

## The Position of Non-Governmental Syrian Powers towards Greater Syrian Plan

*Abdulrahman A. Al-Fawwaz, Ahmad Kh. Al-Afef\**

### ABSTRACT

This study is about the non-governmental Syrian position held by the parliament, parties and other people powers towards the Greater Syria Plan endeavored by King Abdullah I bin Al Hussein during the fourth decade of the twentieth century, aiming at unity of Natural Syria and integration of its four regions (Jordan, North Syria, Palestine and Lebanon) within one state.

The original documentary recourses reviewed revealed divergence between the position held by the Syrian people and that of their government. While then Syrian government departing from self-interest of the statesmen, and in compliance of the tendency of both the patronizing Francis government, and some Arab governments declared fierce opposition to the plan, there was great acceptance and support of the Greater Syria Plan and King Abdullah's endeavors for unity among most Syrian people communities and other representative Syrian currents on the ground of their believe in the unity of the Shamite Regions, as a basis on which to achieve the country's best interest, as a first step towards Pan-Arabism and one best choice to cope with the Zionist threats.

**Keywords:** Non-Governmental Syrian Powers, King Abdullah I, Greater Syria Plan.

### INTRODUCTION

The unity of Syria is considered as one of most important issues that captivated the interest of both the politicians and public people in the Arabic Orient, in general, and the Shamite Regions in particular during the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and formed a dynamically influential pivot in the Arab relations and policies of the Western countries that have a malicious interest in the division of the Arab World, mainly the Shamite Regions as proved the Sykes–Picot agreement 1916.

A glimpse to the literature reviewed about Greater Syria Plan that was heralded and worked for by King Abdullah I bin Al Hussein during the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reveals that the plan was greatly influenced by the resisting position of the Arab political regimes departing from their respective self-interests that

contradict with the plan, from a hand, and in an attempt to please the Super Powers who provide the support for that regimes, on the other hand, whose policy in the region is designed to sustain the state of division, and to abort any Arabs unifying attempt that would create a powerful Arabic center in the Orient to practice greater influence in the international policy for the interest of Arabs, and in the same time capable to stand up for all imperial threats, particularly the danger of the Zionism.

The Syrian Government during that period represented a major leverage of the opposition to the Greater Syria Plan and King Abdullah's ambitions on the excuse that the plan is inconsistent with the hopes and prospects of the Syrian people, who, as they alleged, are content with a Syrian State that is independent and integrated within its current borders governed by republican regime.

The major focus of the present study is to cast light on the position held by the Syrian people and other political parties that truly reflect the people's attitude pertaining

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the Syrian unity issue and the active endeavors then sought after within that framework. This issue will be addressed through four major sections:

- Section One: Greater Syria Plan: Concept & Evolution.
- Section Two: The position of the Syrian Parliament from Greater Syria Plan.
- Section Three: The position of Syrian parties from Greater Syria Plan.
- Section Four: The position of the Syrian people from Greater Syria Plan.

### **Importance of the Study**

The importance of the study established the facts, the realities, the political and historical events during the fourth decade of the twentieth century, The study sought the depth and analysis in order to reach the benefit results that can help researchers, thinkers and those interested in this field, and transfer it to new generations in the truth ways as a reference to them in their present and future. The study came to give the real values and evaluates to the subject of Greater Syria Plan, and the efforts of King Abdullah I to achieve his dream and interest in Arab Unity.

### **Research Methodology**

The study focuses on available data and information to understand and to explain the research problem by resting on primary sources such as observation and using secondary sources such as books, essays and so on.

Primarily, this study depended on a number of original documentary resources, including the Hashemite documents published 1994, and National documents on unity of Natural Syria published 1948.

The unpublished documentary resources primarily included:

- Iraqi Royal Court's Documents deposited at the Department of Books and National Documentation/Baghdad, in course of this research will be referred to as (D.B.D- Baghdad).

- Syrian documents deposited at the Historical Documents Center/Damascus, hereinafter will be referred to as (H.D.C). In addition to Syrian Parliamentary meeting.
- British Foreign Ministry's documents deposited at the Historical Documents Center/ University of Jordan and will be indicated as (F.O).

This study also consulted a variety of Arabic journals and other related referential research studies.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the efforts of King Abdullah I in order to achieve the Greater Syrian Plan?
2. What is the position of the Syrian Parliament from Greater Syria Plan?
3. What is the position of Syrian parties from Greater Syria Plan?
4. What is the position of the Syrian people from Greater Syria Plan?
5. Did King Abdullah I achieved his objectives towards Greater Syria Plan?

### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. Motivate the researchers to get sufficient knowledge of the reality and the true events of Greater Syria project.
2. Understand the historical and political facts that stand behind Greater Syrian Plan.
3. Knowing the challenges and difficulties faced King Abdullah I and his Plan.
4. Knowing the real positions of non-governmental Syrian powers towards Greater Syrian Plan.
5. Realization the factors that affected both supporters and opponents of Greater Syrian Plan?

### **Section One Greater Syria Plan: Concept and Evolution**

The Greater Syria Plan represented one of the most significant issues on the Arab policy scene during the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This plan that was

pioneered by King Abdullah I bin Al Hussein, king of the Hashemite Kingdom intended for reintegration of the Shamite regions within single state, that was divided into four separated political entities in accordance with Sykes–Picot Agreement between France and Britain in April 1916, despite it has long been forming a historically and geographically integrated region<sup>[1]</sup>.

By the end of the World War II both Syria and Lebanon could obtain independence, King Abdullah I of Jordan, as one of the four regional provinces of Bilad al-Sham, seen a favorable opportunity to restore the unity of Bilad al-Sham as long has been considering the British promises at the early days of the foundation of the State of Jordan in 1921 of the possibility of the unity of Bilad al-Sham once the British and French deputation terminate<sup>[2]</sup>.

During that period King Abdullah, therefore, communicated with many political leaders throughout the different Shamite provinces on the official and nonofficial levels, in addition to making parallel correspondences with the government of Britain. The efforts he keenly exerted in that field were crowned with Amman Conference convened on 5 March 1943 on which all Shamite provinces were represented<sup>[3]</sup>, and two schemes have emanated that determined the bases on which the Syrian unity will be depending.

Both schemes formed the first basis in his endeavors towards the unity of Syria:

#### **First Scheme: (Integrated Syrian State Plan)**

This scheme calls for one Constitutional Monarchy state involving North Syria, Transjordan, Palestine, and Lebanon; and the religious minorities of Christians in Lebanon and Jews in Palestine semi-autonomous government in the regions where they represent majority; provided that such form of self-government shall remain within the framework of the united Syrian state; and Belford Declaration shall terminate or otherwise constructed so that to remove the fears of the Arab Islamic Worlds.

As for presidency, the plan's pact proclaimed King

Abdullah bin Al Hussein as president of the state on a variety of considerations most importantly the following:

1. He was the first heir of his father Sharif Hussein, the Leader of Arabs in providing for the Arab interests.
2. The legal rights of his family in ruling the Syrian country as affirmed by the Syrian Constitution which was ruled out by the French occupation of Syria.
3. Large-scale popularity enjoyed by King Abdullah in all Syrian provinces that was inclined to Constitutional Monarchy regime.
4. Promise by the Government of Britain to preside the integrated State of Syria once the French deputation on Syria and Lebanon terminate.

#### **Second Scheme: (Federal Syrian State)**

This scheme alternatively suggested that when the formation of the integrated Syrian state becomes practically impossible, a central federal Syrian state will be instead the choice including governments of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine; having federal government and the capital city being in Damascus. Major responsibilities of the defense, foreign policy, economy, and telecommunications while the provincial governments take responsibility on the internal policies.

Regarding the government system, the second scheme's pact required that the federation is to be governed by an elected legislative council representing the four Syrian provinces, from which federation prime minister and other federation authority members are elected based on the constitutions provisions.

President ship was assigned to King Abdullah bin Al Hussein given the earlier considerations, whereas president ship of Transjordan was to be assumed by a deputy<sup>[4]</sup>.

#### **Section Two the position of the Syrian Parliament from Greater Syria Plan**

Albeit the vast popularity enjoyed by King Abdullah's endeavors targeting unity of the Shamite provinces among the grassroots, as will be demonstrated later, there was a fierce hostility by the official government. That

hostile position was most obviously crystallized post 1946 on the ground that King Abdullah's plan and endeavors were in violation of the International Law principles and Arab League charter<sup>[5]</sup>, and also the tendency of the Syrian people to a republican system<sup>[6]</sup>. The Syrian government also resisted the plan with various suspicions, allegations and media war on the policy of King Abdullah<sup>[7]</sup>, considering it as groundless, nationally meaningless without any patriotic content except mere the personal desire of the King to take over Syrian throne<sup>[8]</sup>.

On another level, the Syrian government communicated intensively with many Arab and international powers, particularly Britain, France, Egypt and Saudi Arabia for purpose of establishing an alliance to defeat the attempts to carry out the plan. They found in hardening the position of the Syrian government a favorable opportunity to satisfy their strategic interests in the region<sup>[9]</sup>.

The official position of Syria to reject the plan had clear reflections on the attitude held by the Syrian parliament. In consequence of proclamation by King Abdullah in his Throne Speech on 11 November 1946, calling for unity of Syria<sup>[10]</sup>, a number of parliament members who sided with the government policy opposing Greater Syria plan launched attack against King Abdullah and his seek for unity on the parliamentary session held on 23 November 1946, defending that the plan forms violation of the right of Syrian government and transgression of its sovereignty, and international agreements. In addition, they considered the plan as an imperial scheme laden with Zionistic greed and personal interest of King Abdullah<sup>[11]</sup>.

The position was developed following the statement by President Shukri Al-Quwatly, calling the parliament members to lay out a plan to defiantly counteract King Abdullah's plan and his endeavors<sup>[12]</sup>. The aggressive position taken by the Syrian parliament against the plan was excessively intensified after the address delivered by King Abdullah on 4 August 1946, on the Syrian unity.

The parliament convened on 29 September 1946 to discuss the issue, and the parliament members considered the issue deliberately and elaborately but their arguments within the framework of the discussions of session held on 23 November 1946. The council proposed a suggestion implying the need for drafting and voting for a definitive resolution about this issue by the council. Eventually a parliamentary committee was formed to lay out a draft resolution, and the council in general consensus agreed on the decision as presented by the committee. The final decision stated the following: "The Syrian Parliament unanimously decide condemnation of Greater Syria Plan which hide beneath personal targets, Zionistic purposes and constraining restrictions that would compromise the independence, integrity and sovereignty of Syria, and put the ruling system at risk; while violates the charters of the Arab League Charter, and the United Nations and the international law, in general<sup>[13]</sup>.

Hence, the question is this: was the decision made by the Syrian Parliament really reflects the Syrian people's will to deny the Greater Syria Plan announced by King Abdullah and the Jordanian Government? And was it a serious expression of stronghold of the republican regime as demonstrated by the Syrian Parliamentary decision on 29 September 1947. To investigate this issue we need to take a closer look at the parliamentary elections in Syria so that to be able to identify whether or not guaranty freedom and discretion to Syrian people.

The former C.I.A.'s Chief Miles Copeland wrote about the Syrian parliamentary elections: "election winners were among those candidates supported by either foreign powers, or landlords who impose on their peasants and other land workers to elect those candidates who best serve their interests; or else would be from greed capitalists who buy in votes of the people in the interest of their fellows in the same way as they usually used to get their wants by means of cheating and steal"<sup>[14]</sup>.

As indicated by the documentary resources, during

this period of time, the Syrian people was most attached to the idea of Syrian unity under a Hashemite leader. This was clearly shown by Alhuda Newspaper July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1947, when affirmed that: "In 1947's elections the Syrian people was supporting the Greater Syria Plan and the Hashemite Family, and the election's results pave the way for a political defiance, since prospective election winners embrace political ideology that contradicts with that of the ruling authority"<sup>[15]</sup>.

The ruling elite in Syria was during that time aware that Greater Syria Plan will be a critical issue in the elections 1947, because it attracts the interest of major part of the Syrians and receives much support from many candidates. In consequence, as it seemed most probable that the candidates backing the plan will win the parliamentary elections, the result which was unfavorable for and rejected by the established government, since the plan threatens its interests, the Syrian government maliciously manipulated the elections process in an attempt to serve its interests. This was affirmed by reports by the Iraqi Commission at Damascus sent to Iraqi Foreign Ministry in Baghdad during that period, particularly that the elections attract much of the interest of Syrian People considering the serious political outcomes it might conceive in post-independence Syria; and further it was the first elections process in Syria under the newly changed elections statute. Reportedly, five political parties were favoring King Abdullah's seek for unity of Greater Syria under a monarchy regime, while rejecting the republican system. These five political parties include: al-Ahrar Party, Muslim Brothers, Social National Syrian Party, National Action League, Student Association, and the Baeth Party that was inclined to Syrian unity under a republican system, while in the same time defiant to the National Block's government and its policies. Reports also revealed that the political blocks supportive to the plan were only the pro-government National Party and the Communist Party<sup>[16]</sup>.

In fact, the different political parties opposing the Independence & National Block harnessed their effort to

resist the National Party's list backed by the government. In summary, most parties participated on the elections were supportive to the Syrian Unity and resisting the established government policies, and no one party was favoring the government except the National Party<sup>[17]</sup>. The preliminary results of the elections conducted on 7 July 1947, demonstrated failure of National party's list in almost all the Governorates. However, many independent and non-parliamentary candidates representing the opposition won the elections, and the Muslim Brother's list "Ulema Association" also succeeded<sup>[18]</sup>.

The contrary has taken place in the complementary elections held on 18 July 1947, when the National party unexpectedly won and Ulema Association boycotted the elections because of the government intervention and manipulation in the elections process to its advantage<sup>[19]</sup>. To be sure, before the complementary elections, the government arrested three of al-Bokamal candidates: Sheikh Mosharaf al-Dandal, Dham al-Dandal, and Ramadan Pasha Shlash based on suspicious communication with Jordan and instigation in favor of Greater Syria Project<sup>[20]</sup>. A good example for government manipulation in the parliamentary elections was the case of Damascus when the electorate mostly illiterate voted for the Ulema Association of Muslim Brothers, the public officials appointed by the government to supervise the voting boxes were intervening for the government's interest by writing certain names, whereas the illiterate voters were dictating the names of the Ulema. In addition, the Syrian Minister of Interior was also pressured and threatened by the President and some others of the National Party's candidates so that to act in favor of the party.

However, at al-Jazeera and al-Forat Governorates the government suppressed the voice of the opposition as did in Damascus and Aleppo. It is worth to note that Greater Syria Plan in both governorates gained intensive support<sup>[21]</sup>. At al-Jebel al-Druze, the government halted the elections to a later date of the complementary elections on 18 July 1947; and despite government

manipulation, the result of the elections run at al-Jebel al-Druze was in favor of the list supported by Aal al Atrash opposing the governmental orientation. In consequence, a legal decree was ordained by the state to install the deputies representatives of all Syrian Governorates, excluding al-Jebel al-Druze's deputies<sup>[22]</sup>. The government excused with the current state of affairs dominating the Mount that were unhelpful to make a decisive decision pertaining the elections conducted thereat<sup>[23]</sup>. In fact, the real reason underlying the government's attitude towards the Mount's elections was the Greater Syria issue, especially Aal Al Atrash, most importantly Sultan Pasha were in support of the plan and there were regular communications between them and King Abdullah in that regard<sup>[24]</sup>.

To summarize, and based on the earlier discussions we can argue that the Syrian parliamentary elections not only were dishonest, but they were employed for the interest of the ruling authority. Further, the parliament deputies mostly were not freely elected by the people; rather they could win the election with support and assistance of the government. On this backdrop we can assert that the decisions made by the Syrian Parliament, particularly those having to do with Greater Syria Plan were not a reflection of the people's will and desire; they rather reflected the political orientation of the government resisting Greater Syria Plan to maintain their self-interest.

### **Section Three the Position of Syrian Parties from Greater Syria Plan**

Syria had a number of political parties that embraced the cause of Syrian Unity, most importantly:

A. Social National Syrian party (under Anton Saadeh)

The Social National Syrian Party was among the most prominent organizations that were active in Syria for purpose of achieving the unity of the Shamite provinces within the natural frontiers. This is clearly evident from the party's literature that demonstrates the principles and basics of the ideology embraced by the party all in all

were revolving around the life and progress of the "Syrian Nation"<sup>[25]</sup>.

The first seven tenets of their ideology considered that the people living in the natural Syrian provinces form a self-contained nation, discrete from others, that should liberate within the borders of its whole homeland, and to subject to national sovereignty so that to be to protect itself from foreign interests and claims<sup>[26]</sup>.

The party re-emphasized its view on the Syrian unity issue in a memorandum sent late of 1945 to leaders of the Arab States on the occasion of ending the World War II, formation of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Power States, and forthcoming reconciliation conference intended to consider the pending international problems. It was noted in the memorandum that: "Every political act by the Syrian Governments will be meaningless for the Syrian People, so long as these governments disregard the Syrian Unity issue; and every solution to this question that does not take into account existence of a single Syrian Nation, with one public interest despite differing political entities-is ineffective solution-that shortly will proven realistically impractical and thus collapse". The party considered that, the optimal solution for the Syrian cause is to harmonize the attitudes of the established governments in the Syrian provinces towards one vision finally leading to a comprehensive unification of Syria<sup>[27]</sup>.

As for its position regarding Greater Syria Plan, one can assert that there were communications between the party and King Abdullah related to nation's issues. In June 1942, the party submitted a note to King Abdullah addressed to the Government of Britain, in which the party fiercely criticized the British policy towards the Arab countries, and renouncement of its promises to them. The King who eventually communicated the note to the British Government, affirmed its claims expressing willingness to achieve the national claims<sup>[28]</sup>. Evidently, the position adopted by the party about Greater Syria Plan and King Abdullah's endeavor to unity loomed more visible post-World War II era, when the party long dispersed reunified itself again, and return of Anton Saadeh from the exile back

into Lebanon, at the same time when Greater Syria issue was heatedly debated among the political elite and grassroots in the Arabic countries<sup>[29]</sup>.

Early of March 1947, Anton Saadeh visited Amman and delivered an address the next day in which declared commitment to the party's seminal principles despite all the different developments occurred in both Syria and Lebanon, while in the same time demonstrated support to pan-Arabism idea in general, and the Syrian unity in particular, and valued King Abdullah's efforts in that regard. This was most confirmed by his address delivered in front of the King Abdullah when said: "You combated on behalf of this nation alone; saved the nation's honor alone; that day when your men were restricted in jail, but their heads still risen up, and their will still truthful, never lower their heads down, or step back away from the superior demands to which endowed ourselves, you were the nation's truthful hope. and your national action was the clearest expression of the nation's will in Lebanon, Sham, Palestine, Transjordan, and Mesopotamia"<sup>[30]</sup>.

This excerpt from Anton Saadeh's address proves that the party's leader was supporting King Abdullah's seek to unity; he therefore set out to make correspondences through his fellows with King Abdullah to converse on Greater Syria Plan, particularly considering large number of supporters to the plan in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Saadeh's assistants kept moving between Beirut and Amman, and their communications were crowned with a meeting attended by King Abdullah and Anton Saadeh at Jordan Valley region on 28 May 1947. In the meeting, Saadeh affirmed his willingness to achieve the Greater Syria Plan cooperatively with King Abdullah provided that no foreign power shall intervene to achieve that goal, requesting that the implementation of the plan, from all aspects, shall be by the Syrians themselves; and the implementation shall not depend on employing money because it is so trivial in the field of national action. Unfortunately, once returned to Lebanon, the security forces were following him since the Lebanese government was standing against the idea of Syrian

unity<sup>[31]</sup>.

B. People's Party (Abdelrahman Alshahbandar's Party)

This was among the most prominent Syrian political parties that were supporting the Syrian unity cause, as will be demonstrated in the second article of party's statute that emphasized: The People's Party believes that the Syrian provinces within its natural borders are inhabited by one people associated together with the ties of race, language, traditions and ethics; and it is his right to enjoy unity, and to take advantage from its material and immaterial benefits; and no one benefit may preclude the intended ends; and People's Party claims a right that is most explicit among the rights of Syrians, and embarked towards an end that is wished by all Syrians, because it forms the cornerstone without which they will have no entity<sup>[32]</sup>.

As for the position held by the party regarding Greater Syria Plan, one can argue that it was clearly crystallized after year 1939 when a delegation of sixty party leaders and some other national leaders in Syria headed by Dr. Abdelrahman Alshahbandar visited Amman pretending consolation to King Abdullah for the death of his nephew King Ghazi. In fact, the visit was arranged for to concert efforts with King Abdullah towards the unity of Syrian provinces, and to express support to his unifying efforts in this course.

In his talk to Zaid Al Kilani, Chief Editor of Al-Wafaa Journal, Abdelrahman Alshahbandar confirmed that the visit intended to strengthen ties of friendship and cooperation among the men working for the Arab cause in both Amman and Damascus. He also articulated that the Syrian people see Emir Abdullah as a great Hashmite prince, and a hero of the Arab Revolt; so the Syrian people appreciate his standings in course of the Arab cause in general, and the Syrian issue, in particular; and associate too much hopes to his forthcoming efforts.

Pertaining unity between Syria and Transjordan he explained that it is a national necessity, and it is a duty for the entities working in both brother countries to cooperate

to achieve the unity. A delegate member, Tayseer Al Thibian, and Chief Editor of Aljazeera Journal, highlighted in his speech in Amman the motivation for that visit saying: "We never travelled and visited this land only to perform consolation duty or to confirm the attachment of Syria with the Hashemite Household. The Syrian have already fulfilled the consolation duty, and expressed their national sentiment towards the prophetic household in different conditions and circumstances. Today we are here for something more splendid and sublime. we came to remind the son of the savor of the Arabs with the doctrines of the Arab Revolt as dictated by his glorious father. that are slightly and partially accomplished, whereas the major part of them still expecting fulfillment by the grand inheritor of the sacred mission deposited to his neck"<sup>[33]</sup>.

Before the delegation left Amman, Abdelrahman Alshahbandar, party's leader, proclaimed that that the Arab Unity is in serious danger, and King Abdullah is the only ruler who can save the Arab Unity that was already torn out by the imperial powers. Then, he said: "we did not come here to say King Ghazi has dead; but we did to say life to King of Syria and Transjordan". Following the outbreak of the World War II, Alshahbandar had already made it clear for the British government that the ruling leaders of the National Block in Syria were too poor to take on Syria; and the interest of Britain during the war is to help the Arab achieve the Unity f Syria under leadership of Abdullah bin Al Hussein<sup>[34]</sup>. In consequence, it is clear that the People's Party was believing in King Abdullah and associates big hopes to his efforts towards the Syrian Unity.

#### C. Al-Ahrar Party:

This party was the most supportive to Syrian unity issue under a monarchical system. The party included a number of prominent persons with pro-monarchy tendency such as Said Haidar, Hasan al-Hakeem, and Zaki al-Khateeb<sup>[35]</sup>.

The party elaborated on its position toward the unity in the note sent by the Secretary-General to the Syrian

Minister of Foreign in September 1945. The note considered that the realization of the Syrian unity is so easy, if so doing was a faithful and serious resolve. For example, they noted in this context: "As for the Syrian unity, it would seems for some foreigners an intricate and problematic issue, but you can show the world how easy it is, when viewed objectively and abstracted from desires<sup>[36]</sup>.

Then indicated in his note to basics and principles on which this unity should be established, arguing: "Syria has perceivably distinctive natural borders; from north there is a mount, from east a river, from south desert, and from the west there is a sea, and lies in-between all that frontiers inland islands that are interdependently integrate that no one state would separately protect itself from the military or even customs aspects". In addition, the people living within this region share common religion, race, tongue, conventions, traditions, values and the willingness to live together as expressly and officially stated by the Syrian people before the American Inquiry Committee in 1919 and resolution on 8 March 1920, and stressed on by the Syrian constitution 1928, the second clause whereof-that was invalidated by the French-stated that the Syrian provinces which separated from the Ottoman State are an inseparably integral political entity, irrespective of divisions taken place since late of World War I. This, in fact, was frequently emphasized by the party's literature. In brochure released on 7 June 1945 the party criticized the separatist government's aggressiveness to King Abdullah's proposals for unity, considering that position inconsistent with the people's best interest, which will not accomplished unless all Shamite provinces reunited under one state<sup>[37]</sup>.

The party also considered that unity of the Shamite provinces with Iraq represents the best way for a truthful Arabic Unity, contrary to the perception suggested by the Arab League that is based on limited cooperation while maintaining sovereignty and autonomy of each state<sup>[38]</sup>. Tallbott, the British Officiant in Beirut mentions this party as being supporter of King Abdullah's attempts to



realize the Syrian unity behind the scene<sup>[39]</sup>; and was among strongest political actors embracing the Greater Syria issue in the elections 1947<sup>[40]</sup>.

#### **D. General National Union:**

Typically, the General National Union was opposing the policy of the National Block that was governing Syria, considering its inability to achieve the nation's prospects because of singularity of authority and excluding other political parties and groups. So, the Union considered all its acts and dispositions as being invalid and unrepresentative of nation's will<sup>[41]</sup>. This party, in particular, was exercising pressure on the government urging it to refrain from negotiating or convening an agreement with France or otherwise without such negotiation or treaties being based on the unity of natural Syria<sup>[42]</sup>. While the National Union was fiercely criticizing the established Syrian government, simultaneously it was strengthening its relations with Emir Abdullah, and large communications were in existence between both parties. While the Emir was sending support and guidance, the National Union, in turn, was standing to King Abdullah side by supporting his seek for unity, and calling him to achieve the national hopes. This clear from a letter sent by Ahmad Helmi al-Allaf, deputy of the General National Union's Youth to King Abdullah on 26 February 1939, in which gloriously celebrated the part taken by Emir Abdullah in servicing the Arab cause, and elaborating on the collaboration of the National Union's Youth together at his disposal in this field<sup>[43]</sup>.

#### **H. Muslim Brothers Group:**

This group was established in Aleppo where opened its first center in 1935<sup>[44]</sup>. At first appeared as religious group calling for chastity and ethics, but soon grown out as a political party with branches and partisans all over Syria. This group was receiving support from the Ulema Association in Damascus, most prominently: Mustafa al-Sebai and Marouf al-Dawalibi<sup>[45]</sup>. The position adopted by the group as to Greater Syria Plan can be deduced from the reports sent to the Syrian Ministry of Interior,

Prime Ministry about the plan and partisans inside Syria.

In a report sent by al-Forat Governor to Syrian Ministry of Interior on 3 September 1947, it was confirmed that major part of those working for Greater Syria Plan who charged with too much sincere and fervor are many eminent people belong to Muslim Brothers Group. Reportedly, Muslim Brothers Group's leaders propagate for the plan publicly<sup>[46]</sup>. Another report sent by Police Director in Syria to Syrian Ministry of Interior on 31 August 1947 indicated that: "Most recently al-Bokamal has become a center and fertile medium for monarchy propaganda, and it is feared that al-Bokamal is going to be the first aperture to be opened for King Abdullah. The meetings are held regularly at the Muslim Brothers' Center, who has become the cornerstone in the action for the monarchy and associated propaganda, and the overall situation signals inconsistency"<sup>[47]</sup>. Many other reports sent from gendarme officers at the frontier regions to the Ministry of Interior and Prime Ministry prove the huge communications between this Group's members and a number of Jordanian figures interested in the accomplishment of the plan<sup>[48]</sup>.

### **Section Four the position of the Syrian people from Greater Syria Plan**

Since 1938 started the eventual efforts by the Syrian public leaders to support King Abdullah's endeavors to realize the unity of the Shamite provinces<sup>[49]</sup>, as they were convinced the he is the optimal and best leader who can meet the aspirations of the countrymen in the unity, freedom, and independence; given his noble lineage that dates back to prophet's family and being son of an eminent leader of the Arab Revolt, and being the most fervor and advocate of the Arab issue; and also being the political leader most gaining loyalty and support within the Syrian provinces<sup>[50]</sup>. This was very clear from the dozens of letters received by the King during the World War II era coming from all the Syrian districts-Homs, Hama, Horan, Aleppo, Jebel al-Druze, Daraa, Damascus, al-Forat region, al-okamal, etc.-urging on fast integration

of Syria and Jordan within one state under leadership of Abdullah bin al Hussein<sup>[51]</sup>. The vast majority of the demands were against the republican system, since it was invented by the French occupation; and rather calling to inaugurate the Hshemite Monarchical system because it reflects the volition and aspiration of the Syrian people in the four provinces of Syria as clearly demonstrated in the pact signed on 8 March 1920<sup>[52]</sup>.

A report sent by Talbott, British Officiate in Beirut sent to British Ministry of Foreign on 22 August 1946 presents adequate analysis of the public opinion of common people in Syria and Lebanon towards Greater Syria Plan and endeavors by King Abdullah in that regard. As reported, Talbot explained that the vast majority of the population in Syria and Lebanon supports an independent and unified Syria as was the case under King Faisal. In the same time, they favor a monarchical rather than a republican system; the later, in their opinion, is an invention introduced by the French to serve their objects. In addition, Talbot indicated in his report that most inhabitants of the Syrian provinces reject the corrupted ruling system of the National Block; look to the reverent protocols of the monarchy; and believe that greater Syria always was forming a single political, economic, and cultural entity that establishment of the United Kingdom of Syria means compliance with the Syrians people's will, and serving best interest of the natural country, and surpassing the state of divisionism imposed by the imperial greed<sup>[53]</sup>.

The inferiority of the Syrian government, and being unable to run the government administration of the state due to corruption, and ineffective planning to coup with pending political and economic problems in Syria resulted in opening the door wide before the Syrian people-who aversively accepted the republican system- to support and stand up for the plan of Greater Syria under a monarchical system.

The calls for unity by King Abdullah started to find its way to ears of vast majority of the Syrian people, ad supporters of the monarchy and greater Syria steadily

grown in numbers in all Syrian governorates following year 1946<sup>[54]</sup>; that King Abdullah was thus motivated to make greater efforts with the Syrian countrymen towards the hope of the Syrian people that is the unity of its country<sup>[55]</sup>.

This was confirmed by the reports that were sent to the Ministry of Interior and Syrian Prime Ministry during that period. As reported, for example, the call for greater Syria plan was so active in Horan governorate and most inhabitants were supporting the plan<sup>[56]</sup>. Based on the reports, the local leaders in this governorate were regularly and intensively visiting Transjordan to hold meetings with Jordanian persons responsible on the implementation of the plan, then go back to Syria to organize the movement thereat. Some of famed leaders are: Ahmad bin Faris Alzoubi and Meziad Almahameed who were members of the Syrian parliament<sup>[57]</sup>. Further, reports also indicated that a number of local leaders in this governorate were working zealously for the plan. For instance, a report sent by Horan Governor to Ministry of Interior dated 9 September 1947 showed that Sheikh Abdelqader Al-Refai, clan leader of Al-Refai in Horan exercises perceivable activities proclaiming for King Abdullah's Greater Syria plan; and similarly Sheikh Khalal Abu Ismail, leader of Allajat Arabs was doing the same<sup>[58]</sup>.

Generally, the reports were recommending the government undertake restrictive actions to frustrate the plan, due to its deadly influence on the Syrian government. However, the call for the plan was so active within al-Forat governorate by Muslim Brothers Group, who actively worked for the plan. A report sent to Ministry of Interior on 3 September 1947, al-Forat Governor demonstrated that since the King Abdullah's statement on 4 August 1947, there was a vigor movement calling for the plan throughout the governorate, and such calls are welcomingly received by most people<sup>[59]</sup>.

In another report sent by Public Security Director to Syrian Ministry of Interior dated 31 August 1947, it was emphasized that: the reason why this proclamation spread

throughout the governorate is the correspondences between Syrians and neighboring Iraqis. Such correspondences were heard and seen and even encouraged by senior statesmen who were greatly influenced by the propaganda and become among strongest supporters of the Greater Syria Plan, the fact that exacerbate their danger directly to the entity of the state. The report demonstrated that monarchical partisans at al-Bokamal cross over borders into Iraq to move later to Amman then come back to al-Bokamal charged with the instructions for clan leaders and even loyal Syrian officers including Administrative Officer Qaim-maqam at al-Bokamal, Said al-Sayed, Financier Turki al-Himesh, in addition to Sheikh Abdelrazaq Pasha Alali, Chief Sheikh of Dlaimi Arabs clan living in Syria and Iraq, Sheikh Eftan al-Sharji al-Bomahel Clan Leader, Abdelelah al-Dibs, al-Bokamal Mayor, the Mufti al-Naqshabandi, and most village mayors (Makhateer) <sup>[60]</sup>, and at the north, the call for Greater Syria was receiving much support and acceptance from most Aleppo people, mainly Naqeeb al-Ashraf <sup>[61]</sup>.

The plan also was strongly accepted at Jebel al-Druze, where most Drouz leaders, most importantly Aal al-Atrash, were partisans of the unity of Syria under a Hashemite monarch<sup>[62]</sup>. As early as 1928 the Drouz set out their efforts in support of Greater Syria Plan, when Abdelghafar al-Atrash, a leader at the Jebel al-Druze communicated with Gillbert Mackress, then British Consul at Beirut, requesting on behalf of the Mount's leaders, Britain's support for the accession of the Drouz to Jordan, and announcing loyalty and allegiance to King Abdullah<sup>[63]</sup>.

This was also clear from the many communications and visits conducted by Jebel al-Druze's leaders to Emir Abdullah for concerted efforts towards the work for unity of Syria under the Hashemite ruling system<sup>[64]</sup>. During October 1947, Durzi Leader Sulan al-Atrash delivered statement in which determined more specifically the position adopted by Drouz from King Abdullah and his seek for unity, saying: "We stand with King Abdullah;

and his demand should be fulfilled. What indeed would bother us from being allegiant to a precious Arabic King, famed with honesty and justice". Within this period, a demonstration set out at Jebel al-Druze shouting in the name of King Abdullah, the Syrian government was pushed to arrest a hundred persons having a hand in the organization of the demonstration (al-Islah, October 9, 1947). After 1946, communications were running intensively between the Jebel al-Druze's leaders and Amman, where the Durzi leaders were contacting King Abdullah and coordinate efforts with him, so that to propagate the plan in Syria and arranging for accession of Jebel al-Druze to Jordan<sup>[65]</sup>. To be sure, a report sent by the Iraqi Commissioner in Damascus to the Iraqi Foreign Ministry in September 1947 stated tat: "There are serious communications between Sultan Pasha al-Atrash and some senior officers in Amman for purpose of arranging a meeting between both parties to discuss the Greater Syrian issue. The report highlighted that Tawfiq al-Atrash and Hussein al-Atrash, cousins of Sultan al-Atrash accompanied with other persons visited Amman twice in 1947, who were favored by meeting King Abdullah at the Prime Ministry, whereat bilateral talks were conversed about Greater Syria issue<sup>[66]</sup>.

The Syrian Ministry of Interior's documents also showed that both prince Meteb al-Atrash, Sayah al-Atrash, Hayel al-Atrash, Hussein & Nayef al-Atrash and Tawfiq al-Atrash were operating a propaganda campaign in favor of Greater Syria plan, and were making shuttle visits between Jordan and Syria for that purpose<sup>[67]</sup>.

In his book, Patrick Seil narrated that Prince Hussein al-Atrash called King Abdullah in 1947 to break into, occupy and annex the Jebel to Transjordan. In turn, the British government intercepted so doing by King Abdullah<sup>[68]</sup>. Furthermore, the British documents highlight that the Druze, Alawi, and Bedouin clans support Greater Syria Plan, and reject the established republican regime<sup>[69]</sup>. In the same direction, a letter from Prince Hussein al-Atrash dated 25 May 1947 reassured his support and allegiance to the endeavors led by King

Abdullah in this matter<sup>[70]</sup>.

In addition to great support given to Greater Syria Plan by parties and common people in Syria, there were prominent high ranking political persons who were known to be supporting the plan, particularly Aal al-Kilani, most importantly Said al-Kilani, who was the most vigor activist promoting the monarchy in Syria, and they had strong relations with Amman<sup>[71]</sup>. In Said's view: inheritors of Faisal Illegal and perceivable interest in the Syria's throne, that should be restored to them. The homage done by the Syrian people to King Faisal and successors expresses will and aspiration of the sons of Syria in its four provinces; and considering the French occupation terminated the Arabic government of Faisal when the Syrian people was most attached to King Faisal and his monarchical system, so its is necessary to return to the original and revoke the republican regime because it was invented by the French occupation which was displeased by the Syrian people<sup>[72]</sup>.

Among the independent Syrian politicians supportive to Greater Syria Plan and relevant efforts by King Abdullah was Hasan al-Hakeem. This is evident in the letter sent by him on 25 May 1946 to the Syrian government criticizing its aggressive policy against King Abdullah's orientation targeting unity of greater Syria; considering proposals by King Abdullah a viable step in way towards pan-Arabism; and forming a security element for the whole Shamite region, particularly Palestine vis-à-vis the Zionist threat. The note called Syrian government to provide support for Greater Syria issue that is the hope and aspiration expressed by the Syrian people in different occasions<sup>[73]</sup>.

This standing was further confirmed by al-Hakeem in a letter sent to the President of the State in May 1946 criticizing the Syrian government's actions intended to prevent many national persons from traveling to Jordan in order to attend the Independence Day festivals. He said in the note: "I was invited to attend the festivals of Jordan's independence proclamation and paying homage with monarchy to the master of the country, pivot of the

Hashemite family, successor of the Arab renaissance, Abdullah bin al Hussein, I was believing the Syrian government will be glad with this national celebration, and would send an official delegation, similar to other Arab governments, and reward back this brother country for sharing us rejoice in our Independence celebrations on the Jalaa Day. To my surprise, the government not only restrained from participation, but also attempted through the Public Security preventing travel everyone supporting attendance of that festival. They sent someone to tell me that if wanted participate in the celebrations, you no longer entitled to use the special passport given to me by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign to go to Amman.

In addition, he criticized the aggressive policy of the Syrian government against Jordan and King Abdullah personally, saying in that regard: "I know, Mr. President, that the Syrian Government in many occasions has proved too much unfriendly attitudes towards the sublime Hashmite family, with inattention to its favors on these lands by saving them from the hands of the Slaughterer Jamal Pasha; liberating the lands from the Turkish ruling authority; and also disregarded his sacrifices in the Arab Greater Revolt, which was triggered and led for sake of the Arab unity and independence; and neglected also the favor of Transjordan itself on the Syrian Revolution's Mujahedeen who were embraced with compassion and caring. I never thought that such aversion would go beyond political protocols, comity and courteousness. Especially the covenant of the Arab League requires strengthening interrelations and bilateral ties among these countries... Surely it is injudicious and unwise provisions". Ultimately, al-Hakeem ended his letter with a word of caution to the Syrian President from following such a parochial hostile policy against Jordan<sup>[74]</sup>.

The standing regarding the Syrian Unity was expressly confirmed in a Press Conference held in February 1951, when Hasan al-Hakeem responded to a question asked by a journalist about the ways that should be followed by Syria in responsive to risk of a comprehensive war or Zionist threats. In the context he

said: "The Arab States have to reunite altogether, if this was impractical due to problems or difficulties impeding every single Arab state, then Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Iraq should unite... through this micro union, risks can be confronted, as these countries are at serious risk more than others; however, the door still open for other countries to join.

Further, he called for establishing understanding between united Syria and Turkey by concluding mutual defense agreement, or friendship and best neighboring agreements at least between both parties, so long as Turkey lies on the frontline to defend the Middle East and Arabs next; he encouraged also accession to the Western block to ensure arms and aids, that could not be obtained otherwise; and most Arab countries have signed political agreements with the Western powers. These countries have to get aligned voluntarily.

Instead of being forced to do so, and such voluntary alignment will ensure for the Arabs freedom and intactness, and help them find solutions for their pending problems, mainly the Palestinian cause, if the Arabs could negotiate effectively. He said: "neutrality is a sort of imagination when we are weak, and the stronger does not respect the neutrality of a weak; so, if it was necessary at wartime for the strong party to invade the neutral lands, they will not hesitate; and even if such neutrality was bad, it is nonetheless inevitable, because neutrality- under such conditions-means hostility to super powers". Then he added: "if we were not strong enough, we have at least to be wise"<sup>[75]</sup>. As for the form the Syrian government will take, al-Hakeem articulated that this is a secondary issue vis-à-vis unity which is essential, and this issue will be left for the Syrian people to decide on. This view by al-Hakeem regarding the Syrian unity is largely consistent with that of King Abdullah<sup>[76]</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

After the previous discussion, a conclusion that can be safely made is that the Greater Syria Plan and related endeavors by King Abdullah for unity was emanating from

the unity conceptualization from the perspective of the Arab Great Revolt, and stand in harmony with the nation's aspirations and prospects for liberty and independence, and in the same time forms continuation of the Arab awakening movement commenced as early as the late quarter of the Nineteenth century. By no means was the call for unity of the Shamite provinces propelled with personal greed or else a puppet in hands of the imperial powers, as once rumored by the opposition and other parties standing against the plan, particularly the ruling authority in Syria as then represented by the National Block.

The documentary resources on which this study depended confirm that the aggressive position taken by Syrian the Government that repudiates Greater Syria Plan was not only a reflection of Syrian people's will and wishes, but also reflected self-interest of the then statesmen that is best served if only Syria remained autonomous; and secondly if were responsive with the desires of the French Government patronizing them, on the other hand, who considered a unity in the Shamite provinces as a threat to their imperial interests in the region. In addition, the Syrian government was subjected to the influence of some Arab regimes taking a hostile position against the plan, mainly Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, the documentary resources reviewed, basically that of the Syrian Ministry of Interior indicate that the vast majority of the Syrian people including the representative political actors were fully convinced with the unity of the Shamite provinces within an integrate state on the ground that such unity will be the first step towards pan-Arabism; and represents the optimum choice to face the imperial challenges, mainly the Zionist threat. The documents reviewed also demonstrated that major part of the Syrian people was considering the republican system as being contrived by the French in Syria under occupation, so it should be revoked, and reverse, instead, to the Hashemite monarchical system that was willingly accepted by the people of Syria in its four provinces at the Public Syrian Conference held in Damascus 8 March 1920. Unsurprisingly, when King

Abdullah bin A Hussein proclaimed for unity of greater Syria, there was large acceptance and support mostly

among the grassroots and their representative political currents existing in all Syrian provinces.

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## الموقف السوري غير الحكومي تجاه مشروع سوريا الكبرى

عبدالرحمن عواد الفواز، أحمد خليف العفيف\*

### ملخص

تناول هذا البحث الموقف السوري غير الحكومي ممثلاً بمجلس النواب والأحزاب والقوى الشعبية العامة من مشروع سوريا الكبرى الذي طرحه الملك عبد الله الأول بن الحسين خلال العقد الرابع من القرن العشرين بهدف توحيد سوريا الطبيعية بأقاليمها الأربع (الأردن وسوريا الشمالية وفلسطين ولبنان) في إطار دولة واحدة. فقد أكدت الدراسة من خلال الرجوع إلى المصادر الوثائقية الأصلية أن الموقف الشعبي السوري كان مغايراً للموقف الحكومي، ففي الوقت الذي أعلنت فيه الحكومة السورية في ذلك الوقت معارضتها الشديدة للمشروع - من منطلق حرص رجال الحكومة على مصالحهم الشخصية وتجاوياً مع رغبة الحكومة الفرنسية الداعمة لهم وبعض الحكومات العربية المعارضة للمشروع - نجد أن هناك قبول وتأييد كبير لمشروع سوريا الكبرى ومساعي الملك عبد الله الوحشية من قبل معظم الأوساط الشعبية السورية والتيارات السياسية الممثلة له، انطلاقاً من الإيمان بوحدة الديار الشامية كأساس أول في تحقيق مصلحة البلاد العليا، والخطوة الأولى في طريق الوحدة العربية، والخيار الأمثل في مواجهة التحدي الصهيوني.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الموقف السوري غير الحكومي، الملك عبدالله الأول، مشروع سوريا الكبرى.

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