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# From Mandate to Independence (1920–1943)

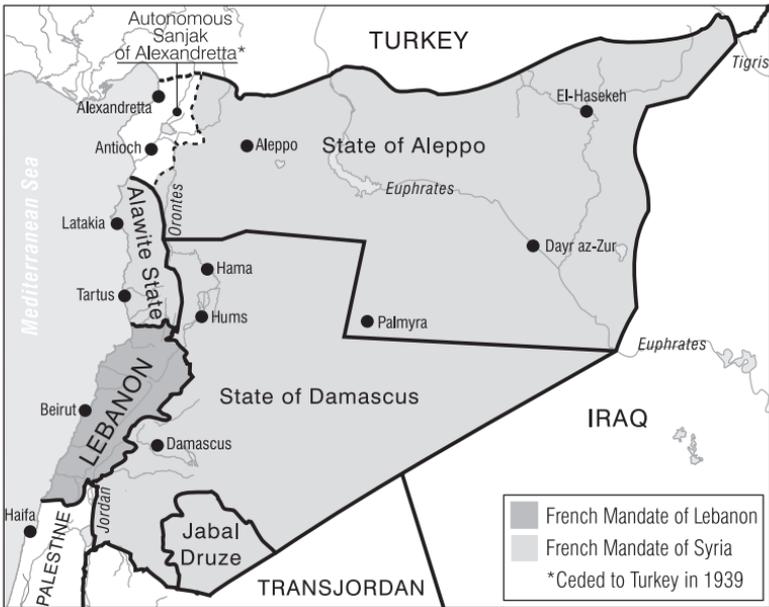
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By splitting off Greater Lebanon from its natural hinterland the French not only confirmed the financial and commercial hegemony of Beirut over the Mountain, but also strengthened a pattern of economic activity in which agriculture and industry had become subordinated to banking and trade.

(Roger Owen, 'The Political Economy of Grand Liban, 1920–1970',  
in Owen (ed.), *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon*)

Proponents of the mandate imagined their country being ruled by a Lebanese governor and Lebanese administrators under French protection. Instead, what they got was what Edmond Rabbath referred to as a French-imposed 'regime of direct rule'. In 1921, Robert de Caix explained that the mandate implied 'a gradual work of civic education and political emancipation'. High Commissioner Gouraud appointed Major Trabaud governor of Lebanon, helped by an executive of seven directors-general (of whom only two were Muslims), but real power in the administration was in the hands of the French 'advisers'. Gouraud also appointed an Administrative Commission (AC) of 15 members, of whom only five were Muslims. Faced with a widespread Muslim boycott, the high commissioner enlarged the commission to 17 members (six Maronites, three Greek Orthodox, one Greek Catholic, one Druze, four Sunnis and two Shi'ites) the majority of whom were landowners and merchant notables. Already, the sectarian quotas were established. Substantially, the commission held mainly consultative powers like its *Mutasarrifiya* predecessor. On 9 March 1922 the AC was replaced by a partly elected Representative Council, the elections to which were also boycotted by large sections of the Muslim population. Nevertheless, the AC, headed alternatively by Habib Pasha al-Sa'd, Na`um Labaki and Emile Edde, began to slowly attract Muslim participation.

High Commissioner Maurice Sarrail's interlude (1924–26) deserves mention, as the freemason and secular general represented the republican exception in French policy toward Lebanon. He



Map 4 Greater Lebanon in the partition of Syria, 1920

wanted to appoint a Lebanese governor, but opposed the choice of Emile Edde, the patriarch's candidate, and finally appointed a Frenchman, Léon de Cayla, as provisional governor. Sarrail initiated a series of courageous reforms. He unified the fiscal system, reducing inequalities in imposition between the inhabitants of the annexed territories and those of Mount Lebanon, opened administrative posts to Muslims and proposed a secular and public education system. Sarrail also divided Lebanon into eleven mixed *muhafazas* and did not apply sectarian representation in the electoral system. A new Representative Council presided over by Mussa Nammour, a Maronite from Zahleh who had turned to freemasonry, elected de Cayla governor of Lebanon. But most of Sarrail's reforms were rejected by the Quai d'Orsay under pressure from the Maronite Church and his policy of appeasement toward the Muslims was soon overshadowed by his repression of the Syrian revolt of 1925–27.

The shock of the Syrian revolt and the approach of the League of Nations Mandate Commission drove France to grant Lebanon and Syria a constitution. High Commissioner Henri de Jouvenel (1926–29) appointed a parliamentary drafting commission, including Petro Trad, `Umar Da`uq, Shibl Dammus and Michel

Chiha, that was immediately boycotted by the majority of Sunni and Shi'i leaders. Nevertheless, the final version of the constitutional text, adopted on 23 May 1926, renamed Greater Lebanon the 'Lebanese Republic', defined its flag as the tricolour French flag with a cedar in the white strip, and adopted French as an official language alongside Arabic. Significantly, the constitution did not define Lebanon's borders, as if to emphasise that they were open to modification. The Representative Council was renamed the Chamber of Deputies, and a Senate was set up to represent sects and regions. The constitution was a hybrid one: on a republican body, emphasising individual rights and liberties and political and judicial equality, were grafted articles concerning communal rights and representation – most probably at the initiative of Michel Chiha. Article 95 provided for the (temporary) fair distribution of government and administrative posts (but not of parliamentary seats) among the various sects. According to Article 9, the state relinquished to the religious communities its legislative rights and rulings on personal status (marriage, divorce, custody, adoption, inheritance, and so on) in the name of the freedom of religious belief. Article 10 summoned the state to defend private religious education on condition it did not conflict with public education. But above all, the constitution legalised the mandate, ensuring French control over the country's foreign and military affairs and public security. The president of the republic was given extensive executive powers, helped by the cabinet whose ministers he had the right to dismiss; yet he was responsible to no one and no institution except the French high commissioner.

On 26 May 1926 Charles Dabbas, a Greek Orthodox notable, was elected head of state for three years in a joint meeting of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, whose 16 members were appointed by de Jouvenel. Nevertheless, the Senate was abolished a year later and in 1929 the presidential mandate was prolonged from four to six years. From that time onwards, the Chamber of Deputies was elected on a sectarian basis under pressure from the Maronite Church and mainly Christian politicians.

The Armenian community finally took shape in Lebanon. Following the initial post-World War I campaigns of transfer and massacres in the Turkish camps, some 4,000 Armenians took refuge in Beirut in the autumn of 1918, coming from Aleppo. The second and bigger wave arrived in 1922 when hundreds of thousands of refugees fled from Cilicia as France decided to withdraw its troops from that district and officially ceded it to Turkish sovereignty. In

1924, the French mandatory authorities decided to settle Armenian refugees in Syria and Lebanon and naturalise them. In Lebanon, Emile Edde welcomed the decision as it increased the number of Christians in the country, as Muslim politicians opposed it. Two years later, High Commissioner de Jouvenel ordered the implementation of settlement and naturalisation. The United Nations supported his decision though it was implementing a project of settling Armenian refugees in Soviet Armenia. In 1929, Syria and Lebanon welcomed a new wave of Armenian refugees, raising their total number to 90,000, 40,000 of whom were in Lebanon, where 30,000 refugees lived in tents then were allowed to move into wooden shacks in Beirut and its eastern suburb; the rest were distributed to camps and settlements in Anjar, Saida, Sour, Zahleh and Tripoli.

At another level, the debate over attachment and detachment went unabated. On the French side, some mandate functionaries found they had created a 'too great a Lebanon' that needed reduction. Among the Lebanese, Riad al-Sulh declared, in July 1928, that the French prime minister Aristide Briand had promised him that he would re-annex the whole of Lebanon to Syria.<sup>1</sup> At the other extreme, Emile Edde presented a memorandum to the Quai d'Orsay in which he argued that a Greater Lebanon with a population of 405,000 Muslims to 425,000 Christians did not contain a majority strong enough to 'defend the country'. He proposed that Tripoli become a 'free city' under French administration – its Christians inhabitants would be given Lebanese nationality, and the Muslims, Syrian nationality – and south Lebanon would acquire an autonomous status similar to that of the Alawite country. As for the rest of the country – rid of some 55,000 Muslims from Tripoli and an additional 140,000 Sunnis and Shi'i from the south – it would constitute a reduced Lebanon but with a 'secure' Christian numerical majority of 80 per cent and sufficient agricultural area of the Biqa` to avert the danger of famine.<sup>2</sup>

The French opted for a different solution based not on the Christian/Muslim divide but on the notion that Lebanon was a land of religious minorities. Political supremacy of the Maronites was insured in their capacity as the biggest numerical minority according to the 1932 census, the last ever to be organised in Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> However, that year closed with an interruption of constitutional life on the occasion of the presidential elections planned for May. Tripoli leader Sheikh Muhammad al-Jisr submitted his candidature to make the point that a Muslim has the right to the post of head of state. Emile Edde, fearing he might lose the contest in favour of

his rival Bishara al-Khoury, withdrew in favour of Jisr, upon which High Commissioner Henri Ponsot (1929–32), refusing to create such a precedent, decreed the suspension of the constitution and disbanded the Chamber of Deputies.

### THE ECONOMIC MANDATE: PHOENICIA AND SWITZERLAND

France treated Syria and Lebanon as one economic unit controlled by two sets of French companies – the Common Interests (*Intérêts Communs*) and the franchise-holding societies (*Sociétés Concessionnaires*) – that held among them monopoly control over public services and the main sectors of the economy.<sup>4</sup>

From the beginning, the definition of the borders of Greater Lebanon followed a precise vision of its economic role. As Roger Owen noted, Lebanon's political detachment from Syria was the condition for its economic intermediary role *vis-à-vis* the Syrian hinterland.<sup>5</sup> The mandate authorities encouraged that outward-looking role. Beirut port, confirmed as the principal port of the Syrian interior, was enlarged and modernised, a second dock was constructed and the city, provided with an airport, progressed to become a centre for international communication. According to a new urban plan, the city was re-centred around Place de l'Étoile, designed on the model of that of the French capital, and the Parliament and a new business quarter were inaugurated there on the occasion of the French Colonial Exposition of 1921. These projects contributed to the development of a tertiary sector dominated by a merchant/financial bourgeoisie, which was becoming more and more embedded into the mandate system. This was supplemented by the expansion of education, another mandate policy, which helped create a middle class destined for liberal professions and the bureaucracy.

In agriculture, the mandatory authorities initially envisaged encouraging the emergence of a class of middle-level farmers to serve as a social base for the mandate. But political considerations ultimately prevailed: attracting the loyalty of the inhabitants of the annexed territories by favouring their traditional landed notables. In 'Akkar, the Biqa' and the south, French governors backed big landowners who became the main beneficiaries from government aid and projects of agricultural development. Paradoxically, sericulture, one of the original reasons for French interest in Lebanon, hardly survived its crisis of the 1920s and finally collapsed in the 1930s, contributing to a new wave of emigration. The Lebanese writer

Amin al-Rihani, an émigré to the US, described the combined effect of emigration and the collapse of sericulture that he witnessed on a visit to his homeland:

Here are the ghost villages, inhabited by unemployment, laziness and desolation. Nothing remains except factories and churches to console you of their disappearance ... Here is the lost wealth, lamented by the newspapers ... and the gentlemen dressed in European attire. National pride, dressed in artificial silk, eat their bread drenched in the sweat of Africa.<sup>6</sup>

A new role was conjured up for Mount Lebanon: estivation and tourism. The idea was part of the project of the New Phoenicians, who were Christian and mainly Maronite, intellectuals of the francophile Beirut bourgeoisie. Grouped around Charles Corm's *La Revue Phénicienne*, Michel Chiha, Albert and Alfred Naccache, Fu'ad al-Khoury, Jacques Tabet and others had revived Phoenicia as a cultural and national identity differentiated from the Arabs and as a model for an outward-looking service economy. The Phoenician model was complemented by the notion of 'Lebanon, Switzerland of the East'. The term, first used by the French travellers Lamartine and Gérard de Nerval to compare the landscape of Mount Lebanon to that of the Alpine country, soon became a multifunctional model: Lebanon, bank of the region, federation of sectarian cantons and a country that exploits its natural beauty in tourism and estivation. While Rihani and his like were bemoaning the wounds and ruptures of emigration, the New Phoenicians glorified the peasants' 'dignified misery' in Mount Lebanon, now presented as an abode of the spirit and of faith. They hailed migration as an age-old vocation of an entire people, expressing its spirit of freedom and adventure.

#### Interests of the city, notables of the Mountain

Under the mandate, Beirut enjoyed economic domination over Mount Lebanon and the rest of Greater Lebanon, but it was the Mountain that controlled the city politically and administratively. Soon, Sunni and Greek Orthodox politicians and functionaries of the city were replaced by those of the Mount Lebanon middle classes, who quickly linked up with the city's commercial/financial interests.

But these political newcomers were far from being united. A great part of the political history of the mandate was dominated by the rivalry between Emile Edde and Bishara al-Khoury, exploited to

the full by the high commissioners. Both men had studied Law at the Jesuit College in Beirut. Edde, a francophile and the son of a drogoman at the French consulate in Damascus, was from Jbeil in the heart of the Christian north and was the favourite Maronite politician of Patriarch Huwayik. Khoury, a notable of Richmaya in the mixed districts of the southern part of the Mountain, was the son of an administrator of the *Mutasarrifiya*. He was a journalist and talented speaker, at ease with Arabic literature and Arab history and with a perfect and eloquent command of Arabic.

In Cairo, where the two men were exiled during World War I, Khoury was close to the Union libanaise of Yusuf al-Sawda, while Edde, already considered France's man, recruited Lebanese and Syrian volunteers to fight alongside the Franco-British troops of the Légion d'Orient. At the end of the war, Edde was brought home by the French navy and named first counsellor to the high commissioner. Khoury was named secretary-general of the administration of Mount Lebanon and counsellor to the French military governor, but he resigned his post two years later in opposition to the nomination of a French governor instead of a Lebanese; Edde, for his part, continued to serve the Mandate. Both men had been members of the legislature since 1922 and Edde was appointed prime minister for a short while in 1929–30, whereas Khoury occupied the post three times and the two men were rivals for the presidency of the republic.

As a reaction to the suspension of the constitution in 1932, Khoury created the Constitutional Bloc, calling for the immediate activation of the constitution and the signing of a new agreement with France. Khoury's men were grouped around the daily *Le Jour*, founded by Michel Chiha in 1934, while *L'Orient*, edited by Gabriel Khabbaz and Georges Naccache, was the mouthpiece of Edde's partisans of the National Bloc.

Soon, the positions of the two groups began to diverge. Edde envisaged Lebanon primarily as a Christian homeland, insisting on its Mediterranean identity, which differentiated it 'ethnically' from the rest of Syria and the Arabs, and looked upon the Muslims as a threat that necessitated his proposed territorial and demographic reduction. In a famous remark, he admonished the Muslims who did not want to live in a Christian Lebanon to emigrate to Mecca. In addition, Edde was a strong partisan of private religious education, with a firm bias toward the Christian missionaries. During his term as prime minister in 1930, he created a scandal by abolishing 111 public schools, most of which were in Muslim-dominated regions.

Khoury, by contrast, envisaged Lebanon as an independent country built in collaboration with its Muslim population and enjoying close relations with Syria and the rest of the Arab countries. Christian rights, instead of being protected by foreign troops, were to be inscribed in the constitution, which guaranteed Maronite political supremacy.

Furthermore, the two men were considerably different when it came to their social status and interests. Edde was linked to the families of the declining merchant aristocracy of the Sursuq quarter and himself was married to a Sursuq, his law firm representing those families in addition to the French consulate and the big French corporations of the time. Khoury, by his marriage to Laure Chiha and that of his brother Fu'ad to Renée Haddad, the rich inheritor of a large firm that imported iron and construction materials, was embedded in the rising financial and commercial bourgeoisie that rapidly developed under the mandate. Among Khoury's legal clients were the *Établissements Darwich I Haddad* and its cement factory in Shikka, and the *Banque Misr, Syrie et Liban* of Midhat Pasha and Tal'at Harb, the first bank with British and Arab capital established in Lebanon in 1929. More importantly, Khoury and his Constitutional Bloc had at their disposal the resources of the *Banque Pharaon-Chiha*, owned by the maternal cousins Michel Chiha and Henri Pharaon. Pharaon participated with French interests in the administration of the French conglomerate *Société du port de Beyrouth*, and was active in real estate. Politically, Pharaon was deputy for the Biqa` region and patron of the Workers' Front, an anti-communist trade union. Michel Chiha (1891–1954) was the director of the family bank and one of the few Lebanese to sit on the board of administration of French franchise-holding companies, among which was the *Banque de Syrie et du Liban*, in addition to being the president of the Beirut Stock Market and the vice-president of the Beirut Chamber of Commerce. Chiha was appointed deputy for the minority seat in Beirut and played a major role in drafting the Lebanese constitution of 1926.

The rivalry between Khoury and Edde was also expressed through the dominant intellectual figures of the times: Michel Chiha and Charles Corm. Corm, the apostle of a Christian Lebanon, considered Muslims as religious and historic adversaries who lacked loyalty to the polity. He emphasised French as the language of the Lebanese Christians and despised Arabic as 'an Asian language' that had been imposed by 'massacres and fright'. In his long poem *La Montagne Inspirée* (1934), Corm writes:

Jesus made me love Mohamet and Moses  
 ... to love our enemy, especially that he hurts us  
 Is to triumph against evil ...

His identification of Lebanon with the Christians was complete:

Muslim brother, understand my candor  
 I am the real Lebanon, authentic and devoted ...

According to Corm, Christianity, the historical inheritor of Phoenicia, accomplished the elaboration of a Lebanese cultural identity distinct from the rest of the Arab world. Chiha, on his part, was no less a Phoenicianist, but he restricted Phoenicianism to the economic sphere, refusing to consider it as a hallmark of Lebanese identity. The Lebanese were a 'Mediterranean variety', a confounded mix of many origins. Lebanon had existed even before Phoenicia and its inhabitants were simply Lebanese. Chiha's Lebanon was defined as both a 'people of merchants' and a 'country of associated sectarian minorities'. He would be mainly known as the organic intellectual of the commercial/financial bourgeoisie.

#### ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AND SOCIAL AGITATION

The 1930s were a decade of great transformations and troubles in the economic, social and political spheres for Lebanon under the mandate.

To begin with, the port of Beirut was losing ground to the Palestinian port of Haifa, which was developed at a rapid pace by the British mandatory authorities and also benefited from the growth of the Jewish sector in the Palestinian economy. Enlarged and modernised, the main dock of the Palestinian port had a surface of 35 hectares compared to 23 for its Beirut counterpart. For years, business circles in Beirut pressed the French to enlarge the city's port facilities, create a free zone and modernise the Beirut–Damascus railway line. They also complained about the high customs duties on imports (10–30 per cent higher than Palestinian rates), which allowed Palestinian merchants and industrialists to compete with Lebanese products in the Arab markets and inside Lebanon itself. In addition, Palestine had become the centre for air traffic between Europe and the Far East. Finally, by 1934 the port of Haifa had surpassed Beirut port, despite the eventual enlargement and opening of a free zone in the latter facility.

On the other hand, the economic privileges of the mandate were alienating larger sectors of society. Large bourgeois interests were coalescing against the monopoly exercised by the French concessionary companies, their fiscal exemptions and the export of their profits to France. They were calling for Syro-Lebanese control over the Common Interests. In 1931, a general strike by taxi drivers against the competition from the tramways merged with a protest by the inhabitants of Beirut and Tripoli against high electricity prices to unleash a mass boycott of the services of the Tramways et Eclairage de Beyrouth (TEB), the French concessionary company that ran both the city's tramway lines and its electricity supply. After some months, the movement triumphed and imposed a reduction of the company's fares by 49 per cent.

Socially, the repercussions of the Great Depression of 1929 further aggravated the collapse of the general standard of living. The ensuing years witnessed a number of workers' strikes against unemployment and the rise in the cost of living, all calling for a wage increases and the amelioration of working conditions.

The situation in the rest of the country was no better. In November 1934, the French granted a monopoly for the cultivation of and commerce in tobacco (the second largest source of revenue for the Lebanese) and the manufacture of cigarettes to a French franchise-holding company, the Régie Co-intéressée Libano-Syrienne des Tabacs et Tombacs, controlled by the French colonial bank, Crédit Foncier d'Algérie et de Tunisie. A general protest strike was called in the two major areas of tobacco cultivation, the predominantly Maronite regions of Jbeil and Batrun in the north and the predominantly Shi'i region of Jabal 'Amil in the south. Significantly, Maronite patriarch 'Arida led the movement backed by a number of Maronite politicians. His conflict with the mandatory powers on this issue led him to a major breakthrough in Syrian-Lebanese relations as negotiations between Bkirki and the Syrian independentist National Bloc started at the end of 1935. In February 1936, 'Arida came out with a clear declaration in favour of Lebanon's independence and sovereignty while calling for a strengthening of Lebanon's relations with 'sister Syria' in the economic and social spheres. Later, the patriarch had called upon the Lebanese to help the victims of the independence demonstrations in the Syrian cities, brutally suppressed by the French authorities. During that period, 'Arida addressed numerous letters and memos to the French authorities in which he reminded them that the promise of independence made by Clemenceau to his predecessor,

Patriarch Huwayik, had ended in colonial occupation. He went on to enumerate the abuses of the mandatory powers: the submission of the Lebanese security forces to the French high commissioner, the domination of French so-called advisers over the administration, the constant intervention of the mandatory authorities in the workings of mixed tribunals (which examined the juridical conflict between Lebanese and Frenchmen), the constant violations of public liberties (suspension of the publication of newspapers, subjecting political parties to a official licensing, and so on), tax increases (from 330,000 piastres before World War I to 10 million under the mandate, although the demographic increase did not exceed 50 per cent), and last but not least, the monopoly control over the economy by the concessionary societies. In conclusion, the patriarch criticised the 'short-sighted' politics that saw friendship between the Lebanese and the Syrians as a 'hostile act against France'.<sup>7</sup>

In February 1935, a new wave of strikes had broken out against the TEB and the Société du Chemin de Fer Damas-Hamah et Prolongements (DHP), who were accused of imposing the cost of their financial deficits on the Lebanese and Syrians while distributing profit dividends to their stockholders with 5–6 per cent interest. In Lebanon, but mainly in the Syrian cities, the strike turned into a political protest and had a decisive effect on defining negotiations for the independence of the two countries.

### 1936: the year of crises

1936 was a turning point in Lebanon's history in more than one sense. Various events and crises reactivated the polemics on attachment/detachment. But although sectarian and political tensions increased, social and regional developments gave rise to a new alignment of forces and the crystallisation of a multi-sectarian current aspiring to independence from France.

Events in Lebanon and Syria that year formed part of a renewed cycle of nationalist and independentist unrest in the region. In Egypt, the nationalist movement imposed the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 26 August 1936, which declared Egypt's independence but ceded the administration of its foreign policy to Britain and a continued military presence of British troops in the Suez Canal zone for another 20 years. Palestine was the scene of a large-scale popular uprising against the British mandate and Jewish immigration; it paralysed the country and lasted until the outbreak of World War II. A general strike that lasted from April to October, suspended upon the request of Arab rulers, was followed by prolonged guerrilla warfare. This

mobilised some 30,000 British troops, the biggest challenge to British colonialism in its history.<sup>8</sup> In Syria, the anti-mandate demonstrations led the French high commissioner, Comte de Martel, to promise, on 24 February 1936, the re-establishment of parliamentary life and the conclusion of a treaty recognising Syria's independence and backing its admission to the League of Nations.

In Lebanon, 1936 started with the election of Emile Edde as president of the republic by only one vote, against Bishara al-Khoury. Following the Syrian precedent, seven deputies from the Constitutional Bloc addressed a memorandum to de Martel on 2 March requiring that Lebanon be treated on an equal footing with Syria by the application of the constitution and backing Lebanon's admission to the League of Nations. A few weeks later, Pierre Viénot, director-general of the Quai d'Orsay, confirmed de Martel's promises. But whereas Syria was promised independence, Lebanon had to be content with a mere 'alliance of friendship' and an 'internal independence': the country's defence and foreign relations were to remain in French hands.

The imminence of a Franco-Syrian treaty created two kinds of apprehension in Lebanon. Christian 'protectionists' feared that Lebanon, 'independent' from France, might soon be annexed by Syria. In turn, Muslim 'unionists' feared that the country's independence would legitimise the Lebanese borders of 1 September 1920 and destroy their hope of annexation.

In the first week of March, the Congress of the Coast and the Four *Cazas*, which had reconvened to reiterate the 'annexionist' demands, suffered the defection of a moderate current represented by Riad al-Sulh and his cousins Kazim and Taqi al-Din. Although Sulh was a strong opponent of the mandate in Syria and Lebanon, he had maintained a distance from the Muslim unionists since the Congress of the Coast of 1928 and opened up to the Christian forces, advocating an inter-sectarian alliance against the mandate. In 1931–33, he was active with Monseigneur Mubarak, the Maronite bishop of Beirut, in the transport and electricity strike. Settled in Beirut, Sulh, who shared the leadership of the south with the As`ads, also aspired to the leadership of the Muslims of the capital against their traditional leader, Salim `Ali Salam. He was also opposed to the mufti and leader of Tripoli, `Abd al-Hamid Karami, and publicly supported (in 1934) the maintenance of Tripoli within Lebanon's borders. In 1935, Sulh served as an intermediary between Patriarch `Arida and the Syrian national movement. With his two cousins, Kazim and Taki al-Din, he founded the Republican Party

for Independence (*Hizb al-Istiqlal al-Jumburi*) headed by `Aziz al-Hashim, a Maronite notable from `Aqura in the Jbeil highlands. The party, representing a section of the professional middle classes, agitated for the political independence of Syria and Lebanon and their economic unity. For the first time, the economic interests of the inhabitants of the coast and the four *cazas* were not linked to political unity with Syria.

Riad al-Sulh had not attended the Congress of the Coast in 1936 as he was banished to the Jazira region in Syria for his role in the pro-independence strikes of the preceding year. Upon his release, a few months later, he travelled to Paris to join the Syrian delegation negotiating the independence treaty. Riad's cousin Kazim, writing in a brochure that appeared a few days after the end of the congress, accused the majority of the congressmen of ignoring the new realities in the country. At the beginning of the mandate, he argued, 'Lebanonism' was synonymous with Christianity and 'unionism' synonymous with Islamism. At that moment, the Christians were increasingly disappointed by France and 'becoming aware that a great number of economic factors render their daily life as well as their destinies intimately linked to those of the destinies of the sons of Syria'.<sup>9</sup> Prime among those factors was the Syrian–Lebanese desire to control the Common Interests as a shared terrain between the two 'nationalisms'. Facing this new fact, the question of attachment had become secondary, for 'how would the Syrian unionists benefit if the [annexed Lebanese] "territories" are "returned" to Syria while [Lesser] Lebanon becomes a colonial base that will menace Syria itself?'<sup>10</sup> In return, Sulh proposed supporting the emergence of a new Lebanese patriotism that would surpass the attachment/detachment dilemma in favour of a wider vision of Lebanon's Arab national roots, which should not necessarily mean merger between Arab countries.

## ABORTED INDEPENDENCE

The independence negotiations in Paris opened in this atmosphere of flux. The Lebanese delegation was led by President Edde and included Prime Minister Khayr al-Din al-Ahdab – a notable from Tripoli and one of the first Sunnis to collaborate with the mandate – in addition to opposition leader Bishara al-Khoury. In order to allay Christian fears, Viénot reiterated, in a letter to President Edde on 23 April 1936, France's guarantee of Lebanon's independence in its 1 September 1920 borders. But this only fanned Muslim

dissent. A congress in Sidon reiterated the demand for annexation and organised street demonstrations, which the gendarmes fired upon killing one demonstrator.<sup>11</sup>

In this context, the question of sectarian representation took on a different turn. The Muslim negotiators in the Paris delegation, Najib `Usayran for the Shi`as and Khayr al-Din al-Ahdab for the Sunnis, insisted that France commit itself to defending the interests of the sectarian 'minorities' in independent Lebanon. Those Muslims who believed in an independent Lebanon not annexed to Syria were certain that that entity would evidently be under Christian, and particularly Maronite, domination. A few months before, Patriarch `Arida had asked that the office of president of the republic be officially reserved for a Maronite Christian. Thus, while the Christian negotiators were looking for French guarantees vis-à-vis Syria and the Lebanese Muslims, the Muslim negotiators were looking for French guarantees vis-à-vis the Christians.

The Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between France and Lebanon, signed on 13 November 1936, was approved unanimously by the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies. France recognised Lebanon as an independent state and undertook to help its admission to the League of Nations. In return, Lebanon guaranteed French capital and interests, and the continuation of the monetary parity between the two countries, and vowed to remain an ally of France in the event of war. France vowed to provide military aid to Lebanon if attacked by a third party. Lebanon would have its own army, but France would maintain a military presence for its Levantine troops (air force and navy) and would enjoy transport and communication facilities. For its part, France would provide military technical aid and advice to the Lebanese armed forces. Emile Edde threw all his weight behind an unlimited French military presence in Lebanon; he received a 25-year period renewable by tacit automatic renewal for the same duration.

Thus, the Franco-Syrian treaty, signed on 9 September 1936, contributed in more than one way to solving an important part of the above-mentioned problems.

To begin with, the Syrian official delegation dropped its annexionist demands concerning Lebanon in return for France's integration of the Druze and `Alawite autonomous zones into the Syrian Republic (whereas Alexandretta was definitely ceded to Turkey). Nonetheless, in their declarations to the press after the signature of the treaty, Hashim al-Atassi and Jamil Mardam insisted on a federal union between the two countries.

Second, in terms of independence and sovereignty, the Lebanese obtained more than the initially promised 'internal independence'.

Finally, the question of 'minorities' rights', which was not included in the text of the treaty, was relegated to an exchange of letters between de Martell and Edde, attached as annexes to the treaty. In letter no. 6, the president of the Lebanese Republic vowed to guarantee equal civic and political rights and to ensure the equitable representation of the country's different 'components' (read 'sects') in government posts. Also, in letter no. 6B, the president informed the high commissioner that he would implement administrative reform aiming at a larger measure of administrative decentralisation and grant municipal and governate (*muhafaza*) councils a consultative vote concerning their respective shares of state expenditure. A few weeks later, the high commissioner designated that Tripoli and its port become an independent *qa'im maqamate*. But nothing else was achieved in terms of decentralisation, or the increase in the prerogatives of municipal councils, or the setting up of regional councils in the *muhafazas*.

Though the Lebanese obtained more than the initially promised 'internal independence', the Franco-Syrian treaty signed on 9 September 1936 did not satisfy many, especially the clause concerning the stationing of French troops. Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Nabatiyeh and Bint Jbeil were rocked by waves of demonstrations and strikes from September to November of 1936. During his visit to the northern port, President Edde was met by demonstrators waving the Syrian flag and shouting slogans in support of unity with Syria. Some 20 protestors were wounded as the gendarmes fired on the crowd and `Abd al-Hamid Karami was arrested. The resulting general strike did not end until a delegation from the Syrian National Bloc intervened with the city's leaders and obtained the release of Karami. In Beirut, bloody clashes between the populous quarters of Basta (Sunni) and Jummayzeh (Maronite) signalled the rise of paramilitary youth organisations expressing mounting sectarian tensions and the influence of the fascist parties of Europe.

The first of these was the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), founded in 1932 by Antoun Sa`adeh and advocating integral Syrian unity including Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Palestine, Cyprus and the northern parts of Iraq. The SSNP was anti-communist, anti-Jewish, corporatist and secularist. It was followed by the Party of Lebanese Unity, the 'white shirts' of Tawfic `Awwad, sponsored by Patriarch `Arida and founded as a reaction to the resolutions

of the Congress of the Coast, whose members were branded as 'secessionists'. In November 1936, the Kata'ib party (Phalange) was founded by Pierre Jumayil, a pharmacist and football referee who was inspired by the discipline of the Hitler Youth during the 1936 Olympic games in Munich. The party believed in Lebanon as the definitive homeland for its inhabitants within its 1920 borders, and professed a Lebanese nationalism distinct from the Arabs, all the while campaigning for Lebanon's independence. The same month saw the founding of the *Najjada* (Rescuers) of `Adnan al-Hakim. These were Muslim independentists who called for integral Arab unity (clearly demarcated from Islamic unity), but did not insist on Syrian-Lebanese unity. In 1937, Rashid Baydun, a businessman and school owner in Beirut, founded *al-Tala'î* (The Vanguard), a Shi`i paramilitary organisation.

Clearly, a simple dichotomy between Christian protectionism and Muslim unionism was no longer accurate. The identity debate had mutated and fragmented, becoming more ideological and more urban. Identity politics was now both a tool and a master of the masses. Two versions of the identity of the country were clashing: Lebanonism versus Arabism. Between the two stood a third variant, the Syrian nationalism of Sa`adeh's SSNP, representing marginal desires among non-Maronite Christians and the Muslims of the peripheries. More importantly, the stakes had changed; the identity debate was no longer defined in relation to the outside (attachment/detachment) but articulated the relations of power inside the country itself.

Curiously, while the rank and file was being radicalised and polarised, the notables drew closer together. The opposition, led by Bishara al-Khoury, understood the Franco-Lebanese treaty as an engagement on the part of France to end the mandate in favour of Lebanon's self-rule and independence. The guarantees for the Christians were written into the constitution and the electoral system and would be embodied in inter-sectarian alliances and in the relations with the leaders of Syria and the other Arab countries, 'brothers and partners in the struggle against colonialism and for freedom and independence', as Khoury called them.<sup>12</sup> The legislative elections of 1937 brought a large number of Constitutionalist to the chamber, with the Pharaon-Chiha bank financially supporting their nomination. Khoury was nominated prime minister, and the bank, representing the power of money in the capital, exerted considerable influence on the economic and financial policies of the

government in addition to benefiting greatly from the beneficence of the prime minister.

In addition to his strong support in business circles, Khoury was privileged vis-à-vis Edde by his inter-sectarian alliances. In contrast to the latter's difficult relations with the Muslims, Khoury's Constitutionalist Bloc included a number of Muslim notables, especially from the peripheral regions of Lebanon: Muhammad `Abd al-Razzaq in `Akkar, Majid Arsalan in `Alay and the Shouf, Sabri Hamadeh in the Biqa` and `Adil `Usayran in the south.

This period also witnessed the emergence of a third force, which was democratic, reformist and multi-sectarian, and reflected the social and anti-monopolist struggles of the 1930s. This group crystallised around the National and Democratic Congress (NDC), which convened in Beirut in November 1938 at the initiative of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP). The congress included members of the professional middle class, economists and trade unionists, in addition to merchants and notables opposed to the traditional *za`ims*. The congress's resolutions condemned the intervention of the mandate functionaries in the work of the ministries, administrative corruption, and the mandatory authorities' support for the franchise-holding companies. They advocated a united budget for the state and the Common Interests. Politically, the resolutions stigmatised the Chamber of Deputies as a 'chamber of notables and big landowners' in which a dozen MPs were ready to be bought and sold, and called for its dissolution and the election of a Parliament of 44 deputies through popular suffrage. Other reforms proposed were the election of the president of the republic by direct popular vote and the ban on combining the posts of MP and cabinet minister. Noting that 80 per cent of fiscal revenues came from indirect taxes, which was detrimental to the poor and the middle classes, the congress called for the adoption of a direct and progressive income and inheritance tax.<sup>13</sup>

The outbreak of World War II suspended the crises of that fateful year. The French National Assembly did not ratify the independence treaties with Syria and Lebanon. In Lebanon, the high commissioner suspended the constitution and dissolved the Chamber of Deputies in early 1939, and though Edde was still nominally president of the republic, real power passed into the hands of the French high commissioners. In 1941, Edde was dismissed when the Vichy administration of General Dentz appointed Alfred Naccache to replace him as head of state.

## TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

As World War I created the conditions for the emergence of Greater Lebanon under French mandate, it was during World War II that the conditions for Lebanon's independence from France matured, in the context of Franco-British competition over the destinies of the peoples of the Near East. In 1940, France collapsed under Nazi occupation. In 1941, Free French and British troops attacked Syria and Lebanon from three directions and overthrew the pro-Vichy administration there. General de Gaulle was increasingly apprehensive that Britain's intentions were motivated by the 'preconceived idea of evicting' France from the entire region. On 26 November 1941, in order to thwart the British outbidding the French, General Georges Catroux, who was nominated delegate-general of Free France in Syria and Lebanon, declared France's recognition of the two countries' independence and invited their respective governments to sign a new treaty with France to terminate the mandate. The declaration came to nothing. The Syrian and Lebanese independentists rejected the idea of a new treaty as there already was one, and the French retorted by claiming that independence could not be accomplished before the League of Nations relieved France of its mandate. Nevertheless, Catroux confirmed Alfred Naccache as president of the republic and continued to behave as an all-powerful high commissioner. Britain, the US, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq immediately recognised the independence of the two countries. Lebanese independentists of all colours – the Constitutionalist Bloc, Riad al-Sulh and his friends, and Bkirki, who called for a national congress under the patronage of Patriarch `Arida – stood up against that illusory and incomplete independence, calling for new elections and the complete handing over of powers to the Lebanese, including their right to elect their own president. The refusal of the French authorities was confirmed during General de Gaulle's visit to Damascus and Beirut in August 1942 when he declared that war conditions did not allow the exercise of full independence.

General Edward Spears was appointed mission chief for Britain in both countries, based in Beirut. Moreover, the Near East, as the region was called then, was a unified theatre of military operations and an economic union organised to support the war effort, with an HQ in Cairo, home of the Middle East Supply Centre, a body that administered the Allies' communication lines and logistics while controlling agricultural and industrial production. In short, Britain dominated the whole region.

Two economic factors motivated the financial/commercial oligarchy to opt for independence. The first was its desire, all sectarian factions included, to privatise and control the French 'Common Interests' as well as the franchise-holding companies.<sup>14</sup> The second was the oligarchy's desire to liberate itself from the constraints and restrictions of a weak and closed French monetary zone.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the oligarchy had accumulated huge profits during the war and established many links with the Anglo-Saxon markets and the Arab oil-producing states. Already, Beirut was the centre of communication between Europe and the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia. The greater part of the gold purchased by the emirs and sheikhs of that oil-producing region transited through its port, and its banks had begun receiving the first deposits and investing Gulf money in real estate.

It was in Cairo that the accords concerning Lebanon's independence were negotiated. Meeting under the patronage of Egypt's prime minister, Mustafa Nahhas Pasha, in June 1942, Bishara al-Khoury and the nationalist Syrian leader Jamil Mardam agreed on the return to constitutional life and the integral independence of both countries, while refusing any privileges for France after independence. The two leaders also decided to take charge of the Common Interests. Khoury was thus recognised by the Syrian nationalists as the representative of the majority of the Lebanese Christians and Muslims. Also during that visit, the alliance between Bishara al-Khoury and Riad al-Sulh was sealed and elaborated in the famous National Pact, in which the former traded French protection for Christian political primacy guaranteed by the constitution and the latter dropped the idea of Muslim annexation to Syria in return for Muslim partnership in running the affairs of the country. Sulh, like many Arab nationalists of the time, had become closer to Britain as the Allies appeared to be heading for victory. During another visit to Cairo in May 1943, Khoury, already being treated as the forthcoming president of Lebanon, signed an economic treaty with Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Jordan. In a declaration to the press – immediately denounced by the Constitutional Bloc in Beirut – he even declared his willingness to sign a federal union between Lebanon and Syria. Khoury was not an obvious British choice from the beginning, though Nahhas Pasha had already adopted him. General Spears, though a sworn enemy of Edde, whom he called a 'French stooge', was not very enthusiastic for Khoury and hoped to advance Kamil Sham'un. As late as July 1943, Britain's men in the region were still testing the two candidates. Iraq's prime minister, Nuri al-Sa'id, met Sham'un

and Khoury that month and was more convinced by the latter. No doubt Khoury's support for a Syrian–Lebanese federal union struck a favourable note with the champion of the Greater Syria project.

Nevertheless, Lebanon's transition to independence did not occur without clashes and violence. The return to constitutional life was not implemented until late 1942, under pressure from General Spears, who insisted on the need to organise national elections and did not hide his sympathies for the independence of the two countries.<sup>16</sup> When the French finally agreed to organise the elections, Ayyub Thabit, a Protestant politician close to Edde, was appointed to head an interim government. He decreed a ratio of 32 Christian to 22 Muslim seats and granted immigrants the right to vote (estimated at 160,000, mostly Christians). Both provisions were rejected by the Muslim politicians and Thabit resigned; he was replaced by a Greek Orthodox lawyer, Petro Trad. Upon the mediation of Nahhas Pasha, an electoral law was decreed in the summer of 1943. It dropped the voting by immigrants and set up a Parliament of 55 seats, 30 for Christians and 25 for Muslims. This ratio of 6:5 remained the guideline for the Christian–Muslim sectarian quotas until 1990, when it was replaced by parity (50:50) according to the Ta'if Agreement.

On 21 September 1943, the result of the summer's elections was a net victory for the Constitutionals. Bishara al-Khoury was elected president of the republic on 21 September and immediately appointed Riad al-Sulh to form the government. In October, a Syrian high-level delegation arrived in Beirut, headed by Prime Minister Jamil Mardam Bey who agreed with his Lebanese counterpart on three vital points: (1) Syria recognised and defended the independence and sovereignty of both countries; (2) Lebanon made the commitment that its territory would not be used as base or passageway for any foreign force that endangered Syria's independence or security; (3) close collaboration between the two countries would take place in the economic and social domains. Following that, Lebanon asked the National Committee of Free France (CNFL) for a transfer of powers and of the Common Interests to the Lebanese authorities. The response was negative, with France declaring that as long as the country was still under mandate, there would be no question of terminating the mandate without a new treaty. In fact, General de Gaulle wanted a new treaty that would guarantee for France a privileged position in Lebanon and Syria in the cultural, economic and military domains. Lebanon answered that the CNFL had no

legal status or legitimacy to sign such treaties and that Lebanon would not grant a privileged status to any foreign power.

On 8 November 1943, the Chamber of Deputies passed a series of constitutional revisions that abolished the clause stating that the French mandatory authority was the sole source of political power and jurisdiction, reinstated Arabic as the country's only official language and adopted a new design for the Lebanese flag.

Thus Lebanon's independence was imposed as a *fait accompli*. On the following day, President Khoury promptly ratified the revisions. However, French delegate-general Jean Helleu declared the constitutional revisions null and void, as they were unilaterally carried out without prior consultation with the French authorities. On 11 November, at dawn, Khoury, Sulh, `Abd al-Hamid Karami and ministers Salim Takla and Kamil Sham`un were arrested and incarcerated in the fort of Rashaya in the southern Biqa`. Emile Edde, who had abstained from voting on the constitutional amendments, was appointed head of state and prime minister. Boycotted by the entire political class, Edde was incapable of forming a government as news of the arrests led to violent popular reaction. A country-wide general strike was decreed, and the officials who were still at large formed a provisional government under Habib Abi Shahla, the speaker of Parliament, and Majid Arsalan, the defence minister, and launched an appeal to national resistance. In Beirut, the Phalange and the *Najjada* formed a united command to wage the common battle and demonstrators took over the Parliament building, demanding the liberation of the incarcerated leaders. Helleu imposed a curfew and sent French and Senegalese troops to repress the demonstrations, which left 18 protestors dead and 66 wounded.

Pressed by the monarchs of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, intervened with General de Gaulle who dispatched General Catroux to Beirut to solve the crisis. On 19 November, General Spears submitted an ultimatum from his government to the Free French, demanding the liberation of Khoury and his friends, or else they would be freed by British troops. On the morning of 22 November, a few hours before the ultimatum was due to expire, Catroux ordered the liberation of Khoury, Sulh and their companions, dismissed Helleu and declared the end of the French mandate in Lebanon.<sup>17</sup>

Lebanon's independence was largely a product of an entente between Britain and Egypt. The former's role was decisive in the termination of the French mandate and the choice of the ruling

tandem. Explaining why the francophile oligarchy had accepted independence from the French, Michel Chiha cynically told his friend Charles Helou that Lebanon could not remain a French trading post in a region dominated by the British. Egypt— the first Arab country to recognise Lebanon's independence — was the Arab guarantor of Lebanon's 'independence', notably vis-à-vis Syria. Significantly, two months after the Lebanese crisis, the Syrian Parliament passed a law for amending the Syrian constitution to abolish all references to the French mandate.

Thus, a new tradition had been inaugurated in which the Lebanese entity periodically shifted and reformed according to the will of the dominant regional and international forces. This pattern was to be repeated many times in the following decades.