WHY HAS THE MIDDLE EAST BLOWN UP IN OUR FACE?
From San Remo (1920) To Tehran Airport (1979)
by Prof. Stephen Humphries
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World War I: Promises, Promises
- Husayn-McMahon Correspondence (1915)
- Sykes-Picton Agreement (1916)
- Balfour Declaration (1917)
- Woodrow Wilson: 14 Points
- Anglo-French Declaration (1918)
- FM Balfour’s internal memo to the British Cabinet (August 1919)

Comparing Sykes-Picot and the Contemporary Map
Plus ca change...

The Sykes-Picot Agreement

Great Britain as Broker and Beneficiary
- Why did Britain take the lead role in planning a post-war settlement in the ME?
- What vital interests did Britain have to address during the war?
- How had these interests changed by war’s end (November 1918)?
Headaches
• importunate France
• anti-imperialism
• new nationalisms in the Middle East
• A few petty distractions:
  – Ireland
  – Russia in revolution
  – The near-collapse of Germany
  – India
  – A bankrupt treasury

A settlement is reached and our real troubles begin…
• Lord Balfour’s internal memo
• Treaty of Versailles and its offshoots:
  – Wilsonian idealism and the League of Nations
  – Mandate System in the Middle East
  – San Remo accords (April 1920): Sykes-Picot is scrapped but not really
    • Britain: Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq
    • France: Syria, Lebanon

Three big countries wriggle out of the Mandate system
• Turkish war of Independence, the end of Ottoman Empire, and the rise of the Turkish Republic (1919-1923)
• Egypt gains qualified independence (1919-1922) and a constitutional monarchy (1923)
• Iran: from chaos to a new autocracy (1919-1925)

By 1923, the Middle East (almost) as we know it.

From equilibrium (1923) to chaos (1979)—what happened?
• The inter-war period: the imperial order endures, but its foundations start to crack.
• World War II: the contrasting but ever-so-similar fates of France and Great Britain: empires of smoke and mirrors.
• AFTER THE WAR (1945-1958):
  – New guys on the block: the US, USSR, and the Cold War in the Middle East.
  – Israel
  – A new generation of nationalists—not our kind of people.

Two Nationalist Movements and their strange fates: 1
• ARAB NATIONALISM
  – A never-resolved problem: what is the Arab nation, who is an Arab? Arab nationalism as identity politics rather than a concrete program.
  – Who shall lead? The accidental hero: Gamal Abdel Nasser
    • Suez ’56
    • The triumphant year of unity: 1958
    • Things begin to stall: 1961
    • The “setback”: the June War, 1967
    • The death of Nasser (1970) and its impact
Nationalisms, 2: The Case of Iran

- Modern Iran: the creation of the Safavids (1499-1722)
- The Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911) and the emergence of modern nationalism
- Autocracy and the lunge for modernization: Reza Shah (1925-1941)
- A constitutional interlude (1944-53): oil, Mohammed Mossadegh, MI6, and the CIA
- Mohammed Reza Shah (1953-1979) and the crisis of hyper-rapid modernization

The 1970s: New forces emerge

- The end of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (no kidding)
- Political Islam: social reform and revolution
  - Iran: the Shi’ite clergy take charge
  - The Arab states: a loose-knit congeries of lay-led groups.

Two leaders of the Islamic movement

- Sayyid Qutb of Egypt (executed by Nasser, 1965)
- Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989)