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Syria and Iraq as Proxy Colonies before Colonization: The Ottoman Vali versus the Western Consul in the Era of Capitulations

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Abstract

This study tries to show that European policies influenced not only the Ottoman center at Istanbul in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also the workings of the provincial administrations as well. Ottoman Syria and Iraq were, according to this assessment, proxy colonies before the direct colonization of post World War I.

Keywords

Ottoman Syria – Ottoman Iraq – Midhat Pasha – Sultan Abdulhamid – Provincial administration – Congress of Berlin – The Capitulations – The Consuls – Druze – Centralization – Decentralization – Nazim Pasha – Mediterranean – Beirut

Albert Hourani once observed that “diplomatic and consular reports must be treated with caution because those who wrote them were themselves actors in the political process, and wrote their reports not simply as a historical record of events but, often, to justify themselves to their government or persuade it to adopt a certain line of action.”¹ Leila Fawaz has spoken of the duality of the Ottoman and European presence since 1840 in Beirut, a duality that may have been specific and general in Ottoman lands then, and which set the tone for

¹ Albert Hourani, “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of the Notables”, in his *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 36-66, here 40.