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al-Da'uq, Umar

By [Malek Sharif](#)

al-Da'uq, *Umar*

Mayor of Beirut during WWI; President of the short-lived Arab government of Beirut in early October 1918

Born 01 January 1874 in Beirut, Lebanon

Died 04 November 1949 in Beirut, Lebanon

Umar al-Da'uq was a merchant and notable of Beirut in the late Ottoman period. He was Mayor of Beirut during WWI and participated in his official and private capacities in the famine relief efforts. He became president of the short-lived Arab government of Beirut in October 1918.

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Early Life and Career

The son of Muhammad al-Da'uq, a merchant and owner of a successful foundry in Ras Beirut. Umar al-Da'uq (1874-1949) studied in the Jesuit school in Ain Tura, Mount Lebanon. He joined the family business at a young age, and expanded it to include *horlogerie*, bijouterie and trade in precious metals. In 1906 he was elected as a member of the municipal council of Beirut and became its auditor in 1908. In 1914 he initiated the enlargement of the chamber of commerce in Beirut to include the industrial activities in the city and became its president for life. He was appointed mayor of Beirut in 1915 after [Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum \(1878-1922\)](#) was deposed by the governor. al-Da'uq remained in this office during the early years of the French mandate until a special law for the

municipality of Beirut was promulgated in 1924. He was the president of the Maqasid Islamic Philanthropic Association from 1934 until his death in 1949.

World War I

In 1917, Umar al-Da'uq helped the Ottoman authorities to establish and run four refugee shelters for the starving children in the streets of Beirut and two workshops for needy women where they would be taught various crafts, given food and paid a symbolic wage. These establishments were run by volunteer notable women from Beirut. [Anbara Salam \(1897-1986\)](#) testifies that one of the workshops saved the lives of 1,000 women and young girls during the famine caused by the war conditions. Al-Da'uq also used his commercial connections to organize municipal relief efforts. The municipality bought grain from the Syrian interior and sold it at cost in Beirut. He also donated privately to relief funds. These efforts, however, remained short of decreasing the large number of starving poor residents and refugees seeking food in Beirut.

In his capacity as mayor of Beirut, Umar al-Da'uq received a telegraph from Emir Said al-Jazairi of Damascus on 30 September 1918, urging him to establish a free Arab government in Beirut. On that same night al-Da'uq conferred in the house of [Salim Ali Salam \(1868-1938\)](#) with leading Beirut notables to avoid a battle with the remnants of Ottoman authority. Salim 'Ali Salam and Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum encouraged him to head the free Arab government of Beirut in order to ensure a peaceful transition of power for [Ottoman](#) withdrawal seemed imminent. A delegation with armed escort was formed to convince [İsmail Hakkı \(1870-?\)](#) to leave the city peacefully before declaring its independence. İsmail Hakkı decided, due to the quick retreat of the Ottoman Army from the province, to leave on 1 October 1918 and entrusted Mayor al-Da'uq with running the affairs of the city. On 1 October the Arab government agreed upon the night before in the house of Salim Salam was proclaimed in Beirut. It was multi-confessional headed by al-Da'uq. The printed proclamation which carried the signature of al-Da'uq, prohibited carrying arms, introduced a curfew after 8 p.m., urged all civil servants to continue their work and responsibilities as before, considered Turkish civil servants and their families as trustworthy to be treated according to Arab chivalry and threatened offenders against public safety with capital punishment. The official ceremony raising the Arab flag on the Grand *Serail*, the former Ottoman Barracks, took place on 6 October in the presence of the representative of [Faysal I, King of Iraq \(1885-1933\)](#), General [Shukri al-Ayyubi \(1891-1967\)](#). Al-Da'uq boycotted this ceremony on the grounds that al-Ayyubi undermined his role and authority in Beirut. On 9 October the French military governor of the Western Enemy Occupied Territories - the former provinces of Beirut and Mount Lebanon combined - appointed by General [Edmund Allenby \(1861-1936\)](#), Colonel [Philpin de Piépape \(1840-1925\)](#) ordered the Arab flag brought down from the Grand *Serail*. This was done unceremoniously and with it the neo-nascent Arab government of Beirut came to its end.

In 1921 Umar al-Da'uq and other Beirut notables, who opposed the French occupation of Syria in the previous year, demanded from the mandatory authorities equity for Muslims regarding the

distribution of public offices in Greater Lebanon. Some of these notables were considered by the French authorities as antagonistic and were exiled in 1922 to the village of Duma in Northern Lebanon. Al-Da'uq was not among them. It seems he was considered as cooperative. In that same year he became one of the members of the partly elected Representative Council. In 1926 he was a member of the committee entrusted with drafting a constitution for Lebanon; a committee that was boycotted by the majority of Sunni and Shiite politicians. The constitution was adopted on 23 May 1926 as the basic law of the Republic of Lebanon, the political entity created to replace Greater Lebanon.

Malek Sharif, American University of Beirut

Section Editor: [Abdul Rahim Abu-Husayn](#)

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