



# The strategic defensive alliance between Western Europe and the crusaders in the Levant (12th -13th centuries)

Muhammed Mu'nis Awad<sup>1</sup>, Hani Munis Awad<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor-department of history and Islamic civilization- college of arts, Humanities and social sciences- Sharjah University- Sharjah- United Arab Emirates

<sup>2</sup>Professor- Department of law-College of Business administration- northern border University- Arar- Saudi Arabia

## Abstract

This research paper deals with what could be described as "The Strategic Defensive Alliance between Western Europe and the Crusaders in the Levant" throughout the 12-13th centuries, as well as the study of its historical development. It would be impossible to study the history of the Crusades without recognizing the fact of their very connection with Western Europe, by which the Crusades rose and constituted a critical stage in the history of the relations between East and West in the Middle Ages.

**Keywords:** Crusades- Middle Ages- The Strategic Defensive Alliance

## Introduction

In This research paper, we discuss the strategic defensive alliance between Western Europe and the Crusaders in the Levant, or what was known as "the Latin Orient".

In the beginning, we must acknowledge that the idea of the West's defence the Crusader presence in the Levant does not only mean defence, but it includes also attack and aggression against Muslim properties

In fact, the history of Western Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries cannot be written without its Asian extension in the East, where the invaders settled in the Euphrates region and the Levant, and established their principalities in Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli and The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

## Discussion

As a base for our research, we need to study the factors that led to the establishment of this alliance between Western Europe and the Crusaders in the East, and these can be observed through the following notes :

**First:** Western Europe saw the Crusader presence as its geopolitical extension, especially through its unique location in the Eastern Mediterranean. There is no doubt that the Capet family in France wanted to

distinguish itself politically from all the ruling families in Germany and England by having this extension outside its own natural European geographic borders.

**Second:** The Crusader presence was a broad field of international competition on the part of the European powers, due to its strategic and economic importance, and every political effort on European soil itself sought to establish itself in the Levant , for political influence, and to support its own rule within its own entity.

**Third:** Western Europe gained huge gains through its alliance with the Crusader presence, as there was a flow of trade across the Mediterranean. The Italian trading cities served as prominent commercial intermediaries between East and West, replacing the role of Muslims as commercial intermediaries, which they practiced without competition throughout the period from the eighth century to the late eleventh century AD. Therefore, one of the goals of the Crusader project was to eliminate Muslim commercial activity in the Levant.

**Fourth:** Western Europe, through its alliance with the Crusader presence, aimed to woo the Eastern Christians in the Levant and Egypt, by making them feel that the Crusaders had come only to protect them and defend them against alleged persecution by

Muslims.

This plan succeeded for the Maronites of Lebanon, but it failed for the Copts of Egypt, who realized the truth about Crusader ambitions in the region. Therefore, the Copts refused to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem as long as it was under Crusader occupation. They even provided assistance to the Ayyubid administration by working as doctors, pharmacists, and money changers. They, also, kept a picture of Saladin in their churches and monasteries, which demonstrated the depth of their appreciation for him.

**Fifth:** The Papacy saw the necessity of protecting the Crusader presence, which constituted a religious and political extension of it, and of its strong influence as "the protector of Catholicism" throughout the Christian world. In my opinion, papal support for the alliance of Western Europe with the Crusader presence in the East was a fundamental element.

**Sixth:** There was popular pressure from the peoples of Western Europe in sympathy with the Crusader entity, which we noticed when calls were made to launch a new Crusade following the success of the Islamic Jihad Movement in achieving a major accomplishment against the Crusaders in the Euphrates region and the Levant. There is no doubt that this pressure was a fundamental factor of the kings' leading of military campaigns to support the Crusaders there.

Western Europe was intervening to support that entity that had been planted on Arab land, and we find this clear from the early history of the Crusaders in the Levant

There are many examples of this. After a long journey of activities by the Islamic jihad movement, led by Mosul, the capital of northern Iraq, the Muslims were able to overthrow the Crusader Emirate of Edessa in 1144 AD, under the leadership of Atabeg Imad ad-Din Zengid (1127-1146 AD). This was considered a decisive and pivotal event, because the Muslims were able, after nearly half a century, to overthrow the first Crusader Principality established by the invaders in the Euphrates region, to serve as an "early- warning-station" to alert the Crusaders to the arrival of any Islamic armies coming from the East.

The European West could not stand idly by in the face of this Muslim decisive victory; therefore, the Second Crusade (1147-1149 AD) was launched, led by the French King Louis VII (1137-1180 AD) and Emperor Conrad III (1138-1152 AD). Its goal was to recover Edessa, but it sought to attack Damascus, despite the alliance of its rulers with the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. This Crusade failed due to the valiant resistance of the city, not to mention the disputes that occurred among the Crusaders themselves.

After that, Saladin, along with the Muslims, was able to unify the Islamic front. He overthrew the Fatimid state in 1171 AD (Nuqra, Uwais, 1401) (Ibn Taghri Bardi) (Awad, 2000), subjugated Damascus in 1174 AD, and took control of Aleppo in 1183 AD. Saladin was able to politically encircle the Crusaders, i.e., besiege them geographically. And the decisive Battle of Hattin which took place in July 1187 AD, led to significant results in the form of the destruction of the Crusader army, whose members were killed, wounded, and captured. Then the cities of the Levant coast, especially Acre, were conquered, and Jerusalem was conquered after it had remained in Crusader captivity from 1099 AD to 1187 AD, as we mentioned before.

Due to that disastrous result for the crusaders in the Levant, the West came forth to the Levant via what was known as "the Third Crusade" (1189-1192 AD), in which participated the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1152-1190 AD), (Blasion, 1902) (Freising, 1953), the English King Richard I Lionhearted (Ambroise, 1943) (1189-1199 AD), and the French King Philip II Augustus (1180-1223 AD) (al-Shinnawi, 2000), that's why that crusade is described in history as "the Crusade of kings".

Enormous material resources were mobilized for this Crusade, and it was considered as the largest campaign prepared during the twelfth century AD. After a long siege of Acre, which lasted two years (1189-1191 AD), it succeeded in bringing it down. Saladin resorted to a defensive policy to preserve Jerusalem, which was the jewel of his army's victories, especially since he was unable to confront the huge fleets of the Crusaders.

One of the events of this Crusade was Saladin's defeat at the Battle of Arsuf (Ibn Shaddad) (Ambroise, 1943) (Awad, 1997) (Maqami, 1994) in 7<sup>th</sup> of September

1191 AD, by the Crusaders led by Richard the Lionhearted. In general, the aforementioned battle is not described as decisive, as Richard the Lionhearted was unable to subjugate Jerusalem, which the Muslims fiercely defended.

The Third Crusade ended with the signing of the Treaty of Ramleh (Subaih, 1965) (Ambroise, 1943) (Tawfiq, 1986) (Omran, 1996) between the two parties on September 2, 1192 AD, which stipulated a 3-year truce, according to which the Crusaders obtained the region extending from Tyre to Jaffa. Saladin allowed the Crusaders to make the pilgrimage to Palestine unarmed, thus expressing the spirit of tolerance that characterized him.

This Crusade resulted in the awareness of Western Europe to the critical role of Egypt in supporting Saladin, as it stood with its human and material capabilities in support of its geographical and historical sister-region, the Levant, through what was known as "Syro-Egypt". It is said that the English King Richard the Lionhearted, as he was packing his bags after the failure of the Third Crusade (1189-1192 AD), recommended to the Crusaders the necessity of fighting Egypt because it was "the head of the snake", as expressed by him. Therefore, we find that the thirteenth century was characterized by an African character in the Crusader movements, because during which the Crusades headed towards Egypt.

The Fifth Crusade (1228-1229 AD) took place under the leadership of King Jean de Brienne (1210-1225 AD), accompanied by the papal legate Pelagius. It advanced towards Damietta and was able to occupy it. The Crusaders stayed there for a long time in a way enabled the Egyptians to obtain support from the Levant. Water was used as a weapon, by opening canals and dams, so the Crusaders' horses were drowned, and, eventually, the Crusade failed.

One of the reasons for its failure (Omran, 1978), in addition to the resistance of the Egyptians led by the Ayyubids, was the disagreements that occurred between King Jean de Brienne and the aforementioned papal legate.

From another angle, a new crusade, known as the Sixth Crusade, was launched into the region. After Saladin, discord had broken out in the ranks of the

Ayyubids, and Al-Kamil Muhammad Ibn al-Adil Abu Bakr (1218-1238 AD) sought the assistance of the German Emperor Frederick II (1211-1220 AD) (Novare, 1953) (Abulafia, 1988), Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick II came to the region on the basis that he would seize Jerusalem in exchange for the support he would provide to his Ayyubid ally.

That cunning emperor, described by Matthew of Paris as "the Stuper Mundi" or "the wonder of the world," as he was fluent in several languages and open-minded compared to his time, adopted a policy of "Carrot and Stick". Sometimes he would strike at the Muslims, even though he had only arrived with 500 knights, and at other times he would show al-Kamil that he could not return to Western Europe without seizing Jerusalem.

Ibn Abi Dhikry, the commander of al-Kamil's army, advised the sultan to fight the emperor so that it would not be said that he had relinquished Jerusalem. However, al-Kamil ordered his imprisonment and did not heed his advice, which demonstrated his narrow-mindedness and foolish dictatorship.

The suspicious Jaffa Treaty took place between the two parties in 1229 AD (al-Dahhan, 1968) (Doudou, 1983) (Van Cleve, 1969; Jam et al., 2025), according to which the Holy City was surrendered to the emperor, in a manner that aroused a storm of opposition among the Muslims who lived during the reign of Saladin, who had reclaimed it with the help and blood of Muslim martyrs.

Thus, the fox of German diplomacy, Frederick II, was able to seize the Holy City with the weapon of diplomacy, something that the earlier emperors and kings of Europe were unable to do.

So, Jerusalem remained in the hands of the Crusaders until 1244 AD, when the Khwarazmians, who came to the region as a result of Mongol pressure, were able to enter it. It remained in Muslim hands until 1920 AD, when the British commander Allenby entered it as an invader.

After that, the French King Louis IX (1226-1270 AD) played a prominent role, as he wanted to come to the region to fight the Muslims. He realized that reaching Jerusalem began in Cairo. Thus, the Seventh Crusade took place in 1250 AD. He arrived in the region with

a huge fleet and managed to attack Damietta. Then, events unfolded, and he was defeated at the Battle of Faraskur thanks to the efforts of the Mamluk soldiers brought by the Ayyubids, especially Sultan Al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub. The Crusaders were defeated, and the French king was captured in the house of Qadi Ibn Luqman, and was not released until a large ransom was paid. France was thus humiliated on the banks of the Nile.

This campaign confirmed France's desire, during the Capet dynasty, to continue supporting the Crusader project it had adopted from the beginning. Therefore, it is described as "the mother of the Crusades".

It is worth noting that, twenty years after the failure of that French king, he had dreams of the old knight!! He wanted to attack Tunisia, which was ruled by Al-Mustansir Al-Hafsid (1249-1277 AD), which is what happened in 1270 AD. It is logically assumed that Tunisia was not the final target of that Crusade, which was known as "the Eighth Crusade", it was even possible to use it as a military base for an attack on Egypt from the west, if the Crusade gained success.

The French missionaries portrayed to their king that as soon as he set foot on Tunisian soil, Al-Mustansir Al-Hafsid would renounce Islam and embrace Christianity. However, what happened on the ground was completely different; the Tunisians resisted those invading forces with a heroic resistance that contemporary French annals explicitly acknowledged, under the leadership of Al-Mustansir Al-Hafsid

That Crusade failed thanks to the resistance of the Tunisians and the spread of disease among the Crusaders. Louis IX himself died on August 25, 1270. He is the only French king to have led two failed Crusades. We must be very careful not to treat him as a saint, as French historians like to do, influenced by the vision of his historian, Jean de Joinville.

We note here that the Crusade against Tunisia, which had no connection to the holy sites in Palestine, confirmed the contradiction between the declared and the hidden in the Crusader project. The issue was not the struggle for the holy sites, but rather the formation of a huge political entity at the expense of the Muslims within the Mediterranean, controlled by France.

In fact, by reviewing the previous pages, we can see how Western Europe planted the Crusader entity on the land of the Levant, and how it sought to protect and adopt it by all military, political, and financial means, as similar as is case of Israel today.

We can also say that the history of the West during that period was divided between two continents: Europe itself, and Asia, especially in the western part, by which I mean the Levant.

France was truly the mother of the Crusades, and therefore it received the largest share of support for the Crusader presence in the Levant. A huge budget was spent to agree on this strategic defensive alliance.

We note that the strategic defensive alliance between Western Europe and the Crusader presence in the Levant was met with strong Islamic resistance over the course of the 12th and 13th centuries AD. Here we mention the pivotal historical roles of a number of leaders, such as Sharaf al-Din Mawdud (1108-1113 AD), Aqsonqur al-Bursuqi (1114-1126 AD), Imad al-Din Zangi (1127-1146 AD), Nur al-Din Mahmud (1146-1174 AD), Saladin al-Ayyubi (1171-1193 AD), al-Zahir Baybars (1160-1177 AD), al-Mansur Qalawun (1279-1290 AD) and Al-Ashraf Khalil bin Qalawun (1290-1293 AD) whose roles were supported by a united Islamic front.

Therefore, we should not ignore the full popular support that sought to expel the invaders from the region, which actually happened when they were expelled from Acre in 1291 AD. This is so as not to fall into the dilemma of interpreting history through the concept of the individual hero and neglecting the popular hero.

It is worth noting that this strategic defensive alliance was a double-edged sword, as when Western Europe became preoccupied with its own issues, its support for the Crusader presence in the Levant weakened.

Also, when the Crusaders clashed with each other, public opinion emerged against the Crusades, and some began to doubt the feasibility of this project.

We found those who believed that it was possible to worship God in the West without having to go to Palestine, which we find in the writings of the poet

William Rutebef (1245-1285 CE)<sup>1</sup> (Balard, 2003) (Awad, 2015).

In fact, Humbert of Romans (d. 1277 CE)<sup>2</sup> (Birdt, 2006) wrote a book entitled "The Call for a New Crusade", in which he revealed the reasons that had led people in Western Europe to turn away from the Crusade's idea (Youssef, 1983), and made his views into the following elements:

**First:** The cowardice of Westerners and their fear of sailing, and the possibility of their exposure to many dangers as a result (Youssef, 1983).

**Second:** The mockery of Westerners of the Crusader adventurers, as they saw the Crusades as a bloody and endless project that could never have an end (Youssef, 1983).

**Third:** Family ties, as many saw the impossibility of leaving fathers, mothers, and children in order to participate in the Crusades. There are those who confirm that old German and French songs confirm this meaning (Youssef, 1983) (Atiya, 2024).

**Fourth:** Women's opposition to the Crusade idea, as women opposed the matter of participating in the Crusade project, which led to the separation of husbands from wives and to women's anxiety about their husbands, and the disintegration of the family (Youssef, 1983).

**Fifth:** Pilgrimage and excuses evading participation in the Crusades. Many made excuses for not participating in those wars, including the lack of Possession of money, or health problems, or the lack of someone to take care of his business while he was outside his own homeland, or that his children were young and needed him to raise and care for them (Youssef, 1983).

**Sixth:** Basic disbelief of the westerners in the Crusader concept. Many believed in the futility of war against the Muslims and the dangers associated with this, as they fought in countries foreign to them (Youssef, 1983).

**Seventh:** The belief that bloodshed contradicts the teachings of Christianity. A trend emerged in Europe believed that Crusades contradicted the principles of Christianity, and that tens of thousands had fallen victim to them, including emperors, kings, and princes. They believed that staying in their homes was better for them than venturing to the East (Youssef, 1983).

**Eighth:** The belief that war against the Muslims would not be in the interest of the Europeans. This trend emerged from the large numbers of Muslims, comparing to Europeans', and because Muslims were the original owners of the land who defended it, as well as they were familiar with the roads and paths compared to the Crusaders (Youssef, 1983).

We should, also, not neglect to note the impact of the failure of the Second Crusade (1147-1149 AD), as this led to the emergence of an opposing public opinion in the West, and many believe that the cry repeated at the Council of Clermont, "Deus Vult," which means "this is God's will," became "Deus non vult," meaning "God does not want this," especially with the successive heavy losses, the large number of Crusaders killed and wounded, as well as the multiplicity of widows, bereaved women, and orphans. So, Europe tasted the bitterness of heavy human losses.

The strategic defensive alliance of the Crusaders in the Levant on the part of Western Europe was a double-edged sword, especially since the Crusader presence in the Levant could not survive without

<sup>1</sup> William Rutebeuf, a contemporary French poet of the thirteenth century AD, was successful in his performance at the Sorbonne University. He composed 56 poems, one of which presented a dialogue between a supporter and an opponent of the Crusader movement. He died in 1285 AD.

<sup>2</sup> Humbert of Romans, a Frenchman born in Romans, around 1200 AD. He joined the Dominican Order and was the fifth Prior General of the Missionary Order from 1254 to 1263. His name was mentioned in 1215 as a student at the Sorbonne University. He first joined the Dominican

Order in 1224 and became a professor of theology at the Dominican school in 1226. Humbert of Romans launched a violent attack on the ecclesiastical order and sought to restore unity between the Latin Church and the Orthodox Church. Humbert was an advocate of the Crusade led by King Louis IX against Egypt in 1250. He suggested the necessity of preparing crusades through a military force in the Holy Land, financed by taxes and donations. Humbert died in 1277.

support from the motherland in the West.

This was a presentation of the strategic defensive alliance between Western Europe and the Latin East.

## Conclusion

This research paper has concluded the following conclusions:

- 1) There were many factors led to the establishment of the strategic defensive alliance between Western Europe and the Crusader existence in the Levant.
- 2) Via that alliance, Western Europe achieved many of its own political and economic advantages.
- 3) The Crusaders could not extend their domain into Egypt, which was always as a "tomb of its own invaders" though the resources made by that alliance.
- 4) The Crusaders' reliance on that western support was a double-edged sword, as when Western Europe became preoccupied with its own issues, the Crusader's presence in the Levant weakened severely.

## References

1. Atiya, Muhammad Jamal al-Din, al-Aghani al-Orobhiyyah wa Taatheeraha ala al-Horob al-Salibiyyah, Damascus, 2024.
2. Awad, Muhammad Mu'nis, Mu'ajam Aalam al-Horab al-Salibiyyah. Cairo, 2015
3. Awad, Muhamed Mu'nis, Fi al-Sera'a al-Islami al-Saleebi, Ma'araket Arsuf 1191 A.D./587 A.H. Cairo, 1997.
4. Al-Imad Al-Isfahani, Al-Fath Al-Qussi fi Al-Fath Al-Qudsi, edited by: Subaih, Muhammad, Cairo 1965 AD
5. Abulafia, D., Frederick II: The Holy Roman Emperor, London 1988.
6. Balard, M, al-Hamalat al-Salibiyyah wa al-Sharq al-Latini, translated into Arabic by : Bashir al-Siba'i. ed. Cairo, 2003
7. Birdt, J., Humbert of Romans, C.I., Vol. II, Oxford 2006.
8. Ibn al-Adim, Zubdat al-Halab min Tarikh Halab. Edited by Sami al-Dahhan, vol. 3, Damascus, 1968.
9. Ibn Nazif al-Hamawi, al-Tarikh al-Mansuri, Talkhis al-Kashf wa al-Bayan fi Hawadith al-Zaman. Edited by : Abu al-Eid Doudou, Damascus 1983.
10. Ibn Hammad, Akhbar Molok Bani Ubayd wa Seeratohom. Edited by: Al-Tuhami Nuqra and Abd Al-Halim Uwais. Cairo, 1401 AH, p. 63.
11. Ibn Taghri Bardi, al-nogom al -Zahirah fi Molok Misr wa al-Qahira, vol. 5, Cairo, 1st edition, p. 341. Awad, Muhammad Mu'nis, al-Horob al-Salibiyyah : al-Elaqat Bayna al-Sharq Wa al-Gharb Fi al-Qarnayn 12,13 AD /6,7 AH. Cairo, 1999-2000, p. 198.
12. Maqami, Nabila, Firaq al-Rohban al-Forsan fi Bilad al-Sham fi al-Qarnayn 12, 13 AD. Cairo, 1994.
13. Otto of St. Blasien, The Crusade of Frederick Barbarossa, in Chatcher, Sorek Book of Medieval Europe. New York, 1902, pp. 529-535.
14. Otto of Freising, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa by Otto of Freising and his continuator Rahewin, trans. Charles C. Mierow, New York, 1953.
15. Omran, Mahmoud Saeed, al-Hodna Bayn al-Muslimin Wa al-Salibiyyin Fi Asr al-Dawlah al-Ayyubiyyah. A Fascicule of : Dirasat Fi Bohoth Tarikh al-Osor al-Wusta. Cairo, 1996.
16. Omran, Mahmoud Saeed, al-Hamla al-Salibiyya al-Khamesah, . Alexandria, 1978.
17. Philip de Novare, The Wars of Frederick II Against the Iblins in Syria and Cyprus, trans. J. La Monte, Colombia 1935.
18. Tawfiq, Omar Kamal, al-diplomasiyyah al-Islamiyyah wa al-Elaqat al-Silmiyyah Ma' al-Salibiyyin. Dirasat Tahliliyyah Watha'iqyyah fi al-Tarikh al-diplomacy. Alexandria, 1986.
19. Van Cleve, T.C., The Crusade of Frederick II, in Setton, K., A History of the Crusades, Vol. II Madison 1969.
20. Youssef, Joseph Nasim, al-Odwan al-Salibi wa al-RAAY al-Aam al-Gharbi. A fascicule of: Dirasat fi Tarikh al-Elaqat Bayna al-Sharq wa al-Gharb fi al-Osor al-Wusta, Alexandria, 1983.
21. Jam, F. A., Khan, T. I., & Paul, J. (2025). Driving brand evangelism by Unleashing the power of branding and sales management practices. Journal of Business Research, 190, 115214.