

Chapter 2: Chapter exercises

The Treaty of Versailles: Effects on Arab statehood and stability of the Middle East

The Treaty of Versailles post-war Peace Conference was intended to produce a new era of international cooperation between independent and dependent nation states via the creation of the League of Nations. Regardless of this overarching principle, the Peace Conference was widely seen to be dominated by the non-explicit intentions of the 'Big Three' victors of the First World War, namely Britain, France, and the United States, represented by David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and President Woodrow Wilson, respectively. The aims of the Big Three were based around a need to restrict the military power of Germany and its war allies via disarmament, reparations to the Allied countries, and, in the case of the British and French delegations, protection and even expansion of the two countries' global imperial interests at the expense of the defeated nations and their former colonies. In contrast to this, after centuries of Ottoman control, the various Middle Eastern delegations wished only for greater regional autonomy and formal international recognition. The aspirations of the Arab world would be set out at the Peace Conference by a memorandum written by Amir Faisal (de facto ruler of Syria), that was formally presented to the conference's Supreme Council (Henig 1995).

However, as opposed to full autonomy for the region, the Middle East was to be divided as stipulated by Article 22 of the League of Nations mandate, which clearly stated that those territories that had formerly been under control of the Ottoman Empire had now reached a stage in their development where they could be provisionally recognized as individual nation states. It would later transpire that provisional recognition meant that the former Ottoman Empire was to be dismantled and divided up as 'mandates' between Britain and France. The mandate system allowed for administration of Lebanon and Syria by France and the former Ottoman provinces of Mesopotamia (contemporary Iraq) and Palestine by the British. Moreover, Britain and France were able to retain their control over substantial tracts of the region under the guise of either protectorates or dependent colonies.

More tellingly, however, the reason why the Anglo-French delegation at Versailles gave little credence to Middle Eastern concerns was because issues relating to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and its effect for the future composition of the region had already been largely resolved prior to the end of the First World War. The future of the Middle East was effectively decided by the secretive Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, two years before the official end of hostilities between the Allies and the Central Powers. In contrast to the Anglo-French position, President Wilson's fourteen-point plan, although not explicitly a plan for the Middle East, was somewhat anti-imperialist, and emphasized the fundamental right for all nation states to partake in the basic westernized principles of democracy and national self-determination (Knock 1998).

How did the Anglo-French agreement made during the war contradict the wider intentions of the Wilsonian plan, and can the subsequent problems of the region be related back to the contradictory outcomes of the Versailles conference?

wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson%27s_Fourteen_Points

www.historylearningsite.co.uk/sykes_picot_agreement.htm

www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/520589/posts

Henig, R. (1995) *Versailles and After: 1919–1933* (London: Routledge)

Knock, T.J. (1998) 'Wilsonian Concepts and International Realities at the End of the War' in M.F. Boemeke et al. (eds) *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)