt al-mukhtalifa, Markaz al-Wathā’iq al-Tārīkhiyya, Damascus.

⁴⁸ “Un splendide tableau de chasse,” headline in the French-language official newspaper *La Syrie* quoted in Poullea, *A Damas sous les bombes*, 80–81, and *The Times*, “Parade of Corpses,” October 27, 1925.

⁴⁹ The best example among many is the rebel manifesto signed, but probably not written, by Sultan al-Atrash on August 23, 1925: MAE-Nantes, Carton 1704, BR 155, August 28, 1925. It appeared in the archives of France, Britain, and the League of Nations, as well as newspapers in Cairo, Paris, London, and Detroit.

intelligence surmised that such postings in Damascus were the work of university law students, and yet none were caught, or even identified. Syrian elites were generally unsympathetic to the rebellion. But the young, particularly former and current law students, were, according to a special Mandate intelligence report on elite Syrian opinion, “unable to contain their enthusiasm and were imbued with ideas of revolution and independence.” Young law students saw the revolt as part of an international struggle against European colonialism. They wrote to newspapers and sympathetic political organizations in Europe, and eventually several young lawyers joined the rebels.⁵⁰

The role of radical lawyers in anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century is obvious and well known. It should thus not be a surprise that revolutionary agitation in Syria was not the work of rebellious peasants and army veterans, but rather of intellectuals of a new and radical generation, raised under colonial rule after the end of the Ottoman state. Just as legal structures legitimated French Mandate rule, the Mandate’s most sophisticated critics used legal arguments to attack the hypocrisy and violence of France’s empire.

French Mandate legal and constitutional structures were not designed to protect the rights of mandatory citizens. As observers noted at the time, so-called liberal imperialism was designed to earn praise from the international community, affirm French national prestige, and dull leftist criticism back in France. Under the imperatives of mass opposition to Mandate rule, however, the cosmetic façade of liberal and constitutional rule fell away, to be replaced by hasty structures of military rule, mass violence, arbitrary detention, and secrecy. Actual mandatory practice undermined the application of the rule of law and constitutional legal structures at every juncture. Colonial advocates and civil servants offered liberal structures and language as a justification for the imperial project, not as goals to be achieved by mandatory government. It is certainly not a coincidence that many such practices have been lasting features of Syria’s post-colonial governments.⁵¹

Syrian lawyers challenged the colonial security state with arguments for durable democratic and constitutional structures and the application of legally guaranteed rights for citizens. It seems likely that the experi-

⁵⁰ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1704, BR 328, December 2, 1925.

⁵¹ On this point see Hāshim ‘Uthmān, *Muḥākamāt al-siyāsiyya fī Sūriyya*, Beirut: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li-l-Kutub wa-l-Nashr 2004.

ence of military occupation and colonial rule cemented an aspiration for constitutional government and the rule of law. At least two of the young men named in the Homs investigation, ‘Adnan al-Atasi and Nadim al-Musali, went on to illustrious careers as legal scholars and political activists. The father of ‘Adnan al-Atasi, Hashim al-Atasi, was soon elected president of Syria’s constitutional assembly. Hashim al-Atasi was among the authors of the 1928 constitution, and later twice served as democratically elected president of independent Syria.

‘Adnan al-Atasi was scarcely less accomplished. He completed his law degree at Damascus University in 1925 and, after study in Geneva, became a professor of international and constitutional law at Damascus University. Back in Syria, Atasi was a founding member of the League of National Action, a political federation made of young nationalists critical of the cooperative attitude of the Syrian National Bloc—a political grouping made up mostly of men of their fathers’ generation. Immediately after independence, Atasi was among the main authors of the Syrian constitution of 1949. He won election to parliament and became a forceful advocate for progressive democracy and rule of law and wrote books critical of military government and undemocratic practice.⁵²

In 1956, after ten years of independence from France, the chief of Syrian military intelligence accused ‘Adnan al-Atasi of treason. Atasi and a number of other politicians were accused of discussing plans for a union with the pro-British Iraqi government. After the Suez crisis of 1956, and the US-British attempt to overthrow the elected Syrian government, such associations became poisonous, and military officers used the crisis to discredit civilian political rivals. A military court, under the legal precedent of the Mandate, sentenced Atasi to death. President Shukri al-Quwwatli commuted his sentence to life in prison in 1958, and in 1960 United Arab Republic president Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasser pardoned Atasi. He withdrew from politics and spent the rest of his life in exile, as Syria came to be ruled by a succession of military dictatorships.⁵³

⁵² See for example, ‘Adnan al-Atasi, *al-Huqūq al-dustūriyya*, Damascus: [no publisher] 1947, *al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-taqaddumiyya wa-l-ishtirākīyya al-thawriyya*, Beirut: [no publisher] 1965, and *Azmat al-ḥukm fī Sūriyā*, n.p. 1953. Also Faris, *Man huwa fī Sūriyya*, 16. A well-researched biography of ‘Adnan and Atasi family trees are found at <http://alatassifamily.net>.

⁵³ Biography of ‘Adnan al-Atasi in Arabic at <http://alatassi.net>; Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945–1958*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1965, 279, and ‘Uthman, *Muḥākamāt al-siyāsiyya*, 223–44.

The French Mandate and its debasement of political culture have had lasting influence on Syria. Façades of liberal rule masked illiberal practice as intelligence and security bureaucracies intruded into every area of life. Martial law decrees, emergency laws, extra-judicial detention, and habits of military rule trace their roots to the Mandate and continue to subvert the rule of law and meaningful constitutional government. And today, as in 1925, Syrian lawyers and human rights advocates are at the forefront of the struggle for a state governed by laws.