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THE CASE OF WILLIAM YALE: CAIRO'S SYRIANS AND THE ARAB ORIGINS OF AMERICAN INFLUENCE IN THE POST-OTTOMAN MIDDLE EAST, 1917–19

Abstract
This article explores the American role in the Syrian political scene in Cairo toward the end of World War I and in its immediate aftermath. It challenges the absence of the United States and of American actors as primary players in much of the historical writing on the Middle East in this period. It illuminates a neglected episode of regional American diplomacy, argues that the United States was not relegated to the periphery in local debates surrounding the dismemberment of Ottoman Syria, and emphasizes the broader uncertainties that characterized the competition for Mandate territories in the Middle East prior to 1920. In doing so, it takes a close look at the long-forgotten reports of William Yale, the U.S. State Department's "Special Agent" in Cairo in late 1917, and situates them within evolving trends in Syrian-Arab politics. Yale, who surfaced in Egypt after serving with Standard Oil in Palestine, was the key Arabic-speaking American "on the spot" and proved to be an astute if imperfect observer of the diversity of Syrian national sentiment. A survey of his reports allows for a new perspective on Cairo's Syrians and their pragmatic and ideological turn toward the United States as World War I unfolded. Alienated from Britain and France, they looked increasingly to the United States, and the appeal of a postwar American trusteeship over Syria gained currency among émigré intellectuals and aspiring powerbrokers.

In February 1918, the new American "Special Agent" in Egypt, William Yale, reported on a committee of Syrian émigrés in Cairo—Christian journalists and scions of the most eminent Damascene Muslim families—who wished to see the United States assume a protectorate over Syria.[1] Under the "tutelage of the United States," Yale mused, "these gentlemen . . . would feel free from the jealousies, greed and ambitions of the European Powers and . . . would feel secure in obtaining their ultimate independence."[2] Yale's report reflected the growing influence of the United States in elite Syrian-Arab circles near the end of World War I. By June 1919, when an American commission arrived in Jaffa to gauge the "will of the people" on the eve of the division of the Ottoman Middle East, the United States was well positioned to act as both an observer and a patron of

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nascent Arab nationalist trends in the contested intellectual space over Palestine and Syria.

This article foregrounds the growing appeal of American trusteeship in the Syrian political scene in Cairo toward the end of World War I and during the immediate postwar debate over Mandate territories. It reassesses the wartime diplomatic events while making the case that amid the high imperial negotiations, a growing group of Syrian exiles in Cairo saw U.S. policy as a viable alternative to Anglo-French colonial aims and actively lobbied American actors for a U.S. protectorate over Syria. Working from the American Mission two blocks north of Midan al-Obera—the old "opera square" in central Cairo—William Yale dispatched a series of nuanced if imperfect reports on changing Syrian political trends. These reports shed crucial light on Syrian-Arab perspectives that have since been de-emphasized in narratives of the Paris Peace Conference and in Mandate histories preoccupied with wartime Anglo-French diplomacy and the presumed "inevitability" of a colonial partition of Syria.[3] As Yale's reports illustrate, Syrian debates in Cairo responded to wartime diplomatic initiatives, shaped regional political organizing, and challenged the planned Anglo-French partition of Ottoman Syria at a moment of great flux and uncertainty in the region's history.

Syrians who left for Egypt prior to World War I have been the focus of much attention in accounts of prewar Arab political, intellectual, and commercial activity.[4] In this period, Arab reformers and opponents of Istanbul's centralization efforts fled Ottoman Syria and converged on Cairo.[5] They came from Beirut and the wider Mount Lebanon region, from the coastal plains of the Syrian littoral, from Palestine, and from Damascus and the ancient cities of the Orontes River. Many had been educated at the new missionary schools, notably the American Syrian Protestant College (SPC, later the American University of Beirut) and the various French institutes that dotted Lebanon's sociopolitical landscape after 1860.[6] Syrians relocating to Cairo—either of their own accord or because they had been exiled by local Ottoman authorities—were Muslims and Christians of varying denominations who worked as public servants, journalists, businessmen, and religious scholars. Cairo, in the years leading up to World War I, was the locus of Syrian-Arab activism and a forum for multilayered reformist politics.

Syrian activists in prewar Cairo have at times been associated with the *nahḍa*, the broadly defined literary, intellectual, and social reform movement of Arabic writers and publishers straddling the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[7] Recent scholarship has widened the geographic expanse of the *nahḍa*, documenting the existence of a global Syrian intellectual lexicon and stressing how Cairo served as a "freedom valve"—*soupape de liberté*—for Syrian dissidents.[8] Critically, it has also explored how ideas and articles were syndicated, or how Syrian reformers exploited Egypt's infrastructure, printing presses, telegraphic networks, and periodically lax censorship codes.[9] Histories of the rich Cairo-Syrian activism prior to 1914, however, often end prematurely, suggesting that the outbreak of the war and the ensuing formalization of colonial borders was a point of closure for many of the Syrian intellectual debates that thrived prior to 1914. This article contests the notion that the war was a watershed that fundamentally altered the nature of global Syrian debates, as Ilham Khuri-Makdisi has suggested.[10] It argues instead that intellectual networks anchored in Egypt exploited the uncertainties of the war and circumvented the uneven implementation of censorship policies to evolve

into political associations, committees, and parties that helped frame the postwar debate over Syrian partition and trusteeships.

The dispatches of William Yale, which include local petitions, memoranda, and the minutes of meetings buried in the corresponding Anglo-French reports or censored in the wartime Syrian-owned press in Cairo, are a complex source on Syrian affairs in Egypt. They provide a window onto how Syrian networks functioned on the microlevel of municipal politics in Cairo as well as how Syrian groups in Egypt conceptualized, promoted, and then disseminated their own programs, which would influence the stalled Peace Conference deliberations in early 1919.

As the lead interlocutor between U.S. policymakers and a diverse group of Syrian activists, Yale made an array of Syrian programs available to a wider audience of American actors mobilizing between Washington and Paris. His reports also underline how American diplomats took Egypt's Syrians seriously, seeing them as possible clients in their effort to wield new influence amid the region's shifting political fault lines. This contrasts with how U.S. policymakers simultaneously dismissed the pleas of Egyptian nationalists, notably Saʿd Zaghlul and the other leaders of the Wafd in 1919.[11] While U.S. policymakers effectively supported British efforts to suppress the Egyptian nationalist movement, Syro-American interactions in wartime Egypt provided much of the policy impetus for the dispatching of the American King–Crane commission in the summer of 1919. The commission, which unilaterally toured Palestine and Syria and recommended a U.S. Mandate upon its return to the Peace Conference, for a time acted as a check on the proposed division of Syria. Syro-American interactions in wartime Cairo informed the commission's surveys and reports, which complicated the ongoing negotiations in Paris.

As Yale relayed evolving trends in Cairene-Syrian politics to Washington and helped disseminate Syrian programs to U.S. policymakers, academics, industrialists, and missionaries mobilizing in Paris, leading Syrian actors turned to the United States and some called outright for an American protectorate. Alienated from Britain and France in the aftermath of the Sykes–Picot Agreement, the Balfour Declaration, and the Anglo-Hijazi partnership—the loosely conceived alliance between Britain and the supporters of the Hashimite Sharif of Mecca, Husayn ibn ʿAli—Syrians aimed to exploit U.S. policy in order to preserve Syria's territorial unity and a degree of autonomy.

Although Yale at times reported selectively on factionalism—glossing over internal Jewish-Zionist divisions, for example, while often fixating on what he believed were intractable ethnoreligious fissures among Syrians—his reports provide particular insights into the broader evolution of the United States as an instrument of Syrian opposition to partition, Zionism, and integration into a Hashimite-controlled government. The Syrian overtures to the United States were fostered through subtle reporting in the Syrian-owned Egyptian press and a grassroots movement across Egypt that organized highly publicized meetings, lobbied foreign observers, and dispatched a series of petitions to Paris as the Peace Conference convened in early 1919.

The United States would ultimately reject a Mandate over Syria as it disengaged more generally from overseas commitments in late 1919. Nevertheless, studying Cairo's Syrians and their wartime politics underlines their active but too often neglected local role in the international debate over Mandate rule. Their turn toward the United States between 1917 and 1919 coincided with mounting opposition to Anglo-French designs

to partition Syria and, for a time, represented a real alternative to the European colonial resolution of the post-Ottoman Middle East.

YALE AND CAIRO'S SYRIANS

Few Americans were more intimate with Cairo's Syrians than the engineer-turned-diplomat William Yale. Born in 1887 in Dobbs Ferry, New York, Yale was external to the missionary establishment that had long monopolized U.S. interactions with Syria. After proving himself as a "roustabout" on rigs in Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, Yale arrived in Palestine in the autumn of 1913 with a group of engineers and geologists from the Standard Oil Company of New York that was dispatched to survey the area around the Dead Sea for minerals and petroleum.[12]

Yale arrived in Palestine during a crossroads in the region's political history. Following the Ottoman centralization efforts over the course of the 19th century,[13] and the government's renewed repression of reformers in the years leading up to World War I, came calls for autonomy of the Arab provinces, or the "decentralization" of the Ottoman administrative apparatus.[14] These were initially articulated in literary societies and other gatherings of Arab intellectuals in Syria and abroad, including in the salons of the Syrian diaspora across Egypt and in émigré centers such as Paris, New York, and São Paulo.[15] Following the consolidation of power by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1908–9, when it became clear that the new government in Istanbul would continue the centralization pursued under its predecessor, Sultan Abdülhamit II, opposition societies proliferated underground in Syria and openly in British-controlled Cairo. With the outbreak of war in 1914, Ottoman authorities in Syria cracked down on local activism, drafting young Arab men into army units serving in distant parts of the empire and executing several leaders of the prewar movement for decentralization.[16]

Working in the new Standard Oil office in Jerusalem, Yale witnessed the tensions in Ottoman-Arab politics surfacing in Syria in the prelude to war and his views were conditioned by exposure to several leading Syrian-Arab personalities who would shortly take center stage in Cairo. He cultivated ties with commercial figures, including Sulayman Nassif, a contractor who interested Standard Oil in prospecting in Palestine.[17] Through Nassif, Yale interacted with Haqqi al-ʿAzm, a descendant of a long line of Muslim Damascene notables who had served the sultan as governors of the Syrian interior; Haqqi emerged in Cairo in the prewar period as a committed anti-CUP activist.[18] It was also through Nassif that Yale came to know Faris Nimr, the editor of Egypt's second-largest daily newspaper, *al-Muqattam*, and one of the most visible intellectuals in the country.[19] These were not insignificant contacts. Nassif and Nimr were both close to the prewar reformist movements and Haqqi, along with his cousin Rafiq, were leading figures in Cairo's Syrian decentralization societies. All of them were pressured by the British Residency and Arab Bureau, as well as by local French representatives, to further European imperial aims in Cairo, but as the war unfolded each promoted to varying degrees—through grassroots organizing and public awareness campaigns in the Syrian-owned Egyptian press—a U.S. role in governing postwar Syria. For Yale, these reformers were independent sources on wider Syrian affairs whose activities reflected the nuances and internal tensions of evolving Syrian politics.

The journalist and Muslim religious scholar Muhammad Rashid Rida, while beyond Yale's immediate social circle, was at the time another major reformist voice in Cairo who worked closely with Rafiq al-ʿAzm to promote Syria's "complete independence," or *al-istiqlāl al-tāmm*, toward the end of the war.[20] Rida would later become an advocate of Wahhabism but in 1918, as the sole editor of the journal *Manar*, he published extensively on Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" and positioned U.S. policy as a source of legitimacy for popular referenda on the question of postwar governance in Syria.[21]

The information Yale gleaned from his contacts in Cairo, from the indirect influence of Rida, and from other sources too numerous to name here, was relayed to Washington through weekly intelligence memoranda that were often at odds with the Anglo-French reports of the same period.[22] This was an important development for policymakers in Washington since, prior to Yale's arrival in Cairo, reporting on the complexities of local politics both in Syria and among émigré groups in Egypt had been inadequate.[23] Little was known beyond the information provided in the bulletins of Britain's Cairo-based Arab Bureau, on which U.S. observers relied before Yale arrived as the State Department's new "Special Agent" at the American Mission in the city in October 1917.

Prior to assuming his post in Cairo, Yale's observations from wartime Palestine had made their way to the Inquiry, the group of "experts" that E. M. House—a close political aide of President Wilson and chief advisor on European affairs—convened in New York and charged with preparing U.S. postwar policy. Yale had left Jerusalem on 2 March 1917, as the United States neared entry into the war, traveling overland on branch lines of the Hijaz and Baghdad railways to Istanbul before departing for Washington. Along the way he documented his journey, writing of Greek Christian Ottoman troops begging in the streets of Jerusalem on their way to meet the advancing British army near Beersheeba; of the toll taken by the Ottoman draft; of the destruction of the orange orchards; and of the forced evacuations of civilians from Gaza and Jaffa only days before his departure from Palestine.[24]

From Washington, Yale sent his observations to the State Department as well as to several members of the Inquiry, including William Westermann, a professor of history and classics at the University of Wisconsin who would later join the U.S. delegation in Paris as a "specialist on Western Asian affairs."[25] It was Westermann who convinced the State Department to appoint Yale to Cairo as "Special Agent.[26] Arriving in Egypt via Paris in October 1917, Yale was formally attached to the American Mission but his reports circumvented consular officials and went straight to the State Department's office of "Military Staff."[27] Here they were received by Leland Harrison, soon to be secretary to the U.S. delegation in Paris, and by William Philips, the assistant secretary of state.[28] The trajectory of Yale's reports and web of contacts intimate that he was able to avoid the bureaucracy of the U.S. consular apparatus in Cairo, which might otherwise have censored his dispatches.

When Yale left Cairo in 1918, it was initially as an attaché to Edmund Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF). Yale charted his own course through Syria and witnessed the fall of Damascus first-hand.[29] While T. E. Lawrence, in the vanguard of the incoming Anglo-Arab army, wrote of the "miles of people greeting us," men tossing their tarbushes, women tearing off their veils, and dervishes "howling and cutting themselves with frenzy,"[30] Yale's account was more measured, noting that the city was in a "state

of considerable confusion." Rival factions fought for control as "marauders roamed the streets and sacked the souks."[31] Unconstrained by the British narrative of liberation that was promoted during the EEF invasion of the Ottoman Middle East, Yale, though certainly an imperfect chronicler, remained perceptive of the nuances of instability and violence, and also of the contradictions of colonial policies cloaked in the new rhetoric of self-determination.

CONFRONTING SYKES AND PICOT

When Yale arrived in Cairo in October 1917, the city's Syrians were distressed. The regional war was moving in favor of Britain, which many Syrians saw as their prewar sponsor, but the unveiling of a series of agreements and pledges unhinged their confidence in Britain's military campaign east of Suez. This shift was notable given Britain's long-term support of Syrian reformist activism. In the prewar period, Britain sanctioned the decentralization committees that formed in Egypt and at times refused Ottoman requests to prosecute and extradite Syrian dissidents.[32] When the Ottoman Empire entered the war, the much-anticipated moment when the government in Istanbul would be forced to reconcile with the decentralization movement had at last arrived for veteran Syrian activists. "The Syrians," Nassif wrote nostalgically in April 1917, "and especially those in Egypt, felt that a better future was in store for them."[33]

Cairo's Syrians did not, however, make up a monolithic constituency. If Haqqi, Nassif, and Nimr were receptive to British interests, others were committed to France. Pro-French Syrians were themselves fragmented and even prominent Maronites in Egypt at times worked to undermine regional French policies.[34] Others were "independents," committed either to "complete independence" or to internal autonomy with a degree of foreign oversight. More often than not, pragmatism outweighed ideology and leading Syrians swapped or abandoned previously coveted ambitions. Proponents of Britain became pro-French, before becoming pro-independence, before returning to Britain, and, steadily, a growing group of Syrians engaged the United States.

Despite their diversity, leading Syrians throughout Egypt in late 1917 shared suspicions of an Allied partition and many, including well-known pro-Anglo-French spokesmen, began actively pursuing an alternative patron. Earlier that year, in April, the visit to Cairo of Mark Sykes, a principal British policy aide, and François-George Picot, the former French consul-general in Beirut, had increased their anxiety.[35] Sykes and Picot were co-signatories of the May 1916 Anglo-French accord, the Sykes–Picot Agreement, that outlined the partitioning of the Ottoman Middle East into British and French governorates and indirect spheres of influence. The accepted and often-told narrative of the agreement is that it was secret until its terms were published in *Pravda* on 25 November 1917 by the new Bolshevik government in Moscow. But Yale's reports and the organizing of his Syrian interlocutors in Cairo suggest that the agreement leaked out sooner into the Syro-Egyptian public domain and that it led leading Syrians to engage the United States as a primary buffer against partition.

Prior to the Bolshevik disclosure of the agreement, Sykes and Picot had alarmed Syrians in Cairo in numerous meetings in the spring of 1917. Sykes had been dispatched to act as a liaison between the EEF and the Foreign Office, but once in Egypt he was pulled into debates with leading Syrians. Sykes "practically admitted," Yale recorded later, on

12 November, "a French occupation of Syria, . . . spoke of a special arrangement . . . in Palestine," and conceded that only a "certain part of Syria . . . would be independent." In other words, Sykes vocalized, in April 1917—months before its official disclosure—the elements of the 1916 accord that would prove the most damaging for Syrians in Cairo who were increasingly skeptical of partition. Yale wrote in early November that Picot had emphasized many of the same themes, that both returned to Europe "without accomplishing anything," and that among Cairo's Syrians "uncertainty and uneasiness . . . still exist concerning the real intentions of these two powers."[36]

The following month, as British troops occupied Jerusalem, Sykes was again dispatched to lobby Syrian leaders and calm anxieties over Anglo-French war aims. In Paris on 23 December 1917, Sykes spoke before a meeting of the Central Syrian Committee (CCS), a group that was largely pro-French but also harbored hopes for greater autonomy.[37] "In a historic celebration," according to the Paris-based and pro-French Syrian émigré newspaper *al-Mustaqbal*, Sykes "lifted the veil" on Anglo-French policy, "put an end to" rumors about Allied disunity over Syria, and stressed the Allies' commitment to a "civil government that will allow peaceful investment in the country." The account was dramatized, claiming that Sykes had produced a "profound sensation" among the Syrians and that their long-held dream of liberating Syria had advanced by "agreement of the two Great Power protectors of the Arabs."[38]

Yale's account from Cairo was more muted, and he underscored the antagonistic points Sykes made alongside the more colorful motifs of the meeting emphasized in *al-Mustaqbal*. "Make no mistake," Sykes had asserted, "Europe will not continue the war for the sole purpose of giving Syria her independence." Chastising the salon intellectuals, Sykes had added, "if the war ends . . . and you Syrians . . . [are] still divided . . . following your ancient races and religions, I would despair of obtaining for you more than reforms on paper." Egypt's Syrians, Yale soon related to Washington, viewed the statements—which Sykes had intended to assuage Syrian suspicions following the formal revelation of the 1916 accord in *Pravda*—as a mere "division of the Arab provinces between France and Great Britain."[39]

Yale's account, in contrast to the one in *al-Mustaqbal*, isolated the points of contention for the Syrian political scene in Egypt, removed from Paris and the carefully managed émigré groups in the imperial métropole. Given press censorship in Egypt, Yale also articulated for Washington an important Syrian response that would otherwise have gone unnoticed in restricted Egyptian newspaper accounts or in the internal Anglo-French policy correspondence.[40] Privy to Syrian petitions to the Arab Bureau that had been leaked to him by activists like Nassif,[41] Yale previewed in his reports the dissatisfaction that would shortly spill out into the Egyptian public domain. This occurred when the Sykes–Picot Agreement and the meeting of the CCS in Paris, with its lofty declarations and air-brushed script, were criticized in Egypt's Syrian press in a series of subtle exposés published near the end of 1918.

Al-Muqattam, in December 1918—following the 7 November "Anglo-French Declaration" which on paper reaffirmed the commitment of Britain and France to local self-determination[42]—highlighted the imminent transfer of governance of the Bekaa valley to incoming French troops, all according to the *ittifāq*—the Sykes–Picot Agreement—of 1916.[43] *Al-Manar* recounted the speeches from the meeting of the CCS but asserted that the "great majority of the Syrians" favored complete independence, *al-istiqlāl al-tāmm*,

as opposed to what Shukri Ghanim, the president of the CCS, had claimed would be the advancement of the Syrians "under the auspices of France ... and the approval of England."[44] Absent from much of the account in *al-Mustaqbal*, Rida's emphasis on *al-istiqlāl al-tāmm* intimated the depth of Syrian opposition to the Sykes–Picot Agreement and buttressed Yale's earlier qualification of the initial press reports celebrating Sykes' presence in Paris and his address to the leaders of the CCS.[45]

Rida also juxtaposed the contradictions of the CCS meeting against what he saw as the consistency of the U.S. position on the "Arab Issue." He observed that while the 1916 agreement "conflicts with the liberation" of the Arab countries and the "independence of the caliphate," Wilson's "Fourteen Points" recognized the need for a "referendum" on the issue of postwar governance.[46] Rida not only condemned Anglo-French war aims but he also appropriated Wilsonian rhetoric to convey a defense of the caliphate, effectively using presumed U.S. postwar policy to justify the caliphate in terms of new norms of international governance. Prior to the war, reestablishing the Arab caliphate had been the aim of only a few opponents of the perceived excesses of the Ottoman sultan. As late as July 1917, the prospect of a "universal Caliphate" was an idea that Sharif Husayn characterized to Lawrence as "absurd" and "blasphemous."[47] Some form of Arab caliphate, nonetheless, appeared tenable toward the end of the war and, for Rida, the at least nominal U.S. commitment to open negotiations provided a source of legitimacy. If the outcome of the war was uncertain toward the end of 1917, a growing awareness of the Sykes–Picot Agreement and evolving skepticism in subtle but critical press reports began to alienate leading Syrians in Cairo from their prewar patrons and represented the first of several Syrian turns toward the United States as 1918 unfolded.

ZIONISM FROM EGYPT TO PALESTINE

Further complicating Syrian politics in late 1917 was the Balfour Declaration of 2 November, reprinted in a Reuters telegram and syndicated in all of Egypt's major newspapers.[48] *Al-Muqattam* reproduced a 9 November account from the London-based *Jewish Chronicle*, and *al-Manar* recirculated the report later the same month.[49] Often lost amid the high imperial treatments of the declaration is the activist response of local political groups in the Middle East. Cairo's Syrians responded vigorously to the Balfour Declaration in the context of their engagement with the United States. Similar to the disclosure of the Sykes–Picot Agreement, the declaration distanced leading Syrians from their prewar British patrons as well as from their presumed allies coalescing around Sharif Husayn in the Hijaz.

The supporters of Husayn's program for a postwar union of Syria and the Hijaz included a variety of Arab political actors—Lebanese, Palestinian-Arabs, and Iraqis, who were henceforth referred to interchangeably as "Hijazis" and "Sharifians" by Western observers and Arab publicists. The group included prominent Cairene Syrians, but by the end of the war most Syrian committees in Cairo pursued programs that sought to preserve Syria's unity and independence rather than join it with the Hijaz. Most of Cairo's leading Syrian actors steadily saw the sharif, as well as the third of his four sons, Faysal, as too willing to compromise with Britain and France on partition and too flexible on the issue of Zionism in Palestine. For his part, Yale again communicated to

U.S. policymakers the responses of Syrian activists in Egypt to the Balfour Declaration, but he also explored how opposition to Zionism played a role in the growing Syrian turn toward the United States as the guarantor of the unity and independence of Syria, including Palestine, following the war.

British censors in Egypt misplayed the release of the declaration and failed to foresee its consequences. On 12 November 1917, Yale related how high-ranking officials at the British Residency in Cairo realized that releasing the declaration "would create a most unfavorable impression . . . but . . . did not anticipate any trouble."[50] This was a cavalier approach to Zionism, displaying ignorance of the hostility to the movement, which had existed long before the declaration's publication, in Egypt's Syrian political scene. Prior to the war, opposition to Jewish immigration had been a limited but noticeable characteristic of activism in Ottoman Palestine and Syria, and Syrians relocating to Egypt had experienced the tensions created by early Zionist settlement.[51]

In Egypt, the Syrian-owned press maintained a focus on Zionism, reporting on Herzl, Zionist congresses in Europe, and Jewish political aims in Palestine. These themes remained points of contention for Syrian intellectuals in Egypt at the outbreak of the war. In August 1914, Rida reminded readers that the "sole purpose of the Zionist movement is . . . a politically free and independent country for the Jews in Palestine, and not the creation of a haven or spiritual center." In Palestine, Rida continued, the Jews will not "exterminate . . . the non-Jews by sword and fire," but will eliminate them "through intrigue and capital."[52] This was the atmosphere of hostility among a certain segment of Syrian writers and political organizers that prevailed in Egypt in the prelude to the declaration's release.

Following its publication, Britain did little to contain local fanfare as Egypt's Zionists gathered at two rallies in Alexandria. The first occurred at the al-Hambra theater and the second, on 11 November, in the Rosette gardens, the city's large municipal park. Amid the Jewish dignitaries and other grandees attending the rally, the governor of Alexandria and future Egyptian prime minister, Ahmad Ziwar, participated in the proceedings, reflecting the receptiveness of some Egyptian notables to the country's limited but important Zionist movement. "Extraordinary enthusiasm permeated the atmosphere" of this second meeting, and Yale deduced on 26 November that "Zionism has certainly been planted on congenial soil in Zion's nearest neighbor nation."[53]

The publicity of these events did not go unnoticed among the coterie of Yale's Syrian contacts. As Zionists gathered in Alexandria, Syrians convened in Cairo and drafted a protest which they hoped to send by telegram to Balfour. It was "signed by over two hundred persons," Yale wrote on 19 November, "who all expressed their indignation at the ceding of their country to the Jews."[54] British censors blocked the telegram and frustrated early Syrian initiatives to send delegations abroad, mainly to the United States and South America, to convince émigré groups to lobby their governments on the issue. Haqqi and Nassif were approached about one such delegation but both were ambivalent.[55] Haqqi had been prevented from visiting Faysal at Aqaba in early November, when he proposed to lead a formal delegation to petition the amir against Zionism. By the end of November, as Yale mused with interest, Haqqi was still in Cairo.[56]

Despite its appearance in the Yale reports, Egyptian Zionism was a minority movement that was contested in Egypt's wider Jewish community.[57] It was true that the movement

attracted established communal patrons, including Georges Qattawi,[58] whose family managed the sugar refineries of Kom Ombo, but few committed fully to the movement. Over the course of 1917, the Residency portrayed divisions over Zionism as a class and geographic cleavage between supporters in Cairo of modest socioeconomic status and skeptics among Alexandria's affluent Jewish merchants and financiers. The distinction was only partially true but by the summer of 1917 the country's Zionist organization and its central Cairo-based committee were indeed bankrupt. As Jewish relief groups formed in Egypt to dispatch supplies to Palestine and Syria, Alexandria's well-capitalized but non-Zionist relief committee refused to fund its Zionist counterpart in Cairo, objecting to the perceived authority of Aaron Aaronsohn, who had emerged as the "moving spirit," in the words of British army intelligence, of the Cairo Zionist committee.[59]

More than a personality rift between Alexandria's "cosmopolitan" Jews and the eastern European-born Aaronsohn, who had worked as an agronomist in Ottoman Palestine, the conflict raises questions about the presence in Egypt of Zionists formerly in Palestine, and about the movement of people between Egypt and Palestine more generally during the war.[60]

While Yale mostly glossed over internal Jewish divisions around Zionism, his reports explore how Aaronsohn, an outsider in the Egyptian-Jewish social hierarchy, exploited his relationship with the British Residency to assume a preeminent but controversial role in Cairene Zionist affairs.[61] As the Foreign Office detailed a burgeoning financial dispute between Aaronsohn and Chaim Weizmann in London—by then the president of the English Zionist Federation—Yale featured the divisions that Aaronsohn's organizational activity created in Egypt itself, and noted that "opinions about him among the Jews in Egypt are widely divergent."[62]

Yale also juxtaposed the relatively free movement of Jews between Egypt and Palestine late in the war against the restrictions on a parallel Syrian-Arab movement. From Cairo, he observed in late February 1918 that "Jews come and go to Palestine, . . . workers and . . . merchants, bankers, settlers . . . while Christians and Moslems . . . are almost cut off from their compatriots" in Egypt.[63] French intelligence corroborated these restrictions, noting the British refusal to allow a Cairo Syrian commission to tour Palestine in early February 1918 to interview local notables and persuade them to return to Egypt to advise the country's Syrian committees.[64]

Aware of the contradictory policies that controlled Jewish and Syrian movement, Yale made little of the British effort to create an Arab-Zionist "entente" and offered a critical assessment of both the Zionist and Syrian commissions that toured Egypt and Palestine in the spring of 1918.[65] Similar to his reporting on the fallout from the Sykes–Picot Agreement in Cairo's Syrian political scene, Yale not only shed light on the Syrian countercommission, an important Arab response to the Balfour Declaration, but also revealed the limitations of Anglo-Zionist rhetoric and policies, how they were challenged by local activists, and how each of these developments filtered through British censorship controls to reach senior U.S. policymakers.

Led by Weizmann, the Zionist commission arrived in Cairo toward the end of March 1918 and on two separate occasions met with a Syrian group that included Nimr, Nassif, and Rafiq al-ʿAzm. The commission members then traveled by train to Lydda, visiting Jaffa and arriving in Jerusalem on 10 April. Here they dined with leading Arab notables at the home of Ronald Storrs, by then the city's military governor.[66] British

officials facilitated these exchanges, which were aimed at "securing the confidence" of the region's non-Jewish communities.[67]

Trailing the Zionist commission, Nassif and Rafiq left Egypt for Palestine, where they held meetings similar to those of the Zionists but offered an alternative set of recommendations, which they sent to Allenby upon their return to Cairo. In allowing their departure, British officials temporarily lifted restrictions on Syrian movement[68] but, as Yale emphasized, the "Syrian Mission" went on its "own initiative and responsibility." It was not endorsed by the Residency in Cairo, which agreed to the journey because British authorities anticipated its "salutary effect upon the Palestinians."[69]

In their final memorandum to Allenby, Nassif and Rafiq assailed what appeared to be new British-backed Jewish monopolies on the re-emerging trade between Egypt and Palestine in 1918, noting that "while no facilities are afforded the native inhabitants for bringing in merchandise ... the Jews here are freely sending ... to their agents in Palestine a variety of goods, and ... Palestinian Jews come ... to Egypt to make their purchases direct." Lamenting the "superior financial power" of the Jews compared to the "impotence" of the "native inhabitants," Nassif and Rafiq played into prevailing racial stereotypes.[70] Of course limited Arab trade between Egypt and Palestine was a product of broader British restrictions on movement, which hindered the rehabilitation of prewar Arab commercial networks, and not of what Nassif and Rafiq argued was Jewish "financial power" or the "natural disabilities" of the Arabs.[71]

On other issues, their observations were more lucid. They advocated the re-establishment of Ottoman-era administrative councils—one of the earliest formal recommendations for representative government in postwar Palestine—and encouraged the formation of development banks to extend credit to local farmers. On the Zionists, Nassif and Rafiq, who supported limited Jewish immigration, acknowledged that in Palestine, the "speeches of Dr. Weizmann, ... able and studied as they were, gave rise to all sorts of misinterpretations, and ... failed to improve matters."[72] Their criticisms of British policy and Zionist activities were substantial but subtle, constrained by censorship and perhaps also by self-interest—Nassif, as a licensee for oil prospecting in touch with both Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell, was well positioned to participate in Euro-American petrochemical projects in postwar Palestine.[73]

Yale, meanwhile, provided an account of the Syrian commission that was more comprehensive and not subject to immediate scrutiny by the Arab Bureau, the Residency, or EEF headquarters at Ramleh. Having likely been sent secondhand observations from Nassif and Haqqi al-ʿAzm, Yale related in more detail the Arab rallies that materialized in Jaffa and deconstructed the exchange between Weizmann and the city's Arab notables. Taking a "leaf from the ... the Zionists," the Arab rallies in Jaffa were "unexpected and impressive," and Nassif and Rafiq "rode through the streets ... greeted by large crowds, who ... strew flowers in their path." When Weizmann's speech before the city's qadi, Raghib Dajani, and other dignitaries was translated into Arabic, Yale stressed that Nassif and Rafiq found it "menacing." After Weizmann insisted that the "eyes of fourteen million Jews were centered on Palestine," Dajani responded that "there were over three hundred million Moslems and over seven hundred million Christians who took the deepest interest in the Holy Land."[74]

One final scandal proved more damaging. When Jewish leaders invited Arab notables to Tel Aviv to commemorate the arrival of a Sephardic Torah, the invitations were sent in

Hebrew. As Yale explained, Hebrew was "a language unknown" to the Arab leaders, who viewed the invitations as a "direct insult" and accused the Jews of making "naught" of their own language.[75] This was an important commentary on the primacy of language for Palestine's Arab notables; in the corresponding Syrian debates in Cairo, the preservation of Arabic as the official language of government in postwar Syria remained a unifying concern in otherwise contentious deliberations over the nature of a possible trusteeship.

All of these observations fit into a compelling pattern. Similar to his commentary on the fallout of the Sykes–Picot Agreement, Yale's reports following the Balfour Declaration, although selective and at times second-hand, exposed a richer account of local political activity than those found in censored Syrian-Arab accounts and internal British memoranda. His dispatches documented an alternative narrative and exposed the inconsistencies of British policy, especially those related to commercial favoritism and uneven restrictions on movement, that continued to distance leading Syrians from increasingly ambiguous British political aims.

TURNING TO THE UNITED STATES

As the joint effect of the Sykes–Picot Agreement and Balfour Declaration took its toll on Egypt's Syrians, it also distanced them from their presumed allies in the Hijaz. Haqqi managed to arrive in Aqaba in December 1917, but Faysal insisted that Husayn "is bound by . . . [his] agreement with the British not to interfere with their policy in Palestine."[76] These divergent approaches toward the Balfour Declaration and Zionism more generally in part underscored a growing Syro-Hijazi conflict, and Yale's reporting on these intra-Arab divisions was again revealing. As the Arab Bureau worked to project Arab unity alongside the EEF campaign in Syria, Yale clarified the breakdown in intra-Arab relations and exposed Syro-Hijazi tensions to senior U.S. diplomats.

As the sharif's army advanced north, Cairo's Syrians struggled to shape the politics of the campaign. Even at the outset of the revolt, suspicions of the sharif's motives had been aired in Cairo by various actors in the Syrian political scene. The Hijaz, Rida suggested in August 1916, is "not prepared to demand the establishment of a state, nor does it have the power on which the independence of the caliphate would depend."[77] When Rida traveled to Mecca in late 1916, both to make hajj and to meet Husayn, his reception was strained. Storrs, reporting from Jidda, related how Rida made "a multifarious ass of himself" and that his "discussions among the Ulema . . . had to be stopped . . . by the Grand Sherif himself."[78] Whatever the nature of Rida's activities in Mecca in October 1916, it was clear that his interactions with the sharif's supporters were not seamless and a speech he delivered in Mina was soon censored in the pro-Sharifian mouthpiece, *al-Qibla*.[79] Rida's activities in Mecca underlined real tensions that would return to Cairo and inform Syrian debates over the character of the proposed Sharifian government in Damascus in 1919.

The Residency also engaged leading Syrians and their media to spread pro-Sharifian propaganda both in the Egyptian public domain and throughout the wider Syrian-Arab diaspora. Nimr, for example, assisted with the early editing of the Arab Bureau's new Arabic-language journal, *al-Haqiqa*, and he published pro-Sharifian poetry and articles in *al-Muqattam* in late 1916.[80] But if Nimr collaborated for a time with the British effort to bolster the uprisings in the Hijaz through Syrian information networks and the

press, he would turn against Anglo-Hijaz politics in late 1918 in Cairo, objecting to British censorship and the increasing restrictions on the movement of activists seen as less sympathetic to the Sharifian cause.[81]

Nimr distilled these policies and their destabilizing consequences for Syro-Hijazi relations in an exchange with Yale in December 1918. Britain, Nimr explained, muzzled Cairo's Syrians through censorship and a refusal to transmit Syrian protests overseas, such as the Syrian petition against Zionism drafted in Cairo following the Balfour Declaration. Meanwhile, the Residency enlisted and funded overtly pro-Sharifian Syrians throughout the diaspora, and in South America in particular, to ensure that émigré political groups supported the sharif's program and not the alternative agendas that were debated in Cairo simultaneously, such as the iterations of *al-istiqlāl al-tāmm*. "Britain," Yale concluded, "intended to force her solution of the Syrian Question ... without giving the other parties among the Arabs the opportunity to express their views."[82]

When the Residency did authorize Cairo-Syrian delegations abroad, it was either convinced of their "salutary effect," as was the case for the Syrian commission to Palestine in April 1918, or saw them as a way for the Residency to demonstrate the centrality and loyalty of its Hijazi clients in contrast to Syrians in Egypt, who were seen as a more peripheral and less reliable constituency in the regional British war effort. This latter attitude informed the Residency's eventual acquiescence to Haqqi's visit to Aqaba in December 1917, when Haqqi tried, unsuccessfully, to enlist Faysal's support in the Cairo-Syrian campaign against Zionism.

There remained, however, one crucial consequence of the unfolding of all of these developments, including the ambiguity of Anglo-French objectives following the Sykes–Picot Agreement; British patronage of Zionism in Egypt; expanded restrictions on Cairo's Syrians; and the unwillingness of Hijazi leaders to deviate from regional British policy. Haqqi's mission to Aqaba, although it failed to turn Faysal against Zionism, was presaging. In Aqaba, Yale wrote, Haqqi found a "strong sentiment in favour of soliciting American protection ... and a general belief that only to the United States could the Arabs ... look for protection against the ambitions and designs of Great Britain and France."[83] The Syrian turn toward the United States was soon unmistakable in the reporting of the Syro-Egyptian press, in a grassroots movement of local committees and petitions, and in a series of dispatches urging U.S. policymakers to safeguard Syria and prevent its division.

Long before not only the "Wilsonian moment" in 1919 but also the U.S. entry into the war in 1917, the Syrian press had promoted pro-American ideas in Egypt's public domain. Intellectuals active in Cairo's press had for years been preoccupied with American industrial development and educational reform, frequently citing American trade and scientific journals and syndicating their articles for recirculation in Cairo's primary Syrian-owned newspapers. These largely sympathetic accounts of diverse aspects of American society emphasized for readers the perceived uniqueness of the United States and helped create a constituency in the Syro-Egyptian public domain receptive to an activist American role in the debate over Syria. In October 1914, Rida, for example, penned "Refuting the Allegations against American Politics through Islamic Law," stressing that there were "no great quarrels between easterners and Americans." A strong critic of Anglo-French colonial aims, Rida set the United States apart from other nations vying for influence in the *umma*.[84] These attitudes took on a new sense of urgency and

were further politicized as the war unfolded. In January 1917, it was no coincidence that *al-Muqtataf* examined the Monroe Doctrine, quoting the U.S. president's 1823 letter to congress committing Washington to safeguarding the Americas from "colonization from the European states." The United States, Nimr implied, might play a similar role in preserving Syrian autonomy following the war.[85]

When the United States entered the war it was not seen as a belligerent. Syrian intellectuals perceived that it had no alternative, and *al-Muqtataf*-—which was also owned and edited by Nimr but released monthly and to a more select readership than *al-Muqattam*—considered the intervention "among the greatest events" of the age.[86] Highlighting the inadequacy of the U.S. military, *al-Muqtataf* observed that the United States had entered the war with a force "smaller than the Swiss army and its fleet did not have a cruiser, . . . dreadnaught . . . or effective submarine."[87] *Al-Hilal*—another major Cairene-Syrian journal, which had been overseen by the prolific essayist, novelist, and biographer Jurji Zaydan until his death in August 1914[88]—then marveled at the rapid transformation of the U.S. military. "Her army before the war was meager," but within a year it increased "from 200,000 . . . to more than 1.5 million."[89] The progress was unsurprising. After all, *al-Hilal* declared, the United States was the "country of invention and innovation" and home to "the greatest inventor of this age," Thomas Edison.[90]

If these reports were of nominal significance, their ideas soon manifested in Syrian organizational activity, at first in private meetings of Cairo's Syrians and steadily through a more visible effort in Egypt's public domain to involve the United States in postwar Syrian affairs. In April 1918, in discussions with Fawzi al-Bakri, one of Faysal's leading Syrian advisors, Nimr agreed to promote a Hijazi-sponsored sovereign in Syria if Faysal governed as a constitutional monarch under U.S. tutelage.[91] Although Hijazi leaders rebuffed the offer, it was not a symbolic initiative but rather a concerted effort to heal intra-Arab divisions through a compromise that would elevate the United States in regional political circles as the preferred "foreign tutor" for postwar Syria.[92] Similar proposals shortly reached the British Residency. In a May 1918 meeting with Osmond Walrond—a former Arab Bureau officer and close aide to the British high commissioner in Cairo, Reginald Wingate—a mixed group of Syrians argued that the United States did not have "interests in the Orient politically speaking, and would . . . retire from Syria as soon as the Syrians . . . learned self-government."[93]

Like the memorandum that Nassif and Rafiq al-ʿAzm submitted on their return from Palestine, this appeal for U.S. oversight showed how a group of Syrian spokesmen internalized pseudodevelopmental and Euro-American perceptions of their own incapacity for self-government. All but one of Walrond's interlocutors were Muslim, suggesting that prevailing notions of Syrians as only partially fit to govern themselves transcended sectarian differences. This is an important point because it challenges the contention that pro-U.S. appeals among Syrians in early 1919 could only have emerged from circles of SPC-trained Christian intellectuals.

Not all of Cairo's Syrians, to be sure, ignored existing U.S. colonial policies, but these were not necessarily seen as a deterrent to growing Syrian sympathies for presumed U.S. war aims. As Yale had observed in February 1918, when he was first approached by Nimr, Nassif, Haqqi al-ʿAzm, and others about the possibility of an American trusteeship, Cairo's Syrians were aware of "America's attitude . . . in regard to Cuba, the Philippine Islands and towards China," but they insisted "that the United States has no political

ambitions in the Near East and would not attempt to remain in Syria as masters of the country."[94] Considering the prolonged violence following the U.S. occupation of the Philippines and U.S. commercial imperialism in China and Cuba, the idea that American intervention in Syria would somehow remain benign was a convenient position designed to appease U.S. policymakers rather than an ideological belief in the benevolence of U.S. foreign policy. It was an expedient stance, too, given the varied and at times strained Syrian interaction with U.S. institutions since the late 19th century. Select Christian intellectuals, such as Nimr and Zaydan, had been alienated by the policies of U.S. missionaries in Beirut in the 1880s, when missionary administrators suppressed discussions of Darwin at SPC.[95] For Nimr and others who interacted on multiple levels with the United States in the prewar period, the Syrian appeal for U.S. intervention late in the war was no mere romantic one. Couched in idealistic terms, the appeals reflected a pragmatism dictated by local politics, as was the case with Nimr's earlier attempt to use potential U.S. involvement to solve the Syro-Hijazi conflict.

Other issues provided similar opportunities to pursue the U.S. option as a way of settling Syrian affairs. Syrians in Egypt who were anxious about Zionism, for example, looked to U.S. immigration law in their own effort to control Palestine's borders. In an open letter to the Peace Conference, "the undersigned . . . refugees and exiles from Palestine" argued for the same "right that authorized the United States to implement a law against Japanese immigration in their country." Rather than a sweeping appeal to U.S. ideals, this was a focused effort to exploit U.S. domestic policies to buttress specific Syrian political claims.[96] Although Wilson was privately informed of the Balfour Declaration before its publication,[97] Syrian activists continued to see the United States as a possible buffer against Zionism.

In early 1919, the calls for a U.S. protectorate over Syria were voiced in even more visible public venues. On 14 February, a meeting of forty-five persons was held at the home of Amin Mirshaq, a well-known functionary in the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works, where Nimr, Nassif, Yaqub Saruf—the co-editor of *al-Muqattam* and *al-Muqtataf*—as well as Saʿid Shuqayr, the Syrian secretary-general of the Sudanese government, were among the principal attendees.[98] The aim of the meeting, as one French observer warned, was to further the "Syrian pro-American movement" and the group shortly dispatched an appeal to U.S. officials in Paris calling for an American protectorate.[99] A follow-up meeting was held on 20 February at the home of Nimr, after which Gilbert Clayton, the chief of regional British intelligence, wrote to the War Office that Nimr, Shuqayr, and "other enlightened men" had already submitted a memorandum to the U.S. consul in Cairo arguing that "America is [the] only power left . . . tied by no former pledges or agreements in regard to Syria."[100]

Each of these meetings offers a flavor of Syrian organizational efforts in Cairo, which were in large part responses to the growing number of reports coming from Paris on the prospect of partition. On 1 March, Nimr hosted a final meeting in the gardens of the Cairo clinic of a well-known dentist, Edouard Gharzuzi. More than three hundred Syrians of varying ideological orientations, party affiliations, and personal prejudices arrived to hear Nimr's program. The ensuing coverage in *al-Muqattam* was curiously brief for a meeting of such large proportions. The conference warranted only the bottom half of one column; it emphasized that Nimr's speech was received warmly and merely listed the speakers who came next.[101] In practice, what followed at the conference

offered a fuller picture of how the Syrian debate over trusteeships was unwinding in Cairo.[102] Challenging the claims of Nimr were Khalid al-Hakim—originally from Homs and a former staff officer in Faysal's army—and Michel Lutfallah—the president of a rival Cairene-Syrian party, the pro-independence Syrian Union—who labelled Nimr a hypocrite and criticized his expedient shifts from one foreign sponsor to another.[103] As *Le Journal du Caire* observed the following day, Nimr's "talent and eloquence" notwithstanding, his argument lacked "precision" and, failing to win over more than a handful of the conference organizers, the meeting ended without a motion in support of his program.[104]

On the one hand, the antagonism toward Nimr at this latest Cairo meeting was unsurprising. The debate over postwar Syria had produced an array of proposals in Cairo's Syrian political scene and the pro-U.S. position was never adopted unanimously. Nimr, nonetheless, generated widespread publicity in the Syro-Egyptian press and his organizational efforts to further the U.S. position—only weeks before President Wilson announced U.S. support for an international commission to carry out surveys and investigate local conditions in Palestine and Syria—signified a high point of support for presumed U.S. policies among an important section of Cairo's Syrians. In turning to the United States, Nimr, to be certain, circumvented its colonial record and saw its intervention as a way of solving the Syro-Hijazi conflict, whereas other Syro-Palestinian organizers tried to exploit U.S. immigration law as a pretext to seal Palestine's borders to Zionism. The excitement for the United States in select Syrian circles in Cairo was soon overshadowed by events in Syria itself, and it would dissipate with the U.S. disengagement from international commitments later in the year. To minimize the pro-U.S. activism of Cairo's Syrians in early 1919, however, would allow hindsight to color a distinctly uncertain episode in the history of modern Egypt and Syria and in the politics of the post-Ottoman Middle East more generally. Between 1917 and 1919 Nimr, Nassif, Rida, the ʿAzm cousins, and other less conspicuous organizers formed a key constituency that was attuned to U.S. policy in Paris and that for a time advocated a U.S. role in governing postwar Syria.

REVISITING THE KING–CRANE COMMISSION

Yale returned to Paris for the opening of the Peace Conference. Over the preceding months, his reports were cited frequently in Inquiry memoranda on the Ottoman Empire, Syrian affairs, and regional Anglo-French tensions.[105] By 20 March 1919, in the context of the ongoing Anglo-French dispute over Syria, it was President Wilson who endorsed sending an "Inter-Allied" commission to the region to resolve the "Syrian Question." Initially proposed by Faysal,[106] Wilson only supported the commission after he was lobbied by Howard Bliss, the president of the SPC.[107] The role of Bliss in U.S. Syrian policy emphasizes the ad hoc nature of the decision making behind Wilson's sponsorship of a commission, which allowed semiofficial actors, such as Yale, a significant say over U.S. Middle Eastern policy in Paris. If Yale's observations did not directly influence conference deliberations, they qualified him to direct the commission's eventual itinerary and to use the commission as a platform to promote his own proposals for a postwar Syria.

On 10 June 1919, despite Anglo-French unwillingness to participate, a U.S. expedition, the "King–Crane Commission," arrived in Jaffa to begin its regional survey. Named

for its two commissioners, Henry King, the President of Oberlin College, and Charles Crane, a Chicago industrialist and Wilson fundraiser with a long interest in international affairs, the commission lasted forty-two days, visited thirty-six of the region's towns and villages, and heard testimony from over 1,500 smaller communities.[108] Yale was the commission's "technical advisor" but in reality was its main figure, organizing meetings with local representatives and countering the effort of British military and intelligence officials to stage-manage the commission and limit its scope on the ground. Reaching Istanbul in August, the commissioners drafted a set of recommendations that endorsed a "Greater Syria," including Palestine and Lebanon, under the suzerainty of a U.S. Mandate, Faysal as constitutional monarch, and a "modification of the extreme Zionist Program."[109]

Yale, at odds with Crane on the ground, submitted a "minority report" to U.S. officials in Paris which rejected the preservation of a "Greater Syria." In his numerous memoranda, Yale's commentary was mostly descriptive. Since he rarely offered his own personal positions, his "minority report" provides the first real glimpse into his worldview. Whereas the commissioners, for example, expressed confidence in Faysal, claiming that he came "naturally into his present place," Yale, who had witnessed the growing Syro-Hijazi tensions over the course of the war and understood Fayal's dependence on Britain, was more critical: "Faisal's prestige ... is but temporary and already has lost much of its éclat."[110] While the commission agreed to Lebanese autonomy, it proposed retaining it within a "United Syria."[111] Christian Lebanon, the commission report suggested, would "exert a stronger ... influence ... within the Syrian State [than] outside it." Yale, in contrast, saw in a separate "Christian Arab state" a model that would "bring civilizing influences on the Moslem Arabs." This would "make the Christian a more self-respecting individual and ... create in the mind of the Moslem a respect ... for the ... Christian whom today he despises as ... inferior."[112]

A similar conceptualization of Jews as proxies of "civilization" helps explain Yale's support of Zionism and a British Mandate in Palestine. Where the commission underscored the incongruence of Zionism with Palestine's non-Jews, exposing the central contradiction of the Balfour Declaration, Yale openly endorsed a future Jewish state. If overseen by Britain, he prophesied, it "will inevitably fall under the control of American Jews ... who will develop a ... Commonwealth in Palestine ... into an outpost in the Orient ... of Americanism."[113] Compared to his wartime reports—which were critical of Zionism, sympathetic to Syrian responses to the Balfour Declaration, and aware of the arbitrariness of British policy surrounding Syrian organizational activity—Yale's position on Zionism in mid-1919 was striking. Although the Arabs, Yale contended, "may never become reconciled to Jewish immigration, ... they will ... accept it as inevitable."[114] Incapable of foreseeing the 1936–39 Arab Revolt, Yale believed that when "the mandatory ... suppresses with a strong hand ... disturbances and demonstrations against the Jews, the danger of a wide spread uprising will be dissipated."[115]

Yale would become disillusioned with Zionism and spent much of his later career critical of the State of Israel,[116] but in mid-1919 his pro-Zionist position emerged from what he considered sincere commitments in the Balfour Declaration. Rather than a biblical belief in the resurrection of a Jewish Palestine, Yale's support for Zionism appeared as a moral, almost legalistic, conviction of the "ideal of a Jewish country." In an April 1918 report—which was on the whole skeptical of Zionism—Yale articulated but also seemed to accept what Salo Baron would soon call the "lachrymose theory" of

Jewish history.[117] On the need to erase the "social stigma" of Jewish identity, Yale wrote that "Jews suffer throughout the world, no matter what honor they may obtain what [*sic*] distinction they may win, what exalted posts they may hold."[118] Zionists believed that only a Jewish state could remove such a stigma and Yale presented the view favorably alongside other Zionist claims in April 1918.

As an engineer, Yale appeared to represent what Mark Mazower has referred to as the "concept of the engineer as laborer for mankind, the technician as harmonizer of peoples." In part this explains Yale's insistence on Jews and Lebanese Christians as "agents of civilization," but if he believed in an "engineered world society" he seems not to have possessed what others described as a "mystical faith in the perfectibility of man."[119] Indeed, Yale borrowed from Cromer's *Modern Egypt* to observe that the Syrian "has to a certain extent developed the vices of servitude [and] is not calculated to develop . . . manly qualities."[120] Despite his own interactions with a diverse group of Cairo's Syrian activists, Yale implied that Syrians in Egypt—exemplified by civil servants working in the Anglo-Egyptian bureaucracy—were largely subservient and had been emasculated as instruments of the colonial establishment. Where Wilson and Jan Smuts saw in internationalism the "culmination of nature's love of association,"[121] Yale's reports emphasize the absence of associational bonds in Syria, which for him justified trusteeship as opposed to Syrian independence. At the same time, his vision of trusteeship was a multilateral one, and although he supported separate British and French Mandates in Palestine and Lebanon, respectively, he favored a "joint mandatory" for the Syrian interior.

British and French policymakers eventually circumvented the commission's recommendations and little was made of Yale's "minority report." The reasons for this are varied and tied closely to changing U.S. domestic circumstances—questions outside the scope of this article. The commission's report arrived at the White House only after Wilson had collapsed from his speaking tour in support of the League of Nations, and few U.S. officials in Paris promoted its findings in late 1919. Yale, however, despite being sidelined in the drafting of the commission's final report, remained in London through the end of 1919, where he met with Allenby, Faysal, the French ambassador, Jules Cambon, and others in an effort to broker a final settlement between the French and Hijazi representatives.[122]

Britain and France would formally partition the Ottoman Empire at the San Remo Conference in April 1920, but not before struggling through a period of mounting challenges, culminating in the King–Crane Commission, which acted as a check on Anglo-French partition plans and underscored that a colonial division of Syria was not inevitable. In the Parisian summer of 1919, U.S. policy dictated the proceedings over Ottoman Syria. This was an achievement for the Inquiry's Middle East section and even more so for Yale, who spent the war documenting an alternative account of the shifting local and regional responses to the major wartime diplomacy. His reports, for all of their flaws, are underappreciated sources that qualify much of the dominant, European-centered narrative of the Middle East in the period, returning to focus lost Syrian-Arab political perspectives and emphasizing the openness of the politics governing the end of the war in the Middle East.

If at times marginalized, Yale's Syrian sources remained important figures through the interwar years. Haqqi al-ʿAzm returned to Syria, where he became governor of Damascus

in 1921 and served as prime minister in the early 1930s. Nassif became a contractor for Royal Dutch Shell in Palestine, was active in local politics, and sat on the 1920 and 1923 advisory councils established by the high commissioner.[123] Nimr remained an influential journalist in Egypt and participated in the country's politics until his death in 1951. After the war, Rida spent a stretch of time in Europe, where he led Syrian-Arab politics in Geneva, serving as vice president of the Syro-Palestinian Congress that convened there in 1921. His pronouncements straddling Islam and politics influenced generations of Islamist thinkers, including Hasan al-Banna and others associated with the Muslim Brotherhood both within Egypt and abroad.[124]

Although each went in different directions in the interwar years, between 1917 and 1919 all of these reformers had considered the United States capable of dictating a Syrian political settlement. As Cairo took center stage in the world of Syrian-Arab politics, their ideas flowed to Washington and Paris through Yale and his increasingly apprehensive British and French counterparts. Though they failed to prevent the emergence of the European Mandates, they brandished pro-American rhetoric in the press, petitioned local U.S. agents, and coordinated protests that presented a serious challenge to the postwar settlement. Their activism, including their turn toward the United States, should reopen a larger debate about the U.S. role in the creation of the Mandates, and about the panorama of forces responsible for the partition of the Ottoman Middle East.

NOTES

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[1]"Syria" here refers to the present-day countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Palestine; when mentioned separately, "Palestine" refers only to the territory west of the Jordan River that became the British Mandate.

[2]William Yale, "Report 14," 11 February 1918, William Yale Collection (hereafter WYC), St. Antony's College, Oxford, Middle East Centre (hereafter MEC), box 1, fol. 2.

[3]See, for example, David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (London: Phoenix, 2000); Jean-David Mizrahi, *Genèse de l'État mandataire: Service des Renseignements et bandes armées en Syrie et au Liban dans les années 1920* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003); and Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000).

[4]Albert Hourani, "The Middleman in a Changing Society: Syrians in Egypt in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1981), 103–23; Thomas Philipp, *The Syrians in Egypt, 1725–1975* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1985).

[5]Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1919* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997), 45–46, 124–25; Rashid Khalidi, *British Policy towards Syria and Palestine 1906–1914: A Study of the Antecedents of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes–Picot Agreement, and the Balfour Declaration* (London: Ithaca Press, 1980), 219–21.

[6]The term "Syrians" at this moment includes those now known as Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians.

[7]See Leyla Dakhli, *Une Génération d'Intellectuels Arabes: Syrie et Liban (1908–1940)* (Paris: Karthala, 2009); and Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2010), 35–59.

[8]Dakhli, *Une Génération d'Intellectuels Arabes*, 52–53, 76–77.

[9]See, for example, Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean*, 46–51, 54–59; Khuri-Makdisi , "Inscribing Socialism into the Nahḍa: al-Muqtaṭaf, al-Hilāl, and the Construction of a Leftist Reformist Worldview, 1880–1914," in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, Public Sphere and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood*, ed. Dyala Hamzah (London: Routledge, 2013), 63–89.

[10]Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean*, 170–71.

[11]Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Manela, "Goodwill and Bad: Rethinking US-Egyptian Contacts in the Interwar Years," *Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (2002): 71–88.

[12]Yale to Monroe, 20 November 1968, WYC, MEC, box 1, fol. 9; on U.S. missionaries in Ottoman Syria, see Ruth Kark, *American Consuls in the Holy Land, 1832–1914* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994).

[13]Philip Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 53–55.

[14]Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 43–49, 69–72, 108–12.

[15]Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean*, 43–57.

[16]Muhammad Kurd Ali, *Kitab Khitat al-Sham*, Vol. 3 (Damascus: Taraqi, 1925), 137–42; Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011), 21–31, 43–47.

[17]Yale, "Report 7," 10 December 1917, WYC, MEC, box 1, fol. 2.

[18]Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism*, 69.

[19]Yale, "Report 10," 31 December 1917, WYC, MEC, box 1, fol. 2.

[20]On Rashid Rida, see Dyala Hamzah, "From *ʿIlm* to *Ṣiḥāfa* or the Politics of the Public Interest (*Maṣlaḥa*): Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and His Journal *al-Manār* (1898–1935)," in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, Public Sphere and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood*, ed. Dyala Hamzah (London: Routledge, 2013), 90–127.

[21]See, for example, "Dukhul al-Mas'ala al-ʿArabiyya fi Taur Jadid," *al-Manar*, 2 December 1918.

[22]Yale to Monroe, 6 November 1962, Boston, WYC, MEC, box 1, fol. 9.

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[41]See, for example, Nassif to Clayton, April 1917, in Yale, "Report 12," 28 January 1918, WYC, MEC, box 1, fol. 2.

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[67]Clayton to FO, 16 June 1918, TNA, FO, 141/803/3.

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