

## 1.6: Syrian National Development after 1920

During the 1920s, there were several sporadic attempts to revive the cause of Syrian unity. In 1921, Amir Abdallah, offended by the ejection of his brother Feisal from the throne of Syria, collected together a number of followers and moved into Southern Jordan upon a train that "two months earlier, in Maan, had been seized at the point of a Syrian nationalist's pistol to go and collect him." Upon his arrival, Abdallah declared that his intention was to reunify Syria and restore its throne to his brother. For a time, Abdallah was hailed as a true liberator and supporters of the Syrian National Congress who crossed into Transjordan after the collapse in Maysaloun flocked to his cause. But after several guerrilla-style operations in the French sector of Syria, Abdallah abandoned his plan of a Greater Syria and withdrew his support for the guerrillas. The British government, not wanting to arouse French suspicion, intervened to halt the situation before it got out of hand. In the subsequent negotiations, it was agreed to make Abdallah an Amir over Transjordan in return for his cooperation. Also during this period, a general Syrian-Palestinian Congress was convened with the active participation of the Party of Syrian Unity. It held its first session in Geneva after which it presented a memorandum to the League of Nations demanding Syrian unity and independence. The Congress was attended by the following groups and organizations:

The Party of Syrian Unity The Arab Independence Party The Islamic-Christian Association of Nablus The Syrian National Association (Boston) The Arab National Party (Argentina) The Party for the Liberation of Syria (New York) The Party of Syrian Unity and Independence (Chile) According to Philip Khoury, "the Syrian-Palestinian Congress soon reproduced many of the same political divisions and regionalist tendencies that had already begun to surface among Syrian [nationalists]." Consequently, the Congress failed to develop into an organized movement and in the end it became an arena for a variety of personal disputes. The one final attempt that deserves a mention took place in June 1928. A general meeting was held at the residence of Yassin Bey al-Jabi, one of Damascus' leading notables, to discuss the question of Syrian union. Attended by delegates from Beirut, Tripoli, South Lebanon, the Syrian coastline, Wadi al-Tyme, Akkar, Tel Kalakh, the Beka', and Baalbak, it adjourned with a statement calling for the reunification of historical Syria. But like its predecessors, the Damascus meeting failed to bear any fruit. It quickly disintegrated and its mainly Muslim members went their separate ways. By then, most Muslim leaders were coming around to Kiyanism, in particular in Lebanon where "Muslim politicians had come to realise that, whereas they might be of first-rate importance in Lebanon, in a Greater Syria they would at best be second-rate next to political leaders from Damascus and Aleppo." The impact of European domination on Arab Syria has not yet received full scientific treatment. Yet there is no doubt as to its decisive significance to Syrian nationalism. Firstly, European domination, whatever its character, had to follow the classical policy of divide and rule in order to establish itself in Syria. This made it difficult for unitary ideas, such as that represented in Syrian nationalism, to take root in the masses. Secondly, European domination bolstered the forces of conservatism and traditionalism and opposed every kind of revolutionary leadership. Thirdly, European domination forced each of the newly created entities in Syria to turn inwardly and to pursue its own independence, thus breaking up the territorial basis of Syrian unity. Combined with an unfavourable domestic climate, these factors arrested the movement toward national unity in Syria.