

May 1939

'Mukafahat al-fashishtiyya!' ('Combatting Fascism!')

Citation:

"'Mukafahat al-fashishtiyya!' ('Combatting Fascism!')", May 1939, Wilson Center Digital Archive, al-Tali'a 5, no. 5 (1939): 347-348. Original contributed by Götz Nordbruch; translated and annotated by Cyrus Schayegh.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/291027>

Summary:

The text printed here is the editor's preface in Arabic in an issue of the Beirut-based leftist journal Tali'a that was dedicated to the Conference for Combatting Fascism held in May 1939 in Beirut.

Led by leftists, including communists, the conference was a well-publicized and well-attended call for action against Nazism and Fascism. It affirmed an alliance, against Nazi Germany (and Fascist Italy) with France, the Mandate occupier of Lebanon and Syria. At the same time, it insisted on the pressing need for political progress. Most important was the ratification by the French parliament, of the 1936 Franco-Syrian and Franco-Lebanese agreements that, like the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Agreement, would have ended the Mandate and granted Lebanon and Syria far-reaching sovereignty while preserving key French strategic interests. (Ratification never occurred.) In August 1939, the Soviet-German Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact forced communists to adjust their language also in the French Mandates. Here and in other Arab countries like Palestine and Egypt, a majority of people whose written records we possess and perhaps also many other inhabitants, felt caution if not aversion towards Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. They disliked how those two states organized their societies; were concerned about those states' territorial ends in the Middle East (which, however, were in the late 1930s actual only in Italy's case); and feared especially Nazi racism for potentially targeting them, like the Jews, as "Semites," as Israel Gershoni's edited volume *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion* (2014) and Götz Nordbruch's *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon* (2009) show.

At the same time, a considerable minority drew open inspiration from Nazi (and other European extreme rightwing) authoritarianism: its cult of a strong leaders, its emphasis on youth as national(ist) revivers, and its style and organizational forms, including salutes, uniforms, marches, and street brawls. Moreover, a small minority from the later 1930s sought to create a political-military alliance with Germany. Until 1939, Germany prevaricated, loath to provoke Britain, the principal power in the interwar Middle East. Thereafter, it did work with colonized nationalists who, as David Motadel's *"The Global Authoritarian Moment"* (2019) has shown, were willing to work with Berlin to become

independent. Among them were some Arabs like Hajj Amin al-Husseini (1895-1974), an exiled Palestinian leader whose wartime deeds and open anti-Semitism soon was, in the eyes of many, proof that Arabs in general had supported the Nazis.

Original Language:

Arabic

Contents:

Translation - English

On May 6 and 7 of this year, the Conference for Combatting Fascism convened in Beirut, the first of its kind in the Arab World. Despite a strike in the *sugs*, two hundred odd delegates from Syria and Lebanon representing 32 organizations. Moreover, dozens of individual delegates attended on their own or sent letters in support.

Al-Tali'a deems it appropriate to earmark this issue or most of it to the proceedings and decisions of this conference, given the significance of this weighty topic.

Fascism is not [simply] a theory or a principle that the Arab can discuss and either approve of or find ugly according to his inclinations and the information he has. No. Rather, fascism means an imminent danger for the Arab lands, after the appetites of the "Deutsche" and the "Führer" had become apparent. They are staring with fixed eyes to the Arab East, wanting to swallow it.

It's sufficient for you to note the extent of the Fascist and Nazi propaganda in the Arab World to confirm who is the raider and danger.

Calling to close ranks and to oppose the Fascist danger that is appearing closely on the horizon does not mean that we are not satisfied with the actions of the French and English governments in the Arab lands. Not at all: for the real democrats in France and England are not satisfied with the policy of their two governments in the Arab East. They constantly raise their voices demanding the just treatment of the Arab peoples, although these voices do not obtain for us our rights and what's connected to it. The reason for this is that those who steer imperialist policy are removed from democracy and serve Fascism's goals.

Indeed, the real democracy, the one for which we call and that we try to strengthen so that it will rid itself from tyrannical imperialism and its policy of violence and force and destruction, as is the case in slaughtered Palestine since the revolt started blazing in 1936 until now.

Al-Tali'a has fought and continues to fight all forms of injustice and oppression and pressure. Today more than ever before, she calls the literati and scholars to fight oppression and imperialism and to fight the danger of fascism in its greatest forms.