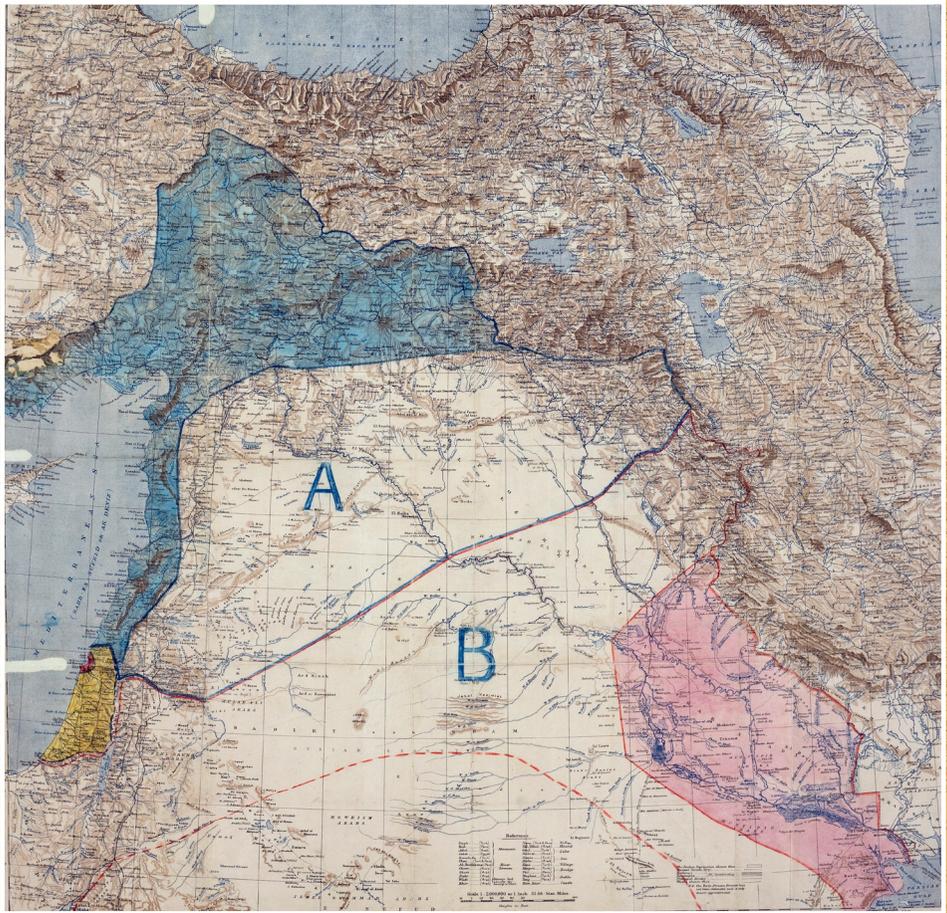

THE LINES THAT BIND



100 YEARS OF SYKES-PICOT

ANDREW J. TABLER, EDITOR



THE LINES THAT BIND

**100 YEARS OF
SYKES-PICOT**

Andrew J. Tabler, EDITOR



THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY
www.washingtoninstitute.org

The opinions expressed in this Policy Focus are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Washington Institute, its Board of Trustees, or its Board of Advisors.

Policy Focus 151, December 2016

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

©2016 by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
1111 19th Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036

Design: 1000colors

Cover image: 1916 map by Royal Geographical Society, annotated by Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot.

CONTENTS

<i>List of Maps</i>	iv
▣ ANDREW J. TABLER	1
Introduction	
▣ FABRICE BALANCHE	3
<i>The Levant: Fragmentation and Remapping</i>	
▣ MICHAEL KNIGHTS	26
<i>Iraq: Identifying a Steady State</i>	
▣ DAVID POLLOCK	32
<i>Ending a Century of Subjugation: Sykes-Picot's Kurdish Legacy</i>	
▣ DAVID SCHENKER	38
<i>Jordan: Resilience and Stability amid Persistent Challenges</i>	
▣ SAM MENASSA	46
<i>Lebanon, Sykes-Picot, and U.S. Foreign Policy</i>	
▣ SONER CAGAPTAY	53
<i>Turkey Faces Its Toughest Tests</i>	
▣ GHAITH AL-OMARI	58
<i>Palestine: State Institutions Before State Lines</i>	
▣ DAVID MAKOVSKY	65
<i>Israel's Enduring Struggle over Land</i>	
▣ BRIGITTE CURMI	70
<i>The Arab World in 2016: Bringing the State Back In</i>	
▣ MARTIN KRAMER	79
<i>Repairing Sykes-Picot</i>	
<i>Contributors</i>	86

MAPS

- MAP 1 *19th Century French, British, and Russian
Imperialism in the Mediterranean* □ 6
- MAP 2 *The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916* □ 8
- MAP 3 *Population of States under Mandate, 1922* □ 10
- MAP 4 *The Levant after 1919 Versailles Treaty* □ 12

ANDREW J. TABLER

INTRODUCTION: A CENTURY OF SYKES-PICOT

MUCH HAS BEEN SAID of the collapse of Sykes-Picot—the secret pact between Britain and France carving out spheres of influence in the Ottoman Empire following its defeat in World War I. While the agreement itself did not make the modern nation-states of the Middle East, the League of Nations “mandates” that eventually became these states were subsequently sponsored by Paris and London, a fact long held up by Arab nationalists as containing the seeds of Western domination of the Levant. Various unification efforts, including the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958–61), sought to replace Sykes-Picot with a pan-Arab order. Similar efforts—albeit not in the name of Arabism—continue today in the horrific videos of the Islamic State heralding the explicit destruction of Sykes-Picot.

The Islamic State’s emergence may have led some to believe a new Middle East order was emerging, but such sentiments were more fundamentally driven by Syria’s breakdown following the Arab uprisings of 2011. Syria’s continued division into Assad-regime, Kurdish, opposition, and jihadist areas has in many ways been a worst-case scenario, and in contrast to Iraq, no international consensus exists on putting the pieces back together again.

A closer look at the Sykes-Picot Agreement indicates the resulting states have largely stood the test of time—at least so far. Most of these states are now under considerable demographic, economic, and political stress, however, which has led to predictions that some could collapse in the not-too-distant future. To put such forbidding predictions in context, The Washington Institute convened an all-

day seminar on April 20, 2016, to mark the centennial of Sykes-Picot. Participants and contributors examined indicators of failure as well as keys to success for the states resulting from the deal. The seminar also focused on the central challenges facing these states today and ways the United States can help them address problems associated with governance, control of territory, and human development.

The case studies in this volume paint an interesting picture of not only the past but also the future of the Middle East. Here, one sees that the region's problems have owed less to "wrong" or "artificial" borders than to weak governance and leadership. Arguably the region's most "artificial" country—Jordan—has done well in no small part because of good leadership. Syria, which has existed in one way, shape, or form for centuries, has struggled because its leaders failed to see the national forest through the trees of sectarianism, regionalism, and petty rivalry. Many, if not most, of the countries in the region suffer from concentration of power in the hands of a small elite. Federalism offers one way to address that problem, but it is no silver bullet. The same goes for decentralization.

While the people of the Middle East themselves will ultimately need to resolve their problems of governance and leadership, the United States and its allies should be proactive in helping regional allies address challenges both chronic and acute, while also recognizing the challenges posed by regional adversaries. Such a U.S. role would not entail "nation building," as polices directed at national constituencies are often described, but instead empowerment of people and institutions to address the problems faced by weak states. At certain junctures, such an effort may require the employment of greater diplomatic or military efforts. In taking such steps, however, the United States will need to develop a clear idea of sustainable "end states" or "workable political solutions" that can help these countries address their problems of governance, territorial control, and human development.

FABRICE BALANCHE

THE LEVANT: FRAGMENTATION & REMAPPING

IN 2007,¹ THE EMINENT Lebanese historian Georges Corm coined the phrase “from Balkanization to Lebanonization” to refer to the historical process under way in the Near East.² Whether his assessment remains relevant today is an open question. Corm explains that his own country’s civil war (1975–1990) and the broader inability of other Near East states to emerge as durable nations owes to the fragmented nature of local actors, which do not recognize the idea of the “nation” in any sense familiar to Westerners.³ After the Ottoman Empire fell following World War I, the Near East became Balkanized with the creation of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Iraq. Lebanonization, characterized as an end point of Balkanization, describes a state’s decay in a civil war⁴ and its reconstitution under the influence of external actors. In the case of Lebanon, these external actors include Israel (until its military withdrawal in 2000) and Syria (until its military withdrawal in 2005), as well as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Twenty-five years after the civil war’s end, many parts of Lebanon remain beyond the state’s authority. Outside Lebanon, the Lebanonization hypothesis can clearly be applied to Syria and Iraq today.

The Middle East, as carved up by France and Britain during and after World War I, ultimately saw the separation of Syria and Lebanon into independent states in 1945 and, in 1947, the partition of Jewish and Arab Palestine. Israel declared its independence in May 1948 and established its territorial lines through military victories

over its Arab adversaries; the Arab part of Palestine was immediately annexed by the kingdom of Transjordan. All such developments emerged from the lifting of the British and French Mandates, established some thirty years earlier. In those interwar years, attempts by separatists to create autonomy were suppressed, allowing the various Middle East states to maintain their territorial integrity: In 1932, for example, Assyrians were massacred in northern Iraq as they sought an autonomous district. The Kurds would similarly remain victims of Baghdad, until 1991. Around this time, the fall of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War did not spur a new round of balkanization in the Middle East, as occurred in Yugoslavia. What did play out was the major conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which weakened the region's states, effectively challenging the Sykes-Picot boundaries.

SYKES-PICOT AND THE CREATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EAST

One Bosphorus was enough to trouble the world; you have created a second, much larger than the other, because it is situated not only between two parts of an inland sea; it serves as a connecting corridor to all major seas. In a naval war, it would be of supreme interest, the point for the occupation of which everyone would fight speedily. You have marked the place of the great battles of the future.⁵

—Ernest Renan, 1885

In 1869, the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez with a canal relaunched the competition among the major European powers to control the route to India, vital to the British Empire and more broadly for relations between Europe and Asia. At the end of the nineteenth century, a three-way clash of interests ensued in the Mediterranean. Britain wanted to control shipping lanes and especially the route to India via Suez; France wanted to transform the Mediterranean into a “French lake”; and Russia sought a direct outlet to the Mediterranean. Thus, the Ottoman Empire, the “sick man of Europe,” though at the mercy of these continental encroachments, was afforded some degree of respite by the rivalry. In 1878, for instance, Britain helped the Ottomans prevent Russia from seizing the Bosphorus

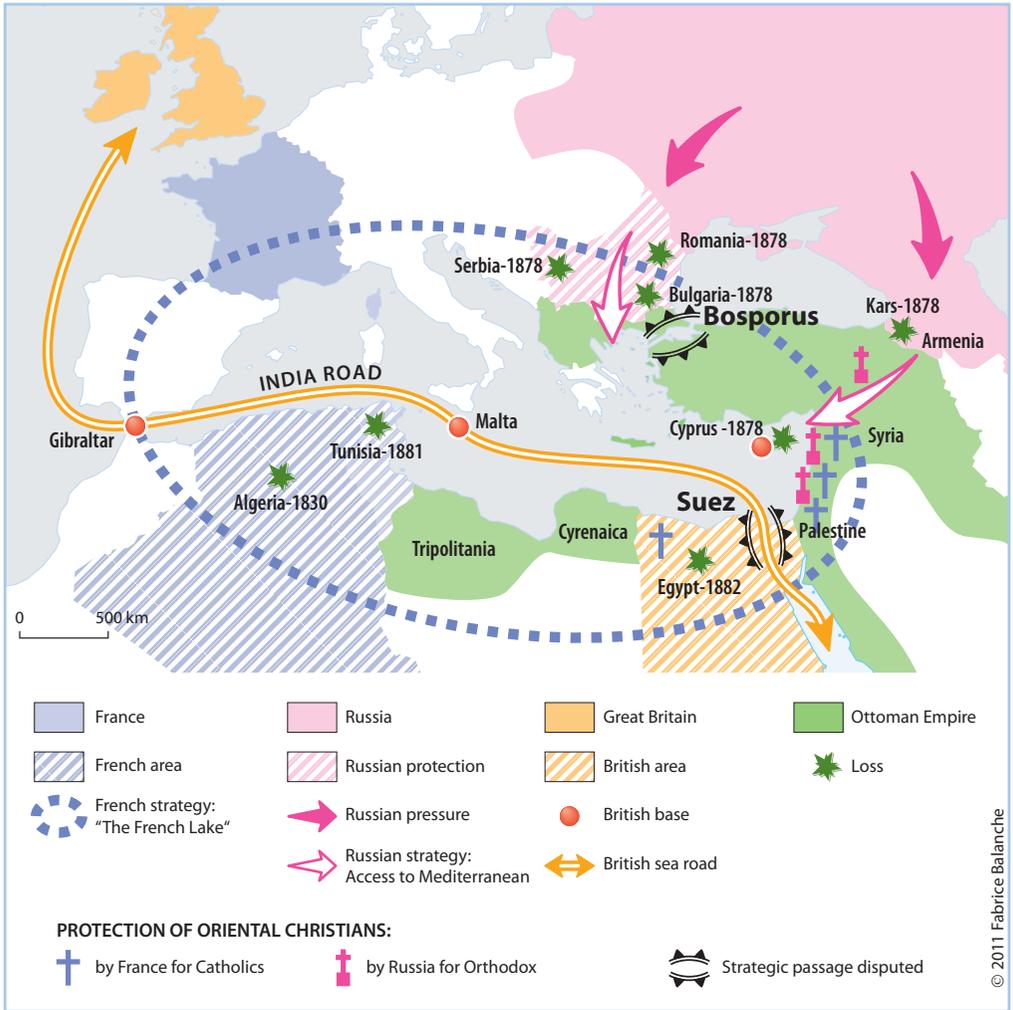
and, in return, received the protectorate of Cyprus. In 1879, Britain became the majority shareholder in the Suez Company and, in 1881, imposed a protectorate over Egypt, squeezing France. From then on, protecting the Suez Canal became a British obsession that determined its entire Middle East policy.

EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM AND WORLD WAR I

Already in 1915, with the world war just under way, Britain and France were negotiating the future of the Ottoman Empire, which sided with Germany in the conflict. These discussions would lead to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the basis of the modern Middle East. For itself, France demanded a protectorate over “natural Syria,” extending from the Taurus Mountains in southern Turkey to the Sinai Peninsula and from Mosul to the Mediterranean. Such aspirations collided with those of Britain, which wanted, at a minimum, to reduce the French presence and create an Arab kingdom headed by Emir Faisal al-Hashemi, the son of the Sharif of Mecca, a leading figure in the Arab fight against the Ottoman Turks. In the end, the parties agreed that France would directly administer the Lebanese coast and that control of southern Iraq would fall to the British; meanwhile, Britain also recognized the Syrian interior as a French sphere of influence and, in return, France recognized British control over the Baghdad area. The talks held further that Palestine would be internationalized, divided into various areas of influence. Russia (May 1916) and Italy (August 1917) were associated with this agreement and received a presence in Palestine as well as control of territory in Anatolia. (See maps 1 and 2.)

FRENCH AND BRITISH IN THE LEVANT

Sykes-Picot, as it was initially laid out, would be altered because of Russia’s exit following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, the Anglo-French rivalry, and French difficulties in controlling all their claimed territory. Even as the French army, commanded by Gen. Henri Gouraud, easily took Damascus in 1920, chasing out Emir Faisal, it barely held control of Cilicia (southern Anatolia) and the Mosul



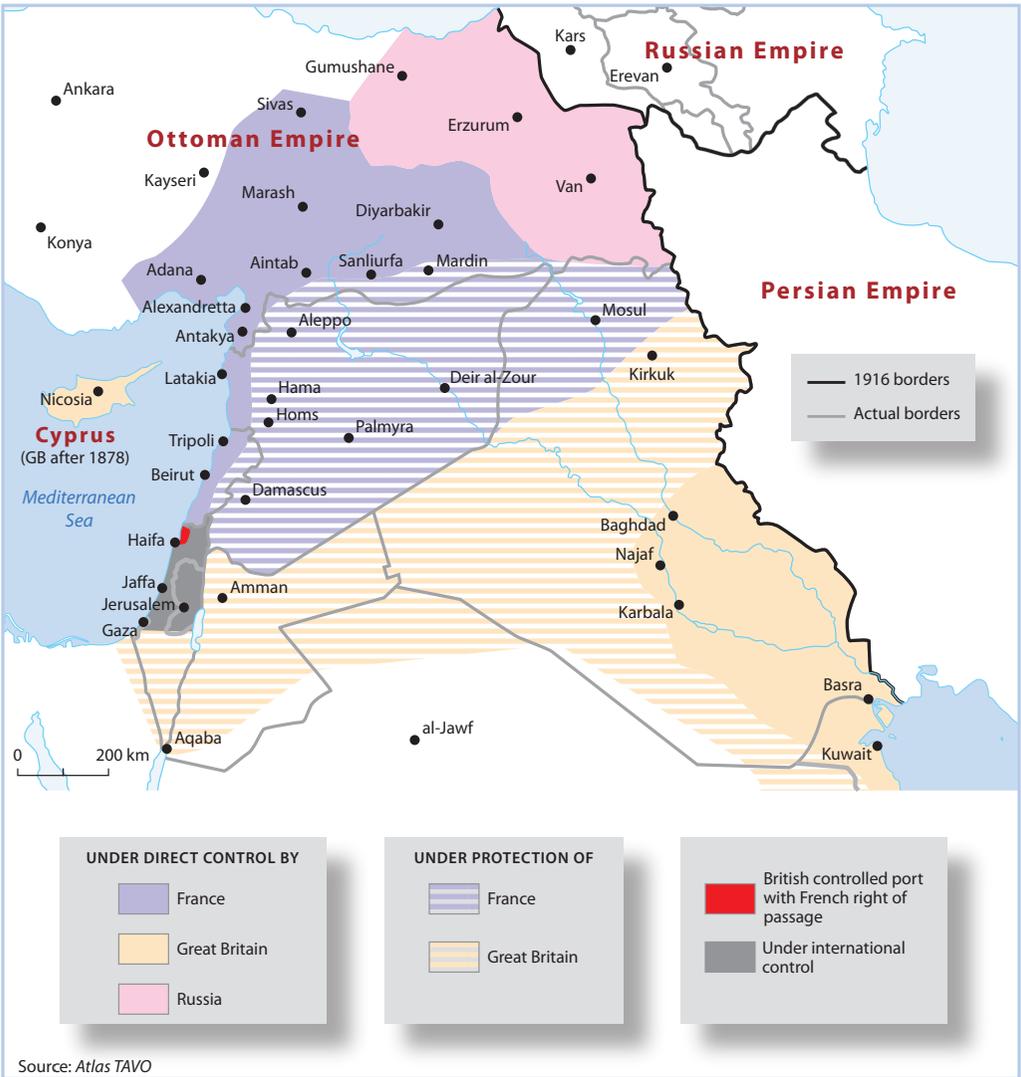
MAP 1. 19th-century French, British, and Russian Imperialism in the Mediterranean

Vilayet. The British had occupied Mosul since spring 1918, which it considered an annex to Iraq. In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne built upon the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which formalized the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.

Occupying Cilicia and the Anatolian territories were Italy and Greece, whereas the Mosul Vilayet was eventually abandoned by France to Britain in exchange for participation in the Iraq Petroleum Company and British support for French claims to the west bank of the Rhine.

The current Middle East, as divided by France and Britain, is the result of both international and local strategies: the protection of the Suez Canal; the economic, political, and religious motives of the French; the claims of Lebanese Christians; and especially the Zionist movement. Added to this list should be Saudi efforts to secure an outlet to the Mediterranean or at least a border with Syria. In Palestine, Zionist and British interests converged because installing a Jewish homeland was part of the crown's defense plan for the Suez Canal. In negotiations with France, the British supported the Zionist pursuit of control over the entire Jordan River watershed, which entailed annexing the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. France, however, firmly refused such endeavors, seeking to protect the new state of Greater Lebanon. However, in their own area, the British limited Jewish settlement to the west bank of the Jordan River, prohibiting Jews from settling in the new Kingdom of Transjordan, led by Abdullah al-Hashemi, another son of the Sharif of Mecca.

Transjordan served as a buffer state between Palestine, French Mandate Syria, and the ambitions of Ibn Saud, the Emir of Nejd and chief rival to the Hashemi clan of Hejaz. The delimitation of Transjordan's eastern border was designed to prevent Ibn Saud from reaching Syria and thereby disrupting the Haifa–Baghdad axis. The preservation of this corridor and control of Mosul oil constitute the bases for the creation of Iraq. In so readily ceding Mosul to France during the Sykes-Picot talks, the British acted out of a desire to avoid direct contact with Russia. But Russia's withdrawal after the Bolshevik revolution, the discovery of oil, and the need to protect southern Iraq against Turkey changed the British calculus. Mosul province



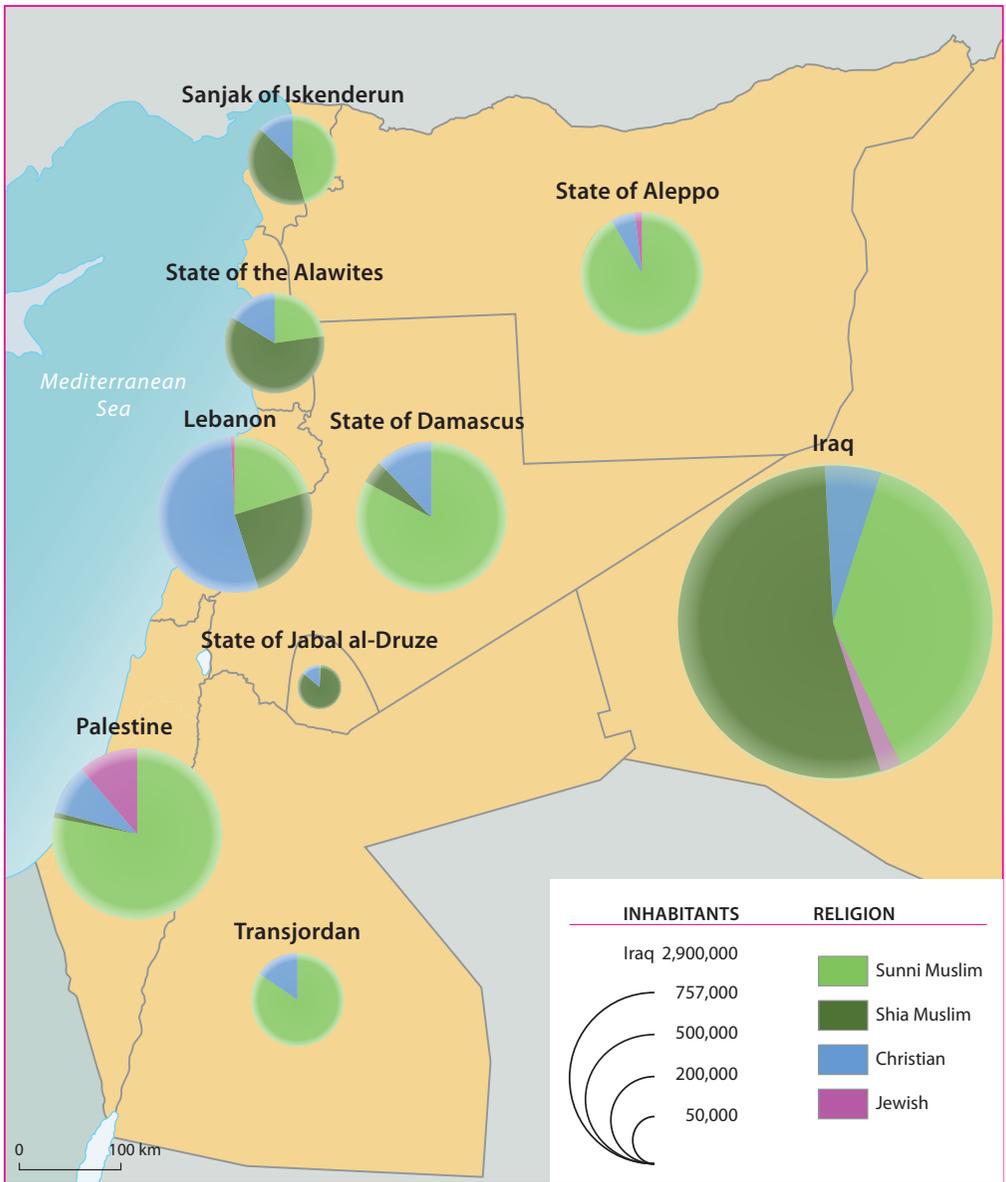
MAP 2. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916

was therefore linked to Iraq, and the Turkish republic finally and definitively abandoned any claim to the region in 1926.

The loss of Cilicia and Mosul reduced the scope of French territorial control over Lebanon and Syria, later joined by the 1939 hand-over to Turkey of the Sanjak of Alexandretta (today's Hatay province, with Antakya its center) and Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights since 1967. In its initial aims, France sought to allow Syrian access to the sea through a Christian-led Lebanon, as well as an autonomous Sanjak of Alexandretta. This model roughly reflected the Sykes-Picot model favoring direct control over the coastal areas and influence inland, but with the distinction that France would rule both territories directly. Nevertheless, France did think such control could be maintained more easily on the coast than in the interior. Christian minorities and Muslim Shiites Twelvers, along with Alawites, Ismailis, and Druze, were considered more likely to accept this presence than Sunni Arabs, who perceived a divide-and-conquer strategy. (See maps 3 and 4.)

THE CREATION OF A CHRISTIAN LEBANON

On November 10, 1919, the French prime minister, Georges Clemenceau, in a letter to Maronite patriarch Elias Peter Hoayek, agreed to grant the Lebanese self-government and an independent national status. While affirming its agreement on the principle of extending Lebanese territory, the French could not yet provide precise parameters. The Maronite patriarch, in agreeing to the border demarcation between Lebanon and Syria, demonstrated overconfidence in the Christians' ability to dominate an area twice as large and populous as the Mount Lebanon Mutassarifate (an Ottoman subdivision with broad autonomy),⁶ where Christians represented 80 percent of the population. Greater Lebanon was extended to the surrounding plains (Akkar and Beqa), which were populated by Muslims. Beqa had previously depended on the Damascus Vilayet, not that of Beirut. The inclusion of such areas satisfied the need expressed by elites, who had experienced terrible famine during the war, for a national breadbasket. Separately, the coastal city of Tripoli, where Christians constituted only a quarter



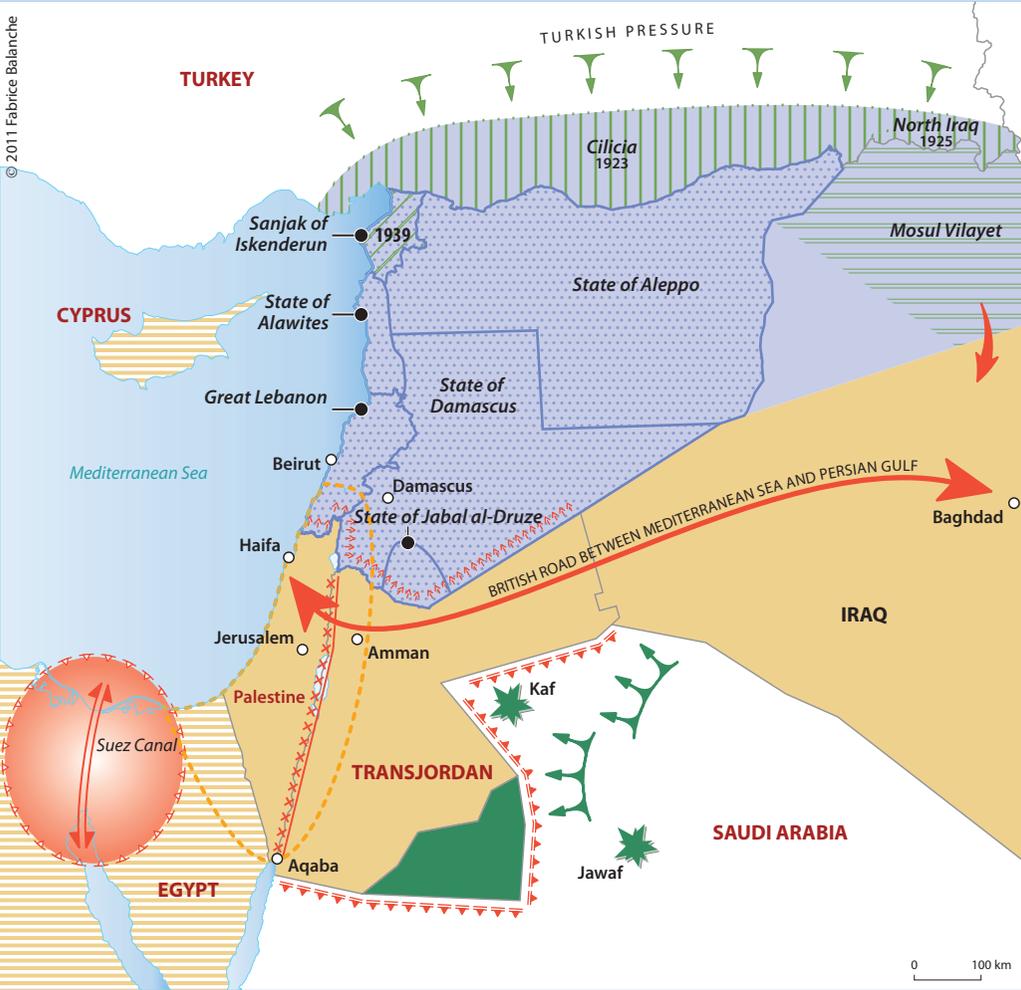
Source: Augustin Bernard, *Annales de Géographie*, Paris, 1924. Population of Iraq, 1921. House of Commons Parliamentary Paper, 1923.

MAP 3. Population of States under Mandate, 1922

of the population, was integrated into Lebanon to prevent it from becoming a Syrian port and a competitor to Beirut. Tripoli, the capital of Greater Lebanon, thus prospered, quickly overshadowing other Levant ports.

Given the Anti-Lebanon range to the east, a small coastal river known as the Nahr al-Kabir al-Janoubi was identified as Lebanon's "natural" border. This "natural" border, however, was broken in two places, Deir al-Aachayer and Tfeil, on the eastern side of the Anti-Lebanon, as a pincer between friendly Christian Lebanon and the less friendly city of Damascus. To the south, the border with Palestine remained difficult to trace, given Zionist demands, as relayed by the British, for the entire Jordan River watershed to secure water supply in northern Palestine. France thus allowed Zionist settlement in the Hula Valley, but prohibited Zionist land purchases in southern Lebanon. In Lebanon, meanwhile, the integration of the Shiite Jabal Amel further reduced Christian dominance. Certainly, a larger Lebanon was more viable economically, but by widening the tent to include greater ethno-religious diversity, Lebanese Christians were effectively mortgaging their future hegemony. In 1924, the borders of Greater Lebanon were fixed permanently and separated from the state of Syria.

In Lebanon, the French Mandate institutionalized and modernized the "milliyet system" in effect under the Ottomans, whereby each faith community operated under its own laws and was represented proportionately in parliament. In this system, the Maronite Christians, Lebanon's largest faith community, constituting a third of the country, were informally assigned the presidency, while a Sunni Muslim would be prime minister and a Shia Muslim would head the Chamber of Deputies. Although the constitution of 1926 clearly identified Lebanon as a "parliamentary republic," the president wielded wide powers without being responsible to the parliament. Indeed, despite being elected by members of parliament, the president cannot be removed by them; the prime minister, by comparison, can be removed if he lacks a parliamentary majority. Moreover, the Christian community's attempt to maintain power despite a declining population explains why the first and last national census was taken in 1932.



BRITISH STRATEGIES

-  Protect Suez Canal
-  Create alternative road to Suez Canal
-  Make Mosul oil available to Iraq
-  Area claimed by Zionist movement
-  Push France far from the Suez Canal
-  Jewish settlement prohibited on east side of Jordan River
-  Containment of Saudis
-  Area under direct British control
-  Area under indirect British control

FRENCH STRATEGIES

-  Protect French interest in east Mediterranean
-  Divide for governance and support of minorities
-  Definitive territory of the French Mandate

SAUDI PRESSURE

-  Saudi conquest
-  To reach the Mediterranean Sea
-  Jordanian territory becomes Saudi in 1965

TURKISH CLAIMS

-  Abandoned to Turkey
-  Turkey abandons claim to Mosul in 1926

MAP 4. The Levant after 1919 Versailles Treaty

Lebanese independence was established on June 8, 1941, but French troops did not leave until five years later. In 1943, the new Lebanese constitution granted thirty parliamentary seats to Lebanon's Christians and twenty-five to its Muslims, a ratio that failed to take into account shifting demographics. Through an agreement called the National Pact, effectively Lebanon's founding charter, the Christian Bechara El Khoury, who headed the al-Dustour Party, was named president and the Sunni Muslim Riad al-Solh became prime minister. In this arrangement, the Sunnis conceded the separation of Lebanon and Syria in return for recognition that Lebanon would orient itself toward Arabism, cooperating with its Arab brothers "to more extreme limits." Thus, at the Arab League meeting of April 7, 1945, Lebanon joined other Arab nations in opposing the realization of Zionism, as expressed in Israel's birth three years later.

EPHEMERAL COMMUNAL STATES FOR ALAWITES AND DRUZE

In Syria, alongside the larger states of Damascus and Aleppo, the French created two European-administered states, one Alawite and another Druze, thereby appearing to honor self-determination in the Levant. Thus, the Alawites and Druze, both despised by Sunnis, would live ensconced within mountains and retain a tribal organization. In fact, however, the mandatory power relied on communal divisions to draw borders within Syrian territory.

Under the Ottoman Empire, the coastal Alawite Mountain area, or Jabal al-Alawiyya, was surrounded by a network of cities and towns populated by Sunni Muslims, Christians, and Ismailis. The road system avoided Jabal al-Alawiyya because of endemic revolts, yet one route was effectively centered on Alawite Mountain, connecting Baniyas to Hama, through Masyaf and al-Qadmus, which were then both Ismaili localities considered safer than Alawite villages to establish such roads. The Ismailis were placed under Ottoman protection because of their rivalry with the Alawites; in exchange, they provided security for this Baniyas–Hama road, which nevertheless remained little used. Because the mountain could not yield bounty to sustain the growing population, Alawites were forced in the late

Ottoman centuries to work as sharecroppers in *latifundias* (tracts of privately owned land) run by the Sunni-Christian oligarchy in the surrounding plains. They were thus integrated into the area's economic system but ceded Alawite political protection in the process.

This overall scenario helped inspire France to encourage the creation of an Alawite state, in which “those forgotten by history,” as the French geographer Jacques Weulersse put it, would emancipate themselves from Sunni control and build their own autonomous community. Based on compromises made in 1924, the Alawite state would also incorporate territories in mainly Sunni northern Latakia, which depended economically on the region and not on the Antakya area, in the Sanjak of Alexandretta. In the new state, in 1935, the Alawites represented two-thirds of the population (224,000 of 350,000), followed by Sunnis (64,500), who dwelled mostly in cities and in the north. The French Mandate authorities focused on education efforts to groom an Alawite elite capable of controlling their own destiny, given that Sunnis and Christians still held key positions, but this effort mostly did not succeed. For the inhabitants of Jabal al-Alawiyya, meanwhile, many of whom were illiterate, service in the French-led Army of the Levant provided a welcome professional opportunity and a ready means of social promotion.

France created the Jabal al-Druze state on the same principle as that underlying the Alawite state. To the west, the border was formed by Sunni communities; to the east, it encompassed some areas of an uninhabited steppe used by Druze shepherds. Comprising just 50,328 inhabitants, Jabal al-Druze was 85 percent Druze, joined by Christian communities, amounting to some 7,000 people, who had always lived harmoniously with the Druze. Sunnis were far fewer—in Suwayda, as the state was also sometimes known, Sunni Bedouin, officials, and families numbered some 700 people.

The main Druze clans accepted the French Mandate and the partition with the state of Damascus (formed in 1920) because it provided them with the means to maintain their hegemony and consolidate their privileges. But certain other families were unsatisfied. In 1925, Druze chiefs led by Sultan al-Atrash, who belonged to a family on the southern Jabal, revolted against the French administration. Over the next two years, the revolt spread throughout Syria

and parts of Lebanon, severely shaking the French administration, which was forced to send aircraft to overcome Druze resistance.

In the end, neither the Alawite nor the Druze state was economically viable. Further, sensitive to the appeal of Arab nationalism, new Druze and Alawite elites campaigned in 1936 for their integration into the state of Syria. Three years earlier, the welcoming of these faith communities into Islam by Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, had softened reservations about their status in a Sunni-dominated state.

States formed from the French and British Mandates were partly the product of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, but they also emerged, as noted, from local factors such as the desire to protect Lebanese Christians, the alliance between Damascus and Aleppo, and the defense of southern Iraq against Turkey. For the residents of nascent Arab states, ethnic and religious divisions were offset by the struggle against colonialism and the new state of Israel. Although such external enemies have always had a unifying effect on the domestic front, they are insufficient to create a nation.

Once independence was achieved, the Middle East countries strived to maintain territorial cohesion based on the colonial divisions and achieve national unity. Whereas France and Britain had divided communities in a way that preserved minorities, the new governments sought to dissolve such communal identification in favor of national identity.

ARAB NATIONALISM AND THE FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNALISM

Communalism, as the earlier section showed, was central to Lebanon's National Pact of 1943. In 1989, the Taif Accord, which ended the Lebanese civil war, reduced Christian parliamentary representation to 50 percent, but against a falling national Christian population of just 40 percent. In Syria, political sectarianism was abolished in 1950, but it remains in Jordan, where Christian, Chechen, Circassian, and Bedouin legislators have reserved seats in parliament. Iraq's 1924 constitution recognized political representation for non-Muslim minorities, but made no reference to Kurds or Shiites. In 1958,

with the fall of the Iraqi monarchy, the seats previously reserved for Christians and Jews were abolished. Religious minorities did regain a handful of reserved seats (9 of 328) with the post-Saddam constitution created in 2005. More broadly in Middle East law, religious affiliation is taken into account for marriage and inheritance. The corresponding absence of civil marriage helps maintain strong community affiliation that states would typically seek to reduce as part of a genuine policy of national integration.

After independence, Arab nationalism emerged as the official ideology of new states, allowing them to transcend religious lines. But it also led to two pitfalls: the rejection of non-Arabs (mostly Turkmen and Kurdish) and the effective foreordaining of each state's demise through ultimate unification of the Arab nation. The trend toward Arabism also reflected recognition by ruling families such as Jordan's Hashemites of insuppressible popular enthusiasm for the concept. In 1958, Syria agreed to unite with Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser in the United Arab Republic (UAR). That same year, trouble developed in Lebanon between the government of President Camille Chamoun and the Lebanese left, requiring U.S. intervention to save Chamoun's government and prevent Lebanese annexation to the UAR. Meanwhile, sensing that its UAR arrangement with Egypt was more of an annexation than a union of Arab equals, Syria left the bloc in 1961.

No doubt, the Egyptian president had in mind the famous words of Joseph Stalin: "All the peoples of the Soviet Union are brothers, but the Russian people are the eldest."⁷ The UAR breakup thus diminished the call for Arab unification, but other governments had suffered its effects, such as that of Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Said, which fell in 1958 in response to demonstrations calling on Iraq to abandon the Baghdad Pact and join the UAR. (Said himself was assassinated in the event.) Abdul Karim al-Qasim, the new head of state, tacked toward the Soviet Union to avoid his predecessor's unhappy fate.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, under Ottoman rule, the nomadic Bedouin lifestyle was hampered by developments such as large agricultural projects in the Euphrates River valley and, in the Mandate period, the creation of new borders. Thus hindered from

engaging in their traditional migration between summer and winter pastures, the Bedouin gradually became sedentary. This trend was encouraged by the provision of state amenities such as land, running water, schools, and roads, developments that were a natural consequence of statebuilding.

STATE CONSTRUCTS BASED ON CENTRALISM

The transportation networks in Syria and Jordan reflect both countries' political centralization. In Lebanon, the relative power of local authorities has made the situation more complex, but overall concentration of economic activities in Greater Beirut at the expense of peripheral cities has yielded the same overall result. Until the 1960s, Syria had a road network centering on Aleppo and Damascus, testimony to the power balance between the two cities. The centralizing will of the Baathist regime, however, tipped this balance in favor of Damascus. The construction of direct routes between the Euphrates River valley and Damascus isolated residents of the al-Jazirah region, harming their access to Aleppo by facilitating their access to Damascus. Meanwhile, the absence of an Aleppo–Latakia highway required that goods be routed through the Alawite Mountain and Homs to reach Syria's Mediterranean ports. In Lebanon and Jordan, the secondary cities of Tripoli and Irbid, because of inadequate transportation and their proximity to Syria, experience impeded access to the rest of their respective countries. Expressways connecting these cities to their national capitals and elsewhere have had the perhaps unintended effect of depleting local economic autonomy. Moreover, in Tripoli, which is predominantly Sunni Muslim, disaffection with the Christian-led government benefits Beirut.

The marginalization of regional cities was also reflected administratively, with their status roughly equivalent to that of newly promoted rural towns. Thus, administratively Irbid was the equivalent of the much smaller town of Tafilah; Tripoli had shared status with the smaller Nabatiyah; and Aleppo matched with the smaller Idlib. In Syria and Jordan, this powerful centralizing effort led to a tightened administrative network, facilitating better territorial control

through strengthened public institutions. In this process, a cycle was created whereby a local bureaucracy employed local residents who, in turn, benefited from the services provided as well as the income and job promotions. Yet in this relationship, provision of services did not always relate directly to population growth but rather to decisions made in a country's power centers.⁸

In Syria and Iraq, the development of roads, investments in government, and a powerful industrial public sector were facilitated by oil revenues both direct and indirect. Standing on the frontline against Israel, Syria and Jordan benefited after 1973 from significant assistance from the Gulf oil countries. Lebanon was less well endowed, and the civil war that began in 1975 prevented the Lebanese from investing aid in infrastructure. Between 1974 and the mid-1980s oil shock, Syria and Jordan experienced exceptional economic growth; in the mid-1980s, however, the end of Arab aid and the difficulties soon to face these countries' most artificial modes of development based on the expansion of the public sector⁹ plunged them into a serious economic crisis. In response, they took steps to liberalize their economies.

In the 1990s, Lebanese economic policy differed from that of its neighbors owing to the need for reconstruction following the civil war. Soon, however, infrastructure investment centered mainly on the Beirut city center.¹⁰ Rafiq Hariri, who served as prime minister in the 1990s and later in the 2000s, sought investment from the oil monarchies and members of the Lebanese diaspora, but instead of investing in a productive economy, he focused on real estate.¹¹ For such a goal, Lebanon had to open itself widely to the global economy, even as a protectionist trade policy would have helped spur domestic industrial recovery. Iraq, thanks to its oil wealth, could proceed with a centralizing policy even in the face of the war with Iran (1980–88) and the post–Gulf War embargo (1990–2003). But since the second U.S. invasion, instability in Baghdad and the autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan have spurred the development of peripheral cities such as Basra and Erbil at the expense of Baghdad or Mosul.

Despite the parliamentary quotas noted earlier, Jordan is far more homogeneous than its neighbors are. Sunni Arabs make up 97 percent of Jordan's population, and minorities are well integrated. Dis-

cord does prevail, however, in the failure of the Hashemite regime to merge “Transjordanians” and Palestinians into a single national identity. Efforts to create such national unity have included King Abdullah’s marriage to a woman of Palestinian origin, just as, in Syria, the Alawite president Bashar al-Assad married a Sunni Muslim to signal openness to this community. Yet such gestures, along with decades of efforts in both countries, have failed to heal fractures, which have been seemingly exacerbated by the demonstrated bankruptcy of Arab progressive and nationalist ideology. To return to Lebanon, an exemplar of communal identity despite economic development, one might recall that the civil war erupted during a period of unprecedented national prosperity—in a country known as the “Switzerland of the Middle East.” Such outcomes overturn the Durkheimian model whereby horizontal solidarity takes precedence over vertical solidarity.

Until 2011, Lebanon was an extreme case of regional sectarian fragmentation, but today it has been surpassed by war-riven Syria and Iraq. The Lebanonization process is under way in both countries, hardly ameliorated by the fragile international consensus for stability, while Lebanon has thus far eluded war. The outcome of the fight against the Islamic State and the Syrian war will weigh heavily on the future of Middle East nation-states, but the broader future will also involve challenges posed by geopolitical and economic marginalization.

A REGION MARGINALIZED

When France and Britain shared the Middle East, the region was a valued nexus between Europe and Asia. The English were obsessed with the Suez Canal and control of Iraqi oil, the exploitation of which emerged as a strategic issue. A century later, the Middle East appears more like a dead end, averted or bypassed by economic flows. Certainly, the Suez Canal remains the world’s first commercial thoroughfare, but the passage of goods is no longer under threat since relations were normalized between Egypt and Israel through the Camp David Accords (1978) and, later, between Israel and Jordan (1994). Egyptian leaders have no interest in closing the passageway, which is the number-two source of foreign currency after

remittances from emigrants. The former Arab powers in the Middle East, Egypt and Syria, have thus become peripheral to the economically mighty Gulf states.

Although the Middle East had been steadily losing international interest since the seventeenth century, and later with the opening of the Suez Canal, Levant ports remained important stations for commerce and various activities from modern-day Iraq, Anatolia, and other such locations. This situation still pertained in 1920, when the split between territories under the British and French Mandates blocked the Port of Haifa's influence over southern Syria. Nevertheless, the Haifa oil terminal became one of two pipelines used by the Iraq Petroleum Company—and Haifa emerged as Palestine's main port. Beirut became the Levant's preeminent French Mandate port, at the expense of Tripoli and the Sanjak of Alexandretta.

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the breakdown in 1950 of the economic union between Lebanon and Syria—following their separate independence in 1943—provoked the development of two ports: Aqaba in Jordan, and Latakia in Syria. The new states, including Jordan, which lacked access to Haifa, were eager to ensure national independence. Beirut and Tripoli remained widely used by Jordanians and Syrians, but customs bureaucracy associated with difficult land passage, and especially the rise of the Baath Party in Syria, increasingly discouraged such use. Traffic in Aqaba and Latakia, therefore, increased gradually until the Lebanese civil war, which prompted accelerated plans to develop new international ports.

In the early 1970s, Syria began building a second international port in Tartus to accommodate the explosion of traffic and reap the transit benefits, particularly to Iraq, which had grown wealthy as a result of rising oil prices. But mismanagement of the ports, cumbersome customs controls, and political problems with Iraq quickly shattered such bilateral hopes. In the late 1990s, improving relations between Syria and Iraq enabled a slight recovery of transit in Latakia and Tartus, to the detriment of Aqaba, but the international embargo on Iraq limited such activity. Today, Syrian and Lebanese ports see mostly domestic traffic.

The transit of Gulf oil, too, has completely turned away from the Levant. After the Lebanese war began in 1975, the Syrian coast

offered the only Mediterranean oil terminal used by Saudis and Iraqis. But political rivalries and increasing financial claims on Syrian oil transit led the Saudis and Iraqis to avoid this route. Saudi Arabia has chosen to use the Suez Canal via Egypt, and Iraq has built a pipeline toward Turkey.

In the 1990s, interest in Syria and Jordan as intermediate points between the Gulf and Turkey was restored, only to be destroyed by the civil war in Syria. Briefly, between 2011 and 2014, streams were diverted to Iraq, but the Islamic State's capture of Mosul interrupted this route. Turkish trucks now use the Mersin–Haifa seaway en route to Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The cost, however, is much higher than traveling on the Aleppo–Deraa highway, and safety precautions in Haifa complicate matters.

The ports of the Arab Middle East, including Latakia and Gaza, have limited traffic as well as freight for hydrocarbons, covering only national needs. Flows between Europe and the Gulf oil monarchies avoid this Mediterranean port infrastructure, which is small and often dilapidated, poorly connected to land networks, and known for its customs red tape. Nor has the land between Jordan and Iraq ever become a major focus for transit, given that the nearby Gulf of Aqaba flows into the Red Sea and not the Mediterranean. The Port of Basra, along the narrow coastline available to Iraq, has only national traffic. A Basra–Amman–Damietta railway track for commerce could achieve regional importance, but its construction is fraught with geopolitical problems. Moreover, the Gulf Arab countries have developed a world-class port infrastructure and multi-modal transport, far exceeding the facilities available elsewhere in the Middle East.

A NEW GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

In 1990, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein evidently assumed the West would give him a pass when he invaded Kuwait, considering the upheavals accompanying the end of the Cold War. In the previous decade, he had received support from the West and the Gulf oil monarchies in his country's war against Iran. But the Iraqi leader had miscalculated. Within a few months, a huge U.S.-led military

force consisting of hundreds of thousands of troops was deployed to the Gulf to protect Saudi Arabia and liberate Kuwait. The first Gulf war marked the beginning of a period of U.S. regional hegemony that would last about two decades, the most striking expression being the Iraq war of 2003–11. With the Syrian war, however, the United States has reduced its regional role.

In the current regional scene, against a lower but still significant U.S. presence, Russia has returned assertively following a post–Cold War hiatus, China is filling in the gaps, and the European Union remains cautious. Room thus remains for Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, each of which wants to expand its regional influence, with or without the help of international actors. At least until the deeply destabilizing summer 2016 coup attempt, Turkey, a NATO member, clearly fell within the Western camp, even if it did not always share priorities with the West. Saudi Arabia has demonstrated increasing separation from the United States based on criticisms over Washington’s insufficient involvement in the Syrian war and the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal. The Islamic Republic, for its part, has emerged from its isolation, aided by Russian and Chinese involvement in the region. Further, the nuclear deal gives Iran additional financial resources and helps normalize its relations with the West.

In vigorously reentering the Middle East by way of the Syrian war, Russia has invoked international law to justify its defense of Bashar al-Assad. By this logic, any foreign interference against the government of a sovereign state is a *casus belli*. China shares such a position. The two Eurasian powers do not want the West, through the United Nations, to intervene in their own fragile peripheries. Although Russia’s maritime base in Tartus, Syria, and its radar stations in the country do not constitute essential strategic interests, they uphold Syria as an ally in a region where conflicts quickly gather international implications. The Chinese, meanwhile, see access to Middle East hydrocarbon reserves as deeply attractive, given their energy needs, whereas the Russians have enough domestic gas and oil production. Finally, in countering the Sunni Islamic terrorism embodied in the Islamic State, Moscow, Tehran, and Beijing perceive echoes of local destabilizing militants, namely in southern Russia and western China.

The EU absence from the Middle East is evident on many planes. In the 2011 Libya campaign, for example, the United States provided 70 percent of operational logistics, despite an Anglo-French presence. In August 2013, France found itself alone in Syria after the British refusal to engage militarily, and especially after the U.S. about-face, when President Barack Obama canceled the bombing of Syria in response to the regime's chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs. Further, any French or British activism in Syria is hindered by the slowness and timidity of collective decisionmaking within the EU, which itself appears highly dependent on NATO and, therefore, American decisions. Economically, the EU is also relegated to a minor role in addressing the enormous financial capacity of the Gulf oil monarchies and BRICS, as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa are collectively known.

The Middle East is thus now more internally focused than in past decades, prey to a lasting conflict among the three regional powers, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, which aspire to occupy the spaces vacated by a dwindling Western military-political apparatus.

A NEW POST-WESTPHALIAN ORDER IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

In October 2013, Ammar Moussawi, the head of external relations for Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group and political party, stated in an interview that the regional conflict would last a “long” time—with “long” equivalent to several decades in Western terms. Moussawi did not refer directly to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which remains a Hezbollah priority. He did speak, however, of the proxy conflict in Syria, pitting Saudi Arabia against Iran. Although he did not explicitly mention the Sunni-Shiite element, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah had done so two months earlier, accusing Saudi Arabia of sparking a new *fitna* (discord). In the Syrian war, Hezbollah and Iran see an existential crisis, with the perceived Sunni offensive supported by Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, states that fear Iran's rehabilitation and expanded regional reach, as facilitated by the nuclear deal. Iran's economy will benefit from the lifting of international sanctions, and the Western powers, eager to sign lucra-

tive contracts with the Islamic Republic, will be more tolerant of Tehran's behavior than before.

The global resonance of the Syrian war has a precedent from some four centuries ago: the conflict in Bohemia (1618–23), which initiated the Thirty Years' War. Today, world powers such as Russia, China, the United States, and Europe are assessing their regional interests and the measures they will take to achieve them. The conflict itself, meanwhile, can only grow, as the Yemen example shows, given the freeing up of local actors. But amid the great instability, a new Westphalian order is emerging in the Middle East, which will ultimately entail a new territorial division superimposed upon Sykes-Picot rather than erasing it.

NOTES

1. Georges Corm, *Le Proche-Orient Éclaté* [The Near East Erupted], 1956–2007 (Paris: Gallimard/Histoire, 2007).
2. According to the French definition, the Near East encompasses the Levant area (Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria).
3. Xavier de Planhol, *Les Nations du Prophète* (Paris: Fayard, 1993).
4. Stéphane Rosiere, *Géographie Politique et Géopolitique: Une Grammaire de l'Espace Politique* (Paris: Ellipse, 2007).
5. Ernest Renan, 1885, reflecting on the Middle East, in reply to a speech by the diplomat and entrepreneur Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had just entered the French Academy.
6. After 1860, foreign actors intervened in Lebanon to protect the Christians, following their massacre by Druze. The Ottoman Empire thus allowed wide autonomy for Mount Lebanon under the governance of a non-Lebanese Christian mutassarif (governor) appointed by the Ottoman sultan, with the approval of the European powers. The mutassarif was to be assisted by an administrative council of twelve members from the various religious communities in Lebanon.
7. Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *L'Empire Éclaté: La Revolte des Nations en U.R.S.S* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978).
8. Fabrice Balanche, "Municipalities in Baathist Syria," *Revue Tiers Monde*, no. 193 (January–March 2008): pp. 169–88.

9. François Rivier, *Croissance Economique dans une Economy Assistée: Le Cas de la Jordanie* (University Press of Lyon, 1980); Mr. Chatelus, “Economic Growth: Changing Structures and Dynamic Imbalance,” in André Raymond, ed., *Syria Today* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1980), pp. 225–72.
10. Georges Corm, *Le Liban Contemporain: Histoire et Société* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005).
11. The Solidere real estate company, charged with rebuilding downtown Beirut, benefited handsomely from this arrangement.

MICHAEL KNIGHTS

IRAQ: IDENTIFYING A STEADY STATE

THE TERRITORY OF IRAQ shown on current maps is not the exact product of the Sykes-Picot Agreement—which split today’s Iraq between the French and British spheres of influence—but rather a smashing together of three Ottoman provinces (Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul) into one state. In the years between 1921 and 1932, Iraq’s borders with Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Iran were defined. Even since then, Iraq has been critiqued as an “artificial state,” largely due to its lack of ethno-sectarian homogeneity. The Islamic State joined the ranks of critics in June 2014, when the group released a video titled “The End of Sykes-Picot” in which the Islamist group threatened to “hit the last nail in the coffin of the Sykes-Picot conspiracy.”¹

The exact placement of the lines on the map—Iraq’s external borders—has arguably been one of the least contentious aspects of the state’s colonial inception. The border areas with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey are, for the most part, sparsely populated and historically were porous enough to allow traditional commerce and communications between cross-border communities. Where the borders touched on strategic, oil-rich areas near the Gulf, Iraq’s sole outlet to the sea, their placement did play a role in sparking major wars with Iran and Kuwait. A similar dynamic applies for many states in many regions of the world.

1. Video has since been taken down; original link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i357G1HuFcl>.

DIVERSITY WITHOUT REPRESENTATION

The most contentious aspects of modern Iraq's birth were caused by the throwing together of a uniquely diverse range of ethnicities, sects, and classes under nonrepresentative forms of government. First and most controversially, the border set with Turkey in 1926 sealed off a part of the Kurdish nation within modern Iraq's administrative borders. Other major minority groupings—Turkmen, Jews, and Assyrian Christians, to name a few—were also consigned to rule from Baghdad. Shiite Arabs, the largest single ethno-sectarian group, were likewise placed under a government dominated by non-Shiite actors.

As Iraq's modern borders and its nationality became a reality, these groups were held together through a variety of means. The military power of the government was frequently critical in fending off revolutions and uprisings by the Kurds and the Shiites. Oil wealth and party politics brought social progress and the beginning of a rentier state where citizens were tranquilized by state patronage. The increasingly violent dictatorship of Saddam Hussein lost control of the Kurdish north, and the centripetal power of the state began to weaken dramatically under Western sanctions.

In the dictatorship's place, the coalition sought to impose on Iraq what it had never indigenously developed—a representative democracy that would incentivize national membership for all Iraq's components. The concept may not have definitively failed, but it is clear that today's quota-based, ethno-sectarian, party-dominated democracy has not knitted together Iraqis more closely—quite the opposite, in fact.

Circumstances such as the rise of the Islamic State and the fall of oil prices have not helped, either. The centripetal forces in Iraq—the government's military power and economic clout—have never been so weak. The idea of devolution of the state based on ethno-sectarian identity has never seemed so appealing to so many Iraqis since the birth of the state.

All this begs the question of how the United States should view Iraq, and how U.S. interests intersect with the nature and form of the Iraqi state. Should the United States pursue a determinative out-

come—say, a “one-Iraq policy” or, conversely, an independent Kurdistan? Or should the United States wait for Iraqis to set the agenda?

FACILITATING A RESET FOR BAGHDAD AND THE KURDS

This issue of Kurdistan is an important place to start because it may represent the most glaring design flaw in modern Iraq’s inception. Though one can argue about the disputed lowlands, the Arab-dominated Iraqi state and Iraqi population undoubtedly have little real interest in or claim to controlling most of the highland areas administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The opposition of Arabs and other non-Kurds to Kurdish independence is rooted in the treatment of ethnically mixed and economically important disputed areas, most of all oil-rich Kirkuk.

From 1991 to 2003, the Iraqi Kurds were administratively independent of the Iraqi state, though their budget was still drawn from a UN-administered share of Iraqi oil exports. They agreed to reintegrate with Iraq in 2003 as an experiment in running an asymmetric federal region within Iraq. The KRG may hold a referendum this year to gather evidence that the majority of Iraqi Kurds want to end the experiment and revert to a more equal relationship with Baghdad, either as twin sovereign entities within a confederal Iraq or, more likely, as an independent Kurdish state recognized by the United Nations.

Of the external powers, Turkey appears to have genuinely dropped its opposition to a sovereign Kurdish state, in part because the Iraqi Kurds are explicit that they will only rule within Iraq’s Mandate-era colonial borders. Iran appears to be very hostile to the idea, partly due to tightening Turkey-KRG relations and partly because of the potential example it might set for Iranian Kurds, but there is no telling whether Iran would sustain its hostility if the international community largely backed a sovereign government for the Iraqi Kurds. If the disputed areas were handled correctly, many signs suggest that Baghdad might be amenable to an “amicable divorce.”

The United States should play a hands-on mediator role in assisting in this amicable separation and ensuring that the Iraqi and

Kurdish entities emerge as good neighbors. The United States has a surprising level of insight and experience regarding the thorny problem of Iraq's disputed areas and is viewed as an honest broker. U.S. leadership could help the emergence of a multinational effort to find phased long-term solutions for areas such as Kirkuk. The United States should also help ensure that minorities—Turkmen, Christians, Yazidis, Shabak, Kakai, and others—are not overlooked, given that they are important stakeholders in the disputed areas with unique grievances and aspirations.

FUNCTIONING FEDERALISM IN ARAB IRAQ

Alongside the obvious issue of Kurdish separatism is the subtler challenge of reconciliation and national identity within federal Iraq, meaning the predominantly Arab parts of the country. Some fault lines relate to the diminished political role of Iraq's Shiite community, particularly under the Saddam regime. Other fault lines are more recent: all communities have suffered from endemic violence and discrimination since 2003. In the fighting against IS, for instance, the crimes inflicted on Iraqi Sunnis by their coreligionists have created a major reconciliation challenge within the Sunni community, not just between Sunnis and Shiites.

The Iraqis in non-Kurdish areas also need to tackle some deep-rooted questions regarding the future Iraqi state and its representativeness. Namely, who will rule Iraq and how will they rule Iraq? Calls for Sunni separatism grew out of both a rejection of the legitimacy of a Shiite-led government in Baghdad and a reaction to the second-class-citizen treatment of Sunnis in mixed areas. Signs suggest that the catastrophic period of Islamic State rule in Sunni Iraq has led to a rationalization on both sides of the sectarian divide. Local-level Sunni leaders are talking less about turning back the clock before 2003 and more about ensuring the return of residents to their towns and securing those areas in partnership with the government. Hundreds of thousands of Sunni displaced persons have lived for up to two years in Shiite and Kurdish communities, their children attending local schools, and hardly a single incident of violence has originated in these displaced populations. There may be an

opening for an exhausted Shiite leadership to make concessions to thoroughly humbled Sunni communities.

Federalism through stronger provincial governors and councils has good potential to work in the non-Kurdish areas. The United States is well positioned to serve as a reassuring presence in interactions between the Shiite blocs and the emerging Sunni community representatives—the governors, provincial council chairs, district administrators, and government-backed militia leaders. The United States, again, has some experience in supporting both top-down and bottom-up approaches to reconciliation in Iraq, both of which are needed now. Reconstruction, the development of localized security forces, and improved local investment and governance are all areas where U.S. leadership could spur long-term multinational assistance programs.

THE U.S. ROLE IN TODAY'S IRAQ

The United States should look hard at its preconceptions about Iraq but should not try to set the agenda for the country's future. Iraq's external borders may be worth preserving and securing, and indeed hardly anyone is interested in changing them. But the internal state of Iraq is something Iraqis themselves seem to recognize is in need of modification. If Iraqis are open to a fair separation from the Kurds, the United States cannot want the "unity of Iraq" more than Iraqis want it themselves. Washington has a strong interest in tight economic, political, military, and diplomatic ties between a more cohesive Iraq and a new Kurdish entity. After all, these neighbors are both strong U.S. allies. Where does the United States *not* want its close allies to get along?

A slow-burning separation may render a different kind of predominantly Arab Iraq—a place where provincial-level decentralization and national and community reconciliation is the name of the game; also a place where the nonoil and hydrocarbon economies have to work in tandem, one providing jobs and the other providing a sizable, slowly declining share of the budget. This will help ensure a sustained connection between the oil-bearing and nonoil regions.

As difficult as it is to conceive sometimes, all the territories within

today's Iraq will be better served by representative, multicultural, multiconfessional, and multilingual governance. No matter how Kurdistan, the disputed areas, and federal Iraq end up, there can be no complete disaggregation of Iraq's diverse weave—it must be factored into the future government. Moreover, the United States should not give up on the basic concept of fostering representative government in Iraq. In fact, the United States should help the Iraqis fully implement this vision in their own time, getting eventually, perhaps quite quickly, to a majority government formed of blocs from all the ethno-sectarian groups. As one senior Shiite leader told the author: “No matter how many Shiites there are, we will never be allowed to run a successful Iraq as long as every government must be a unity government. Maybe we should break up the [pan-Shiite] National Alliance.” This kind of idea, originating from a highly sectarian Iraqi leader, points to the way forward for U.S. policy in Iraq: not setting the agenda, but instead energetically helping Iraqis implement their own good ideas.

DAVID POLLOCK

ENDING A CENTURY OF SUBJUGATION: SYKES-PICOT'S KURDISH LEGACY

THE KURDS, straddling the contemporary borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and numbering some 35 million, are sometimes described as the largest ethnic group in the world without its own country. In truth, that dubious honor probably belongs to India's (and Sri Lanka's) Tamils, Pakistan's various provincial populations, and many others in the subcontinent; but never mind. Kurdish aspirations to overturn or at least dilute the century-old Sykes-Picot lines are certainly among the most important contemporary international ethnic issues.

For the Kurds are indeed very numerous; they are often very attached to their own distinctive language, culture, history, and overall ethnic identity; and many of them remain self-consciously bereft of the independence more or less promised to them by the Western victors of World War I a century ago. Today, their resulting predicament lies at the center of some of the region's most acute conflicts. Its resolution one way or another is necessarily a key ingredient in any long-term plan to pacify and stabilize the entire "northern tier" of the broader Middle East.

The promise of Kurdish independence was not technically part of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, which divided most Kurdish-populated territory between Britain and France while offering independence to no one. Rather, as part of U.S. president Woodrow Wilson's push for "self-determination" at the Versailles Peace Conference and then in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, the Kurds

obtained a commitment to the possibility of sovereign nationhood. Within a few short years, however, that commitment was forcibly crushed.

The Kurds first rose up in rebellion against Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's new Turkish government, which claimed much of their homeland and about half of their total numbers, but they were soon defeated. Meanwhile, the British annexed the old Ottoman Vilayet (province) of Mosul and vicinity, along with a considerable Kurdish population, to their own new League of Nations mandate over Iraq. The French, also in line with Sykes-Picot, took over the mandate in Syria, on the southern edge of historic Kurdistan. In addition, the new government and armies of Reza Shah in Iran retained that country's largely Kurdish far northwestern provinces firmly under Tehran's autocratic control.

By the time of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which roughly codified the new national borders of these areas, there was no further mention of Kurdish independence; however, from then until now—increasingly in recent decades—many Kurds have kept that dream alive. The forces of this movement took entirely different forms, however, at very different times, in the various countries into which the Kurds have been divided.

And the Kurds have also been famously internally divided, not only among but also within each of those new international boundaries. Rival clans, factions, parties, personalities, dialects, ideologies, regional alignments, and other cleavages have all taken a heavy toll. Moreover, many Kurds became loyal citizens of their respective new central governments, while others resumed the fight for self-government.

In Iran, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, some of them briefly collaborated with the Soviet Union in setting up a new Kurdish "Republic of Gilan" based in Mahabad. Tehran quickly squelched that prospect, with strong support from Britain and the United States. In Turkey, after more than half a century of enforced assimilation and relative quiescence, some Kurds started a guerrilla insurgency against Ankara in southeast Turkey in 1984 under the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) banner. That futile uprising has continued, in fits and starts, until this day.

In Iraq, the Kurds in the north also rose up against their central government, first in the 1970s and again in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, after Saddam Hussein's genocidal Anfal campaign against them in 1988. Their resistance was compromised by internal divisions into the archrival Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and their associated militias, culminating in a fratricidal mini-civil war in 1996. However, under U.S. protection from the air, Iraq's Kurds have now successfully carved out a self-governing, relatively stable region that has endured for the past quarter century, despite many internal and external security and economic challenges.

This Kurdistan Autonomous Region, with a native population of five million—plus nearly two million mostly Arab refugees and internally displaced persons—boasts its own Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), with its own president, parliament, and army (the Peshmerga). Its oil-based economy is struggling, however, and remains dependent on pipelines and other support from neighboring Turkey, Iraq, or both. Most strikingly, after two decades of very uneasy and occasionally hostile relations, the KRG and Turkey have in the past five years become the closest of friends, in political, military, and economic terms.

In Syria, with the smallest Kurdish population in both absolute and relative terms, the roughly three million Kurds concentrated in northern enclaves along the Turkish border remained comparatively quiescent until quite recently. They managed a brief campaign of protest and civil disobedience in 2004–5, only to fall back under Bashar al-Assad's harsh repression. Nevertheless, soon after the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011, Assad's forces largely withdrew from those Kurdish areas, leaving them with a sort of *de facto* autonomy that continues today.

Ironically, since mid-2014, the Kurds in both Iraq and Syria have on balance benefited from the rise of a new common enemy: the Islamic State (IS). In August 2014, IS very nearly overran the KRG capital of Erbil, but was pushed back by the Peshmerga—with both U.S. and Iranian backing. Ever since, the United States (and other coalition countries) has provided Iraq's Kurdish forces with direct military aid, both in the air and on the ground, and relaxed its ear-

lier insistence that the KRG subordinate its economy to Baghdad. In Syria, the United States has likewise provided direct military support to the main local Kurdish party and militia fighting against IS: the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and People's Defense Units (YPG). The result, intended or not, is to strengthen Kurdish autonomy in each country.

But not Kurdish independence. The United States and most other countries, particularly Turkey and Iran but also far beyond, plus the weak central governments in Baghdad and Damascus, all remain firmly opposed to that. So, when KRG president Masoud Barzani repeatedly warns of a coming referendum on independence, the most knowledgeable observers are inclined to write that off as a bluff or a bargaining chip cleverly designed to maintain his internal position while extracting the best possible deal from his neighbors and other interlocutors.

Similarly, when the PYD this month announced formal plans for an autonomous “federal” Kurdish region in Syria, it managed the remarkable feat of uniting in opposition every one of its neighbors and more: the Assad regime, the Syrian opposition, Turkey, the United States, and even the rival KRG just across the river in Iraq. Only Russia announced that this might be a reasonable approach to resolving the Syrian civil war. At the same time, both the PYD and Turkey have for the most part avoided direct confrontations across their common border—even though Ankara officially considers the PYD part of the “terrorist” PKK. That leaves Syria's Kurds with *de facto* but not *de jure* autonomy within their own slivers of the country.

Inside Turkey, meanwhile, both the central government and the PKK have for now tragically abandoned their halting rapprochement of 2013–2015 and resumed outright low-intensity war. The PKK demands Kurdish autonomy; the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Ankara has contemplated at least offering its Kurdish citizens more cultural and local political freedoms. The gap between the two seemed to be narrowing just a year ago; it now seems very wide, but might well one day be bridged—if not perhaps with the PKK, then with other authentic Kurdish parties, such as the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). This is one instance where the cliché “no military solution” probably really does apply.

Least and least promising on this list, from the standpoint of Kurdish rights, is Iran. With Iran never part of Sykes-Picot, that imperialist legacy cannot be blamed for the plight of Iran's seven to ten million Kurds. Although they participate in what passes for Iranian national politics, they are denied any real local autonomy or even identity. Their governors are appointed by Tehran, and are often not Kurds. Their language is barely tolerated; only in the past year has the first Kurdish-language institution of higher education in Iran been permitted to open. Any open dissent is brutally repressed, as in the Mahabad riot last year. Executions of Kurdish and many other alleged miscreants are up substantially under President Hassan Rouhani, at ten times the rate per capita of Saudi Arabia across the Gulf. And Iran as usual stoops to playing the sectarian card: many of its favored Kurdish citizens are from the minority Shiite portion of that population, centered in the provincial city of Sanandaj. Some anti-regime Kurds, of either sect, derisively call those collaborators *jash* (donkey), as they once did with the coterie of pro-Saddam Kurds in Iraq.

For the Kurds, in conclusion then, where does Sykes-Picot go from here? Several quick points are in order, all based on the preceding analysis. First, the old borders are still surprisingly durable. A pan-Kurdish project is simply not in the cards, for reasons not only of state sovereignty but also of intra-Kurdish divisions. Second, relatedly, the full independence or secession even of one national piece of ethnic Kurdistan, including from Iraq or Syria, is probably also not on the medium-term horizon. But third, Kurdish local autonomy or "federalism" of some kind is an increasingly plausible—and likely constructive—option, not just in Iraq but also in Syria, and maybe eventually in Turkey as well. And fourth, again relatedly, the recent exceptionally warm ties between Ankara and Erbil strongly suggest that this particular "age-old ethnic conflict" need not be an insurmountable obstacle to political expedience. Someday, believe it or not, Turkey may find an autonomous Kurdish region on its Syrian border every bit as amenable to its interests as the one on its Iraqi border.

For U.S. policy in the region, the implications are equally clear. Washington can usefully support not Kurdish independence, let

alone pan-Kurdish aspirations, but real Kurdish autonomy within three of the four countries in question: in Iraq, in Syria, and in the longer term, subject to agreement with Ankara, even in Turkey. Call it “Sykes-Picot light.” As for the fourth country in this mixture, Iran, the nuclear deal and other realities unfortunately make its Kurdish question utterly unanswerable for the United States, or any other interested parties.

DAVID SCHENKER

JORDAN: RESILIENCE & STABILITY AMID PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

FEW BELIEVED THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM of Transjordan would survive when it was established in 1946. At the time of its founding, there were just 250,000 mostly Bedouin residents in the realm, with few natural resources to speak of. Shortly afterward, in 1948, the kingdom was embroiled in war with the nascent state of Israel, provided sanctuary to some 650,000 Palestinian refugees, and acquired an additional 5,600 square kilometers of territory west of the Jordan River. Then, less than three years later, an assassin's bullet felled the king, leaving the fledgling desert kingdom with a seventeen-year-old sovereign at the helm to navigate as coups rocked two neighboring states.

And this was just the first five years. Over the next decades, the litany of economic, political, and military challenges continued unabated. In 1958, for example, the palace called in British military support to buttress the kingdom from Nasserist threats. During the 1967 war with Israel, an additional 250,000 Palestinian refugees entered Jordan, and in 1970–71, the Jordanian military fought and defeated thousands of locally based Palestinian guerrillas who tried to wrest control of the state. Then there were the Iraqi refugees, who arrived by the hundreds of thousands in 1991 and 2003, and some 400,000 Palestinians, who were expelled by Kuwait in 1991, many of whom found their way to the kingdom.

Despite long odds, the kingdom persevered. King Hussein, Jordan's youthful monarch, developed into a widely respected regional

statesman and peacemaker, an ambassador who raised the international profile of his small, impoverished desert state, eventually attracting large amounts of cash assistance. Most important, Hussein was able to bridge over time many of the profound ethnic differences of his Palestinian and tribal-origin subjects. Hussein's son, Abdullah II, who ascended the throne in 2000, continued along this trajectory, eventually helping move Jordan out of Iraq's orbit and firmly into the pro-West camp.

Over the past decade and a half, Jordan has even more closely aligned itself politically and militarily with the West and the United States in particular, opening the door to increased strategic cooperation and financial assistance from Washington. While the close ties with Washington did not insulate the kingdom from regional challenges, they helped Jordan withstand some of the more difficult crises and political storms threatening its domestic stability.

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO PROBLEMS

Aligning with the West was but one of a series of regionally novel approaches to challenges that helped ensure the kingdom's survival. Other productive approaches that have helped the palace overcome adversity include:

- ▣ **A FOCUS ON RELIGIOUS LEGITIMACY.** King Hussein would frequently refer to the lineage of the Hashemites—direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammed—to try to unite a disparate population and reinforce the legitimacy of his rule, which had essentially been transplanted from the Hejaz, on the Arabian Peninsula.
- ▣ **RELATIVELY BETTER GOVERNANCE.** According to Freedom House, Jordan is “not free.” By regional standards, however, Jordan employs comparatively mild repression. Its monarchs do not employ torture to the same degree as other regional states.
- ▣ **LESS KILLING.** Smart crowd control is a hallmark of Jordanian policing. When demonstrations do occur, the police and gendarme, known as the *derak*, do not fire on crowds, even when this means officers sustain casualties.

- ▣ **MEDIATION OF SOCIETAL CONFLICT.** Over the years, the palace has served as the traditional arbiter between the estimated 40 percent tribal-origin and 60 percent Palestinian-origin population. Much resentment prevails on both sides—social, economic, and political—but the regime has found a formula to defuse tensions and reduce violence. An intermarriage rate of about 30 percent, which includes the king himself, is likely helping matters.
- ▣ **SMART HANDLING OF ISLAMISTS.** The palace has been judicious in its dealings with the kingdom's Islamists. Through a combination of cajoling, cooptation, and, periodically, intimidation and repression, Jordanian authorities have adeptly managed what could have been a significant threat to the regime and the kingdom's pro-West orientation.
- ▣ **TOP-NOTCH FUNDRAISING.** Jordan has been a debtor state since 1946 but has obtained funding from the Gulf, Saddam's Iraq, the United States, Europe, and Japan. The palace has elevated fundraising to an art, leveraging its strategic location and its moderation to extract consistently high rents from the United States, which is now contributing nearly 10 percent of Jordan's budget annually.
- ▣ **ACCEPTING REFUGEES.** Jordan has allowed more refugees per capita to enter than perhaps any other country. These refugees have been a real strain on the kingdom, both economically and socially. But the refugees have also been a consistent profit center, bringing revenues, financial assistance, and at times new capital into the kingdom.
- ▣ **LUCK.** Toward the end of 2012, the kingdom was facing a difficult challenge from the tribal opposition known as al-Hirak, which was moving closer to the Muslim Brotherhood, based on a shared focus on palace corruption. Paradoxically, the war in Syria, the instability in Egypt, chaos in Libya, and the collapse of Yemen served as a disincentive to Jordanians to protest. Instead of demonstrating, Jordanians stayed home, displaying a preference for life in a stable, relatively tolerant Jordan.

KEY CHALLENGES

While Jordan's moderate, nonideological, and revolution-averse political culture is a strong mitigating factor, the risk of domestic instability is greater today than at any time since the country's bloody 1970–1971 period. In large part, the threat is related to spillover from the war in Syria. To date, approximately 1.4 million Syrian refugees have crossed into Jordan. These refugees, who constitute about 13 percent of Jordan's population, pose a unique challenge for the palace.

Fewer than 120,000 of these Syrians live in the kingdom's two available refugee camps, whereas the vast majority are dispersed throughout the state and stretching Jordan's perennially anemic economy, in which job creation is a significant problem. Indeed, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 86 percent of the refugees living outside the camps fall below the poverty line. Officially, unemployment is about 15 percent, a number much worse when one considers the low rate of workforce participation, which is 36 percent. Among young people, unemployment has reached a reported 40 percent. Not surprisingly, the addition of hundreds of thousands of Syrians to the job market is further increasing unemployment among Jordanians as businesses replace locals with cheaper Syrian labor. According to the International Labor Organization, in areas with high concentrations of Syrian refugees, unemployment among Jordanians has risen to 22 percent.

These refugees are stressing the kingdom's infrastructure, including its water, electric, and education sectors, and driving up housing prices. In 2015, the costs of hosting refugees were equivalent to 17.5 percent of the country's budget and a significant contributor to Jordan's \$2 billion deficit. These factors recently led King Abdullah to say the situation had "gotten to a boiling point...Sooner or later, I think the dam is going to burst." Toward the end of 2015, Jordan began limiting entry from Syria solely to those in urgent need of medical attention.

While the economic and social impact of the Syrian refugees is significant, security is an even more urgent concern. An estimated 2,500 Jordanians are currently reported to be fighting in Syria. The Jordanian armed forces are effectively preventing infiltrations and

fighting armed Syrian militants and smugglers along the border, but increasingly there are signs that some refugees—and Jordanian nationals—are being influenced by the ideology of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) or Salafi Islam.

To wit, before IS burned to death a Jordanian pilot downed over Syria in January 2015, only 62 percent of Jordanians said they considered IS—and a mere 31 percent the Syria-based al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra—a terrorist organization. According to that same September 2014 survey conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, just 44 percent of Jordanians surveyed said al-Qaeda was a terrorist group.

No doubt, the killing of the Jordanian pilot has tempered some of these views. Still, terrorist-related incidents and arrests in the kingdom are on the rise. In early March, Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate reported that eight members of an IS cell plotting to attack both civilian and military targets in the state were killed during a shootout in Irbid. In June, an intelligence headquarters was attacked twenty miles north of Amman, and an IS car bomb exploded at the eastern Jordanian border post in Rukban, killing seven soldiers.

WHAT SHOULD THE UNITED STATES DO TO HELP?

Washington has an important role to play in helping Jordan weather the current regional storm. In March 2016, this author, along with Washington Institute executive director Robert Satloff, published a paper for the Council on Foreign Relations titled “Growing Stress on Jordan,” urging the United States to take the following steps to help mitigate pressures on the kingdom:

- ▣ **INCREASE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE.** In 2016, the United States will provide Jordan with more than \$1.6 billion in military and economic assistance. In 2015, Washington also gave the kingdom \$180 million in additional funding for refugee relief, or about half of what the United States gave to Lebanon. Given Jordan's strategic import, Washington should do more. In 2015, Washington donated \$533 million in support to Syrian refugees

in other Middle East countries. Some of this funding could be reallocated to Jordan. Washington should also press European and Arab allies (e.g., Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait) to add an annual budget support component of \$1 billion to its existing infrastructure investment projects, committed in 2013, in the Jordanian kingdom.

- ▣ **SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES.** High unemployment, insufficient job creation, and controlled immigration appear to be driving the migration of Syrian men to Europe. To entice Syrians to remain in the region, if not in Syria itself, will require providing a degree of economic opportunity. Washington should encourage European states to invest in job-creation initiatives in Jordan once the kingdom provides more Syrian refugees with work permits. Local refugee employment was identified as a European priority during the February 2016 Syria donor conference in London. In exchange for World Bank loans and European grants, Jordan committed in mid-2016 to allow Syrians to work in the kingdom. It is important that Amman follow through on this commitment.
- ▣ **INCREASE DEFENSE AND INTELLIGENCE COOPERATION.** Intelligence sharing and security cooperation between Washington and Amman are already exceptionally strong. To further strengthen the relationship and improve Jordan's intelligence-gathering capabilities over southern Syria, the Obama administration should provide the kingdom with an advanced armed- and surveillance-drone capability.
- ▣ **ESTABLISH A GENUINE SAFE ZONE.** Although Jordan has implemented some under-the-radar efforts to support communities on the Syrian side of the border, those efforts lack the imprimatur and staying power of a fully supported humanitarian safe zone, where U.S.-led coalition forces provide security for the sheltering and feeding of internally displaced Syrians. Establishing such a zone with partners in the counter-IS coalition would serve both U.S. strategic interests in safeguarding Jordan and humanitarian concerns by protecting civilians.

U.S. ASSISTANCE WITH GOVERNANCE, TERRITORIAL CONTROL, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

While Jordan, relative to other regional states, has a more tolerant and pluralistic system of government, in recent years, according to Freedom House, in terms of political rights and civil liberties, the kingdom is “not free.” Prior to the 2011 uprisings, political reform had been an important component of the U.S. agenda with Jordan. Perhaps not surprisingly, given regional developments, reform has become a lower priority—for both Washington and the Jordanians. Nevertheless, the United States is currently helping underwrite a substantial decentralization project in the kingdom, which, if successful, will advance political reform. At the same time, in 2015, Jordan rolled out a new electoral law that appears to encourage political party development, a key element of the kind of political reform advocated by the West.

Human development is likewise critical to enhancing the kingdom’s long-term stability. As with many regional states, however, this has until now proved a significant challenge for Jordan. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank are optimistic about Jordan’s economic prospects, yet according to polling conducted by the Amman-based Phenix (sic) Center for Economics and Informatics Studies last summer, 57 percent of Jordanians see the economy as “bad” or “very bad.” Job creation is a big reason, especially given the large number of Jordanian university graduates who have little prospect of appropriate employment. Amman has announced plans to help create 180,000 new jobs by 2025. While such a number would be a good start, it may not be sufficient. In 2013, the IMF estimated that 400,000 new jobs would be needed by 2020. Washington has plowed millions in development assistance into Jordan to address this issue, but it has had little impact.

Fortunately, security, relatively speaking, remains a core competency of the Jordanian government. Both the army and the General Intelligence Directorate continue to perform to a regionally high standard. While IS and other militant groups are plotting attacks in the kingdom—and will likely eventually strike government, civilian,

or tourist targets—Amman is proactive in its border security and domestic defense. The real problem, however, is that ideology traverses borders. The longer the war in Syria continues, the bigger the threat of terrorism is to the kingdom. For Washington, that means the key to long-term stability in Jordan is helping bring the quickest possible end to the fighting next door.

SAM MENASSA

LEBANON, SYKES-PICOT & U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

FOR SOME TIME, Lebanon has been absent from political discourse, conducted either by politicians or researchers or even the media. Interest in Lebanon arises only when a security event occurs on its territory or in the context of tackling the Hezbollah problem.

This omission is unfortunate because Lebanon, which is not an island immune from regional unrest, contributes, for better or worse, to the unfolding of such larger events. Hence, the prevailing situation in Lebanon cannot be approached without bearing in mind changing regional dynamics.

Underlining this point, Lebanon has known a history of weak governments, foreign interference, and porous borders. Since its inception as a political entity with the proclamation of Greater Lebanon in 1921, the country has served as an arena for regional conflicts, a role exacerbated by the divide between the country's pro-West and anti-West stakeholders. Arising from the Sykes-Picot Agreement in particular, Lebanon was ruled under the French Mandate from 1923 to 1946.

In the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Lebanon became home to more than 110,000 Palestinian refugees, a number that reached 300,000 following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and Jordan's Black September in 1970.

The inherent weakness of the Lebanese state was first highlighted by the events of 1958, however, when civil war between the country's

various factions brewed. Lebanon's international position was characterized by sympathy by its Christian president, Camille Chamoun, for the Baghdad Pact and corresponding suspicion of emerging Egypt-Syria unity.

Further weakening the state was the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon following the Six Day War—after the group's formal founding in Egypt in 1964—which created a state within a state. The country was thus burdened by various affiliated Palestinian factions flowing from Syria, Iraq, and Libya, and related crossfire with Israel heightened the sense of instability.

The year 1975 marked the start of the country's devastating civil war, which saw the subsequent entry of Syrian troops into the country, along with Israel's invasion in 1978 and all-out incursion in 1982 that reached the capital, Beirut.

Spurred by the Israeli invasion, Lebanon has since 1983 witnessed the rise of a nonstate actor, Hezbollah, which comprises an increasingly powerful Shiite sectarian militia as well as a political arm. The military wing sets its sights on attacking Israel, while the political leadership seeks local power grabs and to widen the regional clout of its sponsor, Iran.

Given this broad-brush background, the following narrative will attempt to unveil the dominant role of overlapping external players in Lebanon's politics and security.

Indeed, in the sixty-two years from 1943, when Lebanon gained independence from France, until 2005, when Syrian troops left the country, foreign military forces have occupied the country for forty-two years. This includes the French, Palestinians, Syrians, Israelis, and Americans, along with United Nations forces and the Iranians through their proxy Hezbollah. Accordingly, Lebanon has never enjoyed full effective international sovereignty.

In light of this domestic reality and the regional unrest highlighted by the Syrian war, analysts can benefit from looking at Lebanon's main challenges and core assets, along with the corresponding ways the United States can help the country maintain its sovereignty and security.

LEBANON'S CHALLENGES

- ▣ CHALLENGE 1: HEZBOLLAH. The ascendant Shiite militia cum political party poses the greatest threat to Lebanon, regarding both its domestic and foreign policy decisionmaking influence. Having grown into an independent political and military actor, Hezbollah enjoys access to modern and heavy weapons and has genuine support from large segments of Lebanon's Shiite community.

While having a solid constituency is not surprising for a political party, Hezbollah's monopoly over the Shiite community is both unusual and detrimental, especially in Lebanon's confessional-based political system. Backed by its military power, Hezbollah can paralyze decisionmaking and democratic processes, thereby reducing state institutions to shells.

In addition, Hezbollah's cross-border activities established it as a regional power operating openly in various war-torn countries under direct Iranian command. The group wielded its military power against other Lebanese communities and parties for political gain, such as in the 2008 military showdown, along with backing the Assad regime in Syria and engaging in clandestine operations to destabilize Sunni-led Arab Gulf countries, sparking frustration and resentment among Sunnis and helping spread extremist ideology within Lebanon's marginalized communities. Hezbollah also effectively placed Lebanon under Iranian control, creating tensions with Iran's regional rival, Saudi Arabia, and leading the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Arab League to declare Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

- ▣ CHALLENGE 2: SYRIAN REFUGEES. The massive influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon has passed one million, greatly straining a country of just four million citizens. Apart from the humanitarian aspect, the sudden inflow has created a crisis with manifold repercussions, considering the state's institutional frailty, meager resources, fragile infrastructure, declining economy, and perhaps above all, highly sensitive sectarian balance.

A closer look at the refugee issue is revealing: First, rather than living in formal camps, Syrian refugees are dispersed among Lebanese communities throughout the country. Second, along with the internal divide on how to deal with the Syrian conflict, the refugee presence has intensified security concerns centering on the predominant anti-Syrian-regime sentiment of the refugees and its potential to presage extremism and terrorist activism in Lebanon. Third, the refugee crisis has burdened Lebanon's aging and damaged infrastructure and worsened an already tenuous economic situation, with refugees flooding the labor market. Fourth, it has affected Lebanon's demographic balance, potentially empowering the Sunni community. Overall, the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon is a ticking bomb with unclear but possibly dire consequences.

- ▣ CHALLENGE 3: THE PALESTINIANS. Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps are home to about 450,000 refugees, most of them Sunnis and representing an estimated 10 percent of the country's population. These camps are almost beyond any authority, are characterized by wrenching economic and social conditions, and host several religions, despite the Sunni predominance. Residents also include members of political and military organizations affiliated with foreign intelligence services, in addition to a large number of wanted outlaws.
- ▣ CHALLENGE 4: INTERNAL FRAGILITY. Fueled by the already-enumerated challenges, Lebanese harbor a national anxiety about the Syrian conflict spilling over into Lebanon. The situation is further complicated by porous boundaries, weapons smuggling, cross-border skirmishes, and deepening involvement by the pro-regime Hezbollah on one side, and the limited role of anti-regime Lebanese Sunni Islamists on the other. Paired with the massive refugee inflow, these developments implicate Lebanon ever more deeply in the conflict next door.

LEBANON'S CORE ASSETS

Despite the daunting challenges, a number of positive trends that have bolstered Lebanon thus far could be leveraged to ensure its survival.

- ▣ **A RETREATING CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RIFT.** Relative atrophy of the sectarian rift between Christians and Muslims has been accompanied by growing Sunni-Shia polarization on one side and escalating tension among Christian factions of the March 8 and March 14 movements on the other. In spite of the danger inherent in this shift, it makes possible a fundamental alteration of the dispute from religious to political.
- ▣ **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RESILIENCE.** The Lebanese have demonstrated resilience and an ability to adapt to all conditions. Faced with a malfunctioning state, they have bypassed its institutions and resorted to privatized alternatives in virtually all sectors. Tellingly, this resilience is a double-edged sword, as it has induced a continuation of the crisis.
- ▣ **MEANINGFUL CIVIL SOCIETY.** Historically, Lebanon has had a vibrant civil society working on a wide range of political and developmental issues and enjoying a great margin of freedom. Despite greater confessional segregation than in other regional countries, Lebanon sees regular interaction across sectarian lines—whether in civil organizations, places of residence, schools, workplaces, or entertainment venues—often absent in its neighbors.
- ▣ **POWERFUL PRIVATE SECTOR.** The strength of the private sector is especially manifest at the economic level, and is a major contributor to the middle class that prevails in Lebanese society.

WHAT CAN THE UNITED STATES DO FOR LEBANON?

Bearing in mind that neutrality for a country as powerful as the United States is illusory, Lebanon cannot be excluded from a new grand U.S. strategy for the Middle East, given that most of the country's problems are linked to and reflect the region's deep hardships and mayhem.

Unfortunately, the history of U.S. involvement in Lebanon since 1969—when the Cairo agreement tacitly allowed a PLO presence in Lebanon and thus initiated the country's existential crisis—has

been disappointing. In particular, U.S. policymakers have chosen to react to events rather than adopting a proactive and clear strategy. Moreover, preeminent among the goals enshrined within this policy was maintaining the security of Israel's northern border regardless of any other issue.

A broader evaluation of U.S. policy toward Lebanon, and the region, is thus needed along the following lines:

- ▣ An administration engaged in the region's affairs as a strong player, and guided by a clear vision for what it wants from the region and what the region seeks of the United States.
- ▣ In light of a turbulent Middle East, a comprehensive U.S. policy that avoids the American predilection for quick fixes and prioritization of short-term expediency over long-term strategic benefit.
- ▣ Filling the vacuum left by the current implicit policy of "leading from behind." Should this vacuum remain, parties eager to fill it could include military or religious violent extremists and authoritarian international players such as Russia and China.
- ▣ Helping more proactively end the region's civil wars, a reversal from the current effective U.S. neutrality toward such wars, which have become the key drivers of Middle East instability.
- ▣ Beyond ending the existing civil wars, pushing policies that will help avert new failed states and civil wars, and pushing regional states to adopt political, economic, social, and educational reform as the only viable long-term solutions.
- ▣ Abstaining from outsourcing regional problems to corrupt, incompetent, and cruel autocracies and empowering regional dictatorships' proxies to protect U.S. interests in the region. Such repression can only produce false stability.
- ▣ A policy focusing on the region's longstanding grievances and deep-seated problems, not one centered on extremist groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. These groups are symptoms of the region's problems, not their root.

- ▣ Recognition that Iranian meddling in the region is even more dangerous than the regime's possession of nuclear weapons.
- ▣ In the same vein, a substantially greater U.S. and international focus on countering Shiite extremism, which is as dangerous as Sunni extremism.
- ▣ Pushing for a fair settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which could pave the way to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.
- ▣ Rebuilding trust between the United States and its traditional regional allies. The effectively neutral U.S. foreign policy in the region has led it to lose the confidence of allies without gaining new partners in its former enemies.

No fundamental solutions to Lebanon's problems will be forged while the region's wars rage. At this point, all many Lebanese want from Washington is help maintaining security, along with political and economic stability, to prevent state collapse. The United States should intervene to strengthen state institutions, boost the economy, and contain Hezbollah's political supremacy, while scaling back Iran's proxy military and political support for the Assad regime. Finally, Washington should not allow any grand regional settlement to take place at the expense of this small yet relevant country.

SONER CAGAPTAY

TURKEY FACES ITS TOUGHEST TESTS

AMONG THE MIDDLE EAST STATES established after World War I, Turkey has proven especially durable in the face of economic and political shocks. Decades after its formation, Turkey navigated the harrowing 1970s, when the country's economy collapsed and the resulting instability led to fighting involving right- and left-wing militant groups and government security forces, killing thousands. Then, in the 1990s, Turkey was pummeled by triple-digit inflation and a full-blown Kurdish insurgency supported by at least two of its neighbors, Iran and Syria, that left tens of thousands dead. Again, the country emerged intact.

Currently, the country faces a toxic mix of political polarization, economic slowdown after more than a decade of impressive growth, multiple external threats—including from Russia, the Assad regime in Syria, and the Islamic State (IS)—and a surge of terrorist attacks. Indeed, five of the six worst terrorist attacks in the country's history have taken place in the last three years. These attacks, which have killed at least 250 and wounded another 800, are all linked to fallout from the Syrian civil war. The failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, added a heavy layer of angst to the existing sense of national insecurity.

The long historical view suggests Turkey will be able to withstand the current shocks. But a shorter-term analytical perspective indicates things look different this time. For one thing, Kurdish problem has changed.

Until very recently, the country's Kurdish community of 10 to 12 million, representing about 15 percent of the population, was not a unified political force; its internal splits followed the fault lines of the country as a whole.

Starting in the 1990s, nationalist Kurds tended to vote for parties sympathetic to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)—considered a terrorist group by both Ankara and Washington—which was fighting the Turkish government. But PKK backers have not represented the whole of the Kurdish electorate. Since the 1960s, the left-leaning Alevi Kurds, who adhere to a liberal branch of Islam, have voted predominantly for the secular opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). More important, conservative Kurds, who represent nearly half the Kurdish population, have tended to vote for the governing, pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) since its 2001 establishment by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the former prime minister and current president.

In short, many Kurds liked the government, which in turn fought only the nationalist Kurds. Erdogan even launched negotiations with the PKK in 2012 in hopes of ending the insurgency. Nevertheless, the dynamic changed during Turkey's most recent elections, in June 2015, when the Kurds—liberal, conservative, and nationalist alike—coalesced around the Kurdish-nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Alevi Kurds were attracted to the HDP's liberal approach to issues like women's and workers' rights, while conservative Kurds abandoned Erdogan's party for the HDP presumably because of the president's reluctance to help the Syrian Kurdish city of Kobane when it was besieged by the Islamic State in September 2014.

The start of PKK violence in July 2015 scared some of these Kurds away from the HDP. As the November elections approached, such blocs included middle-class Kurds worried about violence and conservative Kurds who disliked the return of the PKK's leftist message. Nevertheless, the HDP remains the dominant party in seven of Turkey's solidly Kurdish-majority southeastern provinces, including Diyarbakir, where the party received a composite 73 percent of the vote.

Despite the defections in late 2015, the political consolidation of the Turkish Kurds under the HDP means Turkey's new battle with

the PKK risks starting a war with almost its entire Kurdish community. The nature of fighting over the past year has offered a case in point. In September 2015, the government enforced a weeklong curfew; shut down electricity, Internet, and phone access; and sent in thousands of troops and police to Cizre, a Kurdish-majority town of 130,000 on the Turkish-Syrian-Iraqi border, before security forces could establish a tenuous hold on the area. Previously, when the government fought the PKK, it could count on help from the local Kurdish population, but that is no longer the case.

Turkey has other concerns as well. As a result of Ankara's Syria policy, which since 2011 has aimed to oust the Assad regime without having secured concrete, long-term U.S. assistance, Turkey holds the unique position of being hated by all major actors fighting in Syria, from the Assad regime and Russia to the Islamic State, the PKK, and the PKK's Syrian franchise, the Democratic Union Party (PYD).

The Assad regime is connected to at least one attack, the Reyhanli bombing in May 2013, which killed fifty-two people. Russia, upset with Turkey's anti-regime stance and livid over its downing of a Russian jet in November 2015, threw its strength behind the PYD to defeat Ankara-backed, anti-Assad rebels in Syria. In return, Turkey has shelled PYD positions. Given its deep involvement in northern Syria, where the Ankara-supported rebels stand in the way of PYD plans to connect the group's Afrin and Kobane cantons, Turkey risks a direct conflict with the PYD. Such a development could—for the first time ever—thrust Turkey into a two-country Kurdish insurgency.

In July 2015, after IS claimed credit for a suicide bombing in the Turkish town of Suruc that killed more than thirty, Erdogan agreed to open Turkish bases to U.S. planes and drones, and pledged to join the U.S. campaign to bomb IS targets in Syria. In doing so, Erdogan has ensured that IS sees Turkey as an enemy and the group will inevitably, and unfortunately, attack Turkey again. An Istanbul car bombing in June 2016 marked one such strike.

In theory, Turkey is powerful enough, with U.S. backing, to withstand the threats from both IS and the PKK. It is not clear, however, whether the government has the necessary domestic support to do so. This is the crux of current worries over Turkey's trajectory: at

another time, most Turks, however grudgingly, would have stood behind the government for the sake of their own security, even at the cost of life and liberty. That no longer seems to be true, given the transformed political climate, and herein lies the greatest challenge: Turkey is already torn, with the pro- and anti-AKP blocs hating each other even more than they fear terrorism at large.

Moreover, Turkey is a parliamentary democracy, but it increasingly looks like a *de facto* presidential system with Erdogan at the helm.

Erdogan has won successive elections since 2002 and built a cult of personality rooted in his self-portrayal as an authoritarian underdog, a victim forced to crack down harshly on those whose “conspiracies” undermine his authority. On this basis, he has successfully targeted and politically brutalized the secular Turkish military, businesses, liberals, the media, Armenians, Jews, left-wing voters, Alevis, and now the Kurds.

Combined with the story of Turkey’s economic success, this narrative has contributed to Erdogan’s enduring, if shrinking, popularity. Although he stepped down as prime minister and AKP leader in August 2014 to honor his party’s term limits, he has continued to run Turkey as president from behind the scenes. The June 2016 resignation of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and his replacement by former transportation minister Binali Yildirim—along with a reshuffled cabinet heavily oriented to Erdogan’s interests and roots in the East Black Sea region—have reinforced the sense of power consolidation under Erdogan.

Separately, the AKP won about 49.5 percent of the vote in the last election, and Erdogan himself retains significant support from Turks who identify with his humble roots and social conservatism. Erdogan thus continues to dominate not only AKP politics but also Turkish politics.

In seeking his goal of officially transforming Turkey into a presidential system, Erdogan is intent on maintaining his image as a strongman to boost his right-wing base. In this regard, Erdogan is hoping to peel away voters from the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Accordingly, he will maintain a hardline posture against the PKK, and by extension the PYD in Syria. This part of

Erdogan's presidential agenda could put Turkey on a collision course with the United States, which relies on the PYD to fight IS. It is thus in Washington's interest to monitor the Turkish-PYD relationship and, more important, promote Turkish-PKK peace, the only path to a corresponding, and permanent, Turkish-PYD peace.

The core questions thus emerge: Can Turkey withstand the simultaneous challenges of a multicountry Kurdish insurgency, IS attacks, and political violence between pro- and anti-AKP camps, and perhaps a rupture with the United States over the PYD issue? More broadly, can Turkey replicate its resilience of the 1970s and the 1990s?

The answers lie largely with Erdogan, whose plans to change the country's constitution and render himself an executive president, only emboldened by the overthrow attempt, could result in an increasingly polarized Turkey. Such a country, overwhelmed by terrorist attacks and exposed to manipulation by Putin and IS, will crumble.

In that context, and given the country's deep divisions, Turkey's only way out, unlikely even before the coup attempt, would have entailed Erdogan pulling back to his powers as defined by the Turkish constitution: a nonpartisan president who does not run the government. Even if Erdogan were to somehow accept such an outcome, his doing so would not necessarily heal the damage he has wrought, particularly when it comes to Syria. Turkey will remain exposed to the civil war there, and Russian intervention will only complicate its position. But insofar as Erdogan has brought his country to the brink, he has the ultimate responsibility for easing tensions before they explode.

GHAITH AL-OMARI

PALESTINE: STATE INSTITUTIONS BEFORE STATE LINES

THE SYKES-PICOT AGREEMENT is often viewed as a narrative of how state structures introduced into the Levant led to the creation, and often failure, of national identities. In the Palestinian case, however, the state was never created. Instead, the story is one of a national identity that struggled first to gain international acceptance of Palestinian statehood and then to manage proto-state institutions in an open-ended interim period. Today, failure on both counts has spurred an acute crisis for the Palestinian national movement.

CHALLENGES

At a fundamental level, the Palestinian public is directionless when it comes to overall national objectives.¹ While a slight majority still believes in a two-state solution, an overwhelming majority believes this outcome cannot be achieved in the foreseeable future due to a widespread belief that Israel is intent on annexing the land occupied during the 1967 Six Day War. While the two-state paradigm is losing ground, it is not being replaced by an alternative unifying national objective. Nor is there Palestinian agreement on the method of achieving political objectives, with the society split among those supporting armed action, diplomacy, and nonviolent resistance. These trends are complicated by the fact that most Palestinians today are under age eighteen, with no personal memory of the sense of possibility that surrounded the Oslo process, let alone a

personal experience of the conflict's cost before the adoption of the two-state paradigm.

The lack of agreement on national objectives is compounded by fragmented and weak national political institutions.² Governance in the Palestinian territories is split, with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) ruling parts of the West Bank and Hamas in charge of Gaza, with no prospects for reunification. The Palestine Liberation Organization is so brittle that even an ostensibly routine matter such as convening the Palestinian National Council (PNC)—the PLO's "legislative" body—proved in 2015 so potentially destabilizing as to render it impossible. The PA and the Hamas government in Gaza are seen by the Palestinian public as deeply corrupt and ineffective. Officeholders in constitutional institutions such as the presidency and legislature have long exceeded their terms, and the prospects for elections are extremely low.

Hamas and Fatah are both beset with internal problems. In the case of Hamas, the power competition among its various wings—military, diaspora leaders, and Gaza-based leaders—has led to paralysis and could play out in ways that spark a new confrontation with Israel or even Egypt. As for Fatah, the top leadership is preoccupied with the question of who will succeed President Mahmoud Abbas, with no mechanism for choosing among the contestants or even narrowing down their unwieldy number. In the meantime, Fatah activists are growing progressively alienated from the organization's leadership as internal Fatah elections, originally slated for 2014, continue to be postponed indefinitely.

These factors—the lack of a "national agenda" and the fragility of national governance and political institutions—make for a volatile situation. Indeed, the latest wave of violence targeting Israelis is symptomatic of the weakening hold that national institutions have on Palestinian society. Unlike in the previous two intifadas, current attackers have no discernible political objectives—whether domestic or vis-à-vis Israel—nor are their actions instigated by organized political forces. Instead, they tend to be very individualized both in terms of planning and execution, as well as objectives.

This situation threatens the Palestinian national project. While a stable status quo could remain for some time, it could just as eas-

ily be fundamentally altered by events predictable (e.g., President Abbas's departure from the political scene) or unpredictable (e.g., a sharp deterioration of the security situation). In the past, the Palestinian polity managed to survive similar scenarios, whether the security challenges of the second intifada or the political challenges presented by President Yasser Arafat's death, but in both cases Palestinian institutions and leaders enjoyed a reserve of legitimacy that they lack today. While Palestinian governing and political structures can be expected to gravitate toward self-preservation in these scenarios—as large institutions everywhere are wont to do—their weakness could also lead to disintegration or even collapse.

The collapse of Palestinian national institutions would have short- and long-term effects. In the short term, such a collapse would create a chaotic vacuum with consequences for the Palestinians and their neighbors, particularly Israel and Jordan. In the longer term, rebuilding Palestinian national political structures and frameworks would be a time-consuming, painstaking, and uncertain process. Indeed, it took the Palestinians close to two decades to rebuild their national political institutions after their collapse in the 1940s, and another two decades to bring these institutions into the international and regional mainstream. This process was punctuated by the PLO's expulsion from Jordan and later Lebanon, a series of intense, often lethal internal Palestinian tensions, and a number of regional wars. While history rarely repeats itself, this precedent indicates that recovering from collapse is a long, unpredictable process that is destabilizing for the Palestinians and their neighbors.

RESPONSE

In examining potential responses, one should note that external actors' ability to influence such internal dynamics is limited and should be approached with humility. There is a tipping point beyond which internal dynamics cannot be reversed. Yet this point can only be identified in retrospect, and until such time, the United States as well as regional actors have an interest in trying to influence the course of events within Palestine.

It should also be noted that maintaining stable national institutions in the absence of statehood is inherently challenging, whether these are institutions in exile like the PLO, political organizations like Fatah, or protostate institutions like the PA. Ultimately, the creation of a Palestinian state is a necessary—although by no means sufficient—condition for achieving long-term stability in the Palestinian polity. However, given the low likelihood of creating such a state soon, the question becomes what, if anything, can be done to stave off a complete disintegration of the Palestinian political system and start a process of rehabilitating it.

When designing a policy response, *primum non nocere* (first, do no harm) is operative. In particular, given the fragility of Palestinian structures, a major diplomatic initiative that ends up failing would do harm and further erode the credibility of the PA and PLO. Similarly, a Palestinian unity arrangement not based on a clear national objective (i.e., a two-state solution vs. commitment to the destruction of Israel) and the means of reaching these objectives (i.e., diplomacy vs. violence and terrorism) would only muddy the waters. Similarly, a unity arrangement does not guarantee a monopoly on the means of violence. For instance, a deal that allows for the continuation of militias such as Hamas's Qassam Brigades would only set the stage for violent internal Palestinian conflict and hold any future national strategy hostage to those who control the guns.

Instead, a policy for stabilizing the Palestinian body politic needs to address the sources of instability. First among these is the disbelief in Israel's desire for a two-state solution and accordingly lack of belief in the achievability of such an outcome. Despite Israel's declared policy in support of a two-state solution, the failure of previous negotiation rounds (which Palestinian leaders blame exclusively on Israel), certain Israeli policies, particularly on settlements, and the current Israeli government's composition have reinforced Palestinian doubts about Israel's sincerity.

While only a peace deal can truly put these concerns to rest, the security cooperation between the Palestinian and Israeli security sectors over the last few years created the possibility of implementing measures that benefit the Palestinians without endangering Israel's security. Such measures, entailing steps whereby the PA's

jurisdiction is expanded beyond Area A and into parts of Area C, could help on a number of levels. To begin with, a corresponding sense of progress could brighten public opinion akin to the shift experienced after the early Oslo military withdrawals in the West Bank and Gaza and the 2005 Gaza disengagement, both of which were seen as insufficient by the political classes but welcomed enthusiastically by the general public for the potential they held to improve their lives. Further, such action can be pointed to as a political achievement for cooperation with Israel, especially on the security side, and an indication of Israeli willingness to deoccupy in the right circumstances. Likewise, Israelis can point to the performance of Palestinian security forces to address Israeli public skepticism about having a security partner on the Palestinian side. These territorial steps could be accompanied by gestures to support the Palestinian economy. Instead of focusing on high-level diplomatic initiatives that have little chance of success, the United States should seek to restart a virtuous cycle of concrete, mutually reinforcing steps that can show Palestinians, and Israelis, that progress is indeed possible and that, under the right circumstances, there is a partner on the other side.

But progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front is not enough to revive the Palestinians' faith in their leaders and governing institutions domestically, particularly when this progress is only partial. To increase the likelihood that this rehabilitation will succeed, it must be coupled with internal measures to revitalize the Palestinian national institutions, based on a two-pronged approach.

First, the PA itself needs to reembar on a reform and institution-building process. Palestinian leaders have retained a measure of legitimacy despite poor governance during times when their strategy of liberation through negotiations had credibility. Today, the belief by around 80 percent of Palestinians that the PA is corrupt only worsens the fraying of the social contract between Palestinians and their leaders. Institutions that are corrupt, ineffective, or unresponsive erode the link of loyalty between individual and national structures, making these structures irrelevant and therefore vulnerable. The United States has succeeded in the past in mobilizing and leading an international coalition that compelled

the PA to engage in serious reform. Reprioritizing reform as a U.S. policy objective would encourage the PA to engage in its own reform process.

In addition to governance reform, political reform is necessary. At a time when national elections are not possible—due primarily to the Hamas-PA split—alternative avenues for creating domestic stakeholders need to be energized. These include reversing the recent trend whereby the PA has been systematically closing down the space for civil society, freedom of expression, and other forms of political and civil activity not under PA control. The more members of the public feel they have input into their political life, the more likely they are to accept the legitimacy of the outcomes, even when they disagree with these outcomes.

Of particular importance in political reform is the revitalization of Fatah, an anchor that has allowed the Palestinian political identity to survive in the absence of a state. As an organization that eschewed ideology in favor of embracing a wide spectrum of political actors whose primary commonality is Palestinian identity, Fatah traditionally allowed for an inclusive forum in which views were debated, policies decided, and political energy channeled. As such, the internal cohesion of Fatah has helped guide the Palestinian national movement through extremely testing times. Today, Fatah has become too closely identified with and dependent upon government, diversity of opinions within it has been compromised in favor of loyalty, and avenues for individual political advancement for energetic young activists have been blocked by aging apparatchiks too intent on holding on to power. As a result, while Fatah's historic legacy maintains its brand's appeal, its organizational ossification has made it unattractive to many, especially among the youth.

It is admittedly difficult for the United States to engage at such a micro level with issues relating to Fatah reform. But this issue can and should be raised with PA leaders as well as with regional allies, particularly Jordan and Egypt, that have a stake in Fatah's rehabilitation and have the tools to engage more specifically with the mechanics of such reform.

CONCLUSION

The Palestinians' ability to sustain their national movement in the post-Sykes-Picot Middle East, with its state-centrism, is remarkable. Yet their failure to achieve self-determination, initially as a movement in exile and subsequently as a protostate structure in an indefinite interim, has taken its toll. This failure has been compounded by the PA's importation of many ills of traditional Arab governments, namely corruption, poor governance, and the closing of the political space. As a result, Palestinians today are losing faith in their national movement's goals, institutions, and leaders. The prospect of the collapse of the movement and its institutions is no longer so far-fetched. Such a collapse would not only have adverse, long-lasting effects on the Palestinians themselves but would also spill over into the wider region, where it would ultimately affect U.S. interests.

While the implementation of a two-state solution would fundamentally change Palestinian domestic dynamics, such a solution is not available at the moment. What is available instead is a set of small but concrete measures in the Israeli-Palestinian arena that can show progress is possible, and internal governance and reform measures that can rehabilitate the Palestinians' view of their governance and political institutions.

These measures will not end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nor will they in themselves produce a Palestinian state. But they might be able to slow down, and in some cases reverse, the current trends and, in doing so, preserve the Palestinian public's faith in the two-state solution, and the Palestinian institutional address for such a solution.

NOTES

1. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 59," press release, March 21, 2016, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/634>.
2. Ghaith al-Omari, *Palestinian Succession: An Overview of Institutional Turmoil*, Research Note 28 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2015), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/palestinian-succession-an-overview-of-institutional-turmoil>.

DAVID MAKOVSKY

ISRAEL'S ENDURING STRUGGLE OVER LAND

AT THE START OF WORLD WAR I, British officials, including future prime minister David Lloyd George, who was then chancellor of the exchequer and was close to the Zionist movement, held discussions with Zionist representatives. These talks laid the groundwork for Britain's position in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, whereby Britain would receive control over the Mediterranean ports of Haifa and Acre, along with present-day Jordan and southern Iraq. An area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River was placed under international administration.

Beyond the written agreement, Britain actually captured territory during World War I. Gen. Edmund Allenby led the British Empire's Egyptian Expeditionary Force during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign, capturing Beersheba, Jaffa, and Jerusalem from October to December 1917. He famously refused to enter Jerusalem on horseback, but rather insisted on dismounting and entering the city on foot as a sign of respect.

British support for Zionism had many roots apart from the relationship with Lloyd George or that between Winston Churchill and the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann. Philo-Semitic restoration was championed as early as the 1840s by Lords Shaftesbury and Palmerston, who in addition to having religious motivations thought a Jewish homeland in Palestine would help stabilize and revive the territory. Jewish national stirrings were also voiced by British writers such as Benjamin Disraeli, a convert to Christianity who served as

prime minister, and George Eliot. Moreover, during World War I, Britain thought support for Zionism would be well received by the Wilson administration. Taken together, this led to the Balfour Declaration, named after British foreign minister Arthur Balfour, declaring, “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”

COMPETING NATIONALISTIC DRIVES

The Balfour Declaration set off conflicting nationalist claims by the Zionists and the Arabs living in Palestine. For almost a century, Palestinians would continue to view Sykes-Picot as an imperialist conspiracy to give their land to outsiders. Decades later, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat would invoke Sykes-Picot as legitimizing Zionism, even though the first Zionist Congress, led by Theodor Herzl, had taken place almost two decades earlier and Jews’ historical connection to the land dated back millennia. The Balfour Declaration, which helped fill the vacuum left by the Ottoman Empire’s collapse, forced Palestinians to fundamentally rethink their identity. In this reorientation, Jerusalem became more central in the worldview of Palestinians, who previously had seen themselves as Ottoman subjects who belonged to “Southern Syria” and tended to view Damascus as their political center. Balfour, in this sense, unwittingly reinforced modern Palestinian national identity. Meanwhile, Jews asserted an indigenous connection to the land based on two ancient Jewish commonwealths and the Jewish minority that had resided there for almost two thousand years.

This nationalist competition continued from 1917 to 1947, culminating in the United Nations Partition Plan. The Zionists accepted the proposal, but the Arabs did not, believing the Zionists were illegitimate. As Britain withdrew on May 15, 1948, Israel was attacked by five armies. Within several months, Israel had repelled the attacks and a country was born.

WHY WAS ZIONISM SUCCESSFUL?

Zionism succeeded for many reasons. First, the Zionists cultivated relationships with the Great Powers—namely, Britain during World

War I, thereby facilitating the subsequent British Mandate for Palestine, and the United States during World War II.

Second, the Zionists were keenly aware of the importance of developing institutions. Among these were Hadassah Hospital (1918), the Haganah prestate militia (1920), the Histadrut trade union (1920), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1925), and the protogovernmental Jewish Agency (1929). When Israel was founded in 1948, each Jewish Agency department was simply renamed as a part of the government.

A third factor propelling the Zionists was its leadership, which demonstrated farsighted judgment. Israel's iconic founding leader, David Ben-Gurion, declared at a party conference in February 1937, "The solution is...establishing two states in Eretz Israel [the land of Israel], an Arab and a Jewish state—[p]artitioning Eretz Israel into two portions so that a Jewish state will be established in one part." He added, "If the minimum land necessary for our growth in the near future will be set aside for the Jewish state, then this is the solution." Weizmann also made clear his belief that the competing nationalist movements could only achieve resolution through territorial compromise. Despite opposition from the harder-line Revisionists, led by Zeev Jabontinsky, Ben-Gurion and Weizmann prided themselves on pragmatism when a larger goal was in sight.

In subsequent years, Ben-Gurion would make other difficult decisions that proved prescient. He insisted on transforming the Haganah from an irregular militia to a conventional military when he concluded that the threats to the nascent state would no longer come from irregular forces but rather from Arab armies. He demanded that the country stretch its resources to the absolute limit by embarking on an open Jewish immigration policy from Middle East countries in the late 1940s and early 1950s. To help Israel remain economically afloat, he reached a reparations agreement with Konrad Adenauer's West Germany just years after the Holocaust. There would be stiff domestic opposition to all these decisions, but Ben-Gurion would prevail given his ability to see beyond the politics of the moment.

In contrast, the Palestinians lacked leaders like Ben-Gurion or Weizmann. Their leadership was riven by rivalry between key fami-

lies. The Palestinian population was more rural, and less ready to compromise, driven by the belief that the Zionist enterprise was illegitimate. Ironically, the Arab side was thereby ill positioned to exploit Britain's increasing sympathy over the Mandate years amid the belief that its regional interests required such a shift. In the White Paper of 1939, for example, the British had essentially committed to ending Jewish immigration in five years, knowing full well that immigration was the lifeblood of Zionism and that Jews were fleeing Nazi-infiltrated Europe. The Zionists were deft enough to join the British war effort against the Germans, while Palestinian leader Hajj Amin al-Husseini allied himself with Hitler. When the UN partition vote emerged in 1947, the Palestinians rejected the half-a-loaf approach, whereas the Zionists agreed to it. Israel was thus established by the United Nations.

Some critics suggest that Israel was established by dint of U.S. support in 1948. While the United States recognized Israel within minutes of its founding, Washington actually maintained an embargo on both the Zionist and Palestinian sides. Israel prevailed in the 1948 war because of its leadership and institutions. By contrast, the Palestinians were poorly served by Arab states that pledged to destroy Israel on their behalf but, in fact, were consumed by their own conflicting national interests.

SYKES-PICOT, A CENTURY LATER

Some three-quarters of a century after Sykes-Picot, in 1993, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn, implicitly agreeing to reach a two-state solution as the culmination of the secret Oslo Accords. Establishing two states would not be as easy as the handshake might have suggested. In particular, questions remained over final-status issues: borders, security arrangements, Jerusalem, and the Palestinian refugee issue.

Following the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. Yet by 2000, the Palestinians had launched a second intifada—much more violent than the first, which spanned the late 1980s and early 1990s—imperiling

the Accords. Much blood was spilled on both sides, especially until the intifada ended around 2004. Separately, an internecine struggle between the PA and the militantly inclined Hamas resulted in the latter's Gaza takeover in 2007. Poor relations between the wings persist today. However, Israeli and Palestinian security officials regularly coordinate efforts to prevent West Bank collapse. Even the most right-wing party leader in Israel, Naftali Bennett, has said the PA is on the ground to stay.

None of these dynamics ameliorates the impasse on final-status issues, which the United States made unsuccessful bids to resolve in 2000, 2007–8, and 2013–14. Meanwhile, in 2005, the Israelis unilaterally “disengaged” from Gaza, removing their few settlements from the area under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Land swaps to account for Israeli settlements in the West Bank remain central to all final-status talks.

But geography is stubborn, and neither side can choose its neighbors. As such, one can perceive hope that the issue of borders, the cornerstone of Sykes-Picot, will one day be resolved, even if such a development is difficult to imagine today.

BRIGITTE CURMI

THE ARAB WORLD IN 2016: BRINGING THE STATE BACK IN

A HUNDRED YEARS after the conclusion of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Arab world is passing through a very harsh period. Wherever one turns one's gaze, the landscape is gloomy: armed conflicts and chaos have become commonplace, and internal threats to security have never been so high. In the Middle East, and to a lesser extent in Europe, bloody terrorist operations are rampant, war economies are consolidating, and states are witnessing expanded illicit trafficking of all types. Among the unsettling dynamics for both Europe and the Middle East are foreign fighters moving back and forth and a historic number of refugees flowing into Syria's neighboring countries and Europe.

Further complicating the situation is a history of outside military intervention in the region, such as the Syrians in Lebanon, the Americans in Iraq, the Iranians and Russians in Syria, and the Saudis in Yemen, not to mention ad hoc coalitions for specific purposes.

Many observers consider a number of Middle East states to have already failed. This status, however, does not prevent the regimes still in place from engaging in continuous and violent repression over ever-more-defiant populations. Ticking time bombs dot the region, including Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon; the Kurdish issue, affecting Turkey, Syria, and Iraq; a counterproductive counterrevolution in Egypt; and the still-unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Some experts go beyond claiming the existence of failed states to say that extreme societal fragmentation within the region will soon

drive even deeper regional chaos. Various religious and ethnic groups are often the first victims of targeted violence and crime. Moreover, groups such as the Yazidis are experiencing ethnic cleansing. Between forced displacements and emigration, the entire diverse fabric of the Middle East is being riven apart.

Such populations feel abandoned, without any form of protection from their central states. Therefore, they rely more and more on nonstate actors and militias to protect them. As a result, as during the Lebanese civil war (1975–90), an increasing number of militias are emerging, with almost one (and sometimes more) to match each religious or ethnic group, expressing a range of aspirations, from wanting to take charge of their own security to establishing *de facto* autonomous areas and, in some cases, requesting complete autonomy from the central states.

FACTORS BEYOND SYKES-PICOT

Despite highly publicized claims by the Islamic State to have “erased” the Sykes-Picot borders, the contemporary Arab states cannot actually be considered the results of that century-old agreement. In looking back, one notes that very little of the initial program was actually implemented. Indeed, between 1916 and 1923, a whole set of agreements (and disagreements) played out on where and according to which claims the borders should be established. To name only a few, in addition to Sykes-Picot, one must recall the exchange between Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, and Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner for Egypt, known as the Hussein-McMahon correspondence (1915–16), as well as the Balfour Declaration (1917) and the British-French dispute over Mosul and the destiny of the Sanjak of Alexandretta. In reality, the states as they exist today are the complex reflection of a continuous back-and-forth between colonial decisions and nationalist aspirations throughout the early twentieth century. The modern borders of the Arab world only vaguely resemble the “lines in the sand” traced in 1916 by Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot.

Therefore, referring exclusively to Sykes-Picot to explain the turmoil in today’s Middle East ignores a lengthy succession of interven-

ing events, including wars, the creation of the state of Israel, oil and energy factors, and foreign interventions, not to mention the failure of the autocratic model of governance, the growing unsustainability of rentier economic systems, and the crucial debate about the role of religion in politics.

Nevertheless, if the memory of Sykes-Picot remains quite vivid in the region today, this has much to do with local populations' perceptions of how the agreement was concluded. The deal has provided a convenient reference point for those wishing to demonstrate that the West is always promising much in terms of self-determination but delivering little. Therefore, Sykes-Picot is considered the "original sin" of the West, portrayed as a foreign actor making decisions without consulting the locals and opening a wide channel for so many conspiracy theories in the region.

MOTLEY PROPONENTS, AND OPPONENTS, OF REDRAWN BORDERS

Students of Western history are well aware that a revolution is not made in a day and that it takes many years to transition from dictatorships to democratic societies—a hundred years for France. Nevertheless, nothing scares the international community more than chaos, especially in an interconnected world, and all parties will invariably seek a means to regulate such frightening prospects.

Today, given an increasingly complicated regional reality, interventions come with question marks. In Libya and Yemen, targeted military operations have not yet produced the desired results. Diplomacy has faltered in war-racked Syria as well as in Lebanon, where state institutions have been gutted. Sectarianism has become acute; authoritarianism is progressing. The hopes of the Arab Spring, sparked five years ago, have almost completely vanished, with only one singular exception, Tunisia, itself tenuous and under constant threat from terrorism.

Given this crisis of legitimacy faced by Arab states, some commentators are proposing a remodeling of the so-called Sykes-Picot map as a tool for promoting a better future, considering that some injustices—especially for communities such as the Kurds—must be

repaired. This school of thought considers that something “creative” has to be done to stabilize the region. It argues that the Middle East states are the direct result of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and that today’s chaos is primarily explained by the artificial character of those states, with this artificiality preventing them from properly governing heterogeneous societies. Some proponents of this theory take a further step by suggesting that these states be reshaped as mini-entities or regions, according to ethnic or religious lines, to accommodate forgotten or targeted communities—in other words, a sort of Sykes-Picot II.

Such advocates, it is worth noting, fall all over the spectrum, often viewing each other as adversaries in other realms. For example, in the Middle East, the Islamic State as well as the Kurds and even some Shiites from southern Iraq are contesting the Sykes-Picot formula, without sharing any semblance of a common vision for the future. In the United States, the ideas started to float after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and failed occupation, with the comments of Col. Ralph Peters, the writers Jeffrey Goldberg and Robin Wright, and Joe Biden and analyst Les Gelb coming as soon as 2006. More recently, in Israel, former defense minister Moshe Yaalon was the first to speak openly about a potential partition of Syria.

Likewise, those opposed to calls for such remapping are not necessarily friends. The Saudis as well as the Iranians, not to mention the Syrian regime, are all, for very different reasons, criticizing this discourse and stressing the need to preserve the integrity of states’ borders.

A PANDORA’S BOX?

However intellectually attractive the prospect of redrawing borders to resolve the current predicament may be, it oversimplifies realities on the ground. Indeed, given regional demographic changes, including the exodus of rural inhabitants to major urban centers, one simply cannot break up into viable entities what is so profoundly mixed and interconnected.

To give only a few examples of this human patchwork, intermarriages between Christians and Muslims, Sunni and Shia Muslims,

Druze or Alawites and other sects, even if falling today, remain very common in this region, producing a real population mix. After the flight of large numbers of refugees from all over Syria, Latakia, often considered an Alawite stronghold, is being transformed into a Sunni city; in Lebanon, the so-called Christian areas of Greater Beirut are nowadays filled with Sunnis who fled during the country's 2008 political crisis to protect themselves from Hezbollah military action.

Nor do “united communities” exist in the area, even within a single sect. In fact, aspirations for a “Sunnistan”—except for the Islamic State—are much stronger in the minds of external actors than among the area's Sunnis, themselves very divided, with little in common, for example, between the Sunnis of Anbar and those of Mosul. For their part, the Shiites are mainly split between those favoring and opposing *velayat-e faqih* (rule of the jurispudent), the principle that underlies the Supreme Leader's authority in Iran. More broadly, they are divided according to their views on Iranian interference in the region. The same goes for the project the Kurds are hoping to implement for their future, with big discrepancies among Iraq's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Turkey's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and the Syria-based Democratic Union Party (PYD). Even the romantic vision of a unique, coherent tribal community must be profoundly revisited given the great divide between generations, the split between Shiites and Sunnis within the same tribes, the struggle between pro- or anti-central authorities in Iraq and Syria, and so on.

All in all, despite truth in the claim of artificial borders—a claim that applies to almost every state in the world—the Middle East states have birthed real nations and not, as is sometime argued, “a bunch of tribes that cannot stick together without the presence of a strong (and dictatorial) man in charge.” In fact, nationalist feelings are still deeply rooted within the countries of the region. In Iraq, social science fieldwork shows that a great consensus persists between Shiites and Sunnis on maintaining existing borders. They disagree not on the shape of the country, but on how to share power inside it. Despite repeated statements to this effect, even the KRG leadership has not made any serious move to separate its region from the rest of Iraq. For these leaders, autonomy appears to be one

thing and independence another. The same remark applies to the Syrians: except for the Kurds and some radical jihadist groups, no political faction in Syria today is calling for the dismemberment of the country.

Therefore, remaking the Middle East from the outside would be dangerous for the following reasons:

- ▣ **COMPLEX DEMOGRAPHIC MAKEUP.** No country, including Iraq, could be repartitioned in a way that yields homogeneous population blocs. Any change would instead require population transfers, then irredentism. Here, a Pandora's box would be opened, with unknowable ripple effects.
- ▣ **SOURCE OF JIHADIST PROPAGANDA.** The Islamic State would be emboldened by such a proposal in its plan to restore a caliphate that last nominally existed during Ottoman times. By insisting on a new and Western-driven remapping, such advocates strengthen the Islamic State narrative and the general framework pitting the group against "the Crusaders and the colonialists."
- ▣ **POTENTIAL FOR GREATER DISORDER WITH HIGH HUMAN COSTS.** Such costs could, as noted, include population transfers and ethnic cleansing, with weak entities constantly fighting each other and the strongest trying to swallow the others.

To conclude, a new Sykes-Picot would be a cure worse than the disease. It would be too risky, too costly, and probably unfeasible politically.

ADDRESSING CAUSES, NOT SYMPTOMS

Instead of crafting recipes for more pain, bloodshed, and disaster, officials can likely better address the root causes of the Middle East malaise by probing questions of governance.

Indeed, the region's authoritarian regimes emerged as a result of a succession of false promises, conflicts, and unresolved issues. For their part, these regimes have long justified their legitimacy based on two proclaimed objectives—Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine—although achieving neither.

Under the pretext of related slogans, these regimes for decades simply blocked all forms of dissent and demands, until the uprisings of 2011. During those popular movements, however, one must remember that the people were calling for

changes in regime, not states. They were seeking dignity, sovereignty, liberty—in other words, citizenship too long denied. They were seeking states that actually protected them, in place of the authoritarian regimes that had effectively hijacked the state apparatuses. Therefore, one could argue that the Arab Spring events of 2011 inaugurated a very bloody birth—to last perhaps a decade, perhaps longer—of a new form of governance rather than the “end of states.”

However chaotic or orderly, over decades, the region’s states and their populations have either lacked a sociopolitical contract altogether or seen it completely disrupted. For all the Arab countries, this social contract needs to be reinvented. A look at Iraq’s situation today indicates the scope of the difficulties the central state must confront, including widespread corruption, the presence of the Islamic State and other militias, and the highly disorganized renewal of certain tribal claims. All such developments derive from the state’s failure to fulfill its mission to protect its citizens. In turn, the population falls back on one of two main tendencies: immigration or a return to tribal and sectarian allegiances. Moreover, in the absence of a strong state, various actors are trying to seize as much territory and as many goods as they can. This principle applies to the Kurds, as well as to the Shiites and the Islamic State.

The ideal scenario for the region would be to simply apply the rule of law, allowing for equal citizenship for all and offering the best guarantee for stability, democracy, and equity. But weak state institutions make implementation of such a program impossible in the near term. Considering high tensions, a transitional system must precede fully implemented rule of law. Even given a pie-in-the-sky scenario in which peace comes to the region tomorrow, rule of law would be insufficient during transitional periods and after bloody conflicts to ensure calm in a vastly heterogeneous society, given wounds resulting from this period of extreme polarization.

These wounds, including various communities’ real fear for their survival, require the formation of creative new protective mecha-

nisms. This is, of course, not an easy job and will require much work and time, but it would prevent the West from making the same mistakes it has made in the past by imposing from the outside a disconnected and unrealistic geopolitical solution.

During the authoritarian period, questions about diversity were silenced or severely repressed under the pretext of preserving stability. At the same time, sectarian divides were sometimes cynically instrumentalized by the regimes themselves—including the Assad regime, with its fellow Alawites. Far from the ideal picture projected by some—“We all lived together without any form of discrimination among Sunnis, Shiites, Christians”—showing any sectarian belonging was often forbidden (e.g., Shiites and Kurds in Iraq), or else some communities were simply left out of the national governing agreements (e.g., Shiites in the Lebanese National Pact of 1943). As a result of this repression, these primary identities are now taking center stage in intellectual debates, especially on the Kurdish issue.

All in all, no good model for managing diversity in the Middle East has been found since the end of the Ottoman Empire, when the *milliyet* system offered certain protections for non-Muslims, although not equality by any means, allowing them to function socially and feel secure.

BOTTOM-UP FORMULAS

The current debate on the future of the Middle East is centered mainly on federalism or a deeply decentralized system, although unfortunately the discussion is mostly conducted from outside the Arab world, with inadequate involvement by the people of the region. Despite strong reservations from certain countries, this system may be the only realistic scenario for countries already fragmented into many subregions and controlled by various armed groups. But such an approach also has dangers. Granting autonomy to federal units can quickly lead to full-blown secession, especially in cases like Syria, where the idea of partition is rejected by both the regime and the opposition.

One thing is clear: governance from the top in these heterogeneous societies is no longer working. It can result only in authoritar-

ian states, with a high risk of new and much more violent dissent. In this context, perhaps not enough attention has been given to the creative local governance experiments in a country like Syria since 2011 (e.g., the Local Civil Councils). In other words, the West must let societal reconstruction happen from the bottom and be ready to support such movements, with great patience.

There are no black-and-white templates for such a transformation. Virtually no state today is completely centralized, and one can identify as many forms of decentralization as states. Perhaps the best approach would be to focus on highly concrete issues, rather than general models, which are likely to put off the population. For example: How many levels of government would be required to protect diversity? What should be their respective powers? Where should taxes be collected and distributed? Which branch of government should be in charge of the police, the schools, and the roads? Should all subunits have the same powers?

Whatever particular formula is adopted, the Middle East is changing profoundly and will need time to emerge from its current predicament. The international community will thus need to proffer much strategic patience and perhaps some humility, especially given that the West no longer enjoys a monopoly on involvement in the region. If any new governance formula emerges, it will come from the region and its local actors.

Some issues will need to be dealt with more immediately. The most pressing is to push for reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, given that the intensifying rivalry is fueling sectarian conflict in the region. The role of political Islam will also be at stake: even if subjected to repression or eradication, at whatever levels, Islamism will not disappear from the political scene. The Tunisian model provides perhaps the best means of addressing Islamists, based on appropriating them within the political system. The results have been promising thus far. Last but not least: if unaddressed, the concerns of the region's stateless peoples, including Kurds and Palestinians, will continue to determine the nature of future conflicts.

MARTIN KRAMER

REPAIRING SYKES-PICOT

I would suggest that no second edition of the Sykes-Picot Treaty be produced. The geographical absurdities of the present Agreement will laugh it out of Court, and it would be perhaps as well if we spared ourselves a second effort on the same lines.

—T. E. Lawrence, November 1918¹

“SYKES-PICOT” has become convenient shorthand to describe a century-old order supposedly in its death throes. Indeed, hardly a day passes when some politician, journalist, or academic does not declare “the end of Sykes-Picot” or argue in favor or against “a new Sykes-Picot.” If the Ottoman Empire was “the sick man of Europe” in the fifty years before its collapse, Sykes-Picot is the sick man of the Middle East today.

Both Sir Mark Sykes and Monsieur François Georges-Picot would be astonished to hear this, because their agreement was never implemented. Britain, which bore the brunt of the war to drive the Ottoman armies out of the Arab provinces, decided that the deal gave too much to France. By late 1918, Lord Curzon, a member of the war cabinet, could declare Sykes-Picot “not only obsolete, but absolutely impracticable.”² In subsequent renegotiations, Mosul, which would have been under French protection, became part of British-controlled Iraq. Palestine, most of which would have been “internationalized” as an Anglo-French condominium, came under exclusive British control. The French also balked at the notion that Damascus might become the seat of an independent Arab state in

which they would serve as mere advisors. They fixed that by conquering Damascus in 1920.

So the Sykes-Picot map never became real, and it certainly doesn't resemble the map of today, which dates to the mid-1920s. Elie Kedourie's landmark book, *England and the Middle East* (1956), even has a chapter entitled "The Unmaking of the Sykes-Picot Agreement," which affirms that by 1918, "the Sykes-Picot scheme was dead... There was nothing to replace it."³

If Sykes-Picot died in 1918, why is it thought to live on? Arab nationalists claimed that the deal shortchanged the Arabs on wartime promises and that it wrongly separated Arab from Arab. "Sykes-Picot" became a signifier for the never-ending Western betrayal of the Arabs. Never mind that, as far back as 1919, T. E. Lawrence called Sykes-Picot "the 'charter' of the Arabs, giving them Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, and Mosul for their own."⁴ Sykes-Picot, he wrote in 1929, "was absurd, in its boundaries, but it did recognize the claims of Syrians to self-government, and it was ten thousand times better than the eventual settlement"—the mandates system.⁵ Just as important, Sykes-Picot left no opening to Zionism: Chaim Weizmann called it "devoid of rhyme or reason" and "fatal to us."⁶

Arab resentment thus should have fastened on the deal that superseded Sykes-Picot: the Anglo-French partition agreed upon at San Remo in 1920, which included recognition of Zionist claims. But indignation is more readily stirred by the notion of two lone British and French diplomats deep in the bowels of the Foreign Office, furtively "carving up" the Middle East with crayons, than the more mundane reality of the British and French prime ministers and their delegations publicly doing the carving in a sun-drenched villa on the Italian Riviera. One also cannot discount the effect of the utterly inaccurate presentation of Sykes-Picot in David Lean's Oscar-winning *Lawrence of Arabia*, where it stands for the most shameful deceit. And finally, of course, there is the propaganda of the Islamic State, with the now-famous theatrical twist of blowing up a border post for its video on "The End of Sykes-Picot."

Stepping back from the Arabist rhetoric, Islamist theatrics, and Hollywood distortion, one sees that Sykes-Picot, however modified and misrepresented over the years, still left behind a legacy. It wasn't

the Sykes-Picot *borders* but the Sykes-Picot *order* that survived. Under Ottoman rule, one could travel from Alexandretta on the Mediterranean to Basra by the Persian Gulf without crossing a border—the same distance as Paris to Warsaw. During and after the war, Britain and France occupied this expanse and divided it into new states, in borders drawn to minimize friction between the two rival powers. This left behind four distinct legacies that persist to this day.

1. Sykes-Picot ruled out the reestablishment of Turkish dominion over the area between Mosul and Aleppo—a real possibility once Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal went on the counteroffensive. The population of this area was of mixed origin, and it included important loci of sympathy for Turkey. The British and French kept the Turks out of Mosul and Aleppo, so that modern Turkey's southern border, as finalized at the Lausanne Conference in 1923, roughly followed the northern border of the Arab state under French protection (Area A) sketched on the Sykes-Picot map.
2. Sykes-Picot left out the Kurds. In particular, the agreement included parts of Kurdistan in the projected Arab state or confederation, ensuring eventual Arab control of important oil and water resources. For Kurds, "Sykes-Picot" also connotes imperialist double-dealing, but for a very different reason than it does for Arabs: the order it created gave them no place on the political map and put a portion of them under an Arab thumb.
3. Sykes-Picot laid the foundation for two independent states, Syria and Iraq, thwarting the (Sunni) Arab dream of a unified empire stretching from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Realizing that dream would have been a challenge even without foreign interference. It became impossible once local urban elites in Damascus and Baghdad accustomed themselves to the two states, and even grew envious of their independence from each other.
4. Sykes-Picot proposed the first partition of Palestine, into a French Upper Galilee, a British Haifa Bay, an international

regime in the Jerusalem-Jaffa corridor, and an Arab Negev. Thereafter, some sort of sharing became the most frequently proposed solution to Palestine, and it has remained so. Moreover, Sykes-Picot determined that ever after, the outside powers would demand a say in the future of the Holy Land.

“The end of Sykes-Picot,” much touted by the pundits, would require that these four legacies come undone. Have they?

1. Turkey has not moved to establish its sway across its borders with Syria and Iraq. Despite the much-heralded neo-Ottomanism of the present Turkish government, there is no sign of a Turkish willingness, let alone an eagerness, to reach down and order the affairs of northern Syria and Iraq. To the contrary: just as Turkey once conceded them to France and Britain, it now defers to Russia and the United States.
2. The Kurds, both in Iraq and Syria, have built up autonomous enclaves. Yet the Kurds haven't made a clean break with the regime in either Damascus or Baghdad, and certainly have not put forward clear-cut demands for independence. The Sykes-Picot order may be weakened, but it is still sufficiently robust to deter the Kurds from moving unilaterally to overturn it.
3. Sykes-Picot divided the region into blue and red zones, which became the two distinct states of Syria and Iraq. This division has become so deeply ingrained that even the Arab nationalist Baath Party, when simultaneously in power in Damascus and Baghdad, not only failed to unite the two countries but fostered hostility between them. Saddam Hussein and Hafiz al-Assad effectively completed the work of Sykes and Picot. True, the Islamic State at its height created a *de facto* “Sunistan” spanning the Syria-Iraq border on the Upper Euphrates, but the jihadist group could not overwhelm Damascus or Baghdad, nor could it unify them.
4. While there is much talk about the end of the two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians, no party in Israel favors total annexation of the West Bank. Not only does a soft partition between Israelis and Palestinians exist *de facto*;

partition remains the declaratory aim of the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. Likewise, the United States, the European Union, and Russia, which continue to see themselves as interested parties in any resolution, remain adamantly in favor of partition.

A century later, then, each of the four principal legacies of Sykes-Picot, while undermined, remains intact. If Sykes-Picot so defied demography and geography, as its critics insist, how is it that these legacies have persisted? The answer is that the agreement, although driven by imperial interests of the moment, captured deeper realities that remain salient to this day. The fact is that Turkey does not have the means to sort out the affairs of the Arabs without again becoming a “sick man.” The Kurds are still scattered and landlocked, without a clear path to true independence. The Levant and Mesopotamia are still two distinct regions that cannot be stitched together, except by a foreign empire. And no single party has the legitimacy to decide the fate of the Holy Land on its own.

In sum, Sykes-Picot does live. And so it is T. E. Lawrence’s opinion that begs to be addressed. Granted, the map is full of “absurdities,” but what map would not be? Every so often, a magazine or journal invites experts to propose a new map, along presumably more “natural” lines. The results are riddled with contradictions, and all are unworkable in the absence of a Great Power willing to expend blood and treasure to impose them.

And here lies the crucial difference between 1916 and 2016. A century ago, this part of the Middle East was hugely important to the European powers for maintenance of their far-flung empires. It provided ports, rail connections, and buffer zones that were needed to control the Mediterranean, Suez, and India. It was thought to have oil before anyone knew of the vast reserves in Arabia proper. It really mattered who controlled Mosul—just as eighteen years earlier, it really mattered who controlled Fashoda.

But those days are long gone. Yes, in 2016 there are still Western interests—in particular, the fear that chaos there could become a source of chaos here, through the spillover of terrorism and refugees. But why go to the trouble and expense of a “new Sykes-Picot” when some renovation work on the old one might suffice?

One idea would be the promotion of strongmen who could enforce the borders as they now exist. But we now know that this sometimes creates more problems than it solves—first, because it produces horrific violence within those borders, and second, because strongmen have a tendency to push too far (see under: Hafiz al-Assad occupies Lebanon and Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait). A second idea would be to license regional powers to create order. This is the Sunni option, and it has the merit of building on the stability of Saudi Arabia and Turkey, two of the most successful cases of state building in the region. But Saudi Arabia foments Sunni-Shiite strife and Turkey provokes Kurdish resistance. The order they foster would be tenuous at its edges.

A third idea was floated by Henry Kissinger in 2013: “An outcome in which the various nationalities agree to coexist together, but in more or less autonomous regions so that they cannot oppress each other... [is] the outcome I would prefer to see.” To which he quickly added: “But that’s not the popular view.”⁷ It has become rather more popular over time, although no one knows how this agreement to coexist might be reached. Such a hybrid (dis)order of states, rump states, autonomous zones, and nonstate actors might be volatile in some places (e.g., northern Syria and western Iraq) but stable in others (e.g., the West Bank and Iraqi Kurdistan).

Some combination of the second and third scenarios might have the most potential to evolve toward a new equilibrium. What can be done to advance this? The Sykes-Picot order was always high maintenance, relying largely on two kinds of dictatorship in succession: colonial and indigenous. No one wants to return to that. But a beaten-down Sykes-Picot order is still better than the alternatives. If it is to be given another lease, an enlightened outside power, leading an alliance, will need to put a finger—and occasionally a fist—on the scale in favor of local actors who meet an agreed standard of constructive moderation.

Is the United States that power? If not, there is no small chance that a future historian might write about 2016: “The Sykes-Picot scheme was dead.... There was nothing to replace it.”

NOTES

1. T. E. Lawrence, "The Reconstruction of Arabia," report to the British cabinet, November 4, 1918, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, ed. David Garnett (New York: Doubleday, 1939), p. 269.
2. Quoted by Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia: The Authorized Biography of T. E. Lawrence* (New York: Atheneum, 1990), 591.
3. Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1956), p. 141.
4. T. E. Lawrence, "To the Editor of The Times," September 11, 1919, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, 282.
5. T. E. Lawrence to William Yale, October 22, 1929, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, p. 670.
6. Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 191.
7. "@fordschool—Henry Kissinger and Paul O'Neill: Policy Reflections," YouTube video, 1:04:21, posted by "Ford School," University of Michigan, June 19, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVasCE1uOf4>.

CONTRIBUTORS

FABRICE BALANCHE, a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute, is an associate professor and research director at Université Lyon 2 and director of the Research Group on the Mediterranean and the Middle East (GREMMO).

SONER CAGAPTAY is the Beyer Family Fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute.

BRIGITTE CURMI, France's ambassador to Libya, was previously a member of the Policy Planning staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs., Paris.

MICHAEL KNIGHTS is a Lafer Fellow at The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf states.

MARTIN KRAMER was the first president of Shalem College, Jerusalem, where he continues as chair of the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Department.

DAVID MAKOVSKY is the Ziegler Distinguished Fellow and director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at The Washington Institute.

SAM MENASSA is the general director, Radio Voice of Lebanon—VDL, with extensive experience in media outlets throughout the Arab world.

GHAITH AL-OMARI, a senior fellow at The Washington Institute, is the former executive director of the American Task Force on Palestine.

DAVID POLLOCK, Kaufman Fellow at The Washington Institute, is the director of Project Fikra, designed to promote positive change and counter extremism in the Middle East.

DAVID SCHENKER is the Aufzien Fellow and director of the Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute.

ANDREW J. TABLER is the Martin J. Gross Fellow at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on Syria and U.S. policy in the Levant.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairman

Martin J. Gross

President

Shelly Kassen

Chairman Emeritus

Howard P. Berkowitz

Founding President, Chairman Emerita

Barbi Weinberg

Senior Vice Presidents

Bernard Leventhal

Peter Lowy

James Schreiber

Vice Presidents

Benjamin Breslauer

Walter P. Stern

Vice President Emeritus

Charles Adler

Secretary

Richard Borow

Treasurer

Susan Wagner

Board Members

Jay Bernstein

Anthony Beyer

Robert Fromer

Michael Gelman

Roger Hertog, emeritus

Barbara Kay

Bruce Lane

Moses Libitzky

Daniel Mintz

Lief Rosenblatt

Zachary Schreiber

Fred Schwartz

John Shapiro

Merryl Tisch

Diane Troderman

Gary Wexler

In Memoriam

Richard S. Abramson, president

Fred S. Lafer, chairman emeritus

Michael Stein, chairman emeritus

BOARD OF ADVISORS

Gen. John R. Allen, USMC

Birch Evans Bayh III

Howard L. Berman

Eliot Cohen

Henry A. Kissinger

Joseph Lieberman

Edward Luttwak

Michael Mandelbaum

Robert C. McFarlane

Martin Peretz

Richard Perle

Condoleezza Rice

James G. Roche

George P. Shultz

R. James Woolsey

Mortimer Zuckerman

EXECUTIVE STAFF

Executive Director

Robert Satloff

Managing Director

Michael Singh

Counselor

Dennis Ross

Director of Research

Patrick Clawson

Director of Publications

Mary Kalbach Horan

Director of Communications

Jeff Rubin

Director of Development

Dan Heckelman

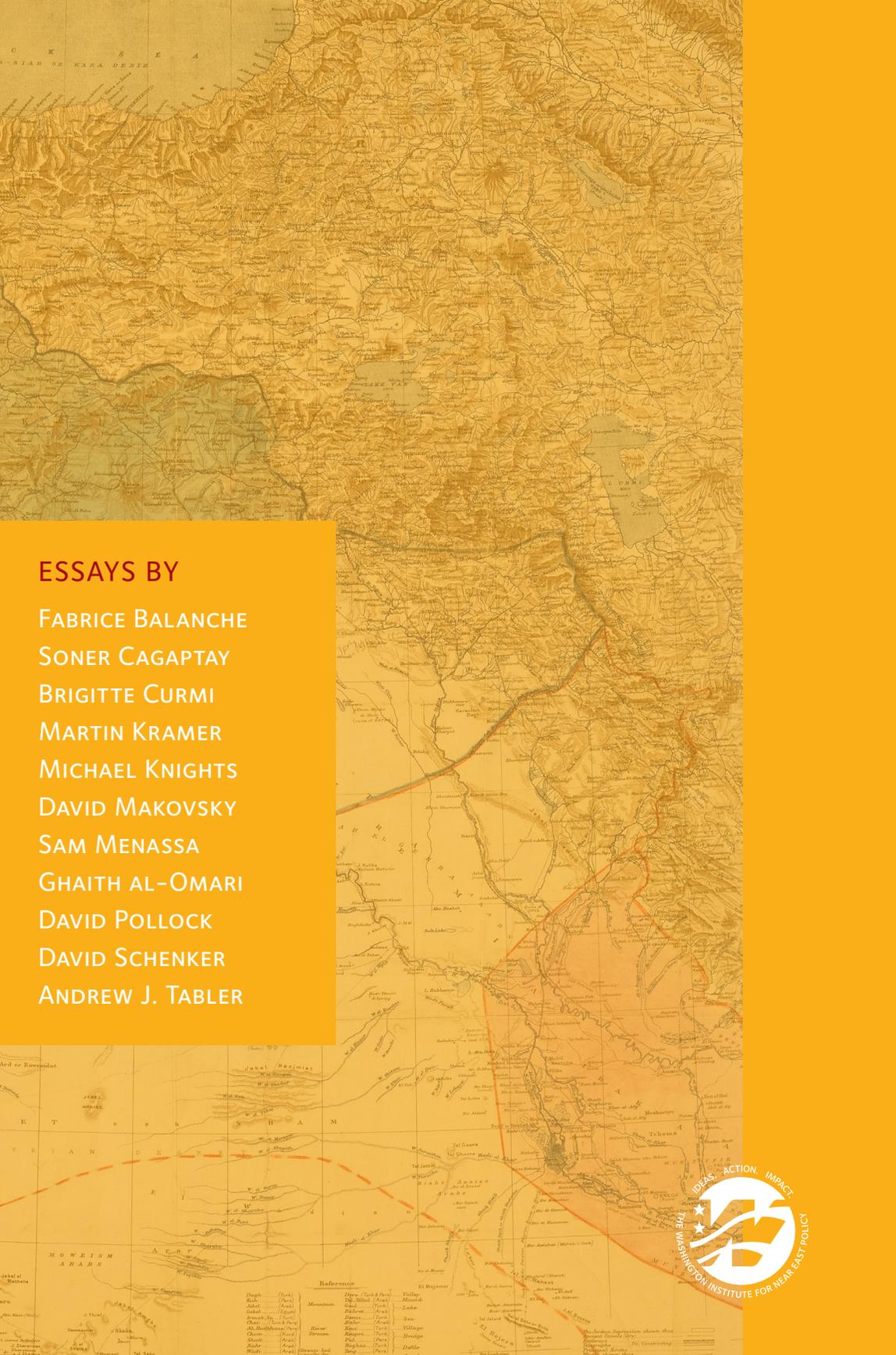
Chief Financial Officer

Laura Hannah

Operations Manager

Rebecca Erdman





ESSAYS BY

FABRICE BALANCHE

SONER CAGAPTAY

BRIGITTE CURMI

MARTIN KRAMER

MICHAEL KNIGHTS

DAVID MAKOVSKY

SAM MENASSA

GHAITH AL-OMARI

DAVID POLLOCK

DAVID SCHENKER

ANDREW J. TABLER

