

How the middle east changed after ww1



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Because of a number of elements, the Middle East found itself profoundly changed after World War I. Although this was the case for many countries, the region experienced it most keenly as a result of not only its own internal conflicts, but also because of the conflicting drives of the countries that won the war. Many of the forces in question continue to shape the Middle East today, and some critics hold that the result of elements born during the First World War, is the general mistrust and hostility held by Middle Eastern countries towards the west.

Although the First World War is usually considered a European endeavor, the Ottoman Empire at the time also played a major role in the war and its aftermath. It was on the side of the Central Power, opposite to Russia, the Ottoman rival at the time (McKinney 2010). The European desire to divide the empire included a Russian interest in the country's ports, as well as in Palestine, based on primarily religious regions. England on the other hand wanted to protect India, while also maintaining political activity in Persia, Iran and Egypt.

The Constantinople Agreement provided for these ambitions by the Allied forces at roughly the same time that Australian forces were increasingly helping to gain power over the Suez Canal and Gaza strip areas (Australian War Memorial). Another secret treaty that specified the colonial ambitions of the European countries was the Sykes Picot Agreement. These two agreements indicated that the Europeans had little intention of honoring President Wilson's plea to let the former Ottoman nationalities develop autonomously.

This was at the root of the problems that started at the time and continue to this day, according to Sam Roberts (2007). After the end of World War I, the Allies struggled to come to

an agreement during the peace talks in Versailles. They could not work out how to divide the world among them, or exactly how this world should be structured and ruled. In addition to the question of Germany's punishment was the problem of the Ottoman territories.

Complicating the matter was the fact that large amounts of oil were being discovered in the Middle East, further encouraging Europeans in their efforts to colonize the area, and therefore imposing their own governments upon regions that have adhered to strict religious ideals of governmental rule for centuries (Roberts 2007).

Another problem was that the British had made several commitments during the war, which conflicted with each other in the aftermath (Roberts 2007). The Arabs were for example promised independence for helping the Allies overthrow the Turkish Ottoman rulers. In the Balfour Declaration during 1917, the British also promised the Jewish people a national home in Palestine. The problem was however created by the British promise to their French allies to divide large areas within the Ottoman territory between them.

After the Treaty of Versailles, the Treaty of Sevres was reached on August 10th, 1920. The negotiations lasted for more than 15 months, and began at the Peace Conference in Paris. They then moved to the Conference of London, and again to the Premiers Conference at San Remo in April 1920.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-the-middle-east-changed-after-ww1/>

The Treaty was nullified during the Turkish War of Independence, after which the Treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923. The Treaty of Sevres was never ratified by the Ottoman Empire, and therefore abolished on March 18th, 1920 when the British occupied Istanbul.

Furthermore, the treaty did not include the United States or Russia, while Greece also did not ratify it.

One of the main problems with this and also other agreements after World War I is the

fact that the negotiating parties had differing goals and objectives for the future of the world. French, British and U. S. leaders for example stated vastly different objectives during the Peace Conference in France. What it came down to was that the Ottoman Empire was in effect destroyed in favor of something new and not necessarily better. The Allied Powers divided the Empire according to secret agreements made during the war. This had not only social and political implications, but also financial ones.

During the process of taking power in the Ottoman Empire, the Allied forces assumed financial control to the extent of approving or supervising the national budget, laws and regulations that governed the financial sector, and the control of the Ottoman Bank. The Public Debt Administration was redesigned to include only British, French and Italians. Further control was exercised over import and export duties, the reorganization of the electoral system, and the representation of races within the Empire. The Allied Powers also had to be consulted for developments of the tax, custom services, and loans before concessions could be given.

The treaty also imposed military restrictions, to the effect that the Ottoman Army could only include 50, 000 men, with seven sloops and six torpedo boats for the navy and no air force. An Inter-Allied commission would supervise the military implementations.

There was a further demand for international trials for those who were responsible for “ barbarous and illegitimate” warfare methods. This was however suspended following the failure of the former Ottoman Empire to deliver persons the Allies believed were guilty of such offenses.

France, Britain, and the United States were the major Allied forces with stakes in the Middle East. The Treaty of Sevres was the beginning of shaping the world according to the Western colonial strategies, although any allegations to this effect were strongly denied.

The zone of influence granted to France then included Syria and parts of southeastern Anatolia, with the inclusion of Antemp, Urfa and Mardin. Cilicia included Adana, Kurdistan and part of East-Central Anatolia. In terms of the United States, Armenia was left to the region itself, with the border however fixed by President Wilson of the United States. Hence the area also became known as “ Wilsonian Armenia.”

The British, emerging as the most powerful of the Allied Forces, were given the Mandate of Iraq on April 25th, 1920 at the San Remo conference. Oil concessions were also controlled by the company, as was the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC), which was renamed the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC in March 1925). In Palestine, the treaty provided the British with Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The San Remo Conference granted Mandate of Lebanon to France. It included the region between the Euphrates River and the Syrian desert, the Mediterranean sea and the Alma Dagh

Mountains stretching to Egypt in the south. The French divided the region into four governments: The Government of Aleppo, Great Lebanon, Damascus, and the Hauran.

The reaction to the Treaty of Sevres was violent. The Turkish national movement for example split from the monarchy in Constantinople and fought the Turkish War of Independence. The Turks resisted the Greek, Armenian and French armies, and settled in an area closely resembling the Turkey of today.

The national movement of the Turks also had its own international relations by means of the Treaty of Moscow and the Soviet Union in 1921. Its Accord of Ankara with France successfully ended the Franco-Turkish War, while the treaty of Alexandropoulos and Kars focused on the eastern borders of the country.

Being unable to enforce the full extent of their treaty upon the unwilling Middle East made the Allies aware that they needed to once again return to the negotiating table if they were to gain any more power than they already had. In 1923 they met again with the Turks and negotiated the Treaty of Lausanne. This replaced the one at Sevres and recovered significant amounts of land for Turkish use.

When the peace talks concluded in 1922, the newly formed League of Nations in effect gave Britain and France permission to oversee a large part of the former Ottoman Empire. Here they continued their ill-concealed colonial effort by creating new states and installing puppet rulers (Roberts 2007). President Wilson's confidant, Colonel Edward House, was not wrong when he

predicted that such actions could only lead to further war. Almost immediately after the war, Middle Eastern nationalists rose up to oppose European Rule (Shuster 2004).

According to Woodward (2009), the post-war settlement after the First World War left Britain in the most powerful position, with Russia all but incapacitated and France with territorial claims on only a small part of the Middle East. The greatest influence was exerted by the British. According to the author however, British rule led to the rise of a conflict situation that persists today. According to many, and particularly the Mid-Eastern citizens of the time, the British and other western forces had acted with considerable arrogance, with little respect for the political and religious issues prevalent in the areas they were colonizing. One significant factor is that the British were unable to keep their promise of Arab independence to its full extent.

Although some received territory, they were embittered as a result of the perceived broken pledge. The result of this was an Arab uprising against the Turks in 1916.

The San Remo Conference nevertheless began to shape the post-war world (McKinney 2010). The result was that the Europeans were making

impositions into country where the various nations were having unique conflicts of their own. According to Roberts (2007), for example, The Islam sects Shiite and Sunni were in conflict regarding the succession of Muhammad as the leader of Islam. Not having any understanding of the sectarian splits within the country, the British created the new nation of Iraq in ancient Mesopotamia. In so doing, the Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul were bound together quite uneasily, as the first was mostly Sunni, the second mostly Shiite, and the third generally Kurdish.

A further factor was that the invasion of the British meant a new type of rulership. Up until the time, Iraq was held together by autocratic kings and dictators. After the war, however, the British installed Feisal as king. He was the son of the ruler of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, one of the British allies during the war (Roberts, 2007). The monarchy started at the time was overthrown in 1958. Saddam Hussein took power from 1968 until 2003, when he was overthrown by a U. S. led coalition. Since this time, little was done to contain the rising sectarian tension in the region, which has escalated violence and threatened civil war in the country. Things fared little better with Western involvement in the land east of the Jordan River. Here, Feisa's brother Abdullah was installed on the throne (Roberts 2007). Like his brother, Abdullah's rule also came to a violent end, with the king being assassinated in 1951. His great-grandson, Abdullah II is currently on the throne.

To the west of the Jordan River, the issue of the promised homeland to the Jews was the cause of conflict and violence for the next two decades. The reason for this was the absolute disregard for the current rulership of the area when the promise was made. With Palestine being mostly Arab at the

<https://assignbuster.com/how-the-middle-east-changed-after-ww1/>

time, its leaders strongly opposed a new Jewish state in the area. Those who supported Zionism on the other hand claimed the right of the Jewish to a state in ancient Israel. The Holocaust during World War II brought further worldwide pressure to keep this promise to the Jews (Roberts 2007).

To compromise, the United Nations divided a narrow piece of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea into respective Jewish and Palestinian states. The problem was that,

while Jewish leaders found this acceptable, the Arab states did not, and attacked the new state as soon as its British protectors left the region in May 1948 (Roberts 2007).

This was followed by a more or less constant state of turmoil between the Arabs and Israelis, including the Six Day War in 1967. A number of peace negotiations were effected, which virtually ended with the election of the militant group Hamas in Palestine during 2006).

The imposition of France within the Middle East was equally fierce. After making Syria a protectorate in 1920, the French claimed special responsibility to safeguard Christianity within the Ottoman Empire. To this end, the country created the separate state of Lebanon at the coastal region of the country. Even today, the Syrians do not recognize this state as legitimate. Nonetheless, Lebanon's independence in 1943 led to conflicts within the state, mostly religion inspired. Strife between the Christians and Muslims for example led to a 15 year civil war in the country by 1975.

Finally Kuwait, once a district of Basra under Ottoman rule, was later overseen by Britain until its independence in 1961. Here also, conflicts pervaded, most notably in 1990, when Saddam Hussein invaded the country and started the first Gulf War. Kuwait was liberated in 1991 (Roberts 2007).

The entire Middle East continues to suffer from internal conflict, some of which is threatening to become a global problem, such as the war in Iraq and the terrorist attacks worldwide. It therefore appears that the actions and promises made by the Allies during World War I sparked little more than increased conflict for all the countries involved. Despite President Wilson's dream of autonomous development for these countries, and despite the eventual independence that they received, it appears that Western influence had ruined them ever since the end of the War. At the bottom of the issue is the fact that these countries never had the opportunity to create a new identity for themselves. The identities imposed upon them now only serve to create more confusion and problems than they solve (Roberts 2007).

According to McKinney (2010), the rise of nationalism began after the First World War, both in the West and the Middle Eastern countries. It began the drive that colonized so much of the Middle East and shaped their identities. The movement however gained momentum during and after the Second World War. The nationalism connected to Turkish nationalism, Arab identities and Zionism lies at the heart of a large amount of conflict that began with the invasion of European forces after the First World War. Nationalism in Palestine was also at the root of the conflict it experienced with Zionism and

the Jewish national identity. Even more than religion, nationalism lies at the bottom of a large amount of Middle-Eastern conflict.

It is not surprising that this is so, McKinney (2010) notes that European colonialism further spurred the growth of Arab national sentiments. Such notions were largely based upon past resentments in terms of promises not kept. In addition, post-World War II coups resulted in the surrender of governments in Syria, Egypt and Iraq between 1949 and 1958.

In response, however, nationalism also became an increasing feature of these countries. Most notable is the nationalism espoused by President Nasser of Egypt after the Free Officers took over in the country. President Nasser advocated nationalism, a strong military, and the Non-

Alignment Movement. The president then went on to nationalize the Suez Canal company owned by Great Britain, and attempted to obtain economic and military aid from the Soviet Union. Although Nasser failed in his attempt to overthrow imperialism in Egypt, he nonetheless was instrumental in awakening the nationalist sentiment in his followers and his successors. His influence also stretched far beyond the borders of Egypt, where many Egyptians and Arabs joined in the movement against the British imposition of their national borders.

Because of this very craftiness, along with that of France and the United States, the face of the former Ottoman Empire changed significantly; a change that was neither easy nor peaceful. The Allied forces imposed their influence in such a way that none of the Middle Eastern countries involved could hope to achieve any sort of autonomous development, as President

<https://assignbuster.com/how-the-middle-east-changed-after-ww1/>

Wilson advocated. Instead, it simply became territory to be colonized, although the term was no longer “ politically correct” at the time.

There is little doubt that the Middle East might have been a much different place without the intervention of the Allied forces. Currently, issues already arising during and after World War I still persist with little solution having been found or applied. According to McKinney, current problems include resource problem in Jordan, the multi-ethnic nature of Iraq, nationalism and the drive to self-determination by means of the Zionist and Palestinian identities, and the Pan-Arabism that resulted from the imperialism imposed by Great Britain.

Clearly, much will have to be done towards finding a solution to this grim situation. Most important is however the almost clichéd adage that, unless we learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. The British effort in the Middle East appears to be a case in point.