Honourable Mention

From "E" to "K": The Development of the Mandate System and Britain's Influence over Iraq

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The 1918 armistice and the ending of the Great War drastically changed the course of global events, not just because of the overwhelming loss of life and devastating destruction, but because of the terms of the peace agreements and restructuring conferences that succeeded the war, and altered the balances of power and the world order. Although Germany was crippled during these agreements and conferences, the Ottoman Empire was also decimated, the victorious powers dividing the conquered lands amongst themselves. These events alone, particularly the dismantling of one of the world's largest empires, changed the world in a drastic way. However, as a result of yet another rising power, the United States of America, and Woodrow Wilson's Liberal Internationalism, the approach toward dismantling the Ottoman Empire was also vastly changed. Article XXII of the Covenant of the League of Nations called for the implementation of a Mandate System for "those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are . . . not yet able to stand by themselves under the

strenuous conditions of the modern world," including those states formerly under Ottoman rule.[1]

The Mandate System revolutionized the approach of European powers toward Imperialism, forcing some, such as Britain, to not only become involved as a Mandatory within the system, but also to incorporate this new system of international politics into their current system of Empire. Not only did the Mandate System itself provide problems for Britain, and other European countries, but the local nature of the states that would become Mandates also proved to be a complicating factor. Maintaining the balance between the economic and political interests of both the Mandate and the Mandatory, as well as providing for security and stability severely complicated the relationships between European powers and the non-European world.

The scope of this paper is limited to the creation and development of the British Mandate of Iraq, and how the British Empire adapted to this process. Within this, I argue that, although the Mandate System was not ideal and ultimately ineffective, it was necessary for Britain to adopt the Mandate System and adapt to the changing global system, in order to both attain foreign policy objectives, specific to their colonial empire and resources, as well as maintain diplomatic ties with other powers, especially the United States, to protect and advance their interests abroad. First I discuss the creation of the Mandate System and the assignment of the Iraqi Mandate to Britain. The next section discusses British foreign policy and diplomatic objectives, and the success accorded to these objectives, as a direct result of the Iraqi Mandate. Finally, I discuss the implications of the Mandate System for Britain and speculate whether or not Britain would have been successful had the government not adopted the Mandate System for Iraq.

The Creation of the Mandate System

The events of the Great War outside of the European mainland drastically changed the way the post-war settlements would be decided. The entrance of the Ottoman Empire

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[1] Yale University Law School, "The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy," avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leaguecov.asp#art22

into the war, on the side of Germany, in 1914 elicited an immediate response from both Britain and France. As a result, the post-war settlements were complicated in an unprecedented manner, forcing the international community to reevaluate its policies toward war conquests. The Mandate System provided a means by which the international community could address the post-war concerns of conquered territory through spheres of influence and sovereign-rule.

The entrance of the Ottoman Empire into the war on the side of the Central Powers, immediately threatened the security of British India. Prior to the war, as Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian note in their "Introduction" to *The Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921*, the British were "committed to maintaining the political integrity of the Ottoman Empire" despite the need to self-police the Persian Gulf.[2] The Ottoman Empire acted as a buffer state for Britain, preventing Britain's greatest threats -- the French, the Russians, and the Germans -- from gaining a strategic advantage in the region. However, the decision by the Ottomans in 1914 to join the War on the side of Germany once again presented the threat of expansion by a rival power.

The Mesopotamia Campaign, the main purpose of which was to "deter any Ottoman activity at the head of the Gulf," began in earnest in late 1914.[3] Although attacking the Ottomans was strategically valuable for the overall pursuit of the War, it also provided the British the ability to effect four aims that would protect the empire abroad: checking Ottoman intrigue; encouraging the local Arabs against the Ottomans; safeguarding Egypt; and securing the flow of oil from Abadan for the Royal Navy.[4]

The British Army experienced considerable success in the initial stages of the campaign, and, by mid-November, within two weeks of deployment from India, had taken control of Basra.[5] Basra, situated at the head of the Persian Gulf, was the initial objective of the Mesopotamian Campaign and control was intended to "deter the Ottomans from suborning Britain's friends or interfering with British interests" in the

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[2] Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian, "Introduction," *The Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 9

[3] Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country, 1914-1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 8

[4] Ibid., p. 246.

[5] Simon and Tejirian, "Introduction," p. 10.

region.[6] These early successes inflated the confidence of the Indian Expeditionary Force in charge of the campaign,[7] and prompted the decision to march on Baghdad, the endpoint of the Berlin-Baghdad Railroad and the German outlet to the Persian Gulf that proved to be a substantial threat to the British overseas Empire and the pursuit of the overall war effort.[8] This march was, however, ill fated: unlike the march on the Turkish fort at Fao and on Basra, the British met consistent armed resistance that resulted in thousands of casualties on both sides. Nonetheless, the British continued to control Basra where it had established an administration for Occupied Territories.[9]

The conquest of Basra, and the ability to effectively administer this *villayet*, while the army marched across the Tigris, prompted a secret discussion between the British and the French regarding the division of the Ottoman Empire, and their respective spheres of influence in the Near East. These negotiations, which would become known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, indicate not only a willingness to dismantle the Ottoman Empire, but also a confidence in the ability of the Entente Powers to be victorious in war as early as 1915, a year during which the British suffered enormous casualties at Gallipoli, Ctesiphon, and Kut.[10]

The Sykes-Picot Agreement, formulated in January but secretly ratified in May 1916, provided the British and the French with a means by which to divide the Ottoman Empire, and for each to attain policy objectives in the region. For the British, drawing "a line from the "e" in Acre to the last "k" in Kirkuk" would allow a significant portion of the Arabian peninsula to come under the direct control of the British Crown, strengthening not only the overland route to India, but also the sea-route through the Persian Gulf, and thereby the passage to Egypt as well.[11] Within their respective spheres of influence, the "Blue" French Zone, including Syria and Lebanon to the north, and the

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[6] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq,* p. 4.

[7] The IEF 'D' was later re-named the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force.
Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq,* p. 11.

[8] Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (New York: Kegan Paul Limited, 2004), p. 65.

[9] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq,* p. 11.

[10] Simon and Teijirian, "Introduction," pp. 10-11.

[11] James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: Britain, France and the Struggle that Shaped the Middle East* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2011), p. 12

"Red" British Zone, encompassing Basra, Baghdad, and eventually Mosul,[12] both states were given the freedom to assert full control and authority, as well as be the "sole provider of any foreign advisors requested,"[13] but were also to recognize and uphold the promise of Arab Independence made by McMahon to Husein.[14]

While the Sykes-Picot Agreement allowed for continuous and effective spheres of influence to continue for both the French and the British following the war, the development of the Agreement is also indicative of a desire to formalize Imperial control over the region. When the Agreement was first formalized in 1916 the intent was clearly intended to extend the reach of both English and French Empires. As the war continued and the Mandate system developed as a means of implementing the agreement however, the Imperial intent was softened in order to maintain diplomatic relations with the United States.

Although the Sykes-Picot Agreement solved several problems, it was not universally liked. As the head of military intelligence for Britain complained, "it seems to me that we are rather in the position of the hunters who divided up the skin of the bear before they had killed it."[15] Not only was the agreement purely self-interested, it was also perhaps too early to be developing settlements regarding uncertain outcomes. Furthermore, the agreement made assumptions that would turn out to be false; unlike in previous wars, territorial acquisition was not secured by wartime occupation and then post-war annexation. Instead, acquisition of territory would be decided on the basis of new ideologies about global governance.

The entrance of the United States into the War against Germany in 1917 and the ardent belief of United States president Woodrow Wilson in self-governance severely altered the status quo in Europe.[16] Wilson's "Fourteen Points Speech" in January 1918,

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[12] See Appendix A

[13] Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 7

[14] The Husain-McMahon Correspondence, of 1916, promised British aid to Husain, the Sharif of Mecca, for the establishment of Arab independence, in exchange for his revolt against the Turks, which would aid the British war effort.

Ireland, *Iraq*, p. 68

[15] Barr, *A Line in the Sand*, p. 32.

[16] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 16.

clearly delineated the president's aims for the War and the potential discussions that would occur at the post-war peace conference.[17] In contrast, the war aims of both Britain and France were unclear throughout the War, becoming crystallized only in the post-war efforts to develop a lasting peace.

When the 11 November 1918 armistice brought the Great War to an end, it exacerbated the unclear aims of the allied powers, particularly Britain and France. The post-war aims of these powers, as well as the United States, are outlined by Paul C. Helmreich: the focus of the British government, under the newly elected David Lloyd George, was to protect India, the Crown Jewel of the Empire, at all costs while maintaining and expanding the Empire.[18] The two main goals of the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, as Helmreich explains, were "establishing as great a degree of British supremacy as possible in the Near East . . . reducing the competitive position of France" while abandoning the "traditional policy of supporting the government at Constantinople [as it] would no longer suffice" to satisfy Britain's new goals and policy aims.[19]

The French post-war aims had a very different focus than the British; the primary aim of the French government was the European settlement. There was both "public and parliamentary demand for terms that would permanently disable Germany and assure French military and economic supremacy on the continent," limiting the ability of the French to advocate effectively for a Near East agreement. Regardless, the French delegation firmly held the belief that the stipulations of the Sykes-Picot Agreement must remain in effect until a new agreement was made.[20]

The goals of the United States were not as plagued by self-interest as those of the British and the French, particularly in the Near East, as the United States had never declared war on the Ottoman Empire. The basic principle that the United States followed throughout the Peace negotiations was that "all agreements or treaties that conflicted

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[17] Ibid., p. 17.

[18] Ibid., p. 12

[19] Ibid., p. 13.

[20] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

with the armistice terms [be] abrogated because all the Allies had agreed that the peace treaties should be based on the Fourteen Points."[21]

The post-war aims of the victorious powers were focused on a variety of objectives in both the Near East and in Europe. In order to effectively address the concerns of all three, Britain, France, and the United States, a new system was necessary. This new system, the Mandate System, was ultimately adopted and changed the course of how the Near East, and many other non-European regions across the globe, would be governed.

The development of the Mandate System was not particularly straightforward; every allied nation had specific, and differing, objectives in the region that made it difficult to achieve a harmonized approach in dividing the former Ottoman Empire. Yet, as Helmreich notes, "there was a fair amount of agreement on basic issues" between the nations at the beginning of the Paris Peace Conference.[22] Primarily, Turkey was to be excluded from Europe with Constantinople and the Straits under international control, while the Arab portions of the Ottoman Empire were liberated, providing them with "national recognition . . . albeit under the watchful care of great powers."[23] Generally, the European powers agreed that the Ottoman Empire needed to be disassembled, but how specifically this would occur demonstrated the vastly divergent opinions.

Prior to the Peace Conference beginning in 1919, two important intellectual discoveries were made. The first was that of a Mandate System, one that would attempt "to strike a balance between the interest-driven role of European colonialism and the needs of 'backward peoples,'" was first conceptualized in 1917 by an American, George Lewis Beer, who had been assigned to an inquiry team tasked with advising Wilson on post-war problems.[24] For Beer, the Mandatory System, at its core, would be the much-needed compromise between European Imperialism, and Wilson's Liberal Internationalism. The second was made by Jan Smuts, a member of the British Delegation, from South Africa, who published "The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion," in December 1918. This was a 71-page document outlining his proposal for a League of

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[21] Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres.* p. 21.

[22] Ibid., p. 23.

[23] Ibid., p. 23.

[24] Quoted in Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 12.

Nations, which would act in many respects as the Empire system did, in order to ensure peace and security for those within its sphere.[25] In the document, Smuts outlines what he believed to be the basic principles for the determination of Mandates, the Mandatory powers, and how Mandates ought to ultimately be controlled by the League. This particular document, incredibly thorough and demanding, formed the basis of the Paris Peace Conference, and the decisions made regarding territorial control.

The Paris Peace Conference, beginning 12 January 1919, provided an opportunity for the leaders of the five victorious powers of the war to participate in the "art of arranging how men are to live," which "is even more complex than that of massacring them."[26] The Peace Conference's decision to act, as Smuts had suggested, as though it were the first meeting of the League of Nations, prompted the acceptance of the Mandate System as a compromise between the two extremes of Wilson and the European powers, especially by Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau, who favoured Imperialism, or Conservative Internationalism.[27] Although the Mandate System was adopted and the terms of the Mandate System were laid out, as per Article XXII of the Covenant of the League of Nations,[28] it was not until nearly a year later at the 1920 San Remo Conference that the Near East Mandates, including Iraq, were formally provided a protectorate.[29]

The San Remo Conference, held in April 1920, formally divided the Ottoman Empire with the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres. Although the most contentious regions discussed at the San Remo Conference were Armenia and Kurdistan, with the majority of the treaty having already been decided, the negotiators officially approved the allocation of the Mesopotamia Mandate to Britain.[30] It was generally accepted by the negotiators that the boundary between the French and British areas agreed upon by the

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[25] J.C. Smuts, "The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion" (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), *United States Archives*.
http://ia600202.us.archive.org/17/items/leagueofnationsp00smutuoft/leagueofnationsp00smutuoft.pdf
[26] Quoted in Barr, *A Line in the Sand, p.* 73.
[27] George Egerton, "Conservative Internationalism: British Approached to International Organization and the Creation of the League of Nations" *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 5, 1 (1994): pp. 1-20.
[28] See Appendix B
[29] David Gilmour, "The Unregarded Prophet: Lord Curzon and the Palestine Question" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, 3 (1996): p. 66
[30] Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres*, p. 302

Sykes-Picot Agreement would hold and that "each nation was free to carry out, without restriction, any policy it wished in the mandated territories."[31] This essentially confirmed Imperial control over the regions but with a different set of rules, upheld ostensibly by international law, by which to govern the territories. With the conclusion of the San Remo Conference and the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres, the Mandate System for the Near East became official international policy.[32]

The Mandate System that Smuts proposed in late 1918 and which the international community, at the Paris Peace Conference, officially adopted ultimately represents a series of national policy compromises. Ultimately, Wilson was satisfied that the Arab nations would eventually be given the right to self-rule, once they had achieved stability and the ability to do so, under the guidance of an imperial power. As well, both Lloyd George and Clemenceau were satisfied that their respective governments would acquire control over the territories, which had earlier been divided, and therefore maintain spheres of influence in areas important to their greater empires.

However, the Mandate System, as I will later show, was not wholly effective. As Harold Nicolson observed,

> Nobody who has not had experience of committee work in actual practice can conceive of the difficulty of inducing . . . agree[ment] on anything. A majority agreement is easy enough: an unanimous agreement is an impossibility; or, if possible, then possible only in the form of some paralytic compromise [*sic*]."[33]

As a result of the compromise, the Mandate System was not likely to last and would cease to be effective if either the Mandate or the Mandatory felt that it was no longer in their respective interests to continue in the relationship. For Britain, already feeling public pressure to leave Iraq,[34] this would occur within only a few years, and Iraq, although

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[31] Ibid., p. 302

[32] The signing of the Treaty of Sèvres was not, however, popular amongst the Arab nationalists in Iraq, many of whom believed they had the right to self-governance without the imposition of a Mandatory power to oversee the country's development.
Ireland, *Iraq,* p. 210

[33] Barr, *A Line in the Sands,* p. 73

[34] Guiditta Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919-23" *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, 1 (2010): p. 6

remaining under the British sphere of influence, would not achieve an effective ability to self-govern as a result of the falsification of Iraq stability to promote Iraqi independence and admittance into the League of Nations.[35]

Although problems with the creation of the Mandate System did exist, many of which were evident from the outset, the Mandate System was clearly the only feasible method of achieving post-war policy objectives for the countries involved, specifically Britain. As the next section identifies, the policy objectives and reasons for desiring influence in Iraq were highly important in British decision-making in the post-war period. In order to achieve these objectives and balance a relationship with the rest of Europe, primarily France, as well as the United States, it was necessary for Britain to make compromises throughout the peace process and accept the path of least resistance: away from Empire and toward internationalism.

Foreign Policy and Diplomatic Objectives

When the British government was assigned the Iraqi Mandate at the San Remo Conference in April 1920, it was the result of many years of direct attempts to control the region. The Skyes-Picot Agreement generally explains the rationale for the British pursuit of what would become Iraq, but does not explain the change in mentality that occurred with the end of the war. In this section, I argue that although Britain "needed" Iraq for regional gains, it was necessary to deal with Iraq as a mandate in order to achieve political and diplomatic objectives within the Western world.

One of the most pertinent questions regarding the decision by British policymakers to acquire the land that would become Iraq, even before the war had been decided, is "why Iraq?" Why did the British seek this particular piece of land, and desire it over land further north, such as that sought by the French? Although this is a

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[35] As Ernest Main notes, the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League, responsible for ensuring that prospective states met the conditions for Independence and entry into the League of Nations, was uncertain about the reports produced by the British on the state of affairs in Iraq as "the Permanent Mandates Commission [accepted the British assurances of Iraq's maturity] with marked hesitation" Ernest Main, *Iraq: From Mandate to Independence* (London: Kegan Paul, 2004), p. 107

complicated decision and many did not understand, even at the time, the two most prominent reasons for pursuing this particular section of land in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and then later in obtaining the mandate for Iraq, were regional strategic security, and economic objectives in resource acquisition.

The regional strategic security rationale for acquiring this southeastern portion of the Ottoman Empire was the Crown Jewel of the British Empire - India. As a result of its geography, what would become Iraq, particularly the Basra *vilayet*, was important for Britain to control, or at the very least, influence. Priya Satia, in the opening line of her paper "Developing Iraq: Britain, India, and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War," indicates that the Mesopotamian Campaign of 1914 "began as a small . . . operation for the defence of Indian frontiers and British interests in the Persian Gulf."[36] Mesopotamia, the British referent to the region that would become Iraq, was the "land bridge or frontier [needed] to control either directly or by proxy" imperial India.[37] At the head of the Persian Gulf, Mesopotamia also provided possibilities for shipping and increased trade in the region.[38]

The region that would become Iraq not only provided for increased trade ability, but also functioned as defensive posturing for the remainder of the British Empire, including both India and Egypt. Holding the mouth of the Persian Gulf would keep the Ottoman Turks from interfering with the British Empire, as well as prevent other potential enemies from gaining control of a region that would be strategically valuable in attacking Britain. Britain was not looking to expand its Empire, but rather to protect it.

Throughout the course of the war and into the post-war period, the British objective to maintain control over the area changed little, and ultimately formed the foundation for British policy in the region, including the discussions of annexation that took place during the war.[39] In many ways, by occupying and controlling, directly or indirectly, the southern *vilayets*, the British were protecting their colony from invasion:

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[36] Priya Satia, "Developing Iraq; Britain, India and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War" *Past and Present* 197 (2007): p. 211.

[37] Simon and Tejirian, "Introduction," p. 8.

[38] Ibid.

[39] S.A. Cohen, "The Genesis of the British Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914" *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, 2 (1976): p. 120.

the easiest way to attack the Empire and weaken their forces, in Europe and elsewhere, would be to attack the colonies and force the British to divide their resources. When the Ottomans entered into the war, it was strategically advantageous for the British to retain control of the *vilayets* in the south, and maintain a buffer between the next closest empire and their own. In the post-war period, it was equally important to protect this frontier, ensuring that the Ottomans would not again overtake the region, or that other British enemies, such as the Germans, who had built a railroad to Baghdad, not acquire regional power. In the post-war discussions, this was an important consideration in maintaining the negotiated peace outside of Europe.

The second major rationale for the British involvement in the Iraqi region was that of economics and resource acquisition. Prior to the outbreak of the war, oil reserves had been discovered in the Mosul *Vilayet* and throughout Persia.[40] Having recently converted the Royal Navy to oil from coal, oil resources were an essential consideration in British policy objectives. Furthermore, access to resource wealth in Mesopotamia would allow the British the ability to overcome the financial weakness experienced as a result of war.[41] Although, Winston Churchill, then the First Lord of the Admiralty, had "consistently denied that Britain would ever come to rely exclusively on [the Persian oil] field," the Admiralty nonetheless did hope to eventually "obtain as much as half a million tons of oil annually from this new source."[42] Throughout the war, and particularly in the post-war discussions, oil was a prominent factor in British decision-making though the British did not necessarily desire to rely solely upon the oil fields of the Persian Gulf; they also did not want their enemies to have access to these resources.

Throughout the discussions of the Near East, both during the Sykes-Picot meetings as well as in the post-war meetings, the oil resources of the Near East, and particularly of the Mosul *vilayet*, dominated much of the debate. The decision to include Mosul in the British Mandate of Iraq was the product of severe negotiations over a lengthy period of time. Initially, Mosul had been delegated to France, as per the Sykes-Picot Agreement, in the hopes that France would be able to provide a buffer between the British and Russian

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[40] Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States," p. 1.

[41] Satia, *Developing Iraq*, p. 223.

[42] Cohen, "The Genesis of the British Campaign in Mesopotamia," p. 121.

Empires.[43] However, a mere six weeks prior to the Paris Peace Conference, Lloyd George, in discussion with Clemenceau, declared his intention to control Mosul, and its associated oilfields.[44] Oil, which was "four times more efficient than coal, would eventually take over as the major marine fuel. This would eventually leave Britain vulnerable because whereas it had coal reserves of its own, it depended on the United States for its supply of oil."[45] The rise of the United States throughout the war years accounts for Britain's reversal of policy toward Mosul and the oilfields in Persia. As the United States' power and global influence waxed, Britain's position as the dominant world power waned; access to the resource of the future was crucial for the maintenance of global hegemony.

Although the ultimate decisions regarding the allocation of access to resources, including oil, wheat and cotton, greatly affected the ability of Iraq to succeed as an independent state after 1932, these discussions and agreements do not pertain to the rationale for pursuing the Iraq Mandate. The knowledge of resource access and the need to obtain direct control over the resources of Mesopotamia, for the purposes of maintaining hegemony, increasing Britain's own status, and preventing other powers from having access (thereby limiting competition), played substantial roles in the decision to pursue control over the region.

In aggregate, the decision of British policymakers to engage in the Mesopotamian Campaign, as well as remain an active influence in the region following the end of the war, did not derive from a single objective in the region, but rather a culmination of factors that would affect the regional security, economics, and strategic positioning of the Empire.[46] By becoming involved, not only was Britain continuing the policy of maintaining the international status quo that it had followed for centuries, but was also protecting the interests of the greater British Empire by preventing potential enemies from gaining control of the region, while benefitting from the resources and geostrategic position of Iraq.

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[43] V.H. Rothwell, "Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914-1918" *The Historical Journal* 13, 2 (1970): p. 288.

[44] Barr, *A Line in the Sand*, p. 72.

[45] Barr, *A Line in the Sand*, p. 65.

[46] The official end of the war with the Ottomans did not occur until 1923, as A.T. Wilson notes, "the East could wait."

A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917–1920, A Clash of Loyalties* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1931), p. 261.

The continued involvement of Britain in Iraq throughout the war and into the post-war period was, in many ways, a rational decision for Britain in terms of regional strategic security, and economic objectives in resource acquisition. However, involvement in Iraq could have taken many forms. The Mandate System, described in section one, however, provided the most rational method for obtaining the aforementioned objectives. Primarily, the Mandate System allowed Britain to gain influence over the region without direct responsibility, while also catering to the desires of the international community and maintaining important diplomatic ties with the United States and the League of Nations.

The United States, under Wilson, pursued a foreign policy of internationalism that was quite uncommon for the nation.[47] Once the United States had entered the war in April 1917, and Wilson announced the American war objectives, via his now-famous Fourteen Points Speech in January 1918, it became evident that the "long established and hitherto almost unchallenged assumptions of British imperial policy had to be reconciled with a whole set of new requirements."[48] Wilson, who brought his "hatred of imperialism" with him to the post-war conferences, was loath to accept the development of protectorates, or annexations to divide the Middle East.[49] Based on the principle of self-determination, however, the United States was willing to acquiesce on the question of international mandates, which would be "embodied in a deed of trust" to protect native populations and to aid in the development of independent governments.[50]

Britain, who had come to rely on the United States for oil supplies,[51] and as an important ally throughout the last two years of the war, was in a greatly weakened position at the end of the Great War.[52] As a result, Britain was not able to dictate terms of peace to the international community as it had in the antebellum years. The increasing

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[47] Spector & Tejirian, "Introduction," p. 159.

[48] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 13.

[49] D.K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958* (Cary, N.C.: Oxford University Press, 2006), 60

[50] Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 12

[51] Rothwell, "Mesopotamia in British War Aims", 289

[52] John R. Ferris, "'The Greatest Power on Earth': Great Britain in the 1920s" *The International History Review* 13:4 (1991): 738.

presence of the United States as a world power, and the inability of the British to dictate terms resulted in a process of negotiating terms and territorial acquisitions that satisfied no one.

The United States' approval of the Mandate System, and the allocation of the Mandates at the San Remo Conference in 1920, laid the groundwork for the Mandates to be accepted by the League of Nations in 1922. The League represented the desire by European states for the "establishment of some new international organization to prevent future wars."[53] As many believed that imperialism had been the cause of the Great War, the members of the League were generally against supporting the development of Empire, which can be seen in the Leagues' later actions regarding Italy in Ethiopia and Japan in Manchuria.[54]

Although many British policymakers were opposed to the idea of a League of Nations to provide and ensure peace and international security, it was no longer realistic to return to the past. As George Egerton explains,

> Both domestic and international pressures had induced the government to commit itself deeply to the policy of establishing a league of nations. Furthermore, if traditional British strategies showed some conflict with the league idea, still, throughout the nineteenth century British diplomacy had also attempted periodically to foster a viable international conference system . . . It was to be expected, then, that the second alternative identified by Hankey – a league based upon the concert of Europe – would attract attention and support in government circles.[55]

This support would also extend to the international community and provide Britain with a strategic advantage it would not otherwise be able to gain.

Just as British policymakers supported the League, so too was the Mandate System supported, and for the same purposes: to attract attention and support in international government circles. The original plan, to annex the *vilayets* controlled by the British at the

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[53] George W. Egerton, *"The Lloyd George Government and the Creation of the League of Nations" American Historical Review* 79:2 (1974): 420.

[54] Dodge, *Inventing Iraq,* 7

[55] Egerton, "The Lloyd George Government and the Creation of the League of Nations," p. 426.

end of the war and develop a sphere of influence south of the Skyes-Picot Line, was not possible under the influence of Liberal Internationalism that Wilson brought to the peace talks at Paris and San Remo.

The Mandate System also allowed Britain a unique position in the Middle East: by acting as the Mandatory of Iraq, the British would be able to directly influence events in the area, as well as maintain access to the Persian Gulf and the port at Basra, while not having to invest economic resources into the area as heavily as they would if it were to be annexed. As a result of the Mandate System's instruction for the Mandates to "work toward self-governance," it was easy for the British to achieve all their objectives in the area without having to pay for the Mandate; an important consideration as Britain was experiencing significant financial weakness in the immediate aftermath of the war. Indirect rule had several advantages, primarily that it would accomplish "the maintenance of economic and strategic influence, the reduction of the permanent military garrisons so as to reduce expenses, and the need to ensure local stability."[56]

In order to maintain the power and international influence of the British Empire, it was necessary to adapt to the changing global community's perspective of Empire and peace vis-a-vis collective security, and to adopt the Mandate System as a means to expand and maintain the influence of the Empire abroad. Although it is not possible to say that the approach was Machiavellian, the Mandate System did provide Britain with the best option to obtain objectives with as much gain and as little cost to the Empire itself as possible under the circumstances.[57]

Implications of the Mandate System

The implications of the Mandate System are, in many ways, difficult to understand. The long-term effects of the Mandate System, as with colonization and Empire-building in general, have been devastating to many states around the world.

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[56] Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States," p. 6.

[57] This is not to say that the Mandate System, under British or any other rule, was in any way morally or ethically just. The debate surrounding the moral issues of Empire is outside the scope of this paper.

However, during the period of the Mandate System, Britain was able to achieve its policy objectives and did so more effectively than it could have under another system. During the time in which the Ottoman Empire was being divided, few options existed for Britain, France, and the United States in deciding how the former Ottoman Empire would be partitioned. Below is an analysis of other potential options:

Annexation

The most feasible method of dividing the Ottoman Empire in the post-war period was annexation. Had Wilson's Liberal Internationalism and belief in the right to self-government not been a factor in the peace talks, it is possible that the spheres of influence decided upon by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement would have been annexed by the British and French governments respectively. However, this arrangement would not address the problems of Constantinople and the Straits, created by Russia's early departure from the war.[58] Although it is likely that these would also have been split amongst the victors (potentially the United States may have annexed these areas for her own empire), the governance of these areas would likely not have affected British policy in the region.

Alternatively, Britain may have acted to annex the region in spite of international pressures for a Mandate System and the move toward self-government. Had this occurred, the British would have had to contend with the United States as an enemy, and likely much of the League of Nations working against it, in every region of the Empire. Furthermore, Britain found itself facing an internal dilemma regarding annexation, "due to conflicting French and Arab claims" in portions of the region.[59] Working against international sentiment would have destroyed Britain as an Empire almost immediately after the war, during which time the Empire was weakened, both effectively and respective to other nations, and the addition of internal strife would only add to these problems. Although the League had no ability to enforce decisions militarily, the implications for Britain would have been grave.

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[58] Russia's departure from the war in 1917 under the Bolshevik government, as well as the attempted treaty with the Turks, forfeited any right Russia had to territorial gains in the post-war period as a victor of the War. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres*, p. 217.

[59] Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres*, p. 28.

Having annexed Basra and the Mosul *vilayets*, the British would likely have pursued a policy of "Indianization," as the India Office proposed during the war.[60] This process would have allowed what became Iraq to be nominally self-sufficient while still providing the British Crown with the resources, access points, and influence that it desired. However, Britain would also have had a greater responsibility to protect the region and would have become much more than tangentially involved in uprisings and domestic violence.[61] Like in India, the Iraq-region would have cost the British Empire a great deal in resources and money that it did not have in the post-war period.

Although annexation would have been effective in allowing the British to achieve their strategic security and economic objectives in the Near East region, the drawbacks of annexation in the post-war era made it impracticable. Not only would annexation have been more costly to Britain in terms of resource allocation, it would also have been costly to Britain's diplomatic position with other European nations, as well as the United States.

Creation of a Protectorate

A similar option for the British would have been to make Iraq a protectorate of the Crown. In many ways, this would have been similar to the Mandate System, and would have had roughly the same effects, providing Britain with a low-cost, low-maintenance way of achieving policy objectives in the area. However, as with annexation, the creation of a protectorate would have severely countered widely agreed upon international values of that period. Many states, particularly the United States under Wilson, greatly disliked the idea of a protectorate system, primarily because it would not allow the regions to gain autonomy from the protector state.[62]

The problem of autonomy also would have provided problems for Britain. a protectorate does not have a formal goal of self-sufficiency, primarily self-government that both sides are working toward. As a result, British resources would have been spread

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[60] Satia, "Developing Iraq," p. 216.

[61] Uprisings, such as the 1920 post-San Remo Conference riot, were common during this time period. Had Iraq been annexed, it is likely that these revolts would have been more severe and less subdued by cooperative governments.
Ireland, *Iraq*, pp. 187-188.

[62] Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, p. 7.

even further across the globe, complicating problems elsewhere and leading toward an earlier collapse of the Empire. Whereas the Mandate System would allow for the British to leave the Iraq region once it was admitted as a formal state under international law and retain its influence, under a protectorate system, the British would be required to remain in the region, expending resources for no additional gain. However, a protectorate would allow for the culture and nationality of the region to remain intact.[63] It is important to note that Winston Churchill, then the British War Secretary, did propose a protectorate over the Basra *vilayet*, but, for strategic security reasons, as discussed above, this was rejected by officials in both Baghdad and London.[64] Although the possibility of establishing a protectorate existed, it would not have been effective for the British and would likely have created a greater number of problems for both Britain and Iraq.

Immediate Self-Governance

Self-Governance is the third most plausible option the British might have pursued in Mesopotamia. Immediate self-governance, as Beer noted, would not adequately address the needs of "backward peoples" who "should be subject to 'outside political control' and 'foreign capital to reorganize their stagnant economic systems.'"[65] Under this system, it is likely that the Ottomans, or the Russians, or even the French, would have expanded into the area, prevented the British from obtaining any policy objectives, and would have guaranteed an absence of British influence in the region. Furthermore, by leaving the region to govern itself, the British Empire, particularly India and Egypt, would have been at great risk, both from the regional instability, as well as the presence of other empires without a proper buffer state to separate (protect) the British Empire.

It is feasible that the region would have reverted to the same self-governance that occurred under the Ottoman rule and that the region would have been stable. However, this would not have allowed Britain to achieve any policy objectives in the area, and certainly would not have allowed Britain access to the resources, primarily oil and the Port at Basra, that it desired and which prompted the 1914 invasion. At best, self-

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[63] J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 11.

[64] Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States," p. 4.

[65] Quoted in Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, p. 12.

governance would have undone the gains made by the British in 1914, and at worst it would have destroyed the Empire.

Conclusion

The Mandate System that provided for the creation of Iraq, as well as numerous other Near East states is a contentious topic that has had lasting impacts that are still seen in the twenty-first century. Many of the decisions made throughout the Mandate period in Iraq contributed to the instability and unrest that existed throughout the twentieth century and which remain today. However, these effects do not effectively articulate the conception and development of the Mandate System. It is important for any critic of the Near East to recognize the nature of states as self-interested; it is the ability to effect change and influence governance in their favour that is the mark of success by states under the Mandatory System.

Under these criteria, it is evident that the British government was successful under the Mandate System. Britain was able to remotely control Iraq, to effect change and influence Iraqi policy without having to invest crucial resources, and was also able to maintain a working and effective relationship with other influential states, as well as developing powers. Although the long-term effects for the state of Iraq now appear to be negative, many of the issues that appear today also existed in 1920 when the Mandate was assigned. Britain's short-term success, lasting into the 1950s when Britain lost control and influence of the region following the collapse of its Empire, in the region is evident. The success that the British did have under the Mandate System, could not likely have been achieved, and at the very least not have been achieved to the same extent, under any other contemporarily available system of governance.

The dramatic shift in international politics and diplomacy that emerged in the final years of the Great War drastically altered the ability of European states to exert influence or control, and transformed the ability of these states to understand the world in which they were now asked to create a stable and lasting peace. In the words of Mark Sykes:

> If America had not come into the war, if the Russian revolution had not taken place, if the idea of no annexation had not taken root, if the world spirit of this time was the world spirit of 1887, there would be no reason why we should take any steps to consolidate our position against a peace conference, it would be good enough . . . [But now] . . . imperialism, annexation, military triumph, prestige, White man's burdens, have been expunged from the popular political vocabulary, consequently Protectorates, spheres of interest or influence, annexations, bases etc., have to be consigned to the Diplomatic lumber-room.[66]

In aggregate, the Mandate System was the necessary option for Britain to successfully pursue their policy objectives in the region in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, despite its many faults and long-term ineffectiveness.

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[66] Quoted in Dodge, *Inventing Iraq,* p. 13.

Appendix A

JOURNAL OF MILITARY AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

The Sykes-Picot Agreement: Red and Blue Zones of Influence[67]
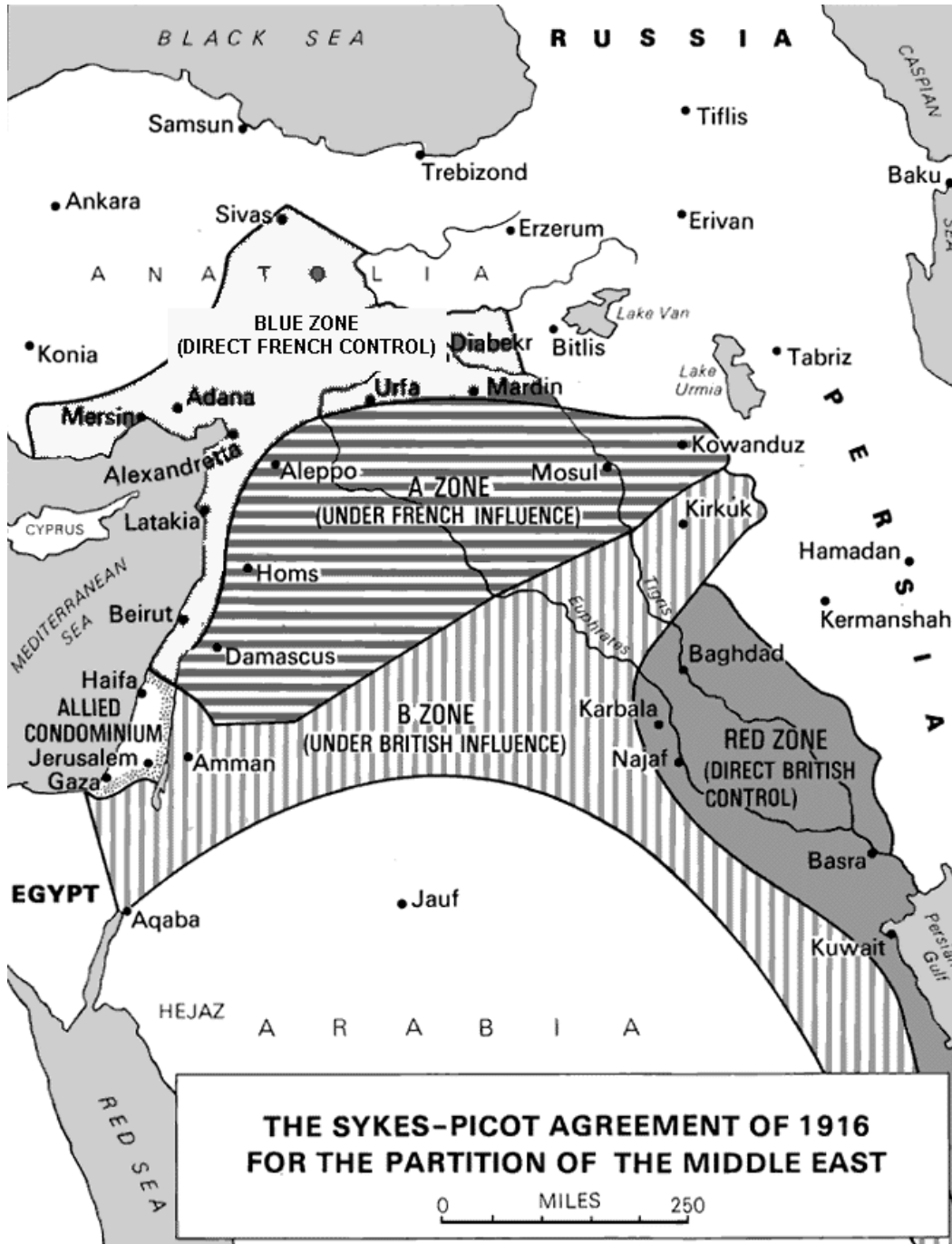
THE SYKES–PICOT AGREEMENT OF 1916
FOR THE PARTITION OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Appendix B

Article XXII of the Covenant of the League of Nations[68]

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.

The character of the mandate must differ according to the stage of the development of the people, the geographical situation of the territory, its economic conditions and other similar circumstances.

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.

Other peoples, especially those of Central Africa, are at such a stage that the Mandatory must be responsible for the administration of the territory under conditions which will guarantee freedom of conscience and religion, subject only to the maintenance of public order and morals, the prohibition of abuses such as the slave trade, the arms traffic and the liquor traffic, and the prevention of the establishment of fortifications or

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[68] Yale University Law School, "The Avalon Project"

military and naval bases and of military training of the natives for other than police purposes and the defence of territory, and will also secure equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other Members of the League.

There are territories, such as South-West Africa and certain of the South Pacific Islands, which, owing to the sparseness of their population, or their small size, or their remoteness from the centres of civilisation, or their geographical contiguity to the territory of the Mandatory, and other circumstances, can be best administered under the laws of the Mandatory as integral portions of its territory, subject to the safeguards above mentioned in the interests of the indigenous population.

In every case of mandate, the Mandatory shall render to the Council an annual report in reference to the territory committed to its charge.

The degree of authority, control, or administration to be exercised by the Mandatory shall, if not previously agreed upon by the Members of the League, be explicitly defined in each case by the Council.

A permanent Commission shall be constituted to receive and examine the annual reports of the Mandatories and to advise the Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates.

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