

The impact of the first world war in the middle east essay sample

[War](#)



The Middle East at 1914 was at the crossroads. The once great Ottoman Empire that had been the dominant political force in the Middle East was decaying, losing ground to the independence Arab movements. In October 1914, the Ottoman Empire that had been severely weakened due to defeat in the Balkan war joined the central powers in the war against the Triple Entente. The Ottomans had controlled the Middle East since the 13th century. Britain's main aim was to defeat Germany on the Western front and the core of its army was needed in Europe to fight trench warfare. However, Britain's economic and strategic interests in the Middle East pressured them into nevertheless confronting Turkey. Britain hoped to protect its colonial interests in the region and have a dominant role in the post-war partitioning of the Ottoman Empire among the Allied powers. France also had its interest in the region and the two countries established the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 that divided the Middle East into areas of influence.

Palestine and Mesopotamia during World War:

Britain's two major onslaughts against the Turks took place in Mesopotamia and the Palestine.

In order to protect the Anglo-Persian oil pipeline that was essential to the British navy, Anglo-Indian troops invaded Basra. In response to this action, the central powers carried out a surprise attack against the British controlled and strategically vital Suez Canal in Egypt. This attempt failed. In 1915, Britain tried to force The Ottoman Empire out of the war by attacking them at Gallipoli. This attack also failed and resulted in a bloodbath on both sides and a humiliating defeat for the British. In April 1916, the Anglo-Indian forces

were surrounded at Kut El Amara a town outside Iraq. They were forced to surrender and were therefore unable to capture Baghdad. Under a new General, Sir Stanley Frederick Maude, Britain regained the initiative in Mesopotamia, and put together a force of 150000 well-equipped men, finally capturing Baghdad on the 11th of March 1917.

At the same time, the victory of The Egyptian expeditionary force controlled by General Sir Archibald Murray against the Turkish attack on the Suez Canal, put pressure on the General to invade Ottoman controlled Palestine. The EEF was dependant on the Sinai railway and water supply and the challenge of invading Gaza was dangerously underestimated by Murray and the British Government. Murray carried out two attacks on Gaza in October and December 1917, which were complete failures, leading to the sacking of Murray.

The third Battle of Gaza under General Sir Edmund Allenby was a victory due to complete supplies and military strength. The troops occupied Jaffa, Judea and finally Jerusalem on the 9th of December 1917. At the Battle of Meggido on September 1918 Allenby defeated the Ottoman army.

The war destroyed the Ottoman Empire and Britain became the dominant power in the region with its occupation of Palestine and Mesopotamia, which became modern day Iraq. Iraq won its independence in 1932. Unfortunately Palestine never got the independence it yearned for from the British and has been struggling for its independence until today. Britain encouraged an Arab revolt against the Turks in 1916, in exchange for support of Arab nationalism and independence. At the same time, Britain signed the Balfour declaration,

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which supported the creation of a Jewish homeland in the land of Palestine. There was therefore great frustration among the Arabs as they felt that the British were arrogant and inconsiderate of their desires. The events of the First World War in Palestine are vital to understanding the Israeli-Palestine conflict, which still deeply affects today's world.

Lebanon and Syria during World War:

Before 1914, Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire where as Mount Lebanon was a Mutassarrifiya, an independent province of the Ottoman Empire that did not include Beirut and the costal cities Saida, Sour and Tripoli.

After the outbreak of the war, Syrian intellectuals, under the control of Jamal Pasha, ask for administrative reform and the decentralization of the Ottoman administration. Jamal Pasha ignores these requests, which led to revolts and the demand for a complete Arab independence. One of the First Arab Nationalist group created was “ Al Jamiyyah al Arabiyyah al Fatat” (Young Arab Society). Prince Faysal, son of Sharif Husayn – the leader of the Hashemite family – is a member of the group. Jamal Pasha is determined to reinforce his control over Syria. He attacks the Fatat members and other nationalists ruthlessly and hangs twenty-one men in the public places of Beirut and Damascus on May 6 1916. The date, May 6, is commemorated annually in both countries as Martyrs' Day, and the site in Beirut has come to be known as Martyrs' Square. The British with the desire of having Arabs' support, ask Faysal to lead the revolts. The Prince enters Damascus in 1918 as a popular hero and is named King of Iraq and Syria.

The Mutassarrifiya collapses after the outbreak of the First World War and problems are born in Lebanon in August 1914, as the Turkish allies with the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians. The Ottoman Empire put an end to Lebanon's semi-autonomous status haven choosing Jamal Pasha to be the commander in chief of Syria including Lebanon taking control over this region with unrestricted power. Jamal Pasha unsuccessfully attacks the British army who were protecting the Suez Canal. In February 1915, he decides to put in place a blockade covering the eastern Mediterranean coast to stop supplies from reaching his rivals. This caused thousands of deaths from severe famine and plagues. The people of Lebanon endured as much as, or more than any other Ottoman province. The blockade led the country to live under miserable and alarming circumstances that then led to a flow of immigration.

The 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement that was made between Britain and France led to the decisions taken at the San Remo Conference held in Italy in April 1920. The Allies gave France a mandate over Greater Syria known today as Lebanon and Syria. After the Franco-Syrian war in Maysalun, having won the battle, the French expel King Faysal from Syria and appoint General Henri Gouraud to implement the mandate provisions.

Lawrence of Arabia (T. E. Laurence)

Born on August 16th, 1888 in Tremadog, Caernarvonshire, now Wales, T. E. Lawrence was an adventurer, military strategist, and a writer who wrote *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which was half biographical and also a detailed account of the Arab revolt against the Turkish Empire. He went to Oxford

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High school, and acquired a scholarship to the Jesus College, which belonged to Oxford. He was best known for his role in the Arab revolt of 1916-1918 against the Turkish Empire.

In 1909, he went on a walking tour, which covered various parts of Turkey, Palestine, and Syria. Using the information he had collected from his tour, he wrote a thesis called « The Influence of the Crusades on European Military Architecture-to the End of the Seventeenth Century ». He participated on an expedition in 1911, which excavated the Hittite site of Carchemish located on the Euphrates. During these years spent in the Middle East, he learnt Arabic and grew accustomed to the Arabic culture.

When World War I broke out, he was assigned to the English intelligence network in Egypt for a year. During this year working for English intelligence, he interviewed Turkish prisoners to become informed on the Turkish army locations, and their strengths, which helped him in his attacks against Turkey.

In a effort to attack Turkey, who had sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary during the war, England had launched a campaign that « Involved British, Anzac and Indian troops driving the Turks back through Palestine towards Turkey itself. » The Arab guerrilla warfare was extremely important for this campaign, and Lawrence was extremely important to the out come of this plan

In 1916, Lawrence joined the Arabian Sheik, Feisal al Husain and helped lead the Arab revolt against the Turks. They helped the attack against Turkey

using guerrilla warfare such as exploding the enemy railway, and supply lines. This warfare eventually led to the taking of the port of Aqaba in 1917, a very important port on the Red Sea which the Turks were forced to leave.

As the British army invaded Palestine and Syria, Lawrence also managed to distract the Turks from the British invasion by leading the Arab forces into the desert. His forces were very useful to the collapse of Turkey, which led to the capture of Jerusalem and the liberation of Damascus. Eventually, the British brought down the Turks at the battle of Megiddo in 1918 with much help from T. E. Lawrence and his army.

What Lawrence had hoped for however, was an independent Arabia, and the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1920, which gave Damascus to the French, ruined such hopes. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Lawrence accompanied the Arab delegation, and became a hero due to lectures given by an American journalist called Lowell Thomas about his experiences in Arabia. Not wanting such praise, Lawrence joined the Royal Air Force and after the Royal Tank Corps under two fake names. He only wished to « Forget and be forgotten. » He bought a small cottage where he was able to finish his *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and died in a motorcycle accident at the age of 47.

Even though T. E. Lawrence only wished to be known for his writing, he became incredibly well known for his leadership of the Arab revolt against the Turkish Empire. The Ottoman Empire was defeated on the 19th of September 1918 with the help of T. E. Lawrence, and this marked the beginning of the end of World War One.