

Conflicting Promises

Directions: Examine and annotate the documents and answer the questions.

Hussein-McMahon Correspondence

The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence was an exchange of letters (14 July 1915 to 30 January 1916) during World War I, between the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali, and Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, concerning the political status of lands under the Ottoman Empire. Growing Arab nationalism had led to a desire for independence from the Ottoman Empire. In the letters Britain agreed to recognize Arab independence after WWI "in the limits and boundaries proposed by the Sherif of Mecca", not including areas in which France had interests. This was in exchange for Arab help in fighting the Ottomans, led by Hussein bin Ali.

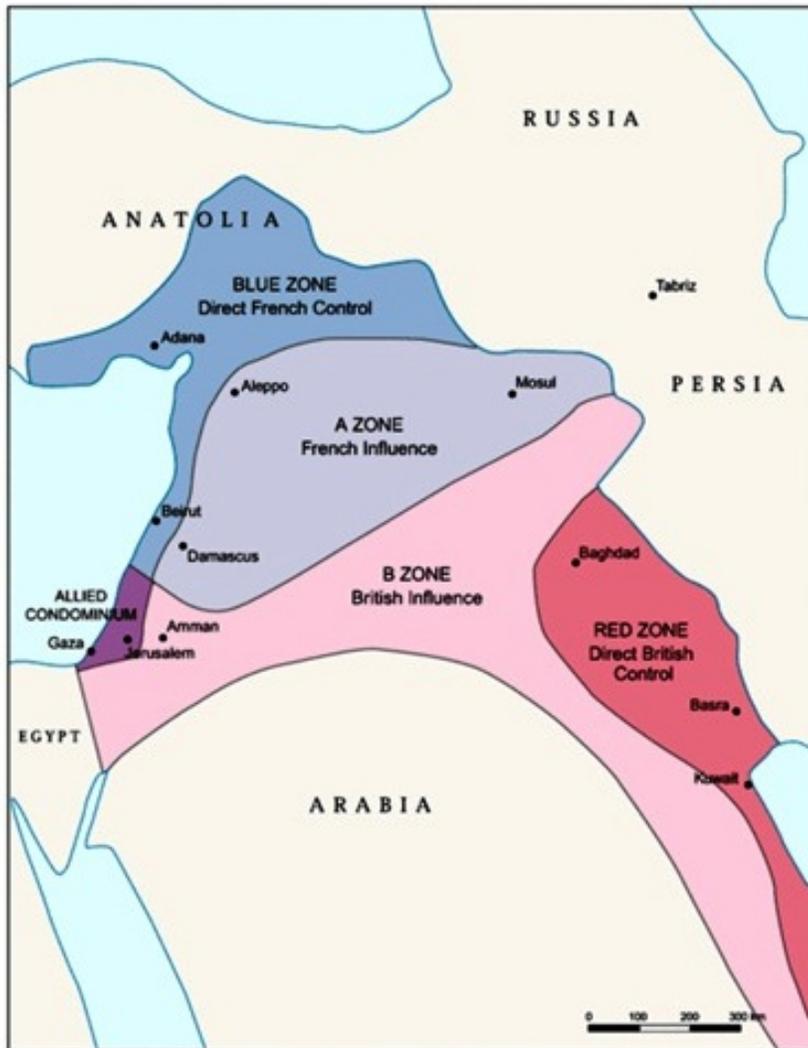
I have received your letter... with much pleasure and your expression of friendliness and sincerity have given me the greatest satisfaction. I have [informed] the Government of Great Britain of the contents of your letter, and it is with great pleasure that I communicate to you on their behalf the following statement, which I am confident you will receive with satisfaction. The two districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo cannot be said to be purely Arab, and should be excluded from the [territorial] limits demanded. With the above modification, and without prejudice to our existing treaties with Arab chiefs, we accept those limits. As for those regions lying within those frontiers wherein Great Britain is free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally, France, I am empowered in the name of the Government of Great Britain to give the following assurances...: Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sharif of Mecca. Great Britain will guarantee the Holy Places against all external aggression and will recognise their inviolability. When the situation admits, Great Britain will give to the Arabs her advice and will assist them to establish what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government those various territories. On the other hand, it is understood that the Arabs have decided to seek the advice and guidance of Great Britain only, and that such European advisers and officials as may be required for the formation of a sound form of administration will be British. With regard to the vilayets of Bagdad and Basra, the Arabs will recognise that the established position and interests of Great Britain necessitate special administrative arrangements in order to secure these territories from foreign aggression to promote the welfare of the local populations and to safeguard our mutual economic interests.

I am convinced that this declaration will assure you beyond all possible doubt of the sympathy of Great Britain towards the aspirations of her friends the Arabs and will result in a firm and lasting alliance, the immediate results of which will be the expulsion of the Turks from the Arab countries and the freeing of the Arab peoples from the Turkish yoke, which for so many years has pressed heavily upon them.

Source: Letter from Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, to Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, 1915

1. What did the British promise to the Arabs?

Sykes-Picot Agreement



The Sykes-Picot Agreement was a secret agreement between the governments of the United Kingdom and France, with the approval of Russia, dividing and defining their proposed spheres of influence and control in the Middle East should the Triple Entente (Allied Powers) succeed in defeating the Ottoman Empire during World War I. The terms were negotiated by the French diplomat François Georges-Picot and Briton Sir Mark Sykes. The negotiation of the treaty occurred between November 1915 and March 1916, and agreement was concluded on 16 May 1916. It effectively divided the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire outside the Arabian peninsula into areas of future British and French control or influence.

Britain was allocated control of areas roughly comprising the coastal strip between the sea and River Jordan, Jordan, southern Iraq, and a small area including the ports of Haifa and Acre, to allow access to the Mediterranean. France was

allocated control of south-eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Russia was to get Istanbul, the Turkish Straits and the Ottoman Armenian vilayets. An "international administration" was proposed for Palestine.

The Russian Tsarist government had been a minor party to the Sykes-Picot agreement, so when, following the Russian Revolution of October 1917, the Bolsheviks exposed the agreement, the British were embarrassed, the Arabs dismayed and the Turks delighted.

2. Based on the terms of Sykes-Picot, what areas of the Middle East would be under British control or influence? Which would be under French control or influence?
3. Do you think this agreement conflicted with the prior agreements between Britain and the Sharif of Mecca?

Balfour Declaration



On November 2, 1917, Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour wrote a letter to Britain's most illustrious Jewish citizen, Baron Lionel Walter Rothschild, expressing the British government's

support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Britain's public acknowledgement and support of the Zionist movement emerged from its growing concern surrounding the direction of the First World War, as it was still unclear who would win. Against this backdrop, the British government made the decision to publicly support Zionism. Aside from a genuine belief in the righteousness of the Zionist cause, Britain's leaders hoped that a formal declaration in favor of Zionism would help gain Jewish support for the Allies in neutral countries, in the United States and especially in Russia, where the czarist government had just been overthrown with the help of Russia's significant Jewish population. Finally, despite Britain's earlier agreement with France dividing influence in the region, Prime Minister Lloyd George had come to see British dominance in Palestine—a land bridge between the India and Egypt—as an essential post-war goal. The establishment of a Zionist state there—under British protection—would allow them to maintain control, while seemingly following the stated Allied aim of self-determination for smaller nations.

Source: "This Day in History: The Balfour Declaration," History.com

4. Why did the British support the Zionist goal of a homeland in Palestine?

5. How did the Balfour Declaration conflict with earlier promises?

Foreign Office,

November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "A. J. Balfour". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'B'.