

# World War I // The Great War



It is generally acknowledged that World War I was a transformative event in world history, possibly the single greatest catalyst for change on a global scale, marking the end of 19th century institutions and the beginning of a new era. This statement is especially true in the Middle East. Studying the Great War in that area of the world raises important military, social, political, and health issues that even one century later, continue to affect the world in which we live.

# EUROPE AT THE BEGINNING OF WORLD WAR I



# The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was the one of the largest and longest lasting Empires in history. It was an empire inspired and sustained by **Islam**, and Islamic institutions.

At the beginning of November 1914, the Ottoman Empire, the world's greatest independent Islamic power, abandoned its doubtful neutrality towards the warring parties, and became an aggressive member of the Central Powers in the conflict, with the sultan declaring a military **jihad** (holy war) against France, Russia and Great Britain.



# Modern Middle East as a Legacy of WWI

To exam the events in the Middle East today as a legacy of World War I, we must go back to the **breakup of the Ottoman Empire** and the creation of the boundaries within the Middle East as we now know them.

The peace settlements, imposed by the Allies after World War I, *collected diverse peoples and cultures of the former Ottoman Empire into what would become nation-states*. Some ethnic groups believed that they would be given their own nation-states; instead, they found themselves **minorities within others**.

*Religious and ethnic differences were ignored*. Regions were carved up with little regard for their geography or history. This new "Middle East" was left with conditions that would breed resentment and alienation at best, conflict and war at worst.



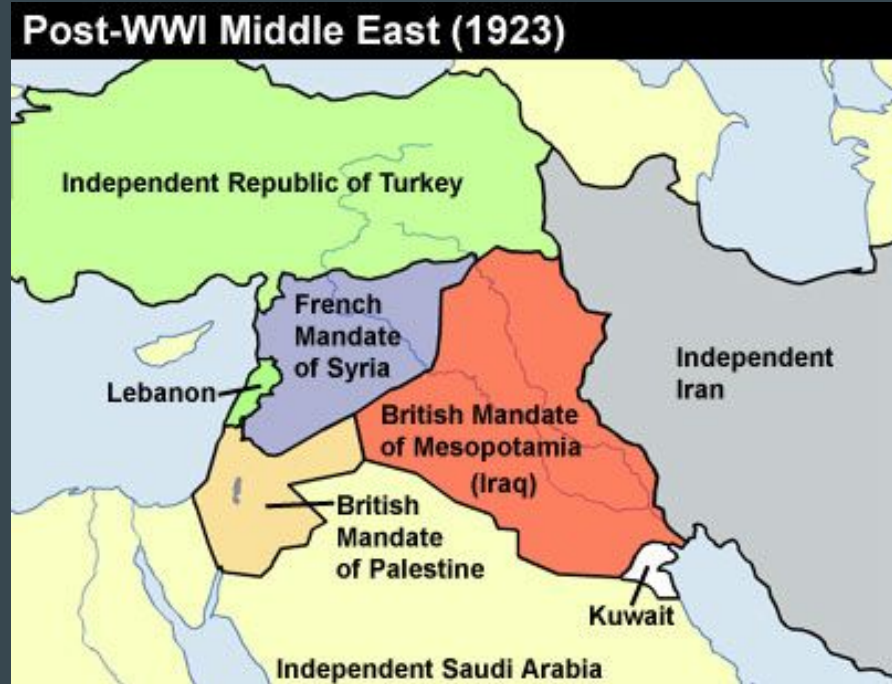
# Some say that the roots of many contemporary conflicts in the Middle East go back to the Great War (1914-1918)

The Ottoman Empire entered World War I on the side of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy.

When a war ends or a game is over there is a winner and a loser. This team lost the war.

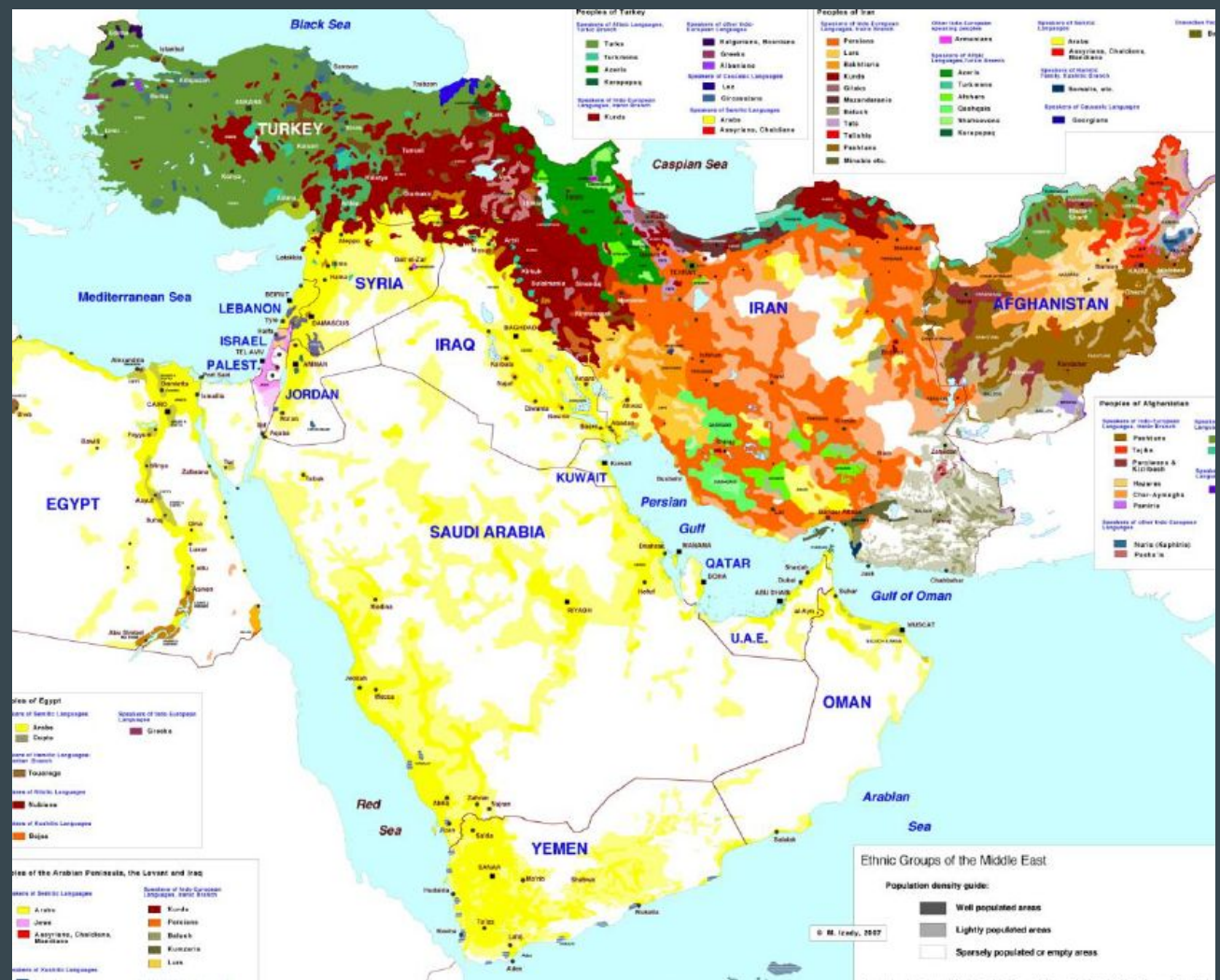
The winners got to choose how the losers were punished.

In this case, the winners also got to choose what the “new” world would look like.





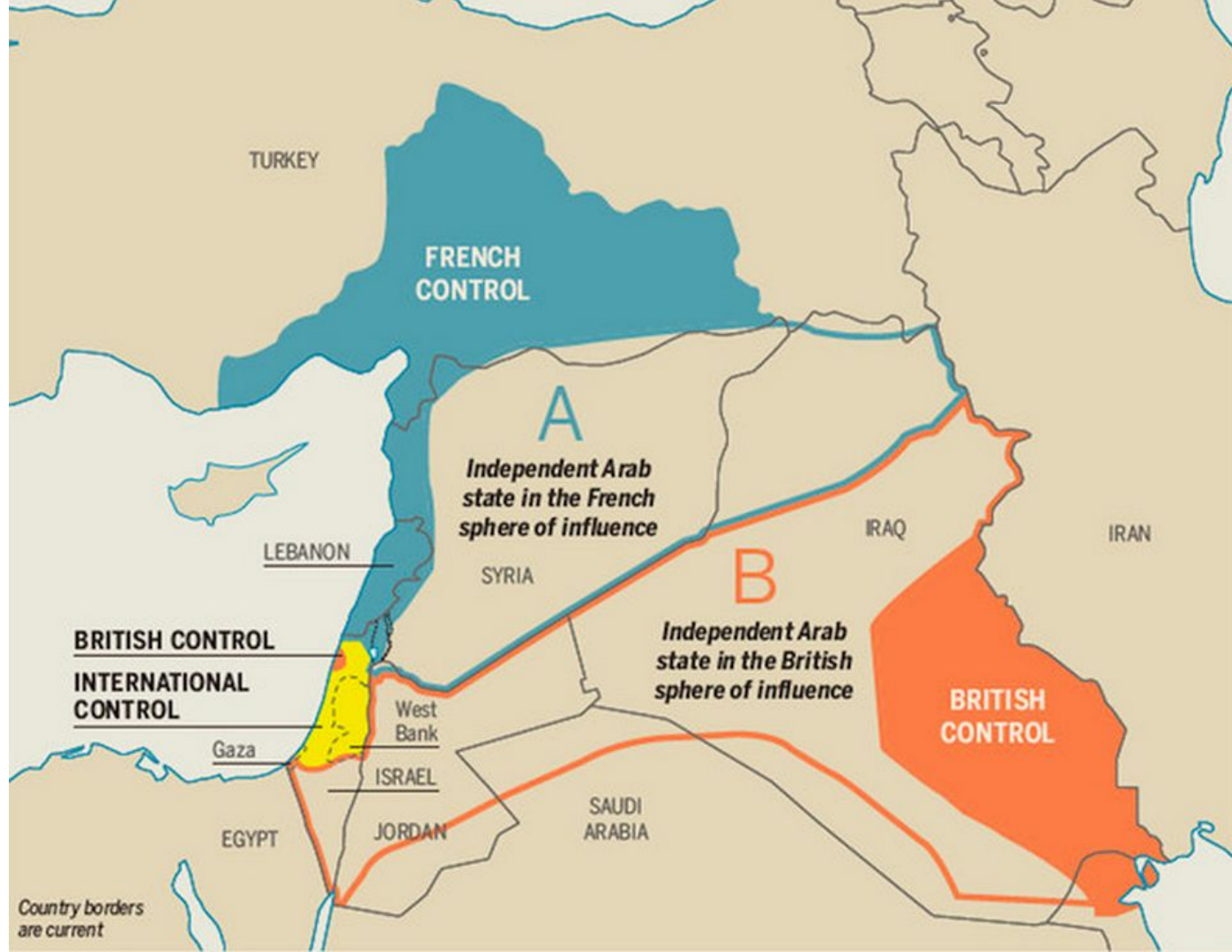
# Ethnic groups of the Ottoman Empire



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Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916):  
divided the land of the Middle East  
into **British** and **French** mandates  
and protectorates, similar to  
colonies.

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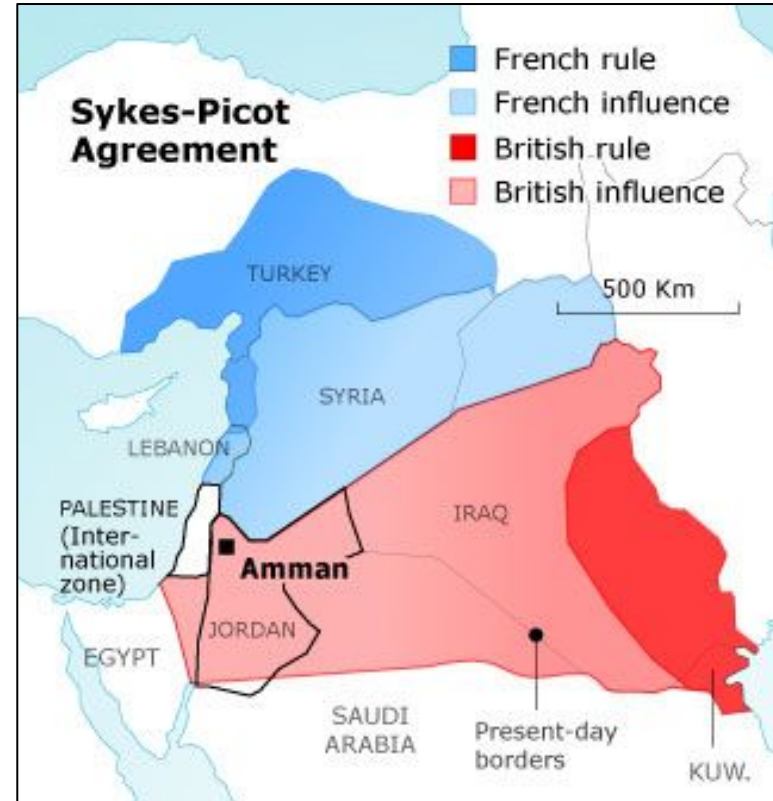


PEACE RUMORS  
Let Us Have (A) Pence (Piece)

On May 19, 1916 at the end of WWI, representatives of Great Britain and France secretly reach an agreement known as the [Sykes-Picot agreement](#). This agreement affected most of the Arab lands under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The agreement stated that those lands were to be *divided* into British and French spheres of influence.

# Sykes-Picot:

- the Syrian coast and much of modern-day Lebanon went to **France**
- **Britain** would take direct control over central and southern Mesopotamia, around the Baghdad and Basra provinces.
- Palestine would have an international administration, as other Christian powers, namely Russia, held an interest in this region.
- The rest of the territory – a huge area including modern-day Syria, Mosul in northern Iraq, and Jordan – would have local Arab chiefs under **French supervision** in the north and **British** in the south.
- **Britain** and **France** would retain free passage and trade in the other's zone of influence.



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To maintain alliances in the region,  
the **British** placed two of the sons of  
the head of Shia Islam as kings of Iraq  
and Jordan.

The majority of **Arabs** living in the Europeans-carved  
mandates **resented** the interventions of Europeans.  
They felt **thrust into** new regional entities that **did not**  
**reflect their identities** and to which **they had no**  
**allegiance**. Middle Eastern borders have not changed  
significantly since the British and French division.



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France and Britain drew the borders of the six new nations -- Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria -- based on their own interests in the region, including:

1. *Access to potential oil resources*
2. *Strategic military bases*
3. *Control of security for trade routes.*





