

Sykes-Picot Agreement

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was a secret treaty drawn up in 1916 between Great Britain and France. Named after Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot, the primary negotiators, the treaty divided up Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire into British and French zones of control following the end of World War I.

The Sykes-Picot agreement would cause ramifications in Middle-Eastern politics for years to come and is still a cause of conflict in the present day.

This article will give details about the Sykes-Picot agreement within the context of the IAS Exam.

Background of the Sykes-Picot Agreement

When World War I broke out in 1914, the Russian, French and British Empires held discussions among themselves on how the erstwhile territories of their enemies would be divided among them. Parallel to this, the British also entered into agreements between Arab nationalists, promising that should a revolt against the Ottoman Empire be carried, independence would be granted in return. Such agreements would be ignored as events unfolded.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was based on the assumption that the Allies would defeat the Ottoman Empire. The primary negotiations leading to the agreement occurred between 23 November 1915 and 3 January 1916 on which British diplomat Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot drew up a memorandum. The agreement was ratified by their respective governments on 9 and 16 May 1916.

The Sykes-Picot agreement in practice divided the Ottoman provinces outside the Arabian Peninsula into areas of British and French influence. The United Kingdom was allocated modern-day southern Israel, Jordan, southern Iraq and port areas of Haifa and Acre. France was handed control of southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Sykes-Picot Agreement post-World War I

The agreement formed the basic framework of the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration in the Levant. Indirectly it led the subsequent partitioning of the Ottoman Empire upon its defeat in 1918. When the war ended French ceded Mosul to the British. Mandates in the Levant and Mesopotamia were assigned in April 1920. The British Mandate for Palestine was to last until 1948 and the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon was to last until 1946. The Anatolian parts of the agreement were assigned by the August 1920 Treaty of Sèvres; however, these ambitions were thwarted by the 1919–23 Turkish War of Independence and the subsequent Treaty of Lausanne.

Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, any claims by Soviet Russia were denied by the other Allies. Whether it was for payback or a genuine stance against secret treaties, the Communist leaders released a copy of the Sykes-Picot agreement in their state newspaper the *Pravda*. This was picked up by other western newspapers such as the 'The Guardian'. The details of the agreement was a cause of much embarrassment to the Allies while the Arabs were outraged and dismayed at the fact that all the sacrifices they made were fruitless.

Consequences of the Sykes-Picot Agreement

The agreement is seen by many as a turning point in Western and Arab relations. It negated the UK's promises to Arabs regarding a national Arab homeland in the area of Greater Syria in exchange for supporting the British against the Ottoman Empire.

It gave way to a legacy of resentment in the region not only among the Arabs but also among the Kurds who were denied a homeland of their own

It is largely believed that the Sykes-Picot agreement ended up creating 'artificial' borders in the Middle-East with little regard for ethnic or sectarian characteristics. It created a recipe for endless conflict when hostile groups were put in the same region together. Yet there is still dispute to what extent did Sykes-Picot actually shaped the modern borders of the Middle-East

To this day the Sykes-Picot agreement continues to be a sour point following the decolonisation of the Middle-East.