

“TAKING BACK” THE CALIPHATE: SHARĪF HUSAYN IBN ‘ALĪ, MUSTAFA KEMAL AND THE OTTOMAN CALIPHATE

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It has been established elsewhere that gaining the Caliphate for the Hāshimite family was a consuming interest for the Sharīf of Mecca, Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, and his son ‘Abdallāh.¹ The desire to take the Caliphate played a cardinal role in his decision to revolt against the Ottomans. As Ḥusayn would have it, he was revolting not to establish a kingdom in the Hidjāz, and not simply a large Arab state, but to establish a replacement Islamic polity, in which the Arabs, led by the Hāshimites, would take their rightful place.

Bolstered by a position held by many Arab intellectuals and political leaders, namely, that the Caliphate should be held by Quraysh, that within Quraysh it should be held by the Prophet’s house, and that the *ashrāf* of Mecca were the most qualified, Ḥusayn sought British help.² Through a series of British blunders, he was encouraged to believe that he had the backing of England for his project.³

Ḥusayn eventually claimed the Caliphate for himself in March

¹ See Joshua Teitelbaum, “Sharif Husayn ibn Ali and the Hashemite Vision of the Post-Ottoman Order: From Chieftaincy to Suzerainty,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (January 1998), pp. 103-122. The primary sources used in the present article consist mostly of the *al-Qibla* newspaper and archival documents from the British Public Record Office, Kew. To the best of my knowledge, Turkish archival sources for the period under discussion are not available to researchers.

² On this idea in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Teitelbaum, l.c.; Elie Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and Its Interpretations* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Eliezer Tauber, “Three Approaches, One Idea: Religion and State in the Thought of ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, Najib ‘Azuri and Rashid Rida,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1994), pp. 190-198.

³ This has been widely discussed; see, for example, Kedourie, pp. 16-20.

1924, when it was abolished by the Kemalist government. But this was only the final chapter in a fascinating episode: Ḥusayn's attempt to have the Ottoman family or the Turkish nationalists grant him the Caliphate, and what may have been nationalist exploration of the possibility of "exporting" that office. This is a story of a coalescing of interests of two former enemies, as they faced a common adversary, the British. But there were also several internal factors that moved Hāshimites and Kemalists to seek common cause.

The Turkish Nationalists, the Sultanate, and the Caliphate

In July 1918 Sultan Mehmet V died and was replaced by Vahdettin, who took the name Mehmet Vahdettin VI. On 30 October, his representatives signed the Armistice of Mudros which ended hostilities between the Entente and the Ottomans. The armistice was a full capitulation, including the occupation of the straits, the demobilization and disarmament of the Ottoman army, and permission for the victorious armies to occupy any place in the empire which threatened their security. Vahdettin was determined to appease the Entente in order to achieve a peace treaty favorable to Istanbul. His *weltanschauung* was that of the dynast, concerned for the position of the Ottoman family as the holder of the Caliphate and Istanbul as the seat of that institution. As such, he followed an anti-nationalist policy.⁴

In Anatolia, the nationalists, led by Mustafa Kemal Paşa (Atatürk), set about organizing resistance to the occupation of Turkey, and were ultimately responsible for the defeat of the Greeks, who had invaded Turkey in May 1919.

Although the Sultan-Caliph was known to be following a policy of appeasement, he still remained an important symbol of the glorious Ottoman past. In April 1920 the nationalist Grand National Assembly met in Ankara, with the purported aim of supporting the Sultan-Caliph. His reaction was to sentence Mustafa Kemal

⁴ Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), pp. 138-139, 142.

to death. The Ottoman Shaykh al-Islām issued a *fatwā* stipulating that all true believers should try to kill the nationalists; Kemal countered with a *fatwā* from the *muftī* of Ankara, which declared the government traitors. He was also careful to stress that the nationalist movement was fighting against the government for the protection and honor of the Sultanate and the Caliphate.⁵

Vahdettin signed the treaty of Sèvres in August 1920. The document left only the smallest of a state in Asia Minor for the Turks, recognized an independent Armenia, gave Izmir and Eastern Thrace to the Greeks, and internationalized the straits. The Entente powers did not have the will to enforce these terms, and accepted a Greek offer to do so. The Greek-Turkish war which ensued until 1922 ended with a Turkish victory, in which Kemal and İsmet Paşa (İnönü) played a key role.⁶

The nationalist victory over Greece, and the Sultan-Caliph's signing of the humiliating Treaty of Sèvres greatly boosted the position of Mustafa Kemal. It was at this juncture, in discussions with journalists, that Kemal first publicly broached the idea of establishing a republic and abolishing the Caliphate.⁷

But first, there was a need to renegotiate the Treaty of Sèvres from the nationalists' newly found position of strength. The conference, to be convened in Lausanne, was hosted by Britain, France, Greece and Italy, who in October 1922 invited *both* the Sultan-Caliph's Istanbul government and the nationalists from Ankara. While the Entente hoped to play these two parties one against the other, their invitation actually constituted the death knell for the Sultanate.⁸

Atatürk was determined to abolish the Sultanate and the Caliphate, and to assert the Grand National Assembly as the sovereign authority. There could be no other representation for Turkey at

⁵ Zürcher, pp. 158-159; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 249-250.

⁶ Zürcher, p. 153.

⁷ Zürcher, pp. 166-167.

⁸ Salahi Ramsdan Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy, 1918-1923: Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish National Movement* (London: Sage, 1975), p. 186; Zürcher, p. 168; Halil inalçık, "The Caliphate and Atatürk's inkilap," *Turkish Quarterly Review Digest* 2 (Spring 1987), pp. 25-36.

Lausanne. All the same, for the time being he left the Caliphate untouched, and made the calculated move of abolishing the Sultanate only. In his famous speech, known as the *Nutuk*, he described Vahdettin as a "degenerate, who, by infamous means, sought only to guard his own person and throne."⁹

On 1 November 1922 the Turkish Grand National Assembly voted to separate the Caliphate from the Sultanate, abolishing the latter and removing from the Ottomans all temporal powers. The Assembly noted that the Caliphate would remain in the Ottoman house, but it was the state which would choose the member of the house who was worthy and fitting in learning and character.¹⁰

First Contact

One man watching the events in Istanbul with particular interest was Sharif Husayn b. 'Alī, who had long coveted the Caliphate. Although the Hāshimites had revolted against the Ottomans, once the World War was over both sides sought to make common cause against the British. Husayn was angered at the lack of support for his ambitions, and Kemal wanted Arab support against the British and the French. The Sharif also thought that Kemal's moves to abolish the Sultanate and the Caliphate provided him with the justification needed to assume the latter office, and he tried to have both the ex-Sultan-Caliph and Kemal offer him the Caliphate. Kemal seemed to be considering that "exporting" the Caliphate might be an effective way to solve his domestic problems.

Both Husayn and his son Fayṣal had contact with Kemal's nationalists. Fayṣal's contacts came out of his desire for an ally against the French; Husayn, who was at odds with Fayṣal after the war, was interested in securing the Caliphate. Father and son were not on good terms, and often operated at cross purposes.

The first recorded contacts between the Hāshimites and Kemal's nationalists seem to have been initiated by Fayṣal in 1919. Fayṣal was interested in finding a way to cooperate against the French in

⁹ Lewis, p. 246.

¹⁰ Lewis, pp. 257-259.

Syria, and he was impressed with Kemal's accomplishments. Kemal calculated that undermining French rule in Syria would improve his position against them in Cilicia. Turkish nationalist propaganda flooded Syria, urging common cause in the name of Islam. In the spring of 1920, Fayṣal went to Aleppo to meet with Kemalist envoys; nothing, however, came of these contacts.¹¹

But by the summer of 1920, the Hāshimites had an even better reason to seek an alliance: the British had stood idly by while the French had crushed Fayṣal in Syria. In September, the British Arab Bureau in Cairo received reports that Ḥusayn had contacted Kemal. The British representative in Jeddah confirmed that the issue was widely discussed in Mecca; while cautious in his assessment, the representative believed there to be some truth to the reports. Although Ḥusayn's official newspaper, *al-Qibla*, issued a denial, a new bi-weekly, *al-Falāh*, headlined its issue with "Mustafa Kemal Swears Allegiance to King Ḥusayn."¹²

British agent Captain Nasiruddin also reported from Mecca that "a message is said to have come" from one of Ḥusayn's other sons, 'Abdallāh, saying that he was in contact with the Kemalists, and that contacts were under way for the Caliphate to be offered to Ḥusayn in exchange for declaring open hostilities against the Allies. Batten, Acting British Agent in Jeddah, was inclined to discount an open rapprochement between the King and Mustafa

¹¹ Sonyel, pp. 22, 74-75; Zeine Zeine, *The Struggle for Arab Independence* (Beirut: Khayat's, 1960), p. 123, 147-148; Malcolm Russell, *The First Modern Arab State: Syria under Fayṣal, 1918-1920* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1985), pp. 139, 171. Sonyel, p. 32, notes that reports of an actual agreement signed between Fayṣal and the Kemalists are a matter of dispute. See also Gotthard Jäschke, "Ein scherifisches Bündnisangebot an Mustafa Kemal. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der arabisch-türkischen Beziehungen," in Wilhelm Hoenerbach (ed.), *Der Orient in der Forschung: Festschrift für Otto Spies* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967), pp. 371-394, who notes that in early 1920 Syrian nationalists, over Fayṣal's objections, met with a committee representing Mustafa Kemal in Istanbul. They reached a tentative agreement on cooperation against the allies, but it was rejected by Fayṣal, who at the time still held out hope for British help against the French.

¹² FO (British Foreign Office) 686/26, JEDDAH REPORT—20th-30th September, 1920; FO 686/12, Confidential Report by Captain Mian Nasir-ud-din Ahmad, Mecca, for period ending 19th September, 1920; FO 686/12, Ihsanullah to Batten, 26 September 1920.

Kemal, but hedged that the "possibility must[,] however[,] still be kept in view."¹³

While the Sultanate was not abolished until 1922, in November 1920 the British Secret Intelligence Service—the S.I.S.—reported that the issue was already being discussed in Islamic circles in Switzerland. Many supported Ḥusayn for the Caliphate, the S.I.S. believed, and it was the prevailing opinion among Turks there.¹⁴

There were other incidents and reports that suggested the existence of ongoing Ḥāshimite-Kemalist contacts. Ḥusayn's son 'Abdallāh was reported to have met a Kemalist envoy near Azraq in northern Transjordan in December 1920, and in the same month a Turkish officer arrived in Mecca for talks with Ḥusayn.¹⁵ It is unlikely that any real agreement was reached between Kemal and Ḥusayn. The British Agent assessed that communications had passed between the two, as Ḥusayn considered himself aggrieved by the British, and may have wanted to keep his options open. But he was not so reckless as to confront the only Power in a position to help him.¹⁶

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Following the 1 November 1922 abolishment of the Sultanate, *al-Qibla* issued a special edition in which Ḥusayn announced that the Sultan-Caliph had asked for British protection; the King extended an invitation to the Sultan to come to the Ḥidjāz.¹⁷ The reigning Sultan-Caliph, Vahdettin, did not wait around to see what the Assembly thought of him. On 17 November he surreptitiously boarded a British warship docked at Istanbul, insisting that he had not abdicated. He signed his application for asylum: "Caliph of the Muslims."¹⁸ The Assembly promptly deposed him, electing Abdülmecit

¹³ FO 686/12, Mecca Report to 1st January 1921 by Captain Nasiruddin, Mecca, 19 January 1921; FO 686/27, Jeddah Report 11th-20th January 1921.

¹⁴ FO 371/5058/E 14781, Secret Intelligence Service, Political Report, 23 November 1920.

¹⁵ FO 371/5177, British Agent (Jeddah), to FO, No. 410, 14 December 1920; FO 686/12, Ihsanullah (Mecca), to British Agent (Jeddah), 18 December 1920.

¹⁶ FO 686/26, JEDDAH REPORT—1st-10th October 1920.

¹⁷ FO 686/28, JEDDAH REPORT, November 1st to 30th, 1922.

¹⁸ Neville Henderson (Acting High Commissioner), Constantinople, to Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, No. 1024A, 17 November 1922, Doc. 262, in *British*

as Caliph.¹⁹ Vahdettin headed for the *Ḥidjāz*, as did the *Shaykh* al-Islām, Muṣṭafā Ṣabṛī. Ḥusayn may have considered using Ṣabṛī in his Caliphal machinations. Ṣabṛī arrived on 5 December; the ex-Sultan did so in the second week of January, 1923.²⁰

The action of the National Assembly met with bitter criticism in the pages of *al-Qibla*; mostly quoting other papers, it decried the removal of temporal power from the Caliph as entirely against Islam. The new Caliph, Abdūlmecit, whom some papers said had distinguished himself in poetry and painting, was contrasted with the early—Arab—Caliphs, who had strictly followed God's law.²¹ It was left to the readers of *al-Qibla* to divine just which modern leader followed in the path of the Rāshidūn. The paper reported Vahdettin's movements as he left Malta, then Port Sa'īd, and then his arrival in Jeddah.²² The arrival of Vahdettin was accompanied by much pomp and circumstance, and *al-Qibla* went out of its way to describe the magnificence of the royal welcome enjoyed by the deposed Sultan.²³ Upon his arrival in Mecca, reported the paper on 22 January 1923, the ex-Sultan put on the *iḥrām* (pilgrim garb), and performed the *ṭawāf* (circumambulation of the Ka'ba) and other rituals.²⁴

The reason underlying Ḥusayn's sudden hospitality for the deposed Sultan-Caliph was the same as that behind his tentative negotiations with the Kemalists. He hoped to have the Caliphate bestowed upon him. The first concrete indication of this was in a conversation between Dr. Nāḍjī al-Aṣīl, *Ḥidjāz* representative in London, and E.C. Forbes Adam of the Foreign Office on 12 January 1923 in Lausanne. Aṣīl said that Ḥusayn would try to persuade

Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. Part II, From the First to the Second World War, Series B, Turkey, Iran, and the Middle East, 1918-1939, vol. 1 (London: University Publications of America, 1997), pp. 150-152.

¹⁹ Lewis, p. 259.

²⁰ FO 686/123, Curzon, Lausanne, to British Agent, Jeddah, 20 November 1922; FO 686/28, JEDDAH REPORT December 1st-31st 1922; and JEDDAH REPORT January 1st-31st, 1923.

²¹ *Al-Qibla*, No. 651, 8 January; No. 656, 25 January; No. 657, 29 January 1923.

²² *Al-Qibla*, No. 651, 8 January; No. 652, 11 January; No. 653, 15 January 1923.

²³ *Al-Qibla*, No. 653, 15 January 1923.

²⁴ *Al-Qibla*, No. 655, 22 January 1923.

an international delegation of *ḥudjdjā* during the *ḥadīdj* to petition him to take the office upon himself. The ex-Sultan would then come forward and offer Ḥusayn the Caliphate, "thus reversing voluntarily the forced seizure of the Caliphate by Sultan Selim I in 1517 from the last Arab Caliph."²⁵

King Ḥusayn was not successful in persuading Vahdettin to endorse his Caliphal pretensions. Grafftey-Smith, Acting British Consul in Jeddah, reported that he had a copy of an intriguing document published in Turkish and in Arabic, in which the ex-Caliph apologized for his actions from the date of his accession, attacked the Kemalists for tampering with the Caliphate, and gave effusive gratitude to Ḥusayn. But Vahdettin had not signed the manifesto, and all copies were immediately withdrawn from circulation. It appears that the document had been prepared for the signature of the ex-Sultan-Caliph, but that he had refused to sign it.²⁶

The ex-Sultan-Caliph, meanwhile, was satisfied neither with the religious delights of Mecca nor the salubrious mountain air of Ṭā'if; he informed the British representative that he wanted to leave for either Haifa or Cyprus. Ḥusayn did not hide his contempt for a Muslim leader who would abandon the *Ḥidjāz* for other parts, especially during Ramaḍān and before the pilgrimage, and despite the unique propaganda such a constellation presented. But try as he might, Ḥusayn could not prevail upon the ex-Caliph to stay, and he left in May 1923 for Switzerland.²⁷

Ḥusayn was, however, able to get one bit of useful propaganda out of the ex-Caliph. Negotiations had begun in Lausanne on 20 November 1922 for a final revision of the Treaty of Sèvres to reflect the victories of the nationalists. During negotiations in Lausanne in January 1923, Ḥusayn had asked the British to secure for

²⁵ FO 371/9135/E 601, Forbes Adam to Curzon, 12 January 1923.

²⁶ FO 686/28, JEDDAH REPORT, April 1st-April 30 1923. According to a report in *The Times*, Vahdettin did send a telegraph of support to Ḥusayn when he proclaimed himself Caliph (see below; FO 371/10217/E 2276, clipping from *The Times*, 13 March 1924).

²⁷ FO 686/28, JEDDAH REPORT, March 1st-March 31st 1923; JEDDAH REPORT, April 1st-30th 1923; JEDDAH REPORT, May 1st-29th 1923.

him the treasures of the Medinan *ḥaram* (*al-Ḥaram al-Nabawī*) which had been spirited away by the Ottoman commander of Medina, Fahri Paşa. For Ḥusayn, it was important to receive these as they would increase his importance in the Muslim world, particularly after the Caliph had been stripped of his temporal authority. For the British, it was another card to play with the Turks. Whitehall wanted to pose as the defender of Islam, returning robbed relics, many of which had been donated by Indian princes. The British wished to include a clause in the treaty with Turkey binding Ankara to restore the treasures. The Turks refused to budge, claiming that the relics belonged to the Caliph in his capacity as a religious leader, and that the Conference had no jurisdiction over the matter. Meanwhile, Ḥusayn was able to obtain from the ex-Sultan-Caliph a signed statement stipulating that Fahri had removed the treasures on the latter's own authority, without any *irade* from the Sultan-Caliph.²⁸ Ḥusayn thought he had the matter sewn up, but in the event the British refused to press the issue, and to Ḥusayn's chagrin no clauses regarding the treasures of the Medinan *ḥaram* nor the *Awqāf al-Ḥaramayn* were included in the Lausanne Treaty of Peace with Turkey, signed on 24 July 1923.²⁹

Whereas Vahdettin had not proven compliant, the Turkish nationalist option still remained to be explored. In early February 1923, during the Lausanne Conference, a secret meeting was held at the Hotel Cecil in the rooms of the Egyptian delegation; it was observed by an agent of the British S.I.S. Present were Ḥusayn's representative, Nādjī al-Aṣīl, Shakīb Arslān, Nūrī al-Sa'īd, Dja'far al-ʿAskarī, Ismā'īl Ṣidqī, Aḥmad Luṭfī Bey and two Indian nationalists. Aṣīl stated that he was authorized to propose that if Turkey were prepared to recognize Ḥusayn "as king of all the Arabian Peninsula," Ḥusayn "would undertake to use all his influence in Arabia to befriend Turkey against England and would in fact be

²⁸ FO 371/8936/E 1199, Curzon (Lausanne) to FO, No. 248, 30 January 1923; FO 371/8936/E 1404, Secretary of State (India) to Viceroy, P. 429, 2 February 1923; FO 686/59, Acting British Agent (Jeddah), to FO, 4 May 1923.

²⁹ See Ḥusayn's protests in FO 371/8955/E 8836, Fuad al Khatib, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to British Agent (Jeddah), No. 969, 10 August 1923.

quite prepared to enter into an offensive and defensive alliance with her." Al-ʿAskarī seconded the motion and offered the support of Iraq, which would scrap its treaty with Britain, if Turkey would recognize Arab independence (and, probably, give up its claim to Mosul). Ḥusayn hoped to use this recognition as a stepping stone to the Caliphate.

Aṣīl, Arslān, and two Indian activists—accompanied this time by Syrian nationalist Iḥsān al-Djabrī—went to see the Turkish representative to the Lausanne Conference, General İsmet Paşa on 4 February. They repeated Aṣīl's proposal; İsmet replied that Turkey would recognize the independence of "Arabia," but could only recognize Ḥusayn as king of such an entity if the Arabs themselves did so. While not willing to discuss Mosul, he was prepared to recognize the independence of Mesopotamia. He appealed to Aṣīl for Ḥusayn to drop his previous enmity to Turkey, and unite with it against the English. The British Agent SW/1 confirmed that further communication had been carried out between Turkey and Ḥusayn later that month.³⁰ There is no indication that they actually offered him the Caliphate, but recognition as king of "Arabia" would have been seen by Ḥusayn as a move in that direction.

As early as March 1923, reports began to appear that Ḥusayn was planning a trip to Northern and Southern Syria.³¹ He eventually arrived in Transjordan in January 1924. Ḥusayn had some significant support from Palestinians,³² and his son was already established in Transjordan. Ḥusayn saw the visit as a vehicle to show that he had support that went beyond the Ḥidjāz, and it may have been in preparation for having himself declared Caliph. With the Saʿūdī leader ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Ibn Saʿūd)

³⁰ FO 371/8937/E 4075, SECRET NEGOTIATIONS DURING THE LAUSANNE CONFERENCE, 27 March 1923, enclosed in M[alcolm] W[oolcombe], SIS Section Ia, to Oliphant, 28 March 1923.

³¹ *Al-Qibla*, No. 671, 19 March 1923. For a more detailed discussion of events leading up to the proclamation of the Sharīfian Caliphate, see Joshua Teitelbaum, "Sharif Ḥusayn ibn Ali and the Hashemite Vision of the Post-Ottoman Order," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (January 1998), pp. 103-122.

³² On Palestinian support for Ḥusayn in 1922-23, see Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 82-83.

threatening the Hidjāz, and without significant British support, it appeared that Husayn viewed achieving the Caliphate as his last chance.

Husayn's travel northwards was accompanied by a constant flow of announcements in *al-Qibla*, detailing his progress and the rousing reception he received in each location, each of which was deemed so wonderful as to be beyond written description.³³ The build-up in the reportage continued, as Husayn distributed 580 gold pounds to "Christians, Jews and Arabs" in Jerusalem.³⁴ Indeed, his visit of two months relegated 'Abdallāh to a secondary role, as delegations from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, as well as British officials and a Zionist delegation went to see him in 'Ammān.³⁵ Such a reception must have been gratifying to the old man.

Probably the most striking evidence of the connection between the visit to Transjordan and the assumption of the Caliphate was an article that appeared in *al-Qibla* on 11 February 1924 under the headline, "The Caliphate and the Arabs: The Faith of the Arab *Umma* in His Majesty the Savior, His Defense of Its Rights." As the article described the mass receptions as support received by the King in Transjordan, and the hopes of the populace for the return of the Caliphate, Husayn promised that in order to put them at ease, he would "do his utmost to establish the Caliphate."³⁶

Meanwhile, Kemal was on his way to abolishing the Caliphate. This was no mean task, since conservative forces as well as some nationalist leaders continued to support the idea of Turkey as the leader of the Muslim world. Caliph Abdülmecit assumed the role of head of the conservative forces. The newspaper *Tanin* questioned

³³ *Al-Qibla*, No. 752, 7 January; No. 754, 14 January; No. 755, 17 January; No. 756, 21 January; No. 757, 24 January; No. 761, 7 February 1924. For a collection of the hundreds of messages of congratulations received by the Sharīf, see Muḥammad Yūsuf al-'Abādī, *Al-Rihla al-Mulūkiyya min Makka al-Mukarrama ilā 'Ammān wa'l-Bay'a al-Kubrā bil-Khilāfa lil-Sharīf al-Husayn b. 'Alī* ('Ammān: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1996).

³⁴ *Al-Qibla*, No. 760, 4 February 1924.

³⁵ Mary Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain, and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 79.

³⁶ *Al-Qibla*, No. 762, 11 February 1924.

what would become of the Caliphate if the President was head of state: "If we lose the Caliphate, the state of Turkey ... would lose all importance in the world of Islam ..." From January to March 1923, Kemal campaigned in western and central Anatolia to abolish the Caliphate. He argued forcefully against it as a retrograde institution which stood in the way of modernization. In October, he became President and head of state.³⁷

On 3 March 1924, with Husayn still in Transjordan, Turkey abolished the Caliphate. By this time, Husayn's position was nearing its nadir. He had suffered several defeats by Ibn Sa'ūd's *ikhwān*, and the British would no longer help him. Mecca would fall that same year. He grabbed his last opportunity, and a few days later proclaimed his Caliphate. The official announcement came from 'Abdallāh's winter camp:

The step taken by the Ankara Government towards this honorable office [i.e., the Caliphate] has led the religious authorities in the *ḥaramayn al-ṣharīfayn* and the al-Aqṣā Mosque and neighboring countries...to surprise us and compel us to accept the Great Imamate and the Grand Caliphate.... Almighty God knows that our sole object is to serve Islam and my people the inhabitants of Arabia (*al-Djazīra*) in particular, and the Muslims in general.

The newly self-proclaimed Caliph concluded by inviting subscriptions for the maintenance of the deposed Ottoman House.³⁸

In mid-March 1924, 'Abdallāh, trying to save face after what was generally viewed as a pathetic move, told a correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*:

They [the Turks] have rendered the greatest possible service to the Arabs. I feel like sending a telegram thanking Mustafa Kemal. The Khalifate is an Arab institution. The Prophet was an Arab, the Koran is in Arabic, the Holy Places are in Arabia, and the Khalif should be an Arab of the tribe of Koreish.... *Now the Khalifate has come back to Arabia.*³⁹

³⁷ Inalcık; Zürcher, pp. 174-175; Lewis, pp. 262-264.

³⁸ Husayn's Caliphate Proclamation, 11 March 1924, in 'Abdallāh bin al-Husayn, *Mudhakkirātī* (Jerusalem, 1945), pp. 197-200; see also FO 371/10212/E 2608, Fuad El Khatib, Foreign Minister Hashemite Arabic Government (Shunneh, Amman) to FO, 13 March 1924.

³⁹ FO 371/10217/E 2286, clipping from the *Manchester Guardian*, 13 March 1924. Emphasis mine.

Nothing ever came of the contacts between the Kemalists and the Hāshimites. Mustafa Kemal viewed the Sultanate-Caliphate as a mill stone around the neck of the Republic, preventing it from moving forward as a modern, European nation. From the circumstantial evidence, it certainly appears as if he was exploring the possibility of “exporting” the Caliphate to Sharif Husayn b. ‘Alī. The Ottoman house showed no real interest in passing on the Caliphate to the Hashemites. As for the Sharif, he was desperate for his ill-fated Arab Revolt not to end solely in a truncated Hidjāzī state. He had pined for the Caliphate, but balked at seizing it lest he be considered a usurper of the legitimate authority. Abandoned by the British and under attack by Ibn Sa‘ūd, he grabbed the Caliphate the moment Kemal abolished it. Alas, his Caliphate was recognized by few, and the office vanished into oblivion.