
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Examining the role of European colonialism in the formation of the political order and borders of the Middle East

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| ABSTRACT

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the colonial rivalries of European powers, especially Britain and France, played a decisive role in drawing the political borders of the Middle East. With the weakening and collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, the victorious powers divided the Arab regions under Ottoman rule by concluding political agreements and treaties, including the Sykes-Picot Agreement and other colonial treaties. This division was made mainly based on the strategic and economic interests of the European powers, and little attention was paid to the historical, cultural and ethnic realities of the societies of the region. This research, using a descriptive-analytical method and library resources, examines the political, strategic and economic processes of European colonialism in the Middle East and analyzes its long-term consequences on the border, ethnic and political crises of the region. The findings show that many of the current borders of the Middle East were drawn based on foreign interests and did not take into account the ethnic and cultural cohesion of the societies. This situation has created long-term conflicts, political instability and security challenges in the region. By presenting historical and analytical evidence, this study highlights the importance of understanding the historical roots of the Middle East crises and shows that without understanding this colonial legacy, the analysis of the region's political and social developments will be incomplete.

| KEYWORDS

European colonialism, Middle East, Border formation, Political borders and artificial borders.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The Middle East is one of the most important geopolitical regions in the world and has always been of interest to major world powers due to its strategic location, vast energy resources, especially oil and gas, and its location on important trade routes between continents. However, many of the current political and security crises and conflicts in this region have their roots in historical developments in the early 20th century. One of the most important of these developments was the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the intervention of European colonial powers in determining the new political borders of the Middle East. In this process, political demarcations were mainly based on the geopolitical and economic interests of the colonial powers, and less attention was paid to the ethnic, cultural, and religious realities of the region. As a result, the formation of new states with artificial and heterogeneous borders paved the way for many political, ethnic, and religious tensions, the effects of which can still be seen in the political and security structure of the Middle East today. Accordingly, the main issue of this research is to examine how European colonialism played a role in the process of forming the political borders of the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and what long-term consequences these demarcations had for the political, social and ethnic structures of the region.

Before the arrival of European colonialism, the region was under the influence of the Ottoman Empire and its social and political structures were formed based on local history and culture. The vast Ottoman territory, which at its peak covered three continents, became a set of independent states or colonies after its collapse. In the Middle East, the countries of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Saudi Arabia were directly separated from the Ottoman states. Lebanon and Syria came under the mandate of France, and Iraq, Palestine and Jordan came under the mandate of Britain. The Arabian Peninsula gained independence with the rise of the Saudi dynasty.

In the Balkans, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, and parts of Romania and Kosovo also established their independence either before or after World War I. In North Africa, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria, which had separated from the Ottomans in earlier centuries, became European protectorates. And at the heart of that empire, modern Turkey was born; a country that, having severed its ties with the imperial past and the institution of the caliphate, entered an era of republicanism and modernization. The collapse of the Ottoman state created an opportunity for European powers to draw new political borders based on their interests. The negative consequences of which have remained the main focus of regional conflicts to this day. The main objective of this research is to examine and analyze the role of European colonialism in shaping the political borders of the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and to assess its long-term consequences on the political, social, and ethnic structures of the region. This research attempts to explain the motivations and goals of European powers, especially Britain and France, in the process of drawing new borders and to show to what extent these demarcations were based on colonial interests and geopolitical considerations. Furthermore, the present research seeks to examine the impact of these artificial borders on the formation of national identities, the emergence of border conflicts, ethnic and religious tensions, and contemporary political crises. On the other hand, this research attempts to clarify the link between past developments and current security and political challenges in the Middle East by using a descriptive-analytical method. Ultimately, the aim of this study is to provide a scientific framework for a deeper understanding of the roots of regional crises and to help present realistic perspectives towards stability and political convergence in the Middle East.

This research is based on the questions: What were the motivations and goals of European powers in intervening and drawing the borders of the Middle East? What political, social and ethnic consequences did the borders drawn by European colonialism have in the countries of the Middle East?

With the hypothesis that European colonialism played a fundamental and decisive role in shaping the political borders of the Middle East. This practice led to ethnic, religious and political crises in the Middle East, and the consequences of colonial division can still be seen in the political conflicts and challenges of the Middle East.

This research is a descriptive-analytical research method. In a descriptive way: it describes and describes historical events, treaties and processes. And from an analytical perspective: it examines the causes and consequences of European colonial actions in the Middle East by analyzing historical sources and documents. In addition, the use of contemporary analysis provides a basis for evaluating the research findings in light of today's political and social conditions. The combination of these three approaches provides a logical and scientific framework for a detailed examination of the subject.

Background The historical study of the formation of the borders of the Middle East under the influence of European colonialism is an important focus in the study of political history and international relations. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, European powers, especially Britain and France, attempted to divide strategic regions based on geopolitical and economic interests (Fromkin, 2000, 281-283).

This division took the form of agreements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), which divided the region between two colonial empires without regard to its ethnic, religious, and linguistic structures (Fromkin, 2000, 188).

This territorial regrouping was formalized through treaties such as the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Lausanne, which led to the creation of countries with artificial borders. Thus, many of the present-day political borders of the Middle East are the product of colonial decisions and do not necessarily reflect the region's indigenous historical and social conditions (Gelvin, 2015, 119). Historical scholars have also emphasized.

2. The Political Structure of the Ottoman Empire

History writers consider Osman, the son of Ertoyrhul, to be the founder of the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Alaeddin Seljuk gave Ertoyrhul the Emirate of Sogut, which was in northwestern Anatolia and on the border of the Byzantine Empire. Ertoyrhul guarded the border with the help of a group of Turkmens and, like other warriors, raided Byzantine territory. His son Osman succeeded his father and founded the Ottoman dynasty that took his name (Sinij, 1970, 6).

Osman Bey, who was initially a Seljuk subject, declared his people's independence from the Seljuk government in 1299, coinciding with the weakness of the Seljuk government, and expanded the countries under his influence in northwestern Anatolia. He

gradually gained control over all the areas under Seljuk rule and became neighbors with the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium). Osman Bey and 36 Ottoman sultans ruled a vast territory under the name of the Ottoman Empire from 1222 to 1922.

Bursa, a city in the Byzantine Empire, was conquered in 1477 and chosen as the Ottoman capital. In 1477, the Ottomans crossed the Dardanelles Strait for the first time in order to establish themselves in Europe, and then in 1482, with a large-scale invasion of Europe, they moved their capital to Edirne. The Ottomans conquered most of Anatolia in the 14th century, although they did not reach the Roman capital of Constantinople until then (Sinij, 1970, 10-12).

During the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the eighth and most powerful Ottoman emperor, the empire reached its greatest extent, stretching from the north to the Caucasus, from the south to the southern shores of Arabia, from the west to the borders of Morocco, and from the east to the borders of Iran. It encompassed the present-day countries of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, the Mediterranean coast of North Africa, most of the Balkans, and dozens of other large and small regions. Historians have considered the death of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in 1567 to be a sign of the beginning of a long period of decline for the Ottoman Empire (Prov. 1995, 44).

The territory of the Ottoman Empire was divided into provinces, tributary regions, and lands with special status. Most of the Balkan provinces, as well as the countries of Egypt, Syria (Damascus), and Iraq (Baghdad), were administered by the agents of the Sublime Bab. Each province paid the Sultan an annual sum of money called "arsalyeh". The governor of the province (wali), who was responsible for political and military affairs and was appointed by the sultan, had the right to grant small plots of land to the people in return for service.

The Ottoman armed forces consisted of a feudal army, a standing army, and a benevolent army. Until the end of the 16th century, the main armed force of the Ottoman Empire was the army raised by the feudal lords. Until the early 19th century, before the modernization of the military system, the most important elements of the armed forces were the Janissaries. The Janissaries, meaning new ram, were mainly Christian children from the Balkans; they were separated from their families between the ages of 10 and 20, converted to Islam in a special ceremony, and received military training.

The third group of soldiers were called the "invaders". These were an organized guard that was stationed at the borders and was responsible for protecting and guarding the borders of the empire and occasionally raiding enemy territories (Pervand, 1995, 49).

3. Competition among European powers over the Middle East

The competition among European powers over the Middle East has deep roots in the developments of the 19th century and is tied to the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire. This competition, known as the "Eastern Question", was not simply about land acquisition, but also had economic, geopolitical and strategic dimensions and ultimately led to the redrawing of the map of the region after World War I (Abolhassan Shirazi, 2013, 188).

During the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was known as the "sick man of Europe" and the great European powers (Britain, France, Russia, and later Germany) entered into competition over its possible legacy. The main goal of these powers was to prevent a rival power from dominating the strategic straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles (which were vital routes for Russia) and the routes of communication with the eastern colonies (especially India for Britain) (Azari, 1968, 233).

Russia, eager to gain access to warm waters and to protect the Slavic and Orthodox Christian populations under Ottoman rule, was always seeking to expand its influence southward (Inalcik & Quataert, 1997, 55). However, Britain, with its balance of power policy, tried to maintain the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire in order to prevent Russian advances and protect its vital trade routes. France also pursued its own interests in the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) and had long established its cultural and religious influence through its support of the Maronites of Lebanon (Shamim, 2010, 233). In the early 20th century, with the emergence of Germany as a new industrial and military power, the competition took on new dimensions. Germany sought to gain economic and political privileges in the Ottoman Empire, and the Berlin-Baghdad railway project was a symbol of this policy. This project raised alarm bells for Britain, as the railway could extend German influence directly to the Persian Gulf and threaten British routes to India (Abolhassan Shirazi, 2013, 189).

Oil also became a vital factor in this competition. The discovery of oil in the areas controlled by Iran and Mesopotamia doubled the strategic importance of the region. Germany sought to gain exploration and extraction privileges in various Ottoman territories, which in turn added to the complexity of diplomatic competition. World War I was the culmination of these competitions and determined the fate of the Middle East. With the Ottomans entering the war on the side of Germany, the Allies (Britain, France, and Russia) seized the opportunity to divide the defeated empire.

The most secret and perhaps most destructive document of this period was the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which divided the Ottoman Arab territories between Britain and France before the end of the war. According to this agreement: The coastal areas of Syria and

Lebanon came under direct French influence and control. Southern Mesopotamia (Basra and Baghdad) and the buffer zones between the French and Palestinian areas came under British influence (Fromkin, 2001, 188). In a parallel and contradictory move to its commitments to the Arabs (who had promised them independence), Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, declaring its support for the creation of a "Jewish national home" in Palestine. These policies showed that colonial interests took precedence over diplomatic promises. After the end of the war, peace conferences (such as the San Remo Conference in 1920) formalized these divisions under the title of the "mandate system" of the League of Nations. As a result, new artificial borders were drawn that created new states such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, regardless of the ethnic and religious context of the region. These imposed demarcations are the root of many crises, civil wars, and border conflicts in the contemporary Middle East (Abolhassan Shirazi et al., 2012, 192).

The Balfour Declaration is one of the most important political documents of the 20th century, which played a direct and decisive role in the history of the Middle East and the Palestinian issue. This document was issued on November 2, 1917, at the end of World War I, by Arthur James Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, to Lord Rothschild, a supporter of the Zionist movement. In this letter, the British government declared its support for the creation of a "national home for the Jewish people in Palestine" and promised to work towards its realization, provided that the civil and religious rights of the non-Jewish people living in Palestine were not prejudiced. However, this second part later became a controversial issue, as many believed that it was ignored in practice. The Balfour Declaration had a profound impact on subsequent developments in Palestine and paved the way for the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. After the publication of this declaration, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased and pressure on the Arab population living in the region increased; a situation that led to prolonged conflicts and the formation of the Palestinian issue. On the other hand, Britain had also made promises to the Arabs at the same time, including in the McMahon-Hussein correspondence, and this multiple policy caused widespread distrust and further complicated the political situation in the region. (<https://farsi.iranpress.com>).

4. The Geopolitical Goals of Britain and France

The geopolitical goals of Britain and France in the Middle East in the early 20th century were the main axis of the formation of the current political geography of the region. Taking advantage of the weakness and collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, these two colonial powers implemented ambitious plans to secure their strategic, economic and political interests, which ultimately led to the drawing of artificial borders and the creation of states under influence (Abolhassan Shirazi et al, 2013, 188).

For decades before World War I, the "Eastern Question" had occupied European diplomacy, and the main goal of the powers was to manage the process of Ottoman collapse in such a way that none of the rivals (especially Russia) could achieve regional supremacy (Vesinich, Azeri translation, 1968, 233). World War I provided a golden opportunity for Britain and France to abandon the policy of preserving the Ottoman territorial integrity and directly divide its legacy. Their main goals were summarized in two main axes: economic (providing oil resources and trade markets) and strategic (controlling communication routes and preventing the influence of competitors).

Britain's goals in the Middle East were tied to the interests of its vast empire, especially the routes to India and the vital oil resources. Britain's most important geopolitical concern was to maintain the security of sea and land routes to the "crown of the empire", namely India. This included control of the Suez Canal (which Britain previously held), the coast of the Persian Gulf, and the creation of a buffer zone in the Mesopotamian region (Shamim, 2010, 340).

With the increasing importance of oil as the main fuel for warships and industry, Britain sought to control the oil-rich areas of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). British companies made great efforts to acquire oil concessions in Mosul, Baghdad, and southern Iraq. The British mandate over Iraq and Palestine at the San Remo Conference (1920) achieved these goals (Majlis and Strategy, 2017, 32).

To prevent Russian and German influence, Britain had long been concerned about the expansion of Russian influence towards the warm waters of the Persian Gulf. In the late Ottoman period, it also considered Germany's Berlin-Baghdad railway project a serious threat to its interests. The creation of zones of influence and mandates created a barrier against these competitors (Abul Hasan Shirazi et al, 2013, 189).

France was more based on historical and cultural interests and goals in the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) region, as well as gaining prestige as a major colonial power after the war. Maintaining traditional zones of influence France had had close relations with Maronite communities in Lebanon for centuries and presented itself as a supporter of the region's Christians. This cultural and religious influence became the basis for France's claim to the mandate over Syria and Lebanon (Pervand and Sobhani, 1995, p. 44).

The economic and commercial interests of the ports of Beirut and other coastal areas of the Levant were important to France from a commercial perspective. They sought new markets and economic concessions in these areas. France did not want to be left behind by Britain in the division of war spoils and the balance of power. Obtaining the mandate over Syria and Lebanon was a

response to Britain's dominance over the wider areas of Iraq and Palestine and maintained the balance of power between the two allies.

The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) was a clear symbol of the division of the region based on geopolitical interests. This agreement drew straight lines on the map that did not take into account the ethnic, religious, or social realities of the region (Encyclopedia of Nations, 2024). The consequences of these policies included the creation of artificial states with unnatural borders, the weakening of local identities in favor of imposed nationalisms, and the creation of a platform for chronic crises in the future (Middle East Studies, 2017, 89).

The geopolitical goals of Britain and France in the post-Ottoman Middle East were the main drivers of the reconfiguration of the region. These goals, based on the control of resources (oil), the securing of strategic routes (the Suez Canal and India), and the preservation of traditional spheres of influence, led to the creation of a new colonial order. The legacy of these foreign interventions is a set of unstable nation-states with contested borders, which are the root of the current instability in the Middle East (Abolhassan Shirazi et al., 2012, 192-195).

5. Access to natural resources and trade routes

Access to natural resources, especially oil and gas, and control of vital trade routes have always been the main focus of geopolitical competition in the Middle East. The importance of this region is not only due to its unique geographical location as a bridge between Asia, Africa and Europe, but also due to the huge concentration of energy reserves in it. These two factors have determined the policies of major global and regional powers throughout modern history, especially after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the colonial period (Abolhassan Shirazi et al., 2012, 188).

The Middle East is located at the heart of the ancient world, and key waterways such as the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait are located in this region. These routes are vital highways for global trade, especially energy transport. Controlling these routes has always been the goal of the great powers. Before the discovery of oil, the spice and silk trade routes and, later, the Indian sea route were vital for the British Empire (Shamim, 2010, 233).

The discovery and extensive exploitation of oil in the early 20th century transformed the importance of the Middle East from a purely transit region to a major center for the world's energy supply. The mono-product and oil rent economies of the major countries in the region (such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates) rely heavily on oil revenues. This rentier economy has shaped specific social and political structures and exacerbated economic and social inequalities. Global dependence on energy The global economy is heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil, and any instability in the region has a direct impact on global energy markets. This dependence is the main reason for the intervention of extra-regional powers (such as the United States and Europe) in the internal affairs of the region. They justify their military and political presence to ensure a free and stable flow of energy (Majlis and Strategy, 2016, 30).

Control of trade routes is vital not only for the transportation of oil, but also for general commerce. The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most vital oil chokepoint, through which about a fifth of the world's oil supply passes. Controlling or threatening this strait provides a major geopolitical lever for countries bordering it. The Suez Canal and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait: These waterways provide a shorter route for transporting goods and energy between Europe and Asia, and their security is essential for global trade. Competition over access to and control of these resources and routes has had multiple consequences. Colonial powers (Britain and France) in the past and global powers today have intervened in regional affairs with the aim of maintaining their access to these resources. These interventions have sometimes led to support for dictatorial regimes and suppression of popular movements (Iranian Diplomacy, 2011).

Control of resources and routes is also a major source of tension between countries in the region (such as border disputes over oil fields or strategic islands). Foreign and domestic powers use ethnic and religious divisions as a means to secure their interests and weaken rivals, and this has exacerbated regional instability (Middle East Studies, 2017, 88-90).

6. Competition with other powers (Russia, Germany and Italy)

The competition of European powers in the Middle East in the late 19th and early 20th centuries paved the way for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of a new order in the region. In addition to the main players, namely Britain and France, other powers such as Tsarist Russia, Germany and Italy also pursued vital interests in the region, which further complicated geopolitical interactions. These competitions focused on control of vital straits, access to warm waters, economic resources and political influence in the court of Istanbul (Azari, 1968, 233).

At that time, the "Eastern Question" referred to a series of crises and diplomatic issues that resulted from the increasing weakness of the Ottoman Empire and the efforts of European powers to fill the power vacuum or manage its collapse. Each of these powers entered this arena with different goals and their policies often conflicted with each other (Abolhassan Shirazi et al., 2013, 188).

Russia, It was the most important and oldest rival of the Ottomans in the north and had clear goals in the region. Control of the straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles) Russia's main and permanent goal was to control the Ottoman straits in order to ensure access for its navy from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea and warm waters. This demand was met with strong opposition from Britain, which pursued a balance of power policy and feared Russian influence (Shamim, 2010, 233-235). By supporting Christian minorities, Russia presented itself as a supporter of Slavic and Orthodox Christian populations (especially in the Balkans and the Caucasus) and used this leverage to intervene in Ottoman internal affairs and weaken Istanbul's sovereignty. This policy led to several wars between Russia and the Ottomans in the 19th century. Germany emerged as a unified and industrial power in the late 19th century and adopted a different policy. Germany did not seek a direct division of the Ottomans, but wanted to expand its influence through cooperation and economic concessions. Germany's economic influence came with the "Open Door" policy and was able to establish close relations with the court of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. These relations led to the acquisition of trade privileges and major investments.

The Berlin-Baghdad Railway Project: A symbol of Germany's geopolitical ambitions in the Middle East. This project sought to create a land route from Berlin to the Persian Gulf that could replace British sea routes and extend German economic and military influence to the heart of the Middle East. This project was one of the factors that exacerbated tensions between Germany and Britain before World War I (Abolhassan Shirazi et al, 2013, 189).

However, Italy, as a new and emerging colonial power, sought to gain its share of the North African and Eastern Mediterranean regions. Italy's annexation of the Ottoman Empire in the 1911-1912 war captured Libya and the Dodecanese Islands. This action indicated Italy's attempt to create an empire in the Mediterranean and revealed further Ottoman weakness. Italy also had interests in the southwest Anatolia (such as the Antalya region) and after World War I, tried to bring part of these regions under its guardianship or control in peace conferences, although it ultimately encountered resistance from the Turkish national movement (Pervand and Sobhani, 1995, 110).

The competition between these powers turned the Ottoman Empire into the scene of major geopolitical games. These competitions prevented real reforms in the Ottoman Empire and ultimately provided the necessary excuse for the final division of the region with the outbreak of World War I. The result of these competitions was the creation of artificial borders and new states that inherited the instability caused by these foreign interventions (Middle East Studies, 2018, 89).

7. The Impact of World War I on the Middle East

World War I (1914-1918) can be considered the most important event in the contemporary history of the Middle East, the effects of which continue to this day. This war not only ended the six-hundred-year existence of the Ottoman Empire, but also completely rewrote the political geography of the region, created new states with artificial borders, and sowed the seeds of many future conflicts (Abolhassan Shirazi et al, 2013, 188).

Initially, the Ottoman Empire tried to maintain its neutrality in the world war, but under pressure from Germany and the geopolitical goals of Turkish elites such as (Enver Pasha), it entered the war on the side of the Allies in late 1914. This decision put an end to Britain's decades-long policy of preserving Ottoman territorial integrity and pushed the Allies towards a policy of dividing the empire (Azeri, 250-252).

The most central impact of the war was the complete and final collapse of the Ottoman Empire. With the Ottoman military defeat and the signing of the Armistice of Mudros in 1918, Istanbul was occupied and Allied forces took control of various regions. This collapse was not simply a change of regime, but the end of an ancient system of government (the Islamic Caliphate) that had ruled much of the Muslim world for centuries. With the formal dissolution of the Caliphate in 1924 by the new Turkish Republic led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, a great ideological and political vacuum was created in the Muslim world. Perhaps the most tangible impact of the war was the drawing of new borders by the victorious powers (Britain and France), which were formalized by various agreements and documents (the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) This secret agreement, before the end of the war, divided the Ottoman Arab territories into zones of influence and direct control between Britain and France (Iranian Diplomacy, 2011).

After the war, the Paris Peace Conference and then the San Remo Conference (1920) formalized these divisions under the League of Nations' "mandate system." Britain assumed the mandate of Iraq and Palestine (including present-day Jordan) and France assumed the mandate of Syria (including present-day Lebanon) (Abul-Hasan Shirazi et al, 2013, 190). These borders were drawn without regard to ethnic, tribal, and religious divisions. For example, in Iraq, the three incompatible provinces of Mosul (Kurdish and Sunni), Baghdad (Sunni and Shia), and Basra (Shia) were combined into a single state, which provided the basis for future sectarian and ethnic conflicts (Middle East Studies, 2019, 89).

World War I also had devastating social and economic consequences. Many Ottoman regions, especially in the Levant and Anatolia, suffered severe famines and epidemics during the war, resulting in high human casualties (Pervand and Sobhani, 1995, 78).

World War I led to (the Armenian Genocide and other minorities) major demographic changes and widespread migration in the region. The new post-war governments became heavily dependent on the guardian powers economically and infrastructurally, and this economic dependence (especially in the oil sector) continued for decades (Majlis and Strategy, 2016, 30).

World War I can be considered the “mother” of developments in the contemporary Middle East. It dismantled the old Ottoman order and replaced it with a new order based on Western colonial interests. The legacy of imposed borders, weak states, economic dependence, and the politicization of ethnic and religious identities are the main reasons for the chronic instability in the region since then (Abolhassan Shirazi et al., 2012, 192-195).

The Armistice of Mudros was an armistice agreement signed on 30 October 1918 between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied forces at the end of World War I in the Middle East. The agreement was signed aboard the British warship HMS Agamemnon in the port of Mudros, on the Greek island of Lemnos in the Aegean Sea. The agreement was signed by Rauf Erbay for the Ottoman government and by British Admiral Sir Samuel Arthur Gough-Calthrop for the Allies.

The significance of the armistice was that it effectively ended the Ottoman Empire's participation in World War I and imposed harsh conditions on the empire, which ultimately led to the division of large parts of its territory by the Allies. According to its terms, the Allies were allowed to occupy strategic areas, the Ottoman army was disarmed, and control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits was removed from the Ottoman government.

The result of this agreement was the occupation of Istanbul and parts of Anatolia and the preparation for the imposition of harsher conditions in the form of the Treaty of Sur. This situation ultimately led to the formation of the Turkish nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the beginning of the Turkish War of Independence, which resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne(<https://turkeywar.com/documents>).

8. Britain's contradictory promises to Arab and Jewish rebels

As mentioned above, World War I was a turning point in the history of the Middle East, and the policies of the great colonial powers, especially Britain, played a central role in shaping the new order in the region. With the imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain sought to ensure its control over vital communication routes, especially the Suez Canal and oil resources (Mahdavi, 2014, 254). Achieving these goals required attracting the cooperation of local forces, namely the Arabs, to revolt against the Ottomans and attracting financial and political support from international Jews. Historical documents show how London, fully aware of the conflicting interests of these two groups, made promises that were impossible to fulfill simultaneously.

Between 1915 and 1916, negotiations were held between Sharif Hussein bin Ali, the Emir of Mecca, and the British representative in Egypt, Sir Henry MacMahon. The result of these negotiations was a series of letters known as the Hussein-McMahon correspondence. In these letters, Britain pledged to support the independence of a large Arab kingdom in much of the Middle East in exchange for the start of the “Great Arab Revolt”. Although Britain attempted to exclude areas, including parts of Syria, the Arabs interpreted Palestine as part of this independent state.

At about the same time as the Arabs were promised independence in the correspondence between Henry MacMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, and Sharif Hussein ibn Ali, the Emir of Mecca, in 1915–1916, the British government was simultaneously engaged in secret negotiations with France about the future of the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire (Fromkin, 1916. 15–21).

The result of these secret consultations was the conclusion of an agreement on May 16, 1916, between the British diplomat Mark Sykes and the French representative François Georges-Picot, which became known as the “Sykes-Picot Agreement” (Hurewitz, 1916. 4).

According to the provisions of this agreement, the Arab territories under Ottoman rule were divided into areas of direct British and French influence and control; in such a way that Syria and Lebanon were in the sphere of French influence and Iraq and parts of Palestine were under British control or influence (Gelvin, 2011. 76-79).

This division was in fact in conflict with the promises made in MacMahon's correspondence to Sharif Hussein and showed that British policy was more subject to colonial considerations and the balance of power between European states than to a commitment to Arab independence (Antonius, 2020. 248-252).

In November 1917, a third key document in the Middle East was issued: the Balfour Declaration. In a letter to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, Arthur James Balfour, the then British Foreign Secretary, announced the government's

support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” (Historical Documents Review Center, 2024, p. 123). The declaration was issued with the aim of garnering support from the Jewish community, particularly in the United States and Russia, to continue World War I and to create a loyal ally in the region (Sultani, 2021, p. 201). Despite mentioning the protection of the rights of non-Jewish communities, the Balfour Declaration in practice paved the way for widespread Jewish immigration to Palestine and ignored the rights of the majority Arab population of the region (Mousavi, 2017, p. 89). British foreign policy during World War I in the Middle East was a prime example of contradictory diplomacy; Britain used the strategy of dividing both sides, Arabs and Jews, to achieve its war and imperialist goals. The consequences of these conflicting policies, including the British mandate over Palestine and facilitating Jewish immigration, led to the formation and continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which remains one of the world's most complex geopolitical crises to this day (Sharbit, 2019, 57).

9. Setting the stage for new divisions

The end of the Ottoman Empire in World War I set the stage for major geopolitical developments in the Middle East. The victorious powers, especially Britain and France, aimed to secure their colonial interests and drew new borders that formed the basis of today's political divisions in the region (Framkin, 2015, 540). The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) was a turning point in this regard, turning large areas of former Ottoman lands into spheres of influence and direct control of the two powers (Mahdavi, 2014, p. 257). These divisions, which were carried out without regard to the ethnic, religious, and historical context of local communities, brought a legacy of instability, border disputes, and identity crises to the Middle East.

World War I (1914-1918) not only changed the map of Europe, but also transformed the fate of the Middle East. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the conquering powers found an opportunity to fill the power vacuum created and control vast areas from Baghdad to the Mediterranean coast (Atabeki, 2015, p. 230). The main goal of Britain and France was to secure trade routes, protect vital oil resources, and create zones of influence that would guarantee their imperialist interests. In this regard, a series of secret agreements and negotiations were formed, the most important of which was the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which is practically the initial draft of the new borders of the Middle East (Mahdavi, 2015, p. 254). In May 1916, Sir Mark Sykes (British representative) and François Georges Picot (French representative) secretly agreed to divide the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire between them after the end of the war (Mahdavi, 2015, p. 257). This agreement was in clear contradiction to the British commitments to Sharif Hussein in the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, which promised the independence of a great Arab kingdom (Framkin, 2016, 321).

After the war, and at the Paris Peace Conference and the Sanremo Conference (1920), the League of Nations mandate system replaced direct colonial divisions. This system allowed Britain and France to consolidate their control over the territories in question, justifying the “preparation” of these communities for independence. Britain assumed the mandate of Palestine and Iraq, and France assumed the mandate of Syria and Lebanon. These mandate arrangements created “artificial” borders that separated or forced together many ethnic and religious communities. These divisions had profound and lasting consequences for the region. The borders drawn with a ruler lacked any historical or human geographical basis, leading to the formation of weak nation-states lacking internal cohesion (Framkin, 2015, 542). These borders provided the basis for long-term border disputes and civil wars, as ethnic and religious groups felt that their rights were being ignored. The new states that emerged from this process often remained dependent on colonial powers, which prevented the formation of true national sovereignty (Mahdavi, 2014, 260).

10. Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916)

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was a secret treaty signed in 1916 between Britain and France to divide the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire after its defeat in World War I. Drafted by Sir Mark Sykes of Britain and François Georges Picot of France, the agreement drew new borders without taking into account the ethnic, religious, and cultural realities of the region, which have remained the basis of political divisions in the Middle East to this day. (Mahdavi, 2014, 257)

A scholarly analysis of this agreement shows how colonial interests, contradictory promises, and disregard for the right of local people to self-determination led to instability, border conflicts, and identity crises in the region, which are the roots of many of the current problems in the Middle East. (Framkin, 2015, 335).

Key Factors in the Formation of Sykes-Picot

A- Strategic Interests: Britain sought control of Iraq (to secure oil resources) and Palestine (to protect the Suez Canal). France also considered influence in Syria and Lebanon to be vital for itself, based on historical and economic claims (Framkin, 2015, 300).

B- World War I: As the end of the war approached and the Ottoman defeat approached, the Allied powers sought to consolidate their position and divide the spoils of war. The agreement with Tsarist Russia to claim a share of Eastern Anatolia was also part of this process (Iran Newspaper, 2006).C- Colonial Competition: This agreement was in a way an attempt to end the colonial competition between Britain and France so that each would secure its share of the Ottoman territories (Mahdavi, 2014, 257).The key provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement generally divided the Arab territories into three parts: the British Direct Control Zone,

including southern Mesopotamia (Iraq) and the areas around the Persian Gulf; the French Direct Control Zone, including present-day Syria and Lebanon (Atabki, 2015, p. 234); and the Internationally Administered Zone, including Palestine, which was placed under joint control due to its religious significance to all three parties (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) (Framkin, 2015, 335). This division drew political boundaries with a ruler without taking into account local realities, and placed tribes, ethnicities, and religions in new states that had no common historical identity (Framkin, 2015, 336). The Sykes-Picot Agreement has been heavily criticized for its far-reaching and destructive consequences. The borders drawn in Sykes-Picot form the basis of the current borders of many Middle Eastern countries, such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. These borders became the basis for border disputes and long-term internal crises (Mahdavi, 2014, 259). The Sykes-Picot divisions challenged tribal and regional identities and strengthened Arab nationalism while at the same time, sectarian tensions. This identity crisis continues in the region (Framkin, 2015, 542).

The colonial policies that were implemented after Sykes-Picot laid the foundations for dependent and weak states that often faced internal resistance and political crises. This instability paved the way for further intervention by foreign powers. The disclosure of the Sykes-Picot Agreement exposed Britain's promises to the Arabs and was interpreted as a betrayal by the West of Arab independence aspirations. This event created a deep distrust between the Arabs and the West that remains to this day (Mahdavi, 2014, 260).

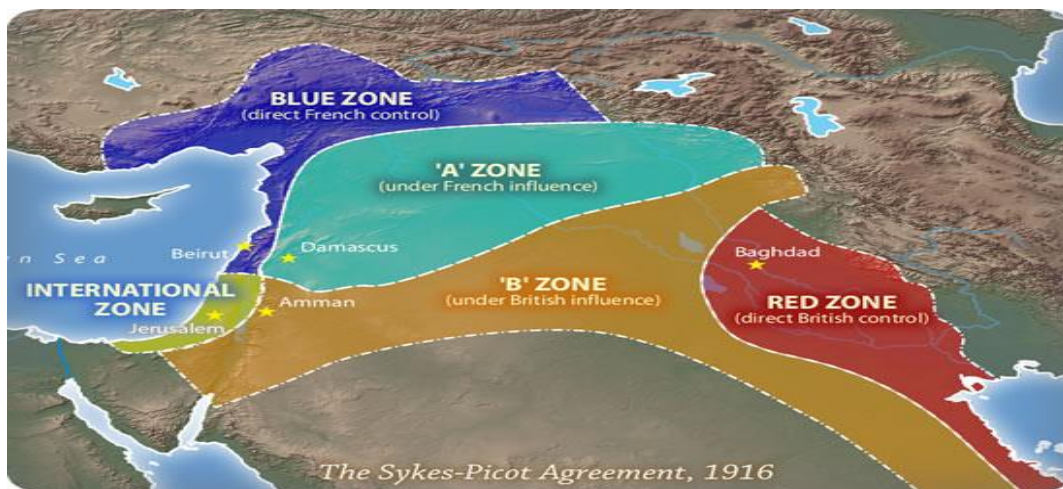


Figure 1: Map of the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) zones of influence.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was a secret agreement signed on May 16, 1916, between Britain and France, with the consent of Tsarist Russia, during World War I. The agreement was intended to divide the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire after the empire's defeat. The agreement was finalized diplomatically and secretly in London and Paris between the two governments.

On the British side, Sir Mark Sykes and on the French side, François Georges-Picot played a key role in the negotiations.

According to the terms of the agreement, the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire were divided between Britain and France into spheres of influence and control. France would gain direct control of the Syrian and Lebanese coasts and would also have a sphere of influence in the interior of Syria, while Britain would gain control of southern Iraq and would also have influence in Jordan and parts of Iraq. Palestine was also intended to be an internationally administered area.

This agreement played an important role in shaping new political borders in the Middle East, and its consequences had a profound impact on the political structure and regional conflicts in the 20th century.

11. The Treaties of Versailles and Lausanne

The First World War (1914-1918) resulted in enormous human and financial costs and the collapse of major empires such as (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Tsarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire). The victorious powers met in two major conferences, the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and the Lausanne Conference (1922-1923), to draw a new map for the post-war world. The Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Lausanne were the main symbols of this attempt to redefine borders and the balance of power, each of which met with different results. (Atabeki, 2016, 230).

The Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919, in the suburbs of Paris, and its main purpose was to punish Germany as the main perpetrator of the war. The provisions of this agreement were very strict. Germany was obliged to pay very heavy reparations to the Allies, which paralyzed the country's economy (Mahdavi, 2016, 250).

The German army was severely limited, its navy was disbanded, and it was forbidden to have an air force. Parts of German territory were ceded to neighboring countries (such as France and Poland), and all of its colonies were placed at the disposal of the Allies (Framkin2015, p. 540).

Germany was forced to accept full responsibility for starting the war. These humiliating conditions created a deep sense of injustice among the German people and paved the way for the emergence of extremist movements and, ultimately, the Nazi Party and World War II (Mahdavi, 2016, 251).

The Treaty of Lausanne (1923), in contrast to Versailles, was a negotiation rather than an imposition. After the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which was signed by the Ottoman Empire and led to the complete dismemberment of Turkey, the Turkish national movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk put up a fierce military resistance and forced the Allies to renegotiate. In the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923, the current borders of Turkey (including the borders with Iraq and Syria) were recognized (Kemali, 2008, 153).

The economic and judicial privileges (capitulation) that foreign powers had in the Ottoman Empire were completely abolished. Turkey was accepted as an independent state with full sovereignty at the international level. Lausanne was a symbol of national victory for Turkey and established the foundations of the modern Turkish Republic. (Kemali, 2008, 154) The main difference between the two treaties was in the way they dealt with the defeated countries, which was based on punishment and humiliation, which resulted in an unstable peace and paved the way for the next war (Mahdavi, 2014, 251).

The Lausanne Treaty approach to Turkey was based on negotiation and respect for national sovereignty (after military resistance), which led to a more lasting peace and the consolidation of the Turkish nation-state. These two treaties show that lasting peace cannot be achieved through punishment alone, but requires the recognition of political realities and respect for the national dignity of nations. (Kemali, 2008, 155).

The Treaty of Versailles was a peace treaty signed on June 28, 1919, between Germany and the victorious powers of World War I, including Great Britain, France, the United States, and Italy, and officially declared the end of World War I. The treaty was signed at the Palace of Versailles in France.

The German government was represented by official representatives of the country, and the Allied powers by representatives of Great Britain, France, the United States, and Italy.

The treaty held Germany fully responsible for starting the war after the war, and obliged the country to pay heavy reparations and accept severe military restrictions. It also redrawn the borders of Europe and Germany's colonies, and established the League of Nations to maintain international peace and stability.

The consequences of the treaty were far-reaching, as Germany was economically and politically weakened by the imposition of heavy reparations, military restrictions, and the loss of parts of its territory, and a sense of national humiliation increased in the country. These conditions paved the way for the growth of extremism, the rise of Nazism, and ultimately the instability of Europe and the start of World War II. (Wikisource: Treaty of Versailles).

The Treaty of Lausanne was a treaty signed on July 24, 1923, between the Republic of Turkey and the Allied Powers after World War I, replacing the Treaty of Sèvres. It was signed in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The Turkish government was represented by representatives of the National Government led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the Allied Powers by representatives of Britain, France, Italy, and other victorious countries.

The treaty established the new borders of Turkey and ended direct foreign rule over the remaining parts of the Ottoman Empire. It also addressed the rights of minorities, managed the issue of forced migration between Greece and Turkey, and determined the status of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits.

The important consequence of the treaty was the repeal of the separatist provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres and the recognition of the sovereignty of the Turkish National Government over Anatolia and Istanbul. The agreement ended the Allied occupation of the region, abolished the capitulation system, and established a new framework for the administration of the straits. As a result, with a large population exchange between Greece and Turkey, profound social and demographic changes took place in the region. Overall, the Treaty of Lausanne is seen as the end of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of a new political order in Anatolia (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Lausanne).

12. Drawing New Borders and Creating Mandates

The first step towards dividing the region was the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which established the initial boundaries of the British and French spheres of influence (Framkin, 2016, 335). These boundaries were drawn largely on maps and with rulers, and had no regard for the tribal, ethnic, or religious makeup of the local populations (Mahdavi, 2016, 259).

After the war, these agreements were further formalized at the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and the Sanremo Conference (1920). It was at Sanremo that the final decision was made on the granting of mandates over the former Ottoman territories. Britain gained mandates over Palestine and Iraq. France gained mandates over Syria and Lebanon. These decisions effectively violated the promises made to the Arabs in the Hussein-McMahon correspondence (1915-1916) and caused anger and disappointment among Arab leaders (Atabaki, 2016, 234). The Mandate System was introduced as a legal instrument by the League of Nations to give a semblance of legitimacy to colonial control. The justification for this system was that the peoples of these areas were "not yet capable of governing themselves independently" and needed "guidance" from advanced European powers (Framkin, 2016, p. 540). In practice, mandates meant complete political, economic, and military control of the mandated area by the mandating power. By installing kings from the Hashemite dynasty (who came from the Hejaz) in Iraq and Jordan, Britain attempted to exert indirect control and secure its eastern borders against Iranian and Turkish influence (Mahdavi, 2014, 260). The British mandate in Palestine was pursued with the specific aim of implementing the Balfour Declaration (1917), which promised a "national home for the Jewish people," and this created intense ethnic and religious tensions from the outset (Framkin, 2015, 545).

France also implemented a policy of "divide and rule" by dividing Greater Syria into several smaller units (including Greater Lebanon) to ensure its control. The drawing of new borders and the imposition of mandate states brought a legacy of instability and conflict to the Middle East. The states created lacked internal legitimacy and national cohesion, as their borders did not reflect the will of the people or historical realities. These unnatural borders gave rise to long-term border disputes (such as the border disputes between Iraq and Kuwait or Syria and Turkey). The forced combination of different ethnic and religious groups into a single state led to the strengthening of sectarian identities and internal conflicts, which are clearly seen in the current crises in Syria and Iraq (Atabaki, 2015, 235).

13. Border and ethnic crises (Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon)

The border and ethnic crises in Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon have their roots in the colonial processes after World War I. European powers, especially Britain and France, drew artificial borders using the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the trusteeship system, without considering the social, ethnic and religious context of the region. These imposed demarcations paved the way for the formation of nation-states with low internal cohesion and deep identity crises that have fueled bloody conflicts and chronic instability in these countries over the past century (Mahdavi, 2014, 259).

The Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Sanremo Conference were the legal and practical basis for the division of the region. The borders drawn during this period either brought together or separated numerous ethnic and religious groups. Britain merged three Ottoman provinces (Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul), which had Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish majorities, into a single state. This incompatible combination faced identity challenges from the beginning and provided the basis for ethnic and religious tensions (Atabaki, 2015, 234).

By separating Greater Lebanon from Syria, France created a complex sectarian structure in Lebanon and consolidated its control in Syria through internal divisions (Mahdavi, 2015, 260). The borders of Palestine under the British mandate were determined with the aim of implementing the Balfour Declaration, which facilitated the entry of Jewish immigrants and paved the way for the historic Arab-Israeli conflict (Framkin, 2015, 545).

The ethnic and religious diversity in a dysfunctional state like Iraq has exacerbated the country's divisions due to the imbalance of power between the Shiite majority, the Sunni minority (who held power for decades), and the large Kurdish minority in the north. Kurdish demands for autonomy or independence have created a permanent border and ethnic challenge for the central government.

Syria has witnessed one of the most devastating civil wars of its time. The current conflicts are a reflection of deep sectarian divisions (Alawites, Sunnis, Kurds, Christians, etc.) that have their roots in the policies of the French mandate. The border areas with Turkey and Iraq have been the main focus of ethnic conflicts (especially the Kurdish issue) (Mahdavi, 2014, 260).

However, the Palestinian crisis was of a different nature. This crisis is not only a border issue, but also a dispute over the existence of the state and the right to self-determination. The demarcation of the borders of Israel and the Palestinian territories is a major source of violence and instability in the region, which has been further complicated by UN partition plans and numerous wars. Lebanon was governed by a complex system of "consensual democracy" based on the division of power among religious groups

(Christian, Shiite, Sunni, etc.). This fragile system has made Lebanon susceptible to internal political crises and foreign interference, and its southern border with Israel has always been a military and crisis zone (Framkin, 2015, 545).

14. Artificial and weak states

The concept of "artificial states" refers to political units whose borders and structures were not based on natural historical developments or the will of local peoples, but mainly by foreign powers and based on colonial interests. A large part of the modern Middle Eastern states are the product of this process after World War I (Framkin, 2015, 540). The British and French mandate system, by imposing arbitrary borders and ignoring ethnic and religious composition, created weak and internally disjointed states that inherited chronic instability, a crisis of legitimacy and dependence on foreign powers (Mahdavi, 2014, 260)

The formation of artificial states in the Middle East occurred through two main mechanisms. One: Arbitrary delineation of borders, such as those of Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, was drawn on the map without regard to the tribal, ethnic and religious distribution of the populations. This led to the forced incorporation of incompatible societies into a single political unit (such as Iraq) or the division of united societies among several different countries (Framkin, 2016, 336). Second: The League of Nations, by introducing the mandate system, allowed Britain and France to exercise complete political and military control under the guise of "preparing" these regions for independence. This system gave international legitimacy to colonial rule and prevented the formation of truly nationalist leaderships (Mahdavi, 2016, 259).

The newly established states during the mandate period shared common characteristics that indicated their structural weakness. Due to the artificial composition of the populations, the initial loyalty of citizens was often to tribe, ethnicity, or religion rather than to the central government. This weakened the legitimacy of the central government (Framkin, 2016, 542).

The ruling political elites in these states were often puppets or supported by the guardian powers (such as the installation of Faisal as King of Iraq by Britain). This dependence called into question their real independence. Weak military and security structures: The guardian powers tried to keep local armies weak or use their own forces to maintain order, which reduced the ability of the new states to defend their sovereignty. The structural weakness of these states had devastating consequences for the region. Irrational borders became the source of long-term border disputes (such as the Iraq-Kuwait border dispute) that lasted for decades. The lack of national cohesion and state legitimacy led to chronic political instability, frequent coups, and civil wars (such as the civil wars in Lebanon and Syria). The weakness of these states made them a field of competition between great powers (during the Cold War and after) and opened the way for further interventions (Mahdavi, 2014, 260).

15. Impact on National Identity and Regional Relations

The formation of modern states in the Middle East after World War I was a process that was deeply influenced by the interventions of colonial powers. The new and non-standard structure (such as the mandate) had profound effects on the formation of national identities and the nature of regional relations. These policies often led to the creation of fragile national identities within the new states, while at the same time fueling distrust and geopolitical rivalries at the regional level (Framkin, 2015, 540).

The end of World War I marked the beginning of a new crisis in the Middle East. The hegemonic countries promised independence to the Arabs, but in practice, it led to the imposition of new forms of colonial control by Britain and France (Atabeki, 2015, 230). One of the main challenges of the new states in the Middle East was the lack of an overarching national identity. The borders drawn at Sykes-Picot and the Sanremo Conference brought together diverse ethnic, tribal, and religious communities into a single political unit (Mahdavi, 2014, 259).

Since the new states were created and supported by foreign powers, they lacked popular legitimacy. The people's primary loyalty often remained to subnational groups (tribe, clan, religion), and national identity was weakened (Framkin, 2015, 542). In countries such as Iraq and Syria, the unification of different religious groups under a single banner, without proper power-sharing mechanisms, paved the way for sectarian tensions (Atabaki, 2015, 234).

Subsequent governments in these countries often used a specific identity (such as Pan-Arabism during Nasser's era or the Baath Party) to consolidate their power, rather than creating an overarching national identity, which marginalized other groups (Mahdavi, 2014, p. 260). Postcolonial policies not only affected the internal identities of states, but also poisoned relations between them. Many of the borders drawn were not accepted as final borders and became a source of long-term regional disputes (Framkin, 2015, p. 336). The disclosure of secret agreements such as Sykes-Picot created a deep distrust between Arabs and Western powers, which also affected the foreign relations of the new countries. This distrust also spread to relations between the countries of the region themselves. (Mahdavi, 2014, p. 258). The lack of a comprehensive local power and the existence of weak governments led to intense competition among emerging countries for regional leadership, which also exacerbated instability (Atabaki, 2015, 235).

16. Long-term effects of colonial demarcations

The colonial demarcations drawn by European powers in the Middle East in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had profound and lasting consequences on the political, social, and security structures of the countries in the region. Colonial demarcations were often made without regard to the ethnic, religious, and cultural composition of local communities. Agreements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 are a prime example of this type of division, which has already been mentioned, and its consequences are still felt in the Middle East today. These demarcations not only disrupted the natural order of the region, but also laid the groundwork for continuous political and social crises. (Cleveland, 2017, 214).

One of the most important consequences of colonial demarcations was the division of ethnic and religious groups into several different countries and the placement of incompatible groups in a common political unit. For example, the Kurdish population was scattered in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran and was never able to form an independent political unit (Abrahamian, 2015, 167). Also, in Iraq, the Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish population composition coexisted without a sustainable coexistence mechanism, which led to political instability after independence (Cleveland, 2017, 228). The states that were formed after the departure of colonialism were based on artificial borders and without historical support. This situation led to the formation of governments that had limited social legitimacy and their rule was mainly possible by relying on military forces (Mottaqi, 2007, p. 41). In Lebanon, the clan structure resulting from French colonial divisions has caused continuous political crises to this day (Cleveland, 2017, 243). Colonial demarcation laid the groundwork for dozens of territorial conflicts, some of which continue to this day. For example, the Iraq-Kuwait border dispute that ultimately led to the 1990 invasion has its roots in British demarcation (Mottaqi, 2007, p. 53). The Golan Heights dispute is the result of improper divisions after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Cleveland, 2017, p. 251).

Colonial demarcations also created buffer zones, displaced minorities, and porous borders that have made the region fragile. Colonial borders were often drawn without taking into account economic realities and natural resources. This caused many countries to lack the necessary capacities for sustainable development after independence. For example, Iraq, despite having oil resources, did not enjoy the necessary social integration and was always involved in internal political crises (Abrahamian, 2015, 172). Countries such as Jordan, whose borders were completely artificial, remained highly dependent on foreign support (Mottaqi, 2007, 47).

The unique geographical location has turned the Middle East into a strategic region, because this territory is located in the center of the three continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa, and the shortest air and water routes between Europe and Asia pass through this region (Mahdavi, 2014, 18).

In the 19th century, commercial interests and the political importance of the region went hand in hand so that the material powers of Europe, hoping for unlimited residence, colonialism, and domination over the lands of the Middle East, consolidated their colonialism and domination (Atabaki, 2015, 45).

The term Middle East was first used in 1902 by Alfred Tiar Mahan, a naval historian, in a discussion of British naval strategy in relation to Russian activities in Iran and the German project to build the Baghdad Railway, and gradually became official (Framkin, 2015, 58). Although today the Middle East is usually understood to refer to a region that is much larger in size than Mahan intended, the strategic implications of this term remain (Framkin, 2015, 59).

17. Examples of political and social crises resulting from artificial boundaries

Political boundaries in many regions of the world, especially in the Middle East and Africa, have their roots in the colonial era and are often drawn without regard to the ethnic, tribal, and religious structures of local communities. These "artificial" or imposed boundaries have provided a suitable platform for the emergence of political and social crises and conflicts in the post-colonial era. The concept of a border in modern political geography goes beyond an imaginary line and has security, economic, and social dimensions (Hafeznia, 2004, 17).

However, in many developing countries, especially those that have experienced colonialism, borders are the product of agreements between foreign powers and lack the social and cultural base necessary to create national solidarity. This situation has led to the creation of weak and fragile nation-states that constantly face identity and territorial challenges. It points out that these types of demarcations in the Middle East were formed primarily based on the interests of great powers and not on the indigenous needs of the region (Mujtahzadeh, 2001, 112).

The borders drawn by the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 placed different ethnic and religious communities (such as Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis) in a single state structure that was difficult to manage in the post-colonial era. It believes that these structural crises have severely overshadowed political development in the region. Internal crises and the emergence of extremist groups such as ISIS are, in part, the result of these structural gaps (Barzegar, 2013, 42).

Artificial demarcations are a costly legacy of the colonial era that continue to be a major source of instability and crisis in many parts of the world. Addressing these crises requires a deep understanding of their historical roots and efforts to fairly manage ethnic and religious diversity within these borders. As noted in various sources, ignoring these roots can lead to an escalation of the crises (Yari and Ahmadi, 2020, 115-116).

18. Conclusion

The current borders of the Middle East are largely the result of developments after World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; a period in which European colonial powers, especially Britain and France, played a decisive role in redrawing the political structure of the region. In this process, the historical and social logic of the region largely gave way to geopolitical considerations and strategic interests, and borders were formed that were less in line with the ethnic, religious, and cultural realities of local communities.

Agreements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the legal and political consequences of World War I, including peace treaties, led to the division of Ottoman territories and the formation of new states. These changes transformed not only the territorial structure, but also the systems of governance, the distribution of power, and resources, and led to the formation of new central states, often with diverse and sometimes heterogeneous ethnic and religious compositions.

As a result of this process, a gap emerged between the new political structures and the social realities of the region; a gap that in many cases led to a decrease in national cohesion, weakening of political legitimacy, and the emergence of internal and regional tensions. However, attributing all crises in the Middle East solely to external factors or imposed demarcations simplifies the analysis; because internal dynamics, political rivalries, and historical interactions between social groups have also played a role in shaping the current situation.

From an analytical perspective, understanding Middle East issues requires a historical and multi-factorial approach that considers both the role of external powers and internal social, cultural, and political structures. Also, the systematic use of local sources and historical documents is essential to reduce analytical biases and increase scientific accuracy.

In sum, the crises and developments in the Middle East are the result of a complex interaction of historical, political, and social factors. Understanding this complexity is essential for a scientific analysis of regional developments and for providing realistic solutions for stability and sustainable development.

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