UNSPOKEN RIVALRIES: THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND COLONIAL CAPITALISM IN FRENCH MANDATE SYRIA

By

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(Under the Direction of Kevin Jones)

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the socioeconomic activity of the United States Department of State, including American firms, in French Mandate Syria. Experiencing difficulties securing large public works contracts in the Mandate's insular and French-dominated economy, an American critique of colonial capitalism ultimately emerges. Analysis of the colonial press, Consulate reports, and high-level correspondence between the State Department and actors on the ground reveals the corruption of colonial institutions. Exploring the role of financial capital in promoting the marriage of private interests with colonial government also highlights the degradation of the French Mandate's custodial role in Syria, including the failure of the colonial government to safeguard the public welfare. Ultimately, this study debunks the long-held contention that the United States remained isolationist until the outbreak of the Second World War.

INDEX WORDS: Mandatory Syria, Colonial Capitalism, State Department, Nationalism, Imperialism, France, League of Nations, Isolationism.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"'Apparently the only way to determine the problem of politically backward peoples who require not only outside political control but also foreign capital to reorganize their stagnant economic systems, is to entrust the task of government to that state whose interests are most directly involved.'"[1] – G.L. Beer, Adviser to Woodrow Wilson

Nestled between the sandy Qalamun Mountains and the vast deserts of Anbar Province, Southern Syria connects the Levant to the ancient commercial roads of South Asia. To the northwest, the rolling hills of Latakia, a famed center of tobacco production, overlook the sun-soaked shores of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Aleppo, capital of northern Syria, embraces weary Anatolian traders with the Old City, a bustling center of souq markets containing Persian textiles, Arab silk, and Egyptian metals. The diversity of the Assyrian landscape dutifully graced the pages of *Syria and Lebanon: Holidays Off The Beaten Track*, a French tourist pamphlet published by the High Commission in 1930 to encourage foreign tourism to Syria. Flanked by captivating photos such as the Monumental Arch of Palmyra and the Norias of Hama, short descriptions, steeped in orientalism, dutifully outlined the opportunities for Western leisure. Newly paved roads constructed by French engineers could transport the ambitious tourist across Syrian land.[2] Or, if the prospective traveler should so choose, newly furnished steamboats

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[1] G.L. Beer, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference* (London: Macmillan, 1923), pp. 424-5, cited in Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 22.

[2] *Syria and Lebanon: Holidays Off The Beaten Track* (Beirut: Commission of Tourism, 1932), pp. 6;13-22, as cited in Herbert S. Goold, "Tourist Literature," February 27th, 1932. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4

offered comfortable passage from the ports of Tartus to the banks of Cyprus. Safe travel within Syria was nearly guaranteed by the imperial presence.[3] Indeed, the colonial pamphlet served as a confident assertion that Syria was thriving under the Mandate, a testament to the ostensible success of France's custodial role.

Distributed among American officials at the Chamber of Commerce in the winter of 1932, the appeal to extended leisure in Syria surely crossed the minds of an administration still grappling with the fallout of the Great Depression. American Consul General Herbert S. Goold of Beirut embraced the pamphlet as a useful representation of the Mandate, one arguing that peace, order, and tranquility were plentiful. The French High Commission happily furnished the American Consul General with twelve copies.[4] Yet despite Goold's unabashed enthusiasm, economic recession, famine, and social and political strife had plunged Syria into a state of chaos. As advisers to a rising global power actively pursuing overseas investment and trade, certain diplomats and State Department officials alike began to grow frustrated at the colonial government's refusal to grant largescale contracts to American corporations by the end of the 1920s. French firms undoubtedly won contracts for most of the major public works projects, including the construction of roads, railways, residential blocks, and sewer systems. Economic tension, coupled with rapidly decaying government institutions and an acute disregard for the public welfare, fostered an American critique of French colonial capitalism. Not to be confused with crony capitalism, colonial capitalism relies on violence to suppress native populations, thereby paving the way for new markets. In Syria, the French colonial government subjugated

[3] *Syria and Lebanon: Holidays Off The Beaten Track* (Beirut: Commission of Tourism, 1932), pp. 6-7; as cited in Herbert S. Goold, "Tourist Literature," February 27th, 1932. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4.
[4] Herbert S. Goold, "Tourist Literature," February 27th, 1932. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4.

the Syrian population under the guise of responsible stewardship advertised by the Mandate. The colonial government aligned itself with French firms, thus indirectly promoting and protecting French private interests using military force.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNITED STATES AND THE SYRIAN PRESS

By the early 1930s, some 150,000 men, or twenty percent of the Mandate's entire labor force, faced unemployment.[5] Middle East historian Phillip Khoury contends that "devaluation of the French Franc, the decline in European and American production for export, the almost complete cessation of remittances from abroad and the reversal of the emigration cycle, and the inability and/or refusal of Syrians of all occupations to repay their loans on schedule" contributed to the reduction of the value of Syria's total exports by one-half.[6] Severe drought further applied pressure on the fragile Mandate economy, and the influx of starving peasants into Syria's major cities, mainly Damascus, would further exacerbate social and political tensions.[7]

Syria in 1933 hardly resembled the proud image of stability and order made by the tourist pamphlet resting on the American Consul General's desk, yet it remains unlikely that American officials understood the full extent of the economic and sociopolitical turmoil engulfing Syria's major urban centers. While the United States did gather intelligence from its network of Protestant missionaries, schools, and other charitable NGOs, the French High Commission rarely engaged in direct communication with the American Consul General in Beirut; therefore, the State Department largely depended on secondhand information produced by the local press. Newspapers such as *L'Orient-LeJour*, *Les Echos de Damas*, *Alef-Ba*, and *Lissan ul-Hal* provided key insights into the political struggle of a frustrated people navigating the evolving

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[5] Philip S. Khoury. *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 397.
[6] Ibid, 396.
[7] Ibid, 398-400.

sociopolitical framework of the Mandate. Excerpts from articles appearing in the local press were translated and subsequently sorted based on the level of diplomatic importance. Many of these clippings contained local commentary on Mandate legislation, the political maneuvering of the National Bloc in Damascus, and the fate of Syrian independence. Interpretations among American officials on how to best assess the accuracy and overall utility of the local press differed greatly, though officials regularly contextualized public arguments and representations made in the press by grouping together conflicting reports, originating from various sources, against each other.[8]

The process of ordering, translating, and interpreting these press excerpts reveal how American views towards Syria evolved on both commercial and political affairs. The construction of an indirect and undoubtedly distorted window into Syria would have rather profound implications for American-Syrian relations, for the United States, using the press as a roadmap outlining public attitudes and experiences, began to search for avenues of investment. Throughout the 1930s, four main concerns clogged American diplomatic cables: the deteriorating financial integrity of the French Mandate, the radicalization of the National Bloc in Damascus, the spread of communism, and the severe lack of preparation for the Second World War. As we shall see, the four headlines would be closely intertwined. Imperial villains, corrupt businessmen, and a hopeful people animated conversation at the highest levels of American government. Despite the dated historical contention that America remained an isolationist power for much of the 1930s, Syria would serve as an early testing ground for both the intelligence community and the durability of American values.[9] The United States would soon learn the true

[8] George L. Brandt. "Syrian Reception of Constitution for Syria Promulgated by French High Commissioner," July 30th, 1930. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4.
[9] "American Isolationism in the 1930s." U.S. Department of State. Accessed October 14, 2018. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/american-isolationism.

cost of colonial capitalism not only for its own business interests but for Syrian society at large. This violent form of crony capitalism, enforced upon a subjugated native population, would corrupt colonial government institutions, contribute to the growth of communism in the North, and frustrate American officials unable to win contracts for American firms.

CHAPTER THREE

COLONIAL CAPITALISM AND FRENCH MANDATE SYRIA

The origins of the colonial capitalist model can be traced as far back as the early eighteenth century, when political theorists and philosophers began to question the economic necessity of colonialism and, the adverse social and political tensions that imperialism produced in the metropole. Edmund Burke first outlined the "historical tension between the liberal self-image of capitalism and its violent colonial entanglements" in the British Empire.[10] As one of the first scholars to study colonial capitalism, Burke regularly grappled with anxieties pertaining to the "disintegration of the inherited social relations under the mercurial pressures of the rising commercial-capitalist forces, embodied in the ascendancy of moneyed interests."[11] The historian Onur Ulas Ince argues that colonial capitalism "grasps capitalist relations as having developed in and through colonial networks of commodities, peoples, ideas, and practices, which formed a planetary web of value chains connecting multiple and heterogenous sites of production across oceanic distances."[12] Moreover, by embracing the concise label of colonial capitalism, which highlights the intersection between colonial violence and private interests, scholars of the Near East may continue Burke's work and expand postcolonial studies.[13] Viewing capitalism through this lens also affords scholars a better understanding of the special interests that drove colonial

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[10] Onur Ulas Ince. "Not a Partnership in Pepper, Coffee, Callico, or Tobacco: Edmund Burke and the Vicissitudes of Colonial Capitalism." *Polity* 44, no. 3 (2012): 341. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41684492.
[11] Ibid, 341.
[12] Onur Ulas Ince. *Colonial Capitalism and the Dilemmas of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4.
[13] Onur Ulas Ince. "Not a Partnership in Pepper, Coffee, Callico, or Tobacco," 341.

policy in Syria and prompted a significant diplomatic conflict between France and the United States by the mid-1930s. Such tension would soon manifest into fierce economic rivalry.

Inherently at odds with the publicly professed aims of the Mandate, the less transparent objectives of French financial capital impeded the development of a truly independent Syria economy equipped with the ability to fully engage in free trade with other nations, particularly the United States. John Atkinson Hobson's study on imperialism provides a theoretical framework to investigate the economic origins of imperialism and the nature of this abusive relationship, arguing that "the economic root of imperialism is the desire of strong organized industrial and financial interests to secure and develop, at the public expense and by the public force, private markets for their surplus goods and their surplus capital."[14] He "investigates the theory and the practice of imperialism regarded as a 'mission of civilization,' in its effects upon 'lower' or alien peoples, and its political and moral reactions upon the conduct and character of the Western nations engaging in it."[15] As would become evident in both French Lebanon and Syria, disinterested forces of Christian missionary work are also exploited by "the selfish forces which direct imperialism" and establish lasting channels of sociopolitical influence between Syria and the metropole.[16]

The historiography of French Mandate Syria developed significantly in the 1980s and 90s with the publication of comprehensive histories such as Phillip Khoury's *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus* (1983) and *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism* (1987). These masterly narratives detail the formation and rise of the Syrian National Movement. Hanna Batatu's *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser*

[14] John Hobson. *Imperialism: A Study* (Memphis: General Books, 2012), 29.
[15] Ibid, 1.
[16] Ibid, 55.

Rural Notables, and Their Politics (1999) also remains an integral addition to the scholarship. Batatu analyzes the history of Syria's modern peasantry, political mobilization in the countryside, and the eventual growth of Ba'thism.[17] Additionally, Leila Hudson provides a useful background on the relationship between capital and cultural and political institutions in Syria. Tracing the flow of economic capital from around 1860 to 1920, Hudson uses the Bourdieuan model to argue that cultural and financial capital influenced the formation of national identity, secularism, and the formation of a more centralized state.[18] Apart from Batatu and Patrick Seale, most scholars have narrowly focused on urban nationalism at the expense of understanding the deeper social and political attitudes of the countryside and their ultimate influence on the rise of anticolonial nationalism.[19] In addition to surveying evolving American attitudes towards the French, this project analyzes the adverse effects of French colonial capitalism on both urban centers and the Syrian countryside. Armenian refugee camps strung along the northeastern border with Turkey serve as an appropriate case study insofar as the growth of communism in these areas may be attributed to the colonial government's neglect of those fleeing Turkish persecution.

The limited historical scholarship on America's relationship with Syria prior to independence has compelled me to construct a multifaceted analysis of the United States' evolving perceptions towards the Mandate, including the rise of economic frustrations that fueled a new American critique of colonial capitalism. James Melki provides a useful analysis of the State Department's attempt to preserve American interests in Syria despite an uncooperative

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[17] Hanna Batatu. *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[18] Leila Hudson. *Transforming Damascus: Space and Modernity in an Islamic City* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), 1.
[19] Patrick Seale. *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: University of California Press, 1988); Michael Provence. The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 18.

French colonial government.[20] Melki, however, only provides a cursory review of the State Department's relationship to the Mandate prior to 1940. Moreover, William Shorrock examines the origins of France's early economic penetration into Syria using railroads, a useful roadmap for situating the increased presence of French finance capital.[21] In contrast, my own project expands the temporal scope of Shorrock and analytical scope of Melki to argue that the United States' growing economic interest in Syria uncovered widespread corruption in the colonial government and an insular economic sphere which primarily benefited French firms at the expense of the public welfare.

[20] James A. Melki. "Syria and State Department 1937-47." *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (1997), 93.
[21] William I. Shorrock. "The Origin of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon: The Railroad Question, 1901-1914." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, no. 2 (1970): 133-53.

CHAPTER FOUR

GLOBAL MARKETS AND THE RACE FOR INFLUENCE IN INTERWAR EUROPE AND BEYOND

The end of the First World War propelled the United States into numerous positions of international leadership. In Europe, Americans led the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922, a key step towards comprehensive postwar disarmament.[22] By extending the timeline for the payment of German debts, the United States also assisted the British in quelling a German revolt and preventing the outbreak of another Franco-German war. Most importantly, the American-sponsored creation of a $200 million loan designed to help the Weimar Republic remain intact during the interwar economic depression illustrated the rising superpower's ability to use financial power on an international scale.[23] Facing pressures to increase American investment abroad and export financial capital, the State Department monitored economic activity in the French colonial sphere throughout the interwar period. American Consular Post reports are filled with anxiety about French eagerness to gain an economic foothold in areas like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Yemen. In one peculiar case, the State Department received a detailed report covering a French mission to Teheran. In an effort to gauge its level of success, American contacts analyzed everything from official dinners to the mental states of high-level attendees.[24] Officials also monitored the French perfection of the "Treaty of Friendship" which, in the case of Yemen, superficially recognized the government in exchange for resuming the construction of a

[22] Bear F. Braumoeller. "The Myth of American Isolationism." *Foreign Policy Analysis*. (International Studies Association) 6, (2010), 355.
[23] Ibid, 357.
[24] C. Van H. Engert. "Special Mission of Senator Honnorat from France." August 20th, 1937. Consular Posts-Damascus, Syria. Volume 4. Records of Foreign Service Posts, 3.

private railway from Al-Hudaydah to Sana'a.[25] Such treaties caught the attention of American officials. Yet despite France's widespread effort to penetrate foreign markets, the United States was particularly interested in French activity in Syria. After all, Americans had already developed a history with the faraway land.

[25] Leo J. Callanan. "Treaty of Friendship Reported Between France and the Yemen." August 26th, 1935. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 7.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIRST ENCOUNTERS

The love affair of American Arabists with Syria began as early as 1827 with the expedition of Protestant missionaries Otis Dwight and Eli Smith.[26] The young teachers became enchanted by the utter vastness of the Arabian desert, its primordial smell accompanying weary travelers navigating the bedrock of a strangely familiar yet largely alien world. Embraced as the Holy Land by Western travelers, a great exchange of culture and ideas rapidly commenced. By 1860, some thirty-five schools were operating in Syria.[27] The first Arabic printing press in Syria was brought in by American missionaries, and "the first nationalist Arab cultural group, the Syrian Society of Arts and Sciences, was a joint venture of Syrians and American missionary Arabists."[28] As noted by Congregationalist minister Howard Bliss, "by sharing 'with the people of the East the best things we have in the West,' "the West had 'not a little to receive' too, including 'the mystical element so prominent in Eastern religions.'"[29] Unfortunately, imperialist designs quickly destroyed this narrative of unfettered altruism, and the pious social connections forged between Protestant missionaries and the Arabs of the Levant were soon exploited.

Robert Kaplan dubiously contends that "American Protestants seemed to be on the verge of achieving the inverse of colonialism and imperialism: they had built a foundation of goodwill and influence on strategic shores, solely though the doing of good works."[30] Despite this image

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[26] Robert Kaplan. *The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 22.
[27] Ibid, 33.
[28] Ibid, 39.
[29] Ibid, 43.
[30] Robert Kaplan. *The Arabists*, 42.

of disinterest, the establishment of Protestant schools, like the American School in Damascus and the Aleppo College, provided the United States intelligence community with important Syrian and Lebanese contacts. These educational institutions supported American diplomatic initiatives, including the United States' desire to increase cultural and political influence throughout the Levant.[31] Prior to the Mandate period, missionaries attempted to undermine Ottoman influence and often worked in tandem with American diplomats, like Allen Dulles, to secure avenues for private investment. Short-lived resistance to religious indoctrination occurred under Faisal's government when the ex-Ottoman official Sati' al-Husri attempted to Arabize the Syrian school system.[32] With the French expulsion of Faisal in 1920, Christian missionary work once again began to flourish in the country. By 1928, American oil companies gained a significant foothold in Iraq with the acquisition of nearly a quarter of the British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Company.[33] Officials and businessmen alike hoped to exploit their religious connection with Syrian Christians to reduce French domination in Syria, ensure free market competition, and open the country to American investment.

French penetration into the region began in the mid-1840s when Antoine-Fortuné Portalis opened the first mechanized silk factory in Mount Lebanon. For the first time in modern history, the once sleepy village of Btater linked the emerging Levantine economy to the European-dominated network of Western merchants.[34] With the Second Industrial Revolution accelerating the expansion of capital in western Europe, overseas investment and the demand for

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[31] Jennifer Dueck. *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End: Syria and Lebanon Under French Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 172-173.
[32] Adeed Dawisha. *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 42.
[33] Ussama Makdisi. *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations: 1820-2001* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 152.
[34]Akram Fouad Khater. "'House' to 'Goddess of the House': Gender, Class, and Silk in 19th-Century Mount Lebanon." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 3 (1996), 326.

commodities skyrocketed. French capital propped up the Lebanese silk industry, transforming Beirut into a primary exporter of the fiber to French markets.[35] Maronite Christians comprised most of the labor force cultivating mulberry trees and ultimately forged a close economic relationship with the French that would endure until the end of the Mandate.[36] By strictly enforcing private property laws and abolishing tax farming, a pro-French landholding class emerged, thereby solidifying enduring capital investment networks between Syria and the French metropole.[37]

The Mandate government relied heavily on divide and rule tactics and aggravated sectarian strife by creating artificial administrative zones. After the French removal of King Faisal in July 1920, the imperial authorities subdivided Syria into six distinct states: Damascus, Aleppo, an Alawite state, a Druze state, Alexandretta, and Greater Lebanon.[38] The French also used this model to squash nationalist aspirations and further complicate efforts to truly unify the country. In a few short years, the unsavory policies of High Commissioner General Sarrail provoked a nationwide rebellion initially led by the Druze. With some 50,000 troops in Syria, the French crushed the nationalist struggle against French rule.[39] Senegalese battalions systematically burned down villages suspected of harboring rebels, and French aviation bombarded Damascus into submission.[40] Syria was now fertile ground for financial capital to fully embed itself, and French imperialism, publicly legitimized in Western eyes by the Mandate, facilitated the growth of colonial capitalism. Both the First World War and the collapse of the

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[35] Joel Beinin. *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 72.
[36] Ibid, 72.
[37] Ibid, 120.
[38] Peter A. Shambrook. *French Imperialism in Syria, 1927-1936* (London: Ithaca Press, 1998), 2.
[39] Ibid, 3.
[40] Antonius, George. "Syria and the French Mandate." *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939) 13, no. 4 (1934), 528.

Russian market in 1917 encouraged France to look to its colonies for reliable returns, and Syria was no exception. Between 1915 and 1929, a record number of joint stock companies were established in French colonies; however, running Syria proved both costly and politically arduous.[41] Government institutions became partially corrupted by private interests, and, as Syrian opposition to French rule continued, the ability of the French to maintain an image of responsible stewardship grew increasingly difficult.

[41] Martin Thomas. *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 103.

CHAPTER SIX

COLONIAL NEGLIGENCE AND THE ASSIGNMENT OF BLAME

The Great Syrian Revolt resulted in significant damages to American businesses, although most businesses affected by French shelling and Arab raids were small-scale industrial operations owned by Protestant families. In the aftermath of the struggle, companies like the MacAndrews & Forbes Company contacted the American Consulate in Beirut and requested the French provide compensation for the extensive damage to private property. American diplomats like J.H. Keeley Jr. submitted damage reports to the envoy of the French High Commissioner, reminding the colonial authorities of the "extensive interests of this company in Syria where its operations contribute considerably to the industrial welfare of a large proportion of the population."[42] The cascade of high level correspondence which ensued resembled a court battle in which the public servant Keeley served as a lawyer defending the rights of his private sector client. The MacAndews & Forbes Company was ultimately granted 10,000 Francs for damages sustained, an exception to the common practice of drowning American pleas in an ocean of bureaucratic red tape.[43] As a result, most companies were denied compensation, further amplifying resentment in the American business community. For instance, American consular reports reveal that the French demanded that companies produce abundant evidence establishing

[42] J.H. Keeley, Jr. "Letter to Pierre-Alype, Esquire." May 16th, 1927. Consular Posts – Damascus, Syria. Volume 5. Records of Foreign Service Posts, 1.
[43] Ibid, 1.

a clear link between French negligence and property damage. In the case of the Singer Sewing Company, the request for reparations was denied based on lack of documentation.[44]

The failure of the French to protect businesses operating in Mandate Syria from the violence of the revolt and even their own shelling, illustrates the severely limited degree of protection American business interests could expect from the colonial authorities. The French prioritized the recovery of their own private assets before launching investigations which could potentially lend a hand to competitors. At the Mandates Commission in Geneva, the French were pressured to reveal the contents of several petitions submitted by Syrian citizens which accused the military of destroying private property, looting, torture, and the extrajudicial murder of civilians.[45] Such transgressions challenged the legitimacy of the League of Nations and became a leading international crisis before Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia eventually overshadowed western coverage of war crimes in the Near East.[46] While the military mopped up the remaining Syrian resistance, the French continued to boast of victory and stability both in the Syrian press and at Geneva in 1926.[47]

By 1927, France primarily concerned itself with pacification of the country through domination of Syria's fragile political institutions. Postwar debt compelled the colonial government to cut administrative costs and maximize returns by outsourcing social welfare and construction projects to private companies, with missionaries spearheading the organization of local education and healthcare.[48] Still, French colonial authorities closely supervised and assisted

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[44] J.H. Keeley, Jr. "Singer Sewing Machine Company." April 7th, 1927. Consular Posts- Damascus, Syria. Volume 5. Records of Foreign Service Posts, 1.
[45] Michael Provence. *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 179.
[46] Ibid, 183.
[47] Ibid, 178.
[48] Liat Kozma. *Global Women, Colonial Ports: Prostitution in the Interwar Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 63.

private firms in achieving imperial objectives and policies. The High Commission assumed a directory role over private initiatives by erecting "native figureheads" and placing French officials in charge of various administrative departments, often located in Beirut, to manage "regional education, security, public works, and Bedouin affairs."[49] Special delegates enjoyed veto power over local governors throughout Syria, further solidifying French control over every level of the decision-making process.[50] This marriage between private interests and colonial government effectively illustrates the phenomenon of colonial capitalism and further signifies the insular design of French imperialism in Syria.

Capitalist systems are not necessarily concerned with elevating the living standards of the communities in which firms operate or even maximizing returns for shareholders. In the colonial context, corporate enterprises often accept suboptimal efficiency as the price for maintaining greater control over workers and the local population.[51] In Mandate Syria, the colonial government's arbitrary enforcement of nonexistent laws created a police state and essentially enabled authorities to arrest political dissidents at will. Colonial institutions eventually decayed, particularly by the early 1930s, and private interests with public contracts in Syria exploited the population with near impunity. Bureaucratic incompetence, coupled with the growing realization among nationalist leaders that the French were merely enriching themselves at the expense of the Syrian people, often led to widespread unrest.[52]

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[49] Phillip Khoury. *Syria and the French Mandate*, 78
[50] Ibid, 78.
[51] Political scientist Ellis Goldberg argues that capitalists may prefer to operate at suboptimal efficiency if it grants firms greater control over their workers. The same phenomenon is present in Mandate Syria's colonial capitalism. Zachary Lockman, *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 115.
[52] Zachary Lockman. *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East*, 89.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GROWING FRUSTRATIONS

State Department officials closely monitored the situation in Syria, assigning considerable weight to the preservation of American business interests, educational interests, and the rights of minorities.[53] Three years after the uprising against French imperialism, a new constitution was drafted by the National Bloc whose new strategy included peaceful cooperation with France and the construction of a new political framework. The remaining nationalists introduced six articles that called for the complete unification of Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Palestine. The following articles outlined the creation of an independent Syrian army and the ability of the Syrian president to "conclude treaties, receive ambassadors, grant pardons, and declare martial law."[54] Facing immense pressure from Paris, High Commissioner Henri Ponsot publicly rejected the new constitution for fear of placing both the economic and strategic interests of the Mandate at great risk.[55] A few days later, the Constituent Assembly was dissolved. Once again, Syria appeared to be on the brink of another countrywide revolt.

As American officials sifted through stacks of translated newspaper clippings, the extent of financial corruption plaguing the Mandate became increasingly apparent. Perhaps most concerning for Washington was the fear that such corruption allowed the National Bloc to challenge the very legitimacy of the international order. In the winter of 1930, the nationalist leader and future Syrian president Hashim al-Atassi published the first of three manifestos in the

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[53] George L. Brandt. "Forwarding of Syrian Constitution," February 24th, 1930. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4, 3.
[54] Phillip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 340.
[55] Ibid, 341.

local press addressed to the "Syrian nation." The fiery documents outlined a series of French transgressions against the Syrian people. The nationalists desired to form a truly independent nation built on the foundation of a constitution unconstrained by special clauses guaranteeing the continuation of the Mandate and the French puppet regime in Damascus. For American officials dissecting the translated newspapers, one particular grievance drew the intense interest of the State Department's Arabists. Hashim Atassi argued that "the French tax-payer will not agree that the money gained by the sweat of his brow should be expended for the profit of certain companies who must not ignore that any agreement signed by governments and established according to the present order of things will be considered by the nation as null and void and without the value of an obligation for it."[56] At a rally formed in Shahbandar Park, Aleppo, a Damascene nationalist asked rhetorically why France had waited years before officially announcing the new constitution. The speaker answered: '"to gain time and to take away the rest of Syria's gold' and install 'deputies that will serve her…to undercut our influence."'[57] A cascade of high-level American correspondence followed, for officials became increasingly interested in Syrian critiques of the colonial government to determine the progress of the Mandate in creating favorable conditions for both international investment and the establishment of a fully independent Syrian government willing to protect the rights of ethnoreligious minorities.

For France, Syria's nationalists undoubtedly comprised local urban elites who served as influential arbiters to the general population. Jennifer Dueck argues that the National Bloc focused on establishing "parliamentary mechanisms" by negotiating with the French High

[56] "Forwarding of Syrian Constitution." Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4, 5.
[57] Peter A. Shambrook. *French Imperialism in Syria, 1927-1936* (London: Ithaca Press, 1998), 52.

Commission, thus avoiding radical reform and leaving the established leadership intact.[58] In other words, the National Bloc rarely threatened the core structure of the Mandate system and was regularly susceptible to French influence. Such coercive circumstances ultimately increased the United States' suspicion of the nationalists' publicly proclaimed political goals. While Washington openly distanced itself from the Nationalists' arguments, American officials were deeply concerned with France's growing abuse of capitalism.[59] By maintaining close relations with the nationalists, the French could continue to extract Syria's resources unchallenged. The increasingly interconnected capitalist model symbolized a way of viewing the world, a perspective which would inevitably influence countless political movements and social ideologies. Indeed, the West regularly viewed the advance of capitalism as progress, the true embodiment of Western civilization. If the French were disassembling the purity of the capitalist model in favor of special interests, the United States, along with the interests of its own firms, would be placed at a severe disadvantage.

In the summer of 1930, striking unemployment numbers, the decline of real wages, and social tension festering in Syria's major urban centers inspired a series of labor strikes directed by National Bloc partisans. Many nationalists condemned the French goods that flooded Syria's economy, bolstered by low duties and dominant access to local markets. The preferential treatment of French merchandise by Mandate authorities further damaged the economic health and social harmony of local communities and placed local workers and industries alike at a severe disadvantage.[60] The origins of French monopolies in the Levant can be traced to the formation of a colonial lobby in 1919 by *L'Asie francaise* publisher Robert de Caix, silk

[58] Jennifer Dueck. *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End: Syria and Lebanon Under French Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17.
[59] "Forwarding of Syrian Constitution." Records of the Department of State, 2.
[60] Peter A. Shambrook. *French Imperialism in Syria*, 53.

merchants, and a cabal of bankers.[61] Together with a special interest group called the Economic Union of Syria, French businessmen systematically expelled German companies from decades' old posts and openly violated the mandate charter by seeking exclusive investment rights in Syria.[62] For the State Department, insularity and shortsightedness of colonial capitalism held hostage the ideals of free trade and the prospect of developing a Syrian economy capable of competing in international markets.

Still, in early 1930, American Consul General and Arabist George L. Brandt was willing to give the French the benefit of the doubt. He calmly concluded that "while there is evidence of French economic and financial penetration of the country, it is to be considered that such penetration can hardly take place without resultant benefit to the country and the people, that the country is thus being developed and that its lack of resources and poor economic situation do not make its exploitation easily possible."[63] Concerning the National Bloc in Syria, he pessimistically commented: "there remains to be answered an insistent demand in Syria for freedom from Western control which is associated with the nationalistic movement occurring throughout the Eastern world and which is not to be stilled by the application of Western logic."[64] While the United States would have been unlikely to behave in a radically different fashion than the French in a similar situation, U.S. officials demanded the opportunity to compete for Syrian contracts in accordance with the "open door" policy the High Commission had so far forsaken. An inferior position fueled sanctimonious discourse, and selfish frustration with the Mandate's obstruction of American investment would soon emerge. American

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[61] Elizabeth Thompson. *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 62.
[62] Ibid, 62.
[63] George L. Brandt, "Manifesto of the President of the Syrian Constituent Assembly," April 15th, 1930. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4, 6.
[64] Ibid, 5.

diplomats and policymakers, invariably white men like the consul generals George Brandt and J.H. Keeley, viewed Syria through the cultural construct of orientalism. Syrian Arab traditionalism was seen as backwards, whereas white Protestant modernity exemplified stability and national progress.[65] This distorted worldview underlined American policy initiatives and reinforced a sense of entitlement to Syria's resources.

To aid a weakened domestic economy, the securement of overseas investment became an active extension of US foreign policy towards Syria. In a memo reassuring the State Department of their imperative role, Brandt declared that "it is one of the primary duties of American consul officers to advise their government promptly and with full details as can be obtained of the completed construction of public works in the country in which they are stationed so that American firms interested may be placed in a position to bid for such work."[66] The Department of State, however, became increasingly frustrated with the colonial government's lack of consideration for American business interests. The colonial government used administrative controls to ensure a select handful of firms received contracts. French firms maintained exclusive access to Syria's development projects, including the sale of motor vehicles, fertilizer, and gas masks.[67] Colonial officials held significant investments in certain multinational corporations, such as the Shell Company, and their support for contractual monopolies amplified the crony capitalist features of the colonial economy. By the same token, the French High Commission outlined numerous and often obscure specifications foreign firms, which actively yearned to secure contracts, were required to follow. One such specification required that foreign

[65] Nicholas Ercole. "Conceiving Arab Nationalism: Culture, Diplomacy, and the Genesis of US-Syrian relations, 1918-1928." (PhD diss., American University, 2016), 2.
[66] George L. Brandt. "Supplying of Asphalt for Syrian Roads," July 15th, 1930. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4, 3.
[67] Ely E. Palmer. "Further Preparations in Anticipation of Possible European Conflict," May 24th, 1939. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4, 2.

contractors provide a well-documented history of successful projects carried out in Lebanon prior to submitting bids within Syria.[68] This had the inevitable effect of favoring firms which were already closely aligned with French officials and the existing colonial structure, thereby enabling French interests to bypass bureaucratic red tape to the detriment of competing American contractors.

[68] "Supplying of Asphalt for Syrian Roads." Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4, 5.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LOCAL CORRUPTION AND THE DECAY OF COLONIAL INSTITUIONS

In July 1930, three months after reaching a wishful conclusion which exonerated France of any wrongdoing, Brandt was issued a new assignment. He scrupulously investigated the French High Commission's prolonged denial of contract bids offered by American firms to provide asphalt for several Syrian roads in Alexandretta and revealed that a special commission, headed by local Minister of Public Works Hussein Bey al-Ahdab, blocked Standard Oil's bid in favor of Shell Company, the colonial government's most favored contractor.[69] Interestingly, Standard Oil representatives quoted valid tests which concluded that the Shell Company failed to meet the Mandate's own specifications for the production of asphalt, yet the Minister of Public Works continued to assign the Dutch firm the most prestigious projects.[70] In a rather embarrassing chain of events, the francophone newspaper *L'Orient-Le Jour*, a pro-French leaning daily owned by native Christians, revealed a scandal in which French Public Works Advisor M. Delittiniere received kickbacks from the assistant manager of the Shell Company in Beirut, a childhood friend of Delittiniere. In the eyes of some American officials, a culture of crony capitalism afflicted the Mandate's public works projects, amplifying the structural deficiencies of colonial capitalism.[71]

[69] "Supplying of Asphalt for Syrian Roads." Records of the Department of State. Roll 4, 10.
[70] Ibid, 5.
[71] Ibid, 7.

Just one year prior to the launch of Brandt's investigation, the Trinidad Asphalt representative Allan Wilson requested that the American Consulate remove restrictions on asphalt imports, a tall order which was at least partially fulfilled.[72] Brandt agreed that "there is some ground for a belief that the local authorities have been unduly influenced in their choice of the Shell asphalt for their country's roads," a degree of influence which American officials were yearning to effectively dampen.[73] Though admittedly some measurable success was achieved in leveling the contractual playing field, Allan's outreach to American officials reinforces the notion that Syrian commoners and business representatives alike still viewed the United States as a dispassionate arbiter willing to exercise its political influence to facilitate free trade in the colonial sphere. Ironically, the Syrian Congress under King Faisal first demanded that the United States, not France or Britain, serve as the primary provider of technical and economic aid to Syria. The pro-American preference remains especially telling insofar as the Damascus Program, a commission that provided "a use barometer by which to gauge public opinion in Syria," streamlined the position in 1919.[74] Such faith in the United States, however, began to slowly fade. As outlined in Paris by his famous Fourteen Points, President Woodrow Wilson promised the peoples of colonized countries the right to self-determination. Interestingly, Erez Manela argues that the principles of self-determination outwardly cherished by Wilson's speech actually inspired nationalists to engage in anticolonial struggle for independence.[75] Disappointment with America's apparent abandonment of lofty Wilsonian rhetoric in support of the nationalist causes

[72] Allan C. Wilson. "Road Building in Syria," March 16th, 1929. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4 (U.S. National Archives T-1177) (OCLC #14197831).
[73] "Supplying of Asphalt for Syrian Roads." Records of the Department of State, 7.
[74] James L. Gelvin. *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (London: University of California Press, 1998), 167.
[75] Erez Manela. *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

and tacit support for the French Mandate festered in Syria.[76] The financial capital driving imperialism in Syria trumped hollow convictions, and the United States wanted equal access to the country's resources.

French tariffs on the sale of American motor vehicles, including the almost complete restriction on American medical and legal staff from practicing in French colonies or mandated territories, also damaged the legitimacy of French claims that the Mandate was actively fostering the development of unrestricted free trade in American eyes. Demand for automobiles skyrocketed in Syria during the 1930s, and American manufacturers aimed to expand their market in Syria. The High Commission placed custom tariffs on American vehicles based on weight and not price, thereby raising the total cost of the heavier American-made Ford to prohibitive levels.[77] In line with the restrictive specifications on the use of asphalt, American medical staff found that they had to obtain medical licenses in either Lebanon or Syria.[78] The specification, again, had the effect of completely barring American medical staff from practicing in Syria. Similarly, a 1935 bill sought to reduce the number of foreign practicing attorneys in Syria to thirty percent of the total pre-Mandate number by requiring that lawyers reside in Syria for at least fifteen years before being allowed to practice.[79] In order to prioritize the interests of French citizens and firms, such restrictions were designed to be unreasonable and ultimately prohibitive to American competitors. In 1936, State Department officials characterized the Mandate's insular economy as "discrimination against American interests," a testament to the frustration prominent in American diplomatic cables.[80]

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[76] J.H. Keeley, Jr., "Arab Unity," December 31st, 1930. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944, Roll 5, 3.
[77] Phillip Khoury. *Syria and the French Mandate*, 91.
[78] Stegall, "Restrictions on Medical Staff." March 3rd, 1933. Records of the Department of State. Roll 4.
[79] Gaudin, "Practice of Law – Syria." April 24th, 1935. Records of the Department of State.
[80] Steger, "Discrimination Against American Interests." April 27th, 1936. Roll 4.

The pervasiveness of high-level corruption not only prevented American companies and workers from investing in Syria, but it adversely affected the ability of the colonial government to adequately provide for the general welfare and safety of the native population. With native funds flowing into French coffers, government services often fell short in their ability to maintain a fully functioning society. Still, the colonial authorities strived to maintain appearances. Foreign tourism provided a considerable economic boost to the Syrian economy and enabled the colonial authorities to showcase the fruits of their labor, but the United States began to realize the extent of colonial neglect of the public sphere by the mid-1930s. For American officials reviewing translated press releases, the erosion of public institutions was evident. The Francophone newspaper *Les Echoes* covered the havoc created by "Damascus lunatics" in the city's market district. Pillaging local shops and throwing stones at children, the outbreak of violence among mentally ill street dwellers created intolerable conditions for the local tourist industry. Further investigation revealed that an overcrowded Damascus insane asylum and a severe shortage in funds for the public healthcare system were to blame.[81] Colonial capitalism was primarily concerned with extracting resources from Syria. Supporting public institutions was secondary to profit.

The overall condition of Syrian cities' dated sanitation infrastructure was also aggravated by administrative neglect and general incompetence. One French official described Beirut's gutters as '"little more than foul, open-air cesspools where filth accumulates and wastewater stagnates."' Rats occupied underground sewers and abandoned buildings across the city where solid waste scaled the walls. In Aleppo, the absence of adequate infrastructure manifested into a public hygiene crisis. Citizens periodically endured overflowing sewers which contaminated

[81] Farrell, "Damascus Lunatics," August 23rd, 1935. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4.

water in many municipalities and officials soon became concerned with the possible outbreak of disease.[82] In 1934, rising wastewater levels threatened a French electric company, finally prompting the creation of an emergency plan to safeguard assets.[83] That same year, the famous Kawkab hotel in Beirut collapsed due to poor construction, resulting in the death of some thirty-nine people. The victims' relatives sent petitions to the League of Nations charging French engineers with negligence and failure to uphold the same quality building standards citizens enjoyed in Paris.[84] All of these social problems reinforced American perceptions of the pathologies of colonial capitalism, which placed special interests above the welfare of the native population.

While private French firms continued to benefit by the Mandate's securement of contracts, Arab workers experienced the very worst of austerity. By 1935, the Mandate began cannibalizing its own administrative structures. To the utter shock and dismay of American officials, the French systematically dismissed all foreign employees, primarily Palestinians and Lebanese, from public offices.[85] The United States could no longer rely on Arab contacts within the Mandate's bureaucratic institutions to pass on vital intelligence regarding the political maneuvering of French officials. American petitions were sent to both the President of the Syrian Republic and Council of Ministers, but to no avail. By 1938, the United States was relying almost exclusively on the native press, Protestant colleges, and a select few Arab and European contacts, for information about the political state of the Mandate. Not all press reports originated in Syria, however. Diverse groups of the Syrian-Lebanese diaspora regularly engaged in "long-

[82] Daniel Neep. *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 156.
[83] Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate*, 157.
[84] Elizabeth Thompson. *Colonial Citizens*, 166.
[85] Farrell, "Foreign Syrian Government Employees Face Dismissal," August 23rd, 1935. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria. Roll 4.

distance criticism" of France's socioeconomic policies in Syria.[86] As early as 1919, organizations like the New York City Party for the Liberation of Syria outlined '"the crimes of the regime,'" charging that "'the concessions of the country are an easy target for the colonizers, and they farm out such businesses like a feudal privilege."[87] Other diaspora groups, such as the relatively privileged Maronites, printed pro-French community newspapers celebrating the achievements of the Mandate.[88]

Further exacerbating social and political tensions in Damascus, the High Commission also prepared a law requiring the termination of government employees "who do not liquidate their private indebtedness by April 1936, and against whom suits are pending for the seizure of their salaries."[89] Employees remaining on the government payroll saw their salaries reduced by twenty-five percent.[90] No doubt Mandate officials were merely attempting to soften the still raging effects of the Depression, yet such extreme measures targeting Syria's lower classes fueled criticism. The Francophile newspaper *Le Jour* called the move illegal, stating that "no already existing laws or regulations would permit it." The Arabic newspaper *Rabita* suggested that "the government pay the debts of its employees and prohibit their contracting new debts after a fixed date."[91] American officials agreed, calling the recommendation a progressive step in the right direction for Syria's workers. Ultimately, Mandate authorities decided to suspend the

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[86] Simon Jackson. "Diaspora Politics and Developmental Empire: the Syro-Lebanese at the League of Nations." *The Arab Studies Journa*l 21, no. 1 (2013), 173.
[87] CADN, Fonds Beyrouth, Premier Versement-Cabinet Politique, Dossiers de Principe 1920-1941, Carton 419, Colonies Syro-Libanais à l'étranger, Pamphlet dated August 1920, transmitted by French Consul at New York to MA., cited in Simon Jackson. "Diaspora Politics and Developmental Empire: the Syro-Lebanese at the League of Nations." *The Arab Studies Journal* 21, no. 1 (2013), 173.
[88] Simon Jackson. *Diaspora Politic and Developmental Empire*, 174.
[89] Farrell, "Report," August 23rd, 1935. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4.
[90] Gaudin, "Law Reducing Salaries of Government Employees by 25%," June 20th, 1933. Records of the Department of State. Roll 4.
[91] Farrell, "Control of Government Employees' Private Indebtedness," August 23rd, 1935. Records of the Department of State. Roll 4.

decree in wake of the growing influence of the National Bloc in Damascus. The series of anti-French boycotts and riots organized by nationalist leaders clearly began to intimidate French policymakers, a testament to the rapidly decaying state of the Mandate.[92] *Le Jour*, a daily based in Damascus, put it bluntly:

> An important development in the Syrian political situation was the meeting in the week of March 16 of the Constituent Assembly at Damascus for the purpose of discussing the deplorable condition to which the affairs of the country have been reduced as a result of the continued policy of procrastination by the French High Commissioner. Their action constitutes an open defiance of the authority of the mandatory power.[93]

The French never intended on providing comprehensive relief for the many ailments afflicting Syria, for the colonial government likely understood that the Mandate's days were numbered. By the late 1930s, the French largely focused on cutting costs and securing last minute contracts emerging from the crises in Europe.

In the spring of 1936, during intense negotiations between the French and the Syrian governments regarding the future of business in Syria after independence, American officials convened in Paris to effectively lobby for certain provisions that would create a judicial system that protected foreign interests and investment.[94] With Syrian protests against the Mandate becoming ever more prevalent, the withdrawal of French forces from Syria was now inevitable. A timetable for independence had been loosely established only to be cemented by the outbreak of the Second World War. From 1936 onward, the United States would no longer be forced to deal directly with the French High Commission in order to facilitate investment. Now, an independent Syria was slowly emerging from the decaying carcass of a dated imperialist model.

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[92] Farrell, "Control of Government Employees' Private Indebtedness," August 23rd, 1935. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria. Roll 4, 3.
[93] Unknown, "Extracts from Two Recent Press Articles," April 24th, 1930. Records of the Department of State.
[94] Steger, "Negotiations Between the French and Syrian Governments at Paris," March 16th, 1936. Records of the Department of State.

CHAPTER NINE

THE GROWTH OF COMMUNISM IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

American officials also recognized the negative consequences of colonial capitalism in the northern countryside. While still a relatively minor political phenomenon at this stage, evidence suggests that communism was beginning to spread in Syria.[95] The American advisor H.S. Goold exclaimed that "almost every daily makes frequent mention of the activity of communist agents in Syria!"[96] Having been fed a nearly constant supply of translated newspaper excerpts, J.H. Keeley Jr., an official working for the American Consulate, relayed to Washington a comprehensive report on the activity of communists in Syria. What Keeley witnessed along the border with Turkey utterly appalled him. He argued that a French solution to the Armenian refugee problem "will do much to counteract the further spread of Bolshevism here, for the deplorable conditions under which these refugees live, concentrated in wretched camps under unbelievably unsanitary and congested conditions, furnish a breeding ground for degeneracy and crime and a fertile soil for Bolshevik propaganda."[97] Other officials were more direct. Many blamed the corruption that had begun to strangle the colonial government, which not only hampered American investment but also exploited Syrian workers. H.S. Goold followed a story of a young worker and father of three who was smothered to death by a collapsing work tunnel. The surviving wife and children received no compensation, and the man's French employer accepted zero liability for the incident. "The young wife and the three children are headed

[95] J.H. Keeley, Jr. "Communist Activities in Syria," March 11th, 1931. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 2, 4.
[96] Steagall. "Arrests of Communists in Beirut on March 6," March 23rd, 1931. Records of the Department of State. Roll 2.
[97] Ibid, 1.

straight for the wall," Goold remarked. He continued: "And it has occurred to 'L'Orient,' a French vernacular, that perhaps the communist danger might not only be attacked by the taking of strong police measures, but also by giving a squarer deal to people in such cases as that related above. Bravo, 'L'Orient!"'[98] The colonial government, however, insisted that they did "'not feel it necessary to intervene energetically to introduce elements of modern labor law in its own administrative organs...or to lead the States to a reform of this type.'"[99] These reflections show how American fears of communism began to shape criticism of the self-interested corruption of colonial capitalism in Syria.

The United States viewed the growth of both the National Bloc and Syrian communism as a symptom of the corruption infecting the Mandate. American fears about the growth of international communism were not altogether unfounded, for Moscow actively took advantage of nationalist disillusionment with the French occupation and ordered the Syrian Communist Party to broaden party membership beyond Armenians.[100] Colonial capitalism, scornfully viewed as a perversion of America's trusted capitalist system, was perceived as lending a hand to the growth of communism in both Armenian refugee camps and Syria's urban centers. Curiously, State Department officials had grown accustomed to trusting the native press, even openly aligning themselves with the bold critiques of the native Christian-owned and Francophone newspaper *L'Orient*. What came next essentially marked the beginning of the end for the French Mandate for Lebanon and Syria, and like the executives who make their millions bankrupting companies,

[98] H.S. Goold. "A Very Dull Summer," August 25, 1931. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 2, 4.
[99] Elizabeth Thompson. *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 102.
[100] Ibid, 102.

French officials would soon abandon the sinking ship and leave the Syrian people to fend for themselves. In the end, however, Syria would finally achieve independence.

CHAPTER TEN

THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT'S LACK OF PREPARATION FOR WWII

In April 1939, on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War, newly appointed Consul Ely E. Palmer studied the French High Commission and Lebanese government's preparation for possible conflict in Europe and abroad. A stockpile of foodstuffs and petroleum canisters had been secured, but there remained a severe deficiency in the number of gas masks held at the disposal of the colonial government.[101] Only government personnel, firemen, and police were supplied respirators, leaving most of the local population unprepared in the event of a gas attack. The local press followed the story and reported that the Lebanese Ministry of Hygiene and Public Assistance "would accept orders for gas masks to cost not over seven Syrian pounds each."[102] For most Syrians, the price was prohibitively expensive, a fact the High Commission must have anticipated. Only four hundred gas masks were ordered for use by the civilian population. Syrians hoping to acquire cheaper gas masks were told to write directly to French manufacturers, and general outrage ensued in Syria.

The construction of viable public shelters in both Lebanon and Syria was likewise absent, as the High Commission and Lebanese government passed the expenses onto nearly bankrupt local municipalities.[103] Attempting to nullify public charges of bureaucratic incompetence and corruption, the French referred to their limited preparation as "passive defense." Covering the

[101] Ely E. Palmer. "Further Preparations in Anticipation of Possible European Conflict," May 24th, 1939. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria, Roll 4.
[102] Ibid, 2.
[103] Ibid, 4.

resulting public protests, the Francophile newspaper *L'Orient* interviewed one angry Damascene who remarked: "'They say the mountains are a good refuge, but what measures has the government taken to transport the population to the mountains in case of danger?'" The journalist sarcastically noted, "Bechir forgets that invoking the secrecy of passive defense is the best way not to have to render an account of measures that are certainly insufficient."[104] By 1939, however, one must recall the overall economic and political condition in metropolitan France. The French government was financially weak, immobilized by political deadlock, and ready to capitulate to the Nazi war machine gathering along the country's borders. Less than a year later, Adolf Hitler would be standing in front of the Eiffel Tower.

[104] Ely E. Palmer. "Further Preparations in Anticipation of Possible European Conflict." May 24th, 1939. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Syria, 1930-1944. Roll 4, 5.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

The failure of the United States to establish significant long-term investments in French Mandate Syria caused disappointment and frustration among American officials to become increasingly palpable. Most historians argue that the United States remained an isolationist country before the Second World War, but what is revealed in the declassified State Department files on Syria paint an altogether different picture. State Department officials and their consul generals focused intensely on overseas investment, which became an active extension of America's foreign policy. An ideological critique of colonial capitalism emerged from these American frustrations with the perversion of the free market. These critiques raise the question of whether the United States would have acted differently had Arabists like George L. Brandt been at the helm of the Mandate. The American exceptionalism that would emerge during the Cold War shaped the political economies of numerous nations, including Saudi Arabia. ARAMCO, a Saudi subsidiary of Chevron, illustrated the United States' addiction for oil despite the enormous human cost incurred by Saudi workers.[105] Most importantly, the United States' early interactions with the Near East, specifically regarding Syria during the 1920s and 30s, would profoundly impact American foreign policy towards the region for decades to come. American officials realized that the nationalist aspirations of native peoples were too strong to actively contain through the dated colonial model. Instead, as illustrated by the United States' close relationship with Saudi Arabia and other key oil exporters, including Iran prior to 1979, the

[105] Robert Vitalis. *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2009), xxix.

securement of overseas investment (driven by financial capital) would remain the primary focus. When such investments were threatened, as was the case with Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, military force was used to maintain the cash flow.

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