

SYKES–PICOT AGREEMENT

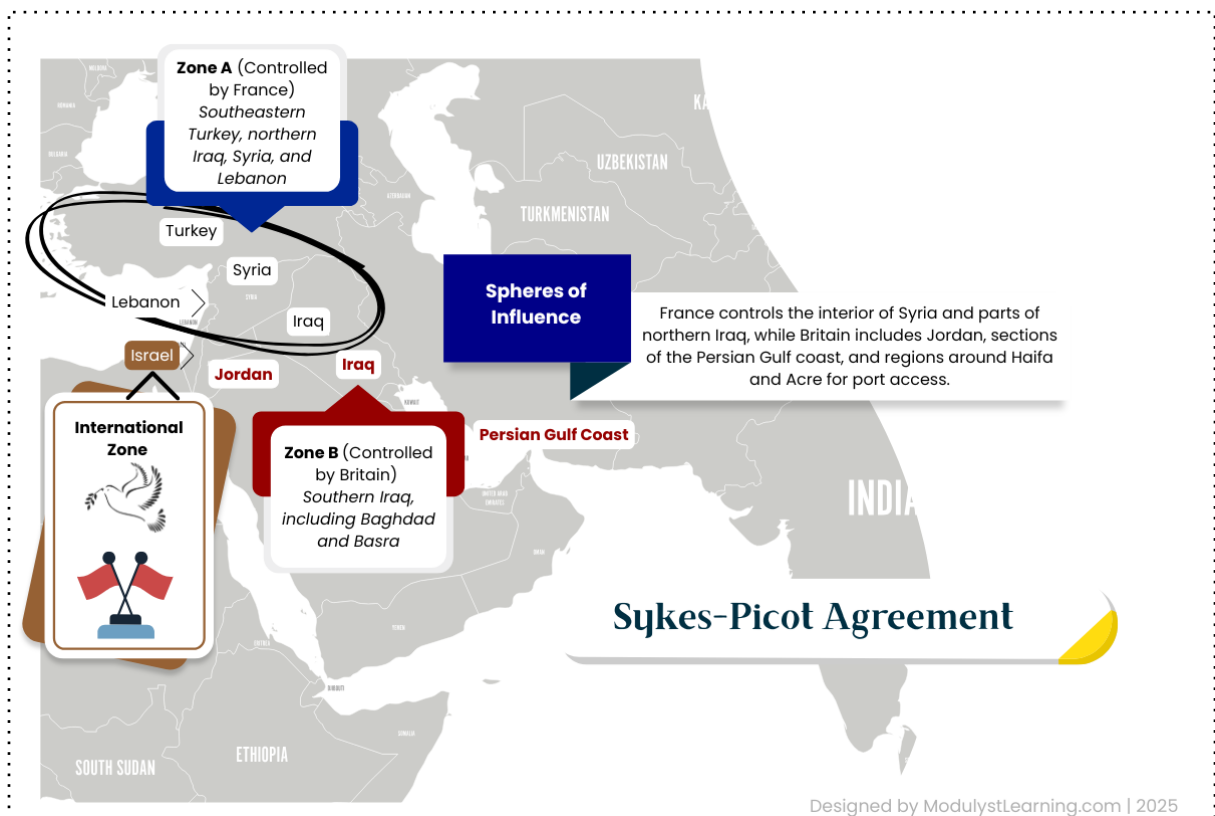
1. The Sykes–Picot Agreement, signed in 1916, was a secret diplomatic treaty between Britain and France, with the consent of Russia, during World War I. It aimed to divide the Ottoman Empire's Middle Eastern territories into zones of influence, anticipating the Ottoman Empire's likely defeat.
2. The Sykes–Picot Agreement was signed on May 16, 1916, involving Britain and France, with the assent of Russia. Sir Mark Sykes represented Britain, while François Georges Picot represented France. Occurring during World War I amid the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, its primary goal was the division of Ottoman-controlled Arab territories.
3. During World War I (1914–1918), the Allied Powers—Britain, France, and Russia—fought against the Central Powers, which included the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans held much of the Middle East, and the Allies expected them to be defeated. Britain and France, colonial powers with strategic and economic interests—particularly oil—in the region, sought to establish their spheres of influence in advance. Simultaneously, Britain encouraged Arab revolts against the Ottomans by promising independence, as exemplified in the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence, which conflicted with the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement.
4. Key Provisions of The Agreement –

Direct Control Zones

- France (Zone A) encompasses southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.
- Britain (Zone B) covers Southern Iraq, including Baghdad and Basra.

Spheres of Influence

- France controls the interior of Syria and parts of northern Iraq, while Britain includes Jordan, sections of the Persian Gulf coast, and regions around Haifa and Acre for port access.
- The International Administration (Brown Zone), which includes Palestine, was intended to be governed internationally due to its religious significance, though the specific arrangements were not explicitly defined.



5. Other essential factors include recognising that Russia was notified and consented to the deal, anticipating control of Istanbul and the Turkish Straits. This conflicted with the Hussein–McMahon Correspondence of 1915–1916, in which Britain pledged Arab independence in exchange for revolting against the Ottoman Empire. It also clashed with later Zionist commitments, such as

the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which endorsed the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

6. In 1917, the Bolsheviks revealed and published the agreement following the Russian Revolution. The Arab world felt betrayed, realising they would not achieve independence. Furthermore, the agreement undermined British credibility with Arab allies such as Sherif Hussein of Mecca.
7. The Sykes-Picot borders created artificial divisions that overlooked ethnic, tribal, religious, and historical considerations. This led to the establishment of arbitrary borders in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. The growth of Arab nationalism also fueled anti-imperialist sentiments, with many Arabs viewing the agreement as a Western betrayal. Moreover, these borders laid the groundwork for ongoing instability, civil wars, and sectarian conflicts throughout the Middle East. In 2014, ISIS explicitly announced the end of the "Sykes-Picot borders."
8. Critical Analysis includes –
 - It includes an ethical dimension, which is an assessment of a secret imperialist carve-up, ignoring local wishes
 - It consists of a geopolitical dimension, which is a precedent for Western interference in the Middle East
 - It consists of the Strategic dimension, which includes Britain and France, ensuring long-term influence and control of oil regimes
 - It consists of the diplomatic dimension, which involves contradictory promises made to Arabs, Jews, and Allies.
9. Related agreements and events

The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence of 1915–16 promised the Arabs independence.

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 pledged to establish a Jewish homeland in the land of Palestine.

Treaty of Sèvres, 1920 – It formalised the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

Mandate System – The League of Nations formally authorizes the control of British and French forces over the mandated territories.

10. The Sykes-Picot Agreement represented ambitions that reshaped the Middle East map without input from local communities. Its legacy of artificial borders and broken promises still haunts the region's politics today.

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