

# Shades of Sykes-Picot Accord Are Cast Over Southwest Asia

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Why should French President Jacques Chirac launch a crusade for regime change in Syria, after having successfully guided an international campaign to expel Syrian troops from Lebanon, and to reorganize the political landscape in Beirut? Is it due to his grief over the February 2005 killing of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who was his close associate for years? Is it because he believes Damascus was involved in the murder, and therefore should be punished?

Why, then, should the French head of state also threaten Iran? On Jan. 19, Chirac announced that France would deploy nuclear weapons against “terrorist” states, and anyone with the intent to attack France. Chirac’s outrageous declaration was read, correctly, as an endorsement of the Cheney doctrine of pre-emptive nuclear warfare, and a direct threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Previously, it had been British Prime Minister Tony Blair who had taken the lead in escalating tensions, both against Syria and particularly around the issue of Iran’s nuclear program. The British have been in the forefront of efforts to haul Iran in front of the United Nations Security Council, as preparations for a military strike. Now, France has joined in.

Why?

Lyndon LaRouche, referring on Jan. 6 to “new developments around the accelerated attacks on Syria,” put out the following assessment: “The shattering calamities hitting the U.S. Bush-Cheney Administration, have brought the role of the United Kingdom’s Blair government more prominently into focus. Shades of Sykes-Picot, the British Foreign Office, flanked by France, have assumed a controlling role in the regional developments of the Southwest Asia region.”

LaRouche elaborated: “Under these shifts in the overall strategic situation, we must take into account the core-controversy which erupted within Europe as a whole, as Britain’s Thatcher and France’s Mitterrand moved in 1990 to attempt to crush Germany, leading into the so-called Maastricht agreements and the present crushing of the economy of Germany under the Euro single-currency system. The recent trend toward increasing Russian cooperation with Germany, around natural-gas marketing, and the weakening of the U.S.A. influence globally by the growing disgrace of the Bush-Cheney government, see London now working to usurp control over Southwest Asia and related developments, more

than slightly away from the U.S. Cheney Administration, bringing old patterns of conflicts left over from early Twentieth-Century Europe into the fore again.”

There is, indeed, no way to understand the implications of the “new direction” in French foreign policy, since 2002-03, without casting it against the historical backdrop of the infamous deals that colonialist France made in the early part of the 20th Century, with colonialist Britain, to conquer and divide large parts of the Middle East. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 was a secret deal signed by the British and the French, which redrew the map of the Middle East, assigning areas of direct control, as well as spheres of influence, to each of the two colonial powers.

The modern-day Sykes-Picot was outlined in the infamous 1996 “Clean Break” doctrine,<sup>1</sup> drafted by a task force under Dick Cheney, adopted by then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and implemented beginning with the 2003 war against Iraq. That plan calls for regime change (through war and/or coups) in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran.

France, in 1991, went along with Operation Desert Storm, but got nothing in return. In 2002-03, France put up a show of opposition to the Anglo-American war plans, and stayed out of the war. Now, the United States and Britain are sitting on top of vast oil reserves in occupied Iraq, and France is sitting there, empty-handed. The old imperial impulse thus has emerged, saying, “Paris wants a piece of the pie.”

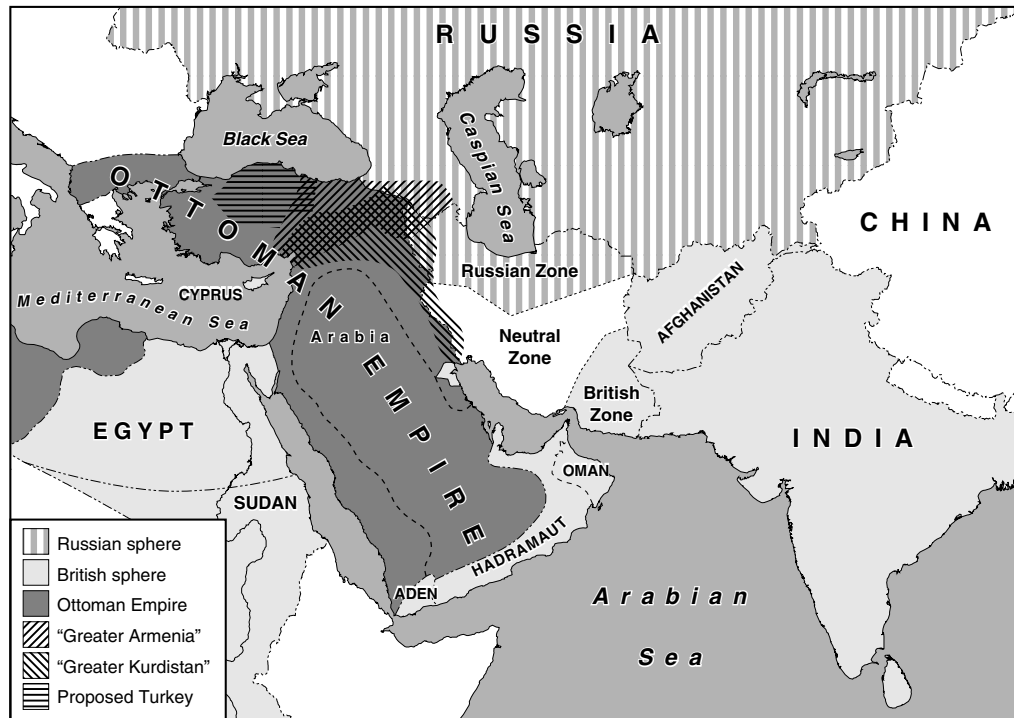
## Britain’s Geopolitical War

World War I was Britain’s geopolitical war, orchestrated by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), to break up the cooperation between the economic powerhouse Germany, and Russia. It was the threat to British imperial control represented by Bismarck’s Germany, Russia under Alexander II, and other nations which were beginning to adopt the American System of economic development, that led the British to war, in an attempt to preserve the hegemony of their oligarchical financial system, and the empire which rested on it. Emblematic of the threat as perceived by Britain, was the Berlin-Baghdad railway project.

1. “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” issued in 1996 by the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies in Jerusalem.

FIGURE 1

## Self-Contradictory British Schemes for Breaking Up the Ottoman Empire



*The British strategy for destroying the Ottoman Empire, included organizing Arab forces to fight an “autonomous” revolt against the Turks, and then redrawing the map so as to secure British imperial control. The French were in on the plan—but they had their own, conflicting, interests.*

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In the process, Britain planned to break up the Ottoman Empire, which had moved into the German orbit, and set up puppet regimes under Arab monarchs, in the context of an overall reorganization of Southwest Asia into colonial spheres of influence. France was to be a partner to this scheme, although, as often is the case in agreements among rival imperial forces, each tried to cheat the other.

France had a certain experience in inter-imperialist rivalries with Great Britain, especially in Africa. There it had its own sphere of influence to protect and, if possible, expand. From the 17th Century, France had used commercial interests as a tool to establish a foothold in northern Africa. In the course of the 19th Century, France established a presence in Algeria, and in 1881, occupied Tunis. In 1882, England took Egypt (the domain of Napoleon a century earlier); in 1897, Lord Kitchener defeated the Sudanese national movement under the Mahdi. England ruled Egypt, and through it, Sudan. Britain put an end to French expansionism at Fashoda in 1898. A further deal between the two rivals in 1904, gave England a free hand in Egypt, in exchange for a French zone of influence in Morocco.

On the eve of World War I, Eurasia was dominated by the imperial powers, whereby Russia had acquired what is today Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, the Khanates of Khiva, Bukhara, Tashkent, Merv, Samarkand) and counted half of Persia as in its sphere of influence. Britain held

another chunk of Persia, as a result of the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement, and also controlled Arab sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf. It administered Egypt, Cyprus, and Aden on the Red Sea, and had Afghanistan in its sphere of influence.

The rest (except for the Arabian desert) was part of the Ottoman Empire, whose Sultan ruled over diverse ethnic populations, including Slavs, Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews. Among the imperial powers, Orthodox Russia claimed the right to protect the Orthodox peoples, who were in the Balkans and in the Middle East, while the French were the protectors of the Catholics, including the Maronite Christians in the Syrian provinces.

Following the Balkan wars of 1912-13, general war broke out, pitting the Entente of France, Russia, and Britain against Germany, the Ottoman Empire (then under the rule of the Young Turkey party), and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

### Plans for Post-War Arabia

The basic British war plan, notwithstanding bickering over details among the elite that ran the conflict, was straightforward: Organize Arab forces to mount what would be presented as an autonomous revolt against the Ottoman oppressors, smash the Ottoman Empire into smithereens, and redraw the map, with brand-new Arab “states,” ruled by British puppets (**Figure 1**). The French, who endorsed the plan, would

have their own marionettes in their designated spheres of influence.

The mastermind of the operation was Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener, the butcher of Sudan (honored as Earl Kitchener of Khartoum), who served as the Proconsul in Egypt. In August 1914, he became Minister of War. Egypt at the time was a British protectorate, which ceased being under the Ottoman Caliphate in 1914.

Kitchener's choice for Arab leadership was the scion of the Hashemite dynasty, Hussein ibn Ali, ruler of Mecca. Hussein, known as the "Emir of Mecca," and "Sherif of Mecca," ruled the Hejaz (what is today northwest Saudi Arabia, on the Gulf of Aqaba and Red Sea) under the Ottoman Sultan. However, after the seizure of power by the Young Turks in 1908, Hussein feared this new power would infringe on his domain. Two of his sons, Abdallah and Feisal, both members of the Ottoman parliament, also feared the Young Turkish government would depose their father. Therefore, their openness to the British advances.

It was Gilbert Clayton who first proposed to Kitchener that the family of the Sherif of Mecca be approached. Clayton was the Cairo agent of Sir Henry McMahon, who had replaced Kitchener as Proconsul for Egypt. Clayton was in contact with various Arab exile groups and secret societies in Cairo, who intimated that other Arab leaders would be ready to rebel against the Sultan, if there were a viable leader.

In a Sept. 6, 1914 memo to Kitchener, Clayton made the suggestion that Abdallah, one of Hussein's sons, be considered the British candidate. Abdallah had met with Kitchener in 1912 or 1913, and again in 1914, as well as with Ronald Storrs, who was Kitchener's Oriental Secretary in Cairo. Clayton said that he thought that other Arab leaders would support this choice. Kitchener wanted to know what position the Arab leader would have if there were war, so he laid out in a telegram to Storrs, what he should say to Abdallah:

"If the Arab nation assist England in this war that has been forced upon us by Turkey, England will guarantee that no internal intervention take place in Arabia, and will give Arabs every assistance against foreign aggression."

This was followed up by another dispatch issued by the Cairo office, to the effect that the Arabs of "Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia" would be given independence guaranteed by Britain, if they rose up against the Ottoman Empire.

The overall idea embraced by Kitchener and his group, was that the Arabs should be encouraged to rebel against the Ottomans, and in exchange get "independence"— which meant different things to different people. To the Arabs in question, it meant actual independence; to the British making the promises, it meant something more like local autonomy as a British protectorate, or even under direct British rule. For Storrs, for example, the idea would be to build what he called the Egyptian Empire, with the Sherif of Mecca as Caliph,



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*Lord Kitchener was the mastermind of the British plan to break up the Ottoman Empire. He hand-picked Arabs to lead a "revolt" against the Ottomans, under British tutelage.*

flanked by an Egyptian King, who, however, would rule under the control of Kitchener.

Hussein made clear that what he demanded was sovereignty over a vast Arab kingdom, which would be truly independent. After having sounded out the views of Arab secret societies in Damascus and elsewhere, through his son Feisal, Hussein learned that they would follow him in a revolt against Turkey, *if* he had the guarantee that the British would back Arab independence.

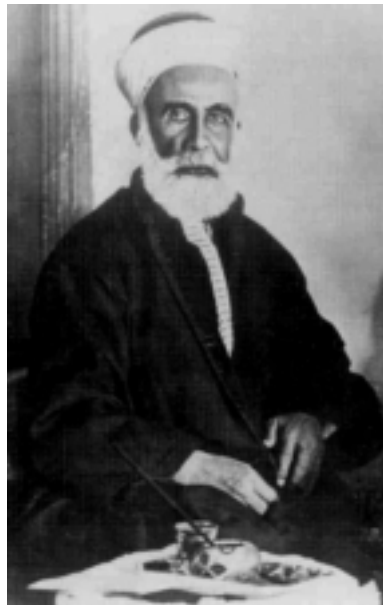
Hussein drafted a letter to the British High Commissioner dated July 4, 1915, in which he outlined his demands. In it he incorporated demands formulated in the so-called Damascus Protocol, a document drawn up by the Arab forces in Syria:

In exchange for his cooperation which should lead to the control of the entire Arabian peninsula, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and part of Cilicia, the Sherif Hussein formulates the following demands:

1. The independence of the Arabs, limited in a territory including in the north, Mersina Adana and limited by the 37th parallel up to the Persian border: the eastern border should be the Persian border up to the Gulf of Basra; in the south, the territory should border on the Indian Ocean, leaving aside Aden; in the west, it should be limited by the Red Sea and the Mediterranean up to Mersina.

2. Great Britain should recognize the establishment of an Arab Caliphate and the abolition of the capitulations. In exchange, the Sherif declares his readiness to grant preference in all economic enterprises of the Arab countries to Great Britain, all else considered equal.

2. A defensive military alliance should be concluded. In the event that one party may undertake an



King Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud (left), a Wahhabite, was the factional rival of Hussein ibn Ali (right), the Sunni ruler of the Hejaz (what is now Saudi Arabia). The British India Office wanted to promote Abdul-Aziz, whereas Lord Kitchener opted for Hussein.

ality. If the situation permits, Great Britain will place at the disposal of the Arabs advisors (*advice-conseils*) and will aid them in establishing the form of government which seems most appropriate for the different territories. On the other hand, it is understood that the Arabs have already decided to seek the counsels and advice of Great Britain exclusively; and that such European advisors and officials as may be needed to establish a sound system of administration, shall be British. As regards to the two Vilayets of Basra and Baghdad, the Arabs recognize that the fact of Great Britain's established position and interests there will call for the setting up of special administrative arrangements to protect those

territories from foreign aggression, to promote the welfare of their inhabitants and to safeguard our mutual interest.

Hussein got vague assurances but no explicit commitment to the independent Arab kingdom he desired.

### Dissent in the Imperial Leadership

Opposed to this idea of an Arab Caliph (and/or King), who would head up a British-controlled Arab empire, was the India Office of the British Empire. This department, which was responsible for Persia, Tibet, Afghanistan, and eastern Arabia, in addition to India, considered these regions, and Mesopotamia, to be its prerogative. India argued that Muslims in its sphere of influence would not accept an Arab Caliph, but preferred a Turk. If they were to favor any Arab, it would be Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, who was at factional odds with Hussein.

The idea prevalent in the India Office was that *it* should organize an invasion and occupation of Mesopotamia. This is the message that Viceroy to India Charles Hardinge delivered to Sykes, during the latter's fact-finding tour in 1915. Hardinge also expressed the India Office's view that any talk of "independence" for the Arabs, was absurd, since, in his view, the Arabs were incapable of self-rule.

The entity set up to coordinate policy, and to counter opposition—from India, for example—was the Arab Bureau, established in 1916. This was the brainchild of Sir Mark Sykes, a young Tory who had been elected to the House of

offensive war, the other party must maintain strict neutrality.

The High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, responded to Hussein's demands, in correspondence later known as the "McMahon letters." McMahon, in a note attached to a letter of Oct. 24, 1915, had the following to say:

The districts of Mersina and Alexandretta, and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo, cannot be said to be purely Arab, and must on that account be excepted from the proposed delimitation.

Subject to that modification, and without prejudice to the treaties concluded between us and certain Arab Chiefs, we accept that delimitation.

As for the regions lying within the proposed frontiers, in which Great Britain is free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally France, I am authorized to give you the following pledges on behalf of the Government of Great Britain, and to reply as follows to your note:

That subject to the above modifications stated above, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and uphold the independence of the Arabs in all the regions lying within the frontiers proposed by the Sherif of Mecca.

Great Britain guarantees the Holy Places against any external aggression and recognizes their individu-



*Sir Mark Sykes, a Tory parliamentarian, devised the scheme for the Arab Bureau, headquartered in Cairo, to run Lord Kitchener's operations.*

Commons four years earlier, and was reputed to be an expert on affairs pertaining to the Ottoman Empire. Sykes had served directly under Kitchener, and was his primary tool. The Arab Bureau worked out of Cairo, as part of the Intelligence Department, but ultimately under Kitchener's direction. The titular head was archaeologist David G. Hogarth, an intelligence operative, who worked under Clayton. Among the members of the Arab Bureau was T.E. Lawrence, better known as "Lawrence of Arabia," who led some of the military campaigns of the "Arab leaders." The thrust of the Arab Bureau was to spread Britain's control over Arabia, from British Egypt.

### Enter Imperial France

The French were less than enthusiastic about Britain's scenarios. The French colonialist faction had its sights set on Lebanon and Syria, as "intrinsicly" belonging to France. This claim was based on the historical facts of French conquests in the Crusades, as well as on the then-current status of "protection" which the French accorded the Catholic populations in the region, especially in Mount Lebanon, near the coast of Syria.

The British were opposed to granting France such wide-ranging concessions. Clayton argued, and Sykes agreed, that, if massive Arab armies were brought into the war on Britain's side, this could become a decisive factor in victory. Their idea was that this would contribute to speedy victory on the western front. Britain was faced with two imperatives: First, deploying British forces in the Middle Eastern theater would reduce their presence in the West, thus increasing the burden for France. France, therefore, had to be promised some concessions. Second, in order to recruit the desired Arab armies from Hussein's forces, concessions had to be made to the Hashemites, which might conflict with French ambitions. Thus McMahon's specifications in his correspondence, that Hussein would have to relinquish claims on "the parts of Syria located west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and

Aleppo," that is, the coastal areas of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, which the French claimed. Hussein still demanded Beirut and Aleppo, and reiterated his principled rejection of any French presence in Arabia.

France obviously had to be brought into the horse-trading, because of the conflicting claims. Thus the British Foreign Office invited France to send a delegate to London, to figure out what they could or could not offer Hussein. This led to the birth of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

### Sykes-Picot Agreement 1916

François Georges Picot was the delegate sent to negotiate with the British, on Nov. 23, 1915. He came from a colonial family and represented the policy outlook of the "Syrian party" in France, which asserted that Syria and Palestine, which they considered a single country, were French property, for historical, economic, and cultural reasons. Picot's negotiating position was that France should have direct control over the coastal regions, indirect control over the rest of Syria (through a puppet), and also over the land stretching eastwards, to Mosul.

The terms of the agreement signed on May 16, 1916 (see **Figure 2**), appeared to satisfy these demands:

It is accordingly understood between the French and British governments:

That France and Great Britain are prepared to recognize and protect an independent Arab state or a confederation of Arab states (a) and (b) marked on the annexed map, under the suzerainty of an Arab chief. That in area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall have priority of right of enterprise and local loans. That in area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall alone supply advisers or foreign functionaries at the request of the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.

That in the blue area France, and in the red area Great Britain, shall be allowed to establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.

That in the brown area there shall be established an international administration, the form of which is to be decided upon after consultation with Russia, and subsequently in consultation with the other allies, and the representatives of the Sherif of Mecca.

That Great Britain be accorded (1) the ports of Haifa and Acre, (2) guarantee of a given supply of water from the Tigris and Euphrates in area (a) for area (b). His majesty's government, on their part, undertake that they will at no time enter into negotiations for the cession of Cyprus to any third power without the previous consent of the French government.

That Alexandretta shall be a free port as regards the trade of the British empire, . . . ; that there shall be

freedom of transit for British goods through Alexandria and by railway through the blue area, or (b) area, or area (a); and there shall be no discrimination, direct or indirect, against British goods on any railway or against British goods or ships at any port serving the areas mentioned.

That Haifa shall be a free port as regards the trade of France, her dominions and protectorates. . . . There shall be freedom of transit for French goods through Haifa and by the British railway through the brown area. . . .

That in area (a) the Baghdad railway shall not be extended southwards beyond Mosul, and in area (b) northwards beyond Samarra, until a railway connecting Baghdad and Aleppo via the Euphrates valley has been completed, and then only with the concurrence of the two governments.

That Great Britain has the right to build, administer, and be sole owner of a railway connecting Haifa with area (b), and shall have a perpetual right to transport troops along such a line at all times. It is to be understood by both governments that this railway is to facilitate the connection of Baghdad with Haifa by rail, and it is further understood that, if the engineering difficulties and expense entailed by keeping this connecting line in the brown area only make the project unfeasible, that the French government shall be prepared to consider that the line in question may also traverse the Polgon Baniyas Keis Marib Salkhad tell Otsda Mesmie before reaching area (b). . . .

It shall be agreed that the French government will at no time enter into any negotiations for the cession of their rights and will not cede such rights in the blue area to any third power, except the Arab state or confederation of Arab states, without the previous agreement of his majesty's government, who, on their part, will give a similar undertaking to the French government regard-

FIGURE 2

### The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916



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ing the red area.

The British and French government, as the protectors of the Arab state, shall agree that they will not themselves acquire and will not consent to a third power acquiring territorial possessions in the Arabian peninsula, nor consent to a third power installing a naval base either on the east coast, or on the islands, of the Red Sea. This, however, shall not prevent such adjustment of the Aden frontier as may be necessary in consequence of recent Turkish aggression.

The negotiations with the Arabs as to the boundaries of the Arab states shall be continued through the same channel as heretofore on behalf of the two powers.

It is agreed that measures to control the importation of arms into the Arab territories will be considered by the two governments.

The document ended with the notification that the Russian and Japanese governments would be informed, and that

Italy's claims would have to be raised.

The agreement remained top secret, initially. Sykes travelled to Petrograd, to inform the Russians of the deal, and to seek their acceptance. He did not know that the French, in all secrecy, had set up a separate deal with the Russians, regarding Palestine. Aristide Briand, the negotiator, succeeded in getting Russian backing for French control over Palestine, which in the Sykes-Picot accord, should have been under an international regime. The Sykes-Picot Agreement was kept secret until, following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, documents were found in Russia, in January 1918, and made known to the Ottoman government.

## The Arab Revolt

The Sykes-Picot treaty was one thing: a secret deal between imperial powers on dividing up the remains of the Ottoman Empire, once it had been dismantled. Quite another thing was to defeat the Ottomans. To accomplish the latter Britain had opted for an Arab revolt.

The British were convinced from their intelligence reports, that masses of Arabs would follow a revolt led by Hussein. When the revolt was launched in the Hejaz, in early June 1916, the hundreds of thousands of Arabs they expected to desert from the Ottoman army and join the revolt, did not show up. Instead, British aircraft and ships were deployed, along with Muslim troops from British Egypt and elsewhere in the Empire. As the military revolt continued to show its weaknesses, and some began to despair of its success, T.E. Lawrence proposed that Hussein's tribesmen be drafted to fight in a guerrilla campaign led by the British. This was in opposition to a French proposal, to send Muslims from the French Empire, to Hejaz, to serve as military advisors. The British line was that the Arabs would not accept Christian forces fighting for or with them. This was the cover story; the main concern of the British was, they did not want the French meddling.

On July 6, 1917, T.E. Lawrence mobilized (with handsome payment in gold) a confederation of Bedouin tribal chiefs, to take the port city of Aqaba. Lawrence, who bought Arab tribes as irregulars, was known as "the man with the gold." After the capture of Aqaba, which proved Lawrence's point, Gen. Sir Edmund Allenby, the new commanding officer, agreed that such tribesmen could be deployed alongside British forces, in the Palestine and Syria campaigns.

In 1917, War Minister Lloyd George ordered troops from British Egypt to prepare the invasion of Palestine. Immediately the French, obviously suspicious of British intentions, dispatched Picot to accompany the mission, and, in turn, the equally suspicious British ordered Sykes to join as a mediator. (Sykes had been promoted to head up the political mission as General Officer Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.) The French, having signed a separate secret deal with the Russians, had their own claims on Palestine. The intent of the British-Egyptian invasion was to secure



*T.E. Lawrence was the British Arab Bureau operative, known as "Lawrence of Arabia," who led some of the military campaigns of his Arab dupes, so as to spread British control throughout the region.*

Palestine for the British, and orders were not to make any promises to the Arabs involved.

General Allenby was selected as the new commanding officer in June 1917, and set off to Egypt, to lead the invasion of Palestine. Lloyd George had expressed his wish, as if in a letter to Santa Claus, that Jerusalem be taken by Christmas. Obliging, on Dec. 11, Allenby walked into Jerusalem through the Jaffa Gate, with his officers, and declared martial law for the city. Allenby explained to Picot, that the city would remain under British military administration, for some time. Ronald Storrs was made military governor. Lloyd George had gotten his Christmas present.

The British India Office forces had attempted, unsuccessfully, to take Baghdad in 1915, after which a new Commander-in-Chief, Maj.-Gen. Stanley Maude, was named. Maude invaded Mesopotamia, and took Baghdad on March 11, 1917. On March 16, a Mesopotamian Administration Committee was established under Lord Curzon (former Viceroy of India), which decided the fates of Basra and Baghdad, or Mesopotamia: The southern province of Basra, largely Shi'ite, was to be British, while the ancient capital of Baghdad was to be "Arab," under some form of British protectorate.

In a text approved by the War Cabinet, Sykes called on Arab leaders to join with the British, promising them freedom and independence. It spoke of an Arab Middle Eastern confederation, to be ruled by the Sunni King Hussein, or by one of his sons.

After Palestine and Mesopotamia, came the conquest of



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*The British march through the Jaffa Gate into Jerusalem, seizing the city on Dec. 11, 1917: a Christmas present for War Minister Lloyd George.*

Syria. Allenby, having taken Megiddo (“Armageddon”) in September 1918, moved on to Damascus. This key city was to be taken, and given, in accordance with the Sykes-Picot accord, to an Arab administration, de facto under French control, although the British maintained military control. Once the city had been taken, Hussein’s flag (designed by Sykes) was dutifully hoisted. The only areas of direct French control were the coastal regions, whereas the interior was to be independent, under Hashemite rule, with French advisors. Feisal and his troops arrived later than planned, but did at least arrive; this was important, because it would allow Lloyd George to argue, in 1919, that Feisal’s forces had been instrumental in the capture of Syria, and that therefore he should administer Syria—of course under British control.

In a meeting with Feisal, Allenby laid down the terms of Feisal’s rule: He, as a representative of Hussein, would administer Syria (minus Palestine and Lebanon) under French protection, and, for the purpose, would have a French liaison officer assigned to him. Feisal objected to the French role, but was overridden by Allenby, who pulled military rank.

After having led his armies into Damascus, Feisal struck out and moved against Beirut, on Oct. 5. This immediately prompted the alarmed French to deploy warships and troops. Feisal was forced to leave Beirut on Allenby’s orders. Picot was designated the political and civilian representative of France, under Allenby.

It was at this time that the top British figures began to question among themselves the wisdom of maintaining their

promises to France, as listed in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Lloyd George said the treaty was “inapplicable,” considering that Britain had done the lion’s share of military conquest; Curzon thought it was “obsolete”; and even Sykes started voicing doubts. The point was, the British wanted to consolidate their hold in the Middle East, and, if possible, deprive the French of any position, except a limited presence in Lebanon.

### **Armistice and No Peace**

Following indications that both the Turks and the Germans were ready to sue for peace, an armistice conference was organized aboard the British ship *Agammemnon* on Oct. 27, 1918 in Lemnos, in the absence of the French! Turkey accepted the terms of an armistice, after which the Young Turk leaders fled for their lives. Armistice in the west

was arranged on Nov. 11, 1918.

The British wanted to consolidate their positions, and, above all, keep the French out of Syria. In 1919, Lloyd George was arguing that since Feisal had been crucial in conquering—or rather “liberating”—Syria, with his 100,000 troops (a wild exaggeration), then England had to honor its commitments to its Arab ally, Feisal, who was decidedly against any French role. This is the tack he took in the Paris Peace Conference which opened in 1919, trying to recruit President Woodrow Wilson to his views. Feisal, constantly accompanied by his controller T.E. Lawrence, and bankrolled by the British, played along willingly. Britain exerted de facto control over Syria, which was administered by Arab leading families.

However, maintaining the military occupation was becoming costly both economically and politically, for Britain. Thus, London finally abandoned its claim to Syria, and left it to Feisal and the French. In January 1920, Feisal concluded a secret deal with former French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau for formal Syrian “independence” under French tutelage—i.e., French advisors.

The final settlement (at least for the time being) was defined in early 1920, in terms which were established in the Treaty of Sèvres. As far as the Middle East was concerned, the agreement stipulated the following: Syria, including Lebanon, and Cilicia were to go to France, but were supposed to become independent eventually. Britain took Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Palestine, and exerted protection over Arabia (He-



jaz), which meant, it would be officially “independent,” but ruled by British puppet monarchs. Britain was formally granted influence over Egypt, Cyprus, and the Persian Gulf coast. Italy got Rhodes and the Dodecanese, while Adalya (in Turkey) fell under its sphere of influence.

Feisal was proclaimed King by the Syrian National Congress, which had deliberated in 1919, on a constitutional monarchy. Feisal was to be King over Greater Syria (including Lebanon, Transjordan, and Palestine) in 1920. Not long after, however, in July, the French finally did what they had been itching to do, and moved in militarily under Gen. Henri Eugène Gouraud to occupy Damascus. In a bloody exchange, they sent Feisal packing into exile, and established Syria as completely French, under French mandate. Feisal’s monarchical ambitions were not, however, dashed; he was to move on, under British control, to become King of Iraq.

As for Iran (then Persia), the British clinched their control through the infamous Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, with Ahmad Shah. (See Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, “A Persian Tragedy: Mossadeq’s Fight for National Sovereignty,” *EIR*, Nov. 4, 2005.)

At the Cairo conference in 1922, following anti-British riots beginning in 1919, Britain granted Egypt formal independence, and formally gave up the protectorate. Declaring Egypt a constitutional monarchy, Britain, however, maintained certain “rights”: It was responsible for Egypt’s defense (which meant the right to station troops on Egyptian territory), for security in the Suez Canal Zone, managing the Sudan question through military and civilian rule, controlling imperial communications, and formulating foreign policy. Fuad I became the King on March 15, 1922, and in 1928 established a dictatorial regime.

It was at this Cairo conference that Feisal was designated monarch for Iraq, and his brother Abdallah, named Emir of Transjordan. Feisal’s ascension to power was orchestrated to make it appear that he was the people’s choice, ratified by a plebiscite, and so forth. Abdallah took up his post in Amman, fortified by British intelligence expert H. St. John Philby as advisor, and backed by the Arab Legion, under the British command of Col. F.G. Peake, and then Glubb Pasha. In 1923, Transjordan was separated from Palestine, and functioned as a buffer zone against central Arabia.

One issue that had not been debated or considered in the treaties, was oil. Competition between France and England over the rich oil reserves in Mosul became critical. This was ended formally at the conference of San Remo in 1920, where they signed a secret deal to split the oil. This became known to the United States, which objected to the monopoly, and demanded a piece of the pie. In the 1926 Mosul Treaty, Iraq got nominal control over the oil region, and the interests were divvied up among British (52.5%), American (21.25%), and French (21.25%) oil companies.

As far as central Arabia was concerned, Hussein laid claim to the title of Caliph in 1924, which the rival Abdul



*British War Minister Lloyd George decided in 1918 that the Sykes-Picot Agreement had given too much to France, since Britain had done most of the work of conquest.*

Aziz ibn Saud rejected. (Hussein had had himself proclaimed “King of all Arabs” in late 1916, but Britain, France, and Italy recognized him only as King of Hejaz.) The Wahhabite ibn Saud declared war on Hussein, and, with the capture of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, defeated the Hashemite. Hussein abdicated, and his son Ali renounced the throne, so ibn Saud, the favorite of the India Office, was proclaimed King of Hejaz and Najd in 1926.

## **The Fate of Palestine**

In the course of the horse-trading, Palestine, claimed by Britain, was eventually supposed to become independent. This chapter is the most complicated in the entire history of the region, and merits treatment which goes far beyond the scope of this article. Thus, only cursory remarks are provided here.

While the British were promising Arab rule and independence to the Hashemite Hussein and his sons, they were simultaneously promising a homeland in Palestine to the Jews. In the Balfour Declaration of Nov. 2, 1917 (named after Arthur James Balfour, then Foreign Secretary), the following was declared:

His majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish

FIGURE 3

**The British Mandate (c. 1922)**



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communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

According to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Holy Places in Palestine were to be under an international regime. Administration of the Holy Places was never an administrative affair, however. From the earliest times, the Great Powers vied for political influence in Jerusalem, through their religious institutions. There were the Germans, who had established a foothold in the Crusades, as well as the French; the Russians, with the Russian Orthodox Church sites; the Armenians; and, of course, the peoples of the region, who were Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

The French, who had their own ambitions for Palestine, feared that the British support for Zionism would lead to Britain's total control there. The British lied to the Arabs, that they had no intention of fostering a Jewish state, and lied to the Zionist representatives, that they intended precisely that. The Arab-Jewish violence that broke out in 1919 was pre-programmed by the British to ensure that Arabs and Jews would not join forces. Britain received the mandate over Palestine from the League of Nations on July 24, 1922 (Figure 3).

It should also be noted that even the most "pro-Zionist" among the British political leaders, were constitutionally

anti-Semitic. Sykes was reportedly anti-Jewish to the extreme, but hated the Armenians more. "Even Jews have their good points, but Armenians have none," he wrote.

This does not imply that Sykes was pro-Arab. He is reported to have written that urban Arabs were "cowardly," "insolent yet despicable," "vicious as far as their feeble bodies will admit," whereas Bedouin Arabs were "rapacious, greedy . . . animals."

**Postscript**

Today, the British are again in Basra, protecting its rich oil fields; and their partners, Bush and Cheney, are struggling to maintain control over Baghdad. The Anglo-Americans have promised their Iraqi counterparts "independence," "sovereignty," "freedom," and "democracy." Arab military units, organized in militias or tribal groups, are fighting alongside their armies, as they did with Lawrence of Arabia, not against another empire, but

against the Iraqi people who have risen up against the new imperialist yoke.

Palestine remains in the throes of Arab-Israeli conflict, which the Great Powers have failed to solve. Guarantees of Palestinian statehood are solemnly uttered alongside commitments to the defense of Israel's right to exist. But no viable option for the realization of a peace program for the region has been put on their agenda.

Iran is on the firing line, again contested between Russian interests and the Anglo-Americans. And the French have set their sights on Syria, including Lebanon.

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