

FRENCH-BRITISH INFLUENCE AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS: UNRAVELING THE ORIGINS OF CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A influência franco-britânica e suas ramificações: desvendando as origens do conflito no Oriente Médio

La influencia franco-británica y sus ramificaciones: desentrañar los orígenes del conflicto en Oriente Medio



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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the influence of French-British imperial interventions on the geopolitical configuration of the Middle East and the origins of its contemporary conflicts. Based on a theoretical framework that articulates geopolitics and post-colonial studies, this study employs a historical analysis methodology, grounded in a bibliographic review, to investigate pivotal events such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which delineated arbitrary borders, and the Balfour Declaration, which promised a "national home for the Jewish people." As its main results, the analysis demonstrates that these interventions not only divided communities while disregarding their cultural identities, but also left a legacy of instability, ethnic conflicts, and regional rivalries. The occupations in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, for example, are identified as factors that contributed to the formation of challenging political dynamics. It is concluded that the legacy of these historical actions directly resonates with the region's current challenges and that an in-depth knowledge of these roots is fundamental to informing effective conflict resolution strategies, promoting a more collaborative vision for a future of coexistence and peace.

Keywords: Imperial interventions; Middle East; Conflicts; Sykes-Picot Agreement; Balfour Declaration.

Article History

Received: 18 May, 2025

Accepted: 26 September, 2025

Published: 26 October, 2025

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar a influência das intervenções imperiais franco-britânicas na configuração geopolítica do Oriente Médio e nas origens de seus conflitos contemporâneos. Apoiando-se em um referencial teórico que articula a geopolítica e os estudos pós-coloniais, a pesquisa utiliza uma metodologia de análise histórica, fundamentada em revisão bibliográfica, para investigar marcos decisivos como o Acordo Sykes-Picot, que delineou fronteiras arbitrárias, e a Declaração de Balfour, que prometeu um “lar nacional para o povo judeu”. Como principais resultados, a análise demonstra que essas intervenções não apenas dividiram comunidades, ignorando suas identidades culturais, mas também deixaram um legado de instabilidade, conflitos étnicos e rivalidades regionais. As ocupações no Iraque, Síria e Líbano, por exemplo, são apontadas como fatores que contribuíram para a formação de dinâmicas políticas desafiadoras. Conclui-se que o legado dessas ações históricas ressoa diretamente nos desafios atuais da região e que o conhecimento aprofundado dessas raízes é fundamental para informar estratégias eficazes de resolução de conflitos, promovendo uma visão mais colaborativa para um futuro de coexistência e paz.

Palavras-chave: Intervenções imperiais; Oriente Médio; Conflitos; Acordo Sykes-Picot; Declaração de Balfour.

RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la influencia de las intervenciones imperiales franco-británicas en la configuración geopolítica de Oriente Medio y en los orígenes de sus conflictos contemporáneos. Apoyándose en un marco teórico que articula la geopolítica y los estudios poscoloniales, la investigación utiliza una metodología de análisis histórico, fundamentada en una revisión bibliográfica, para investigar hitos decisivos como el Acuerdo Sykes-Picot, que delineó fronteras arbitrarias, y la Declaración Balfour, que prometió un «hogar nacional para el pueblo judío». Como principales resultados, el análisis demuestra que estas intervenciones no solo dividieron a las comunidades, ignorando sus identidades culturales, sino que también dejaron un legado de inestabilidad, conflictos étnicos y rivalidades regionales. Las ocupaciones en Irak, Siria y Líbano, por ejemplo, se señalan como factores que contribuyeron a la formación de dinámicas políticas desafiantes. Se concluye que el legado de estas acciones históricas resuena directamente en los desafíos actuales de la región y que el conocimiento profundo de estas raíces es fundamental para informar estrategias eficaces de resolución de conflictos, promoviendo una visión más colaborativa para un futuro de coexistencia y paz.

Palabras clave: Intervenciones imperiales; Oriente Medio; Conflictos; Acuerdo Sykes-Picot; Declaración de Paz.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the period post-World War I, geopolitical changes and the collapse of traditional empires paved the way for a significant redrawing of the global map. Among the European powers that performed crucial roles in this process were France and the United Kingdom, whose influence extended significantly over the Middle East, in the wake of geopolitical perspectives of the period as the central pivot area on the European continent. This tumultuous historical scenario forged decisions that ultimately contributed to the complexity and tensions that characterize the current conflict in the region.



France and the United Kingdom, as victors of the Great War, assumed dominant positions in the reconfiguration of the Middle East. Their strategic decisions not only shaped geographical boundaries but also laid the foundations for political, ethnic, and territorial disputes that continue to this day. The impact of these powers' intervention reverberates in the complex dynamics we witness in the region, from territorial conflicts to sectarian tensions.

The purpose of this article is to unveil the intricate relationships between France, the United Kingdom, and the geopolitical fabric of the contemporary Middle East. By examining the decisions made in the aftermath of World War I, we seek to understand how the geopolitical and strategic choices of these powers contributed to the instability that characterizes the region today. We will explore the nuances of agreements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, which delineated borders and established commitments, but which, in turn, sowed the seeds of persistent disputes and challenges. To achieve the proposed objectives, this article employs a qualitative approach based on the historical-analytical method. The research was developed through a bibliographic review of academic and specialized sources on geopolitics and the history of the Middle East. This methodology allows for an in-depth analysis of key events, such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, and the interpretation of their long-term ramifications, connecting the actions of European powers to the contemporary conflicts that mark the region.

Ultimately, this historical examination aims to shed light on the intricate web of events that shaped the modern Middle East, offering critical perspectives for understanding the current context and potentially contributing to a more informed dialogue on solutions and approaches for the region.

The reorganization of the Middle East after World War I was marked by a series of agreements and treaties, each leaving an indelible mark on the region. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, forged in European negotiating rooms, delineated borders that often ignored local ethnic, cultural, and religious considerations. This arbitrary division, far from reflecting the realities of the region, fueled resentments and rivalries that persist to this day.

Meanwhile, the Balfour Declaration introduced an additional dimension to the equation by promising the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. This promise, while intended to gain Zionist support and garner international favor, created deep friction with the Arab communities already established in the region. The

Palestinian question, rooted in the Balfour Declaration, became a central point of tension, triggering conflicts that extend from the British Mandate to the present day.

The imperialist occupations of France and the United Kingdom, while seeking to consolidate their spheres of influence, directly shaped the course of events in the Middle East. The exploitation of resources, the imposition of pro-Western governments, and the manipulation of borders contributed to the political instability that characterized many countries in the region throughout the 20th century. Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, for example, found themselves mired in internal conflict and governmental instability, largely due to the legacy of colonial occupations.

As we explore these historical episodes, it becomes clear that the current configuration of the Middle East is intrinsically linked to past interventions by European powers. The choices made by France and the United Kingdom, although driven by strategic interests at the time, have had complex and often destructive repercussions on the lives of people in the region. Recognizing the connection between the colonial past and current challenges is imperative for a holistic and informed approach to the dynamics of the Middle East. This historical reflection is essential to move toward a deeper understanding and, perhaps, more just and sustainable solutions for the region.

2 BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

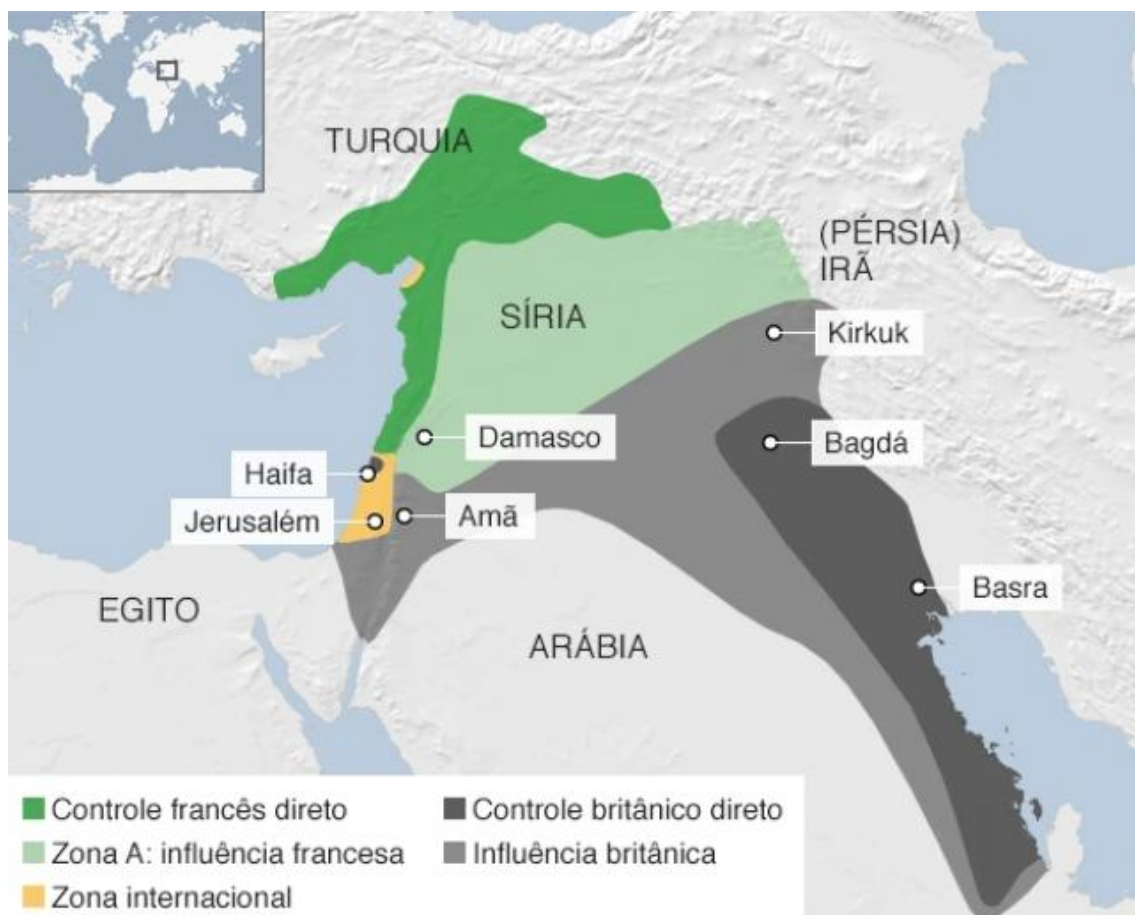
The post-World War I period witnessed an exhausted and transforming Europe, where the victorious powers sought to redefine borders and consolidate their global influence. “The disintegration of the central empires and the rise of nationalist movements created a scenario conducive to geopolitical reconfiguration” (Fromkin, 2008, p. 40, our translation). In the specific context of the Middle East, the motivations of the European powers, notably France and the United Kingdom, were driven by a combination of strategic, geopolitical, and economic interests.

The quest for strategic influence in the Middle East was intrinsically linked to trade routes, control of natural resources, and the consolidation of advantageous geopolitical positions. The Suez Canal, for example, was a vital artery for world trade and a strategic connection between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The European powers saw control of this passage as a crucial advantage in ensuring rapid access to their colonies in Asia and Africa, as well as protecting their trade routes (Rogan, 2021, p. 321, our translation).



The Sykes-Picot Agreement, signed in secret in 1916 between Sir Mark Sykes, representing the United Kingdom, and François Georges-Picot, representing France, encapsulated the ambitions of these powers in the Middle East. This agreement was designed to establish clear spheres of influence and define areas of joint control. The proposed division of the Middle East between the French and British, despite being a response to local dynamics and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, ignored the aspirations and cultural identities of communities in the region. According to Al-Marashi (2021, p. 11), “The Sykes-Picot Agreement, therefore, not only represented a geopolitical division, but also an arbitrary imposition of borders that would have lasting implications for ethnic and political dynamics in the Middle East.” The map below illustrates the regions and countries involved in the Sykes-Picot Agreement:

Map 01 – Regions and countries of the Sykes-Picot Agreement



Source: BBC (2016)

Exploring these historical motivations reveals not only the complexity of post-World War I international relations, but also the seeds of enduring tensions in the region. Thus,

“the European powers, while acting in pursuit of their own interests, shaped the destiny of the Middle East in ways that continue to resonate in the conflicts and challenges facing the region today” (Fisk, 2007, p. 142, our translation). This historical context is essential to understanding the origins of current conflicts and seeking paths to a more just and sustainable resolution.

The implementation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement triggered a series of challenges and contradictions in the Middle East. The artificial borders established not only ignored local ethnic and religious diversities, but also fueled sectarian rivalries by dividing historically interconnected communities. The imposition of these arbitrary borders created often heterogeneous states, where diverse ethnic and religious groups were forced to coexist under centralized governments. This intricate dynamic sowed the seeds of internal conflicts that echo through time (Demant, 2015, p. 52, our translation).

The Balfour Declaration, made in 1917, brought another dimension to the equation, specifically by addressing the issue of Palestine. The British commitment to create a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine immediately generated tensions with the local Arab population. In this sense, “[...] the clash between the promise made to the Zionists and the aspirations of the Arabs, who hoped for autonomy and self-determination, added an additional layer of complexity to the region” (Elias, 2011, p. 231, our translation).

The imperialist occupations of France and the United Kingdom further exacerbated tensions. The exploitation of resources, interventions in local political structures, and support for regimes favorable to European interests created a legacy of mistrust and political instability. The impact of these occupations reverberates in the contemporary crises we see in countries such as Iraq and Syria, where sectarian divisions are exacerbated by histories of external intervention (Hourani, 2016, p. 198, our translation).

When examining these intertwined historical events, it becomes evident that European powers not only shaped borders but also profoundly influenced the social and political structures of the region. During this same period, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, different theories of dominance and geopolitical projection were developed by European powers and the United States, whether by land Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947) and his pivot-center area, a major focus of influence with geopolitical thinking during the two great European wars, or by sea, as proposed by Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) (Myamoto, 1981).

The Middle East today bears witness to the constant challenge of reconciling diverse identities in artificially conceived states (Said, 2016). Understanding this historical

background is crucial to any approach aimed at addressing the complex problems of the Middle East, providing a more informed basis for lasting and just solutions.

3 THE SYKES-PICOT AGREEMENT

The Sykes-Picot Agreement, conceived in 1916, reflects the confluence of British and French interests in the reconfiguration of the Middle East after World War I. The agreement, secretly negotiated by Sir Mark Sykes, representing the United Kingdom, and François Georges-Picot, representing France, outlined the spheres of influence of these powers in a region marked by centuries of history, culture, and ethnic diversity.

The provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement were fundamental to the definition of borders in the Middle East. The region was divided into zones of French and British control, reflecting a colonialist understanding that gave little consideration to local cultural and ethnic nuances. France was given control over parts of what are now Syria and Lebanon, while the United Kingdom was given control over parts of Palestine and Iraq. In addition, some areas were designated as international or under Russian influence (Visentini, 2014, p. 98, our translation).

One of the main issues with the Sykes-Picot Agreement is that it didn't really match up with the promises made in the Balfour Declaration. While the Sykes-Picot Agreement sought to establish zones of foreign influence in the Middle East, the Balfour Declaration, issued by the British government in 1917, promised the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine.

This divergence of commitments created intrinsic tensions between European agendas in the region, “[...] the promise made in the Balfour Declaration was in direct disagreement with the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which outlined zones of French control in the same region” (Lewis, 2004, p. 76, our translation). This contradiction laid the groundwork for future conflicts, fueling disagreements between Arab, Jewish, and European communities in Palestine, as well as generating resentment among Europeans themselves, with the French and British seeking to advance in directions that often conflicted.

These contradictions between the agreements established during World War I played a crucial role in shaping the political and ethnic landscape of the modern Middle East, perpetuating challenges that persist to this day. Critical analysis of these historical documents is essential to understanding the origins of conflicts and tensions in the region and to forging more equitable approaches in the search for sustainable solutions (Becker, 2010, p. 56, our translation).

The impact of the Sykes-Picot Agreement on the demarcation of borders in the Middle East was profound and lasting. The division established by the colonial powers ignored the pre-existing ethnic and cultural identities in the region, often grouping distinct peoples under the same political entity. This fragmented approach contributed to the creation of artificially conceived states, in which communities with diverse histories and interests were forced to coexist. The result was a complex tapestry of borders that, rather than reflecting local realities, often exacerbated tensions between ethnic and religious groups.

The contradiction between the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration added an additional layer of complexity to the region, especially in Palestine. The promise of a 'national home for the Jewish people' came into direct conflict with the zones of influence assigned to France in Palestine by the Sykes-Picot Agreement. This contradiction not only generated discontent among local Arab communities but also fueled disputes between the European powers involved (Correia, 2018, p. 154, our translation).

Furthermore, the arbitrary borders established by the Sykes-Picot Agreement continue to be a destabilizing factor in the region. Countries such as Iraq and Syria, conceived under the influence of the agreement, face significant challenges to their internal cohesion due to the ethnic and religious diversity forced under a single political entity. Similarly, "[...] the persistence of these historical divisions is evident in the internal conflicts, power struggles, and sectarian tensions that characterize many of these states" (Nassoulié, 1994, p. 154, our translation).

In short, the Sykes-Picot Agreement

[...] is emblematic of European intervention in the Middle East, where colonial considerations and strategic interests prevailed over the self-determination of local populations. A thorough understanding of this historical legacy is essential to addressing current challenges in the region more effectively (Olic, 1991, p. 32, our translation).

Reflection on the consequences of these past interventions should inform contemporary approaches, aiming at a more holistic and fair understanding of the dynamics of the Middle East.

4 THE BALFOUR DECLARATION AND THE BRITISH MANDATE IN PALESTINE

The Balfour Declaration, issued in 1917 by the British government, represented a significant change in the dynamics of the Middle East by promising the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. Sir Arthur Balfour, then British Foreign Secretary, expressed



official support for the idea of Zionism, a movement that sought to establish a Jewish state in Palestine (Gomes, 2001, p. 160, our translation).

The promise contained in the Balfour Declaration had an immediate and lasting impact on the Palestinian question. By adopting a position that favored the creation of a Jewish national home, the British generated discontent and tensions among the local Arab communities, which constituted the majority of the population in the region. For Demant (2015), the British promise was perceived as a breach of commitment to Arab aspirations for self-determination and independence, very much in line with a vision aimed at greater and better definition of borders, as reflected years later by Ancel (1938) in his *Géographie des frontières* or even the Germanic lebensraum – with jurisdiction over those borders being the prerogative of the empire that dominated at the time.

The promise of a “national home for the Jewish people” was ambiguous in terms of what it would mean in practice and how it would affect the local Arab population. Increased Jewish immigration to Palestine and the purchase of land by Jews exacerbated tensions, as this led to the loss of land for Palestinians and the transformation of the region's demographics.

The impact of the Balfour Declaration was intensified by the subsequent British Mandate in Palestine, which began in 1920 and lasted until 1948. During this period, tensions between the Jewish and Arab communities increased, fueled by the ambiguity of the Balfour Declaration and British administration that often favored one group over the other (Memmi, 2007, p. 73, our translation).

These tensions culminated in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the creation of the State of Israel. The legacy of the Balfour Declaration remains a central element in peace negotiations in the region to this day, highlighting the complexity and lasting ramifications of historic decisions in the Middle East. The impact of the declaration continues to be felt in the territorial disputes, interpersonal relations, and political issues that persist between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Balfour Declaration and the subsequent British Mandate in Palestine also had profound implications for the political and social development of the region. The ambiguity of the declaration paved the way for conflicting interpretations about the future of Palestine, exacerbating tensions between Jews and Arabs. The British Mandate, in taking direct administration of the region, faced significant challenges in balancing the divergent aspirations of the Jewish and Arab communities (Soon, 2011, p. 89, our translation).



Jewish migration to Palestine increased during the British Mandate, intensifying territorial disputes and social tensions. According to Visentini (2014), the formation of autonomous Jewish communities and the acquisition of land often led to clashes with the local Arab population, resulting in cycles of violence and hostility. Political instability, combined with resistance to the British presence, made the Mandate a tumultuous era in the history of Palestine.

The impact of the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate echoes in contemporary controversies, contributing to the persistent issue of the status of Jerusalem, borders, and the rights of Palestinian refugees. The legacy of these historical events still fuels debates about justice, self-determination, and coexistence in the region. For Rogan (2021), the Balfour Declaration, which initially aimed to secure Zionist support during World War I, inadvertently shaped a crucial chapter in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Understanding these events is crucial to addressing contemporary challenges and seeking paths to a just and sustainable resolution.

The implementation of the British Mandate in Palestine also witnessed the difficulty of reconciling the conflicting promises made during World War I. The situation was further complicated by increased tensions between the Jewish and Arab communities, as well as the emergence of nationalist and independence movements on both sides. The lasting impact of these historical dynamics is evident in the competing narratives about the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Nakba (catastrophe), which marked the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their lands (Fromkin, 2008, p. 45, our translation).

The legacy of the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate continues to shape international relations in the region. According to Rogan (2021, p. 309, our translation), “the international community often finds itself involved in efforts to mediate the conflict, seeking solutions that consider the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.” However, the deep historical roots of the conflict often complicate these efforts, as the wounds opened by the British Mandate and the Balfour Declaration remain sensitive for many communities.

In short, the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate are crucial elements in shaping the political and social landscape of the modern Middle East. In this sense, “[...] by understanding the impacts of these events and their interconnections, we can shed light on the complex challenges that persist in the region, paving the way for more informed dialogues and lasting solutions” (Visentini, 2014, p. 103, our translation). Critical examination of these historical chapters is an essential tool for promoting a deeper

understanding and potentially contributing to the construction of a more peaceful and equitable future.

5 IMPERIALIST OCCUPATIONS AND GEOPOLITICAL DIVISIONS

British and French imperialist occupations in the Middle East during the 20th century left a deep mark that resonates to this day (Darwin, 1999; Ker-Lindsay; Williams, 2008; Thomas, 2017). An emblematic example was the British occupation of Iraq after World War I. The League of Nations granted Britain a mandate to administer the region, resulting in a series of significant developments. British administration favored the Sunni ruling minority, exacerbating sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shiites, a dynamic that still persists in contemporary Iraqi political complexities.

Similarly,

The French occupation of Syria and Lebanon after World War I played a vital role in shaping the political and ethnic structures of the region. The French mandate in Syria saw the creation of artificial political entities and the imposition of administrative divisions that, in many cases, neglected the cultural and ethnic affinities of local communities. These decisions contributed directly to the sectarian tensions that still plague Syria today (Soon, 2011, p. 91, our translation).

Moreover, the British Mandate in Palestine, as established by the League of Nations after World War I, also exemplifies the impact of these occupations on the region. According to Memmi (2007), British administration intensified tensions between Jewish and Arab communities, culminating in the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and triggering lasting conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians.

Imperialist occupations, by introducing arbitrary borders, favored systems of government, and sectarian divisions, shaped the political and ethnic dynamics in the Middle East region. Many of the borders drawn during these periods of occupation did not reflect social and cultural realities, leading to internal divisions, sectarian rivalries, and political instability.

The impact of these colonial interventions continues to be felt in the persistent political instability, ethnic conflicts, and sectarian divisions that characterize many countries in the region. Understanding these occupations is crucial to comprehending the complexity of current dynamics in the Middle East and to exploring paths toward more lasting stability (Demant, 2015, p. 91, our translation).

British and French imperialist exploitation also extended throughout the 19th century, when these powers sought to consolidate their influence in the Levant region, comprising areas that are now part of countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Jordan. According to Gomes (2001, p. 158, our translation), “[...] a notable example was French influence in Lebanon, where France sought to protect Christian interests by establishing a confessional system that assigned government positions based on religious affiliation. This sectarian division persisted over time, contributing to the complex Lebanese political matrix, where sectarian identity plays a central role.

“In Egypt, the British occupation of the early 20th century had significant implications. Initially intended to protect the interests of the Suez Canal, the British presence evolved into a broader occupation” (Olic, 1991, p. 32, our translation). Egyptian nationalism opposed this foreign presence, culminating in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, which resulted in British withdrawal but left behind a legacy of political instability and a complex relationship between Egypt and Western powers.

Imperialist occupations have also shaped contemporary relations between the Middle East and global powers. The legacy of these interventions is visible in the foreign policies adopted by colonial powers and in the response of states in the region to foreign influences. The complex and often tumultuous dynamics between the Middle East and Western powers highlight the need for an in-depth analysis of historical roots to understand the challenges faced today. Understanding these historical events is crucial to forging more equitable and respectful relations between the Middle East and the rest of the world (Nassoulié, 1994, p. 154, our translation).

British imperialist occupation also left a significant mark on the Persian Gulf, where the discovery of oil in the 1920s and 1930s transformed regional dynamics. According to Correia (2018, p. 154, our translation), “[...] the United Kingdom played a central role in the exploitation and control of oil resources in the region, establishing agreements and alliances that shaped not only the economy but also the power structures.” The creation of states such as Kuwait and British influence in the development of Saudi Arabia exemplify how imperialist decisions influenced geopolitical and economic lines in the region.

The British occupation of Iran during World War II was also a crucial episode. Fearing a possible German invasion through Iran, the British and Soviets occupied the country in 1941, resulting in the abdication of Shah Reza Pahlavi in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. “[...] this event, while removing Nazi sympathizers from power, contributed to growing anti-colonial feelings in Iran and eventually triggered events that led to the Islamic Revolution in 1979 (Becker, 2010, p. 56, our translation).

Altogether, British and French imperialist occupations in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf had a lasting impact, influencing not only political and economic structures but also international relations and the perceptions of local populations. Understanding these events is essential to contextualize contemporary dynamics and to inform more equitable approaches to relations between Middle Eastern nations and the rest of the world.

6 CONTEMPORARY RAMIFICATIONS

British and French imperialist interventions in the Middle East have profound repercussions on the region's contemporary political configurations, contributing significantly to issues of instability, ethnic conflicts, and regional rivalries, in continuities and discontinuities of early 20th-century geopolitical, maritime, land, and air dominance propositions, now transmuted and/or expanded into symbolic, cultural, and informational perspectives of the 21st century. A clear example is the persistent political instability in Iraq, resulting in large part from the British administration after World War I.

The preference given to the Sunni elite during the British Mandate created sectarian imbalances that culminated in internal conflicts, especially after the US-led invasion in 2003, contributing to political fragmentation and the rise of extremist groups.

Syria, under French rule, also faces profound challenges related to sectarian divisions established during the French Mandate. The Alawite regime led by Bashar al-Assad, historically supported by the French, faces opposition from Sunni groups, exacerbating sectarian tensions and resulting in the devastating civil war that began in 2011. For Lewis (2004, p. 79, our translation), "[...] foreign intervention in Syria by various regional and global powers is also intrinsically linked to the lines drawn during the French Mandate. In addition,

The Palestinian question, derived from the British Mandate in Palestine and the conflicting promises made by the Balfour Declaration, remains an inexhaustible source of tension. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent conflicts resulted in a Palestinian diaspora, contributing to endless hostilities and instability in the region (Visentini, 2014, p. 102, our translation).

Besides, regional rivalries between Gulf states, often exacerbated by colonial manipulations, persist as a constant challenge. Divisions between Sunnis and Shiites, for example, are often exploited for political purposes, contributing to polarization and sectarian conflicts in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The contemporary Middle East is a complex mosaic of challenges, many of which have their roots in colonial interventions of the past. The political and ethnic dynamics that emerged from these interventions continue to profoundly influence the region, highlighting the importance of a critical analysis of these historical events to inform more effective approaches to promoting stability and peace in the Middle East (Said, 2016, p. 298, our translation).

Imperialist interventions in the Middle East have also left a legacy of economic exploitation that contributes to the region's contemporary dynamics. British exploitation of oil in the Persian Gulf, for example, shaped the economies of the Gulf states, transforming them into oil giants, but also creating dependencies and internal economic imbalances. For Hourani (2016), issues related to the control and distribution of natural resources play a central role in regional rivalries, adding an economic dimension to political tensions.

Also, interventions have also influenced

[...] international relations in the Middle East, often placing countries in the region in a complex game of global alliances and rivalries. The Cold War saw the Middle East become a battleground for Western and Soviet influences, further exacerbating local instabilities. Contemporary relations between global actors, such as the United States, Russia, and European powers, continue to be influenced by this historical legacy (Elias, 2011, p. 237, our translation).

The sectarian divisions that emerged during imperial occupations also fuel conflicts in the region, thus, “[...] sectarianism, often manipulated by political actors to advance their agendas, is at the root of many armed conflicts, such as the wars in Iraq and Syria” (Demant, 2015, p. 73, our translation). These divisions contribute to the fragmentation of the social and political fabric, hindering the formation of inclusive governments and the search for sustainable solutions to conflicts. Ultimately,

[...] understanding the contemporary ramifications of imperialist interventions in the Middle East is essential for developing effective conflict resolution strategies and promoting lasting peace in the region. Critical analysis of these historical events provides valuable insights into the complex interconnections between past and present, informing more holistic approaches to addressing current challenges in the Middle East (Fisk, 2007, p. 121, our translation).

Imperialist exploitation in the Middle East also shaped power structures, contributing to the emergence of autocratic regimes that persist to this day. Many local leaders were installed or supported by colonial powers in exchange for guaranteeing stability for their economic and strategic interests. According to Al-Marashi (2021, p. 20, our translation), “[...] this model of governance has often resulted in authoritarian regimes that restrict political

participation and perpetuate social inequalities, fueling popular discontent and sometimes leading to uprisings and revolutions.

The interventions also left a lasting impact on the public perception of the West in the Middle East, “[...] historical resentment toward colonial powers influences attitudes toward contemporary foreign policies, contributing to anti-Westernism in certain regions” (Rogan, 2021, p. 321, our translation). This creates fertile ground for political movements and groups that oppose foreign influence, complicating diplomatic relations and the search for stability in the region. Nevertheless,

[...] imperialist interventions triggered nationalist movements and redefined identities in the region. Resistance to foreign rule often unified communities around emerging national identities. However, the demarcation of arbitrary borders during occupations contributed to the fragmentation of ethnic and religious groups, fueling internal tensions that persist to this day (Fromkin, 2008, p. 83, our translation).

Promoting lasting stability in the Middle East requires not only pragmatic approaches to resolving immediate conflicts, but also a sensitive and respectful understanding of the region's complex historical and cultural dynamics.

7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The interventions of France and the United Kingdom in the Middle East, notably through the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, played crucial roles in shaping the current dynamics and challenges in the region. The Sykes-Picot Agreement established arbitrary borders, ignoring local cultural and ethnic realities, while the Balfour Declaration created contradictory promises that contributed to the Palestinian question and the formation of the State of Israel. British and French imperialist occupations also shaped political, economic, and social structures, not to mention sectarian divisions that persist as sources of conflict.

Understanding these historical roots is crucial to addressing contemporary challenges in the Middle East. Political instability, ethnic conflicts, regional rivalries, and economic issues are intrinsically linked to the legacy of these colonial interventions. The arbitrary division of territories and support for autocratic leaders created fertile ground for discontent, fueling resistance movements and instability.

The importance of understanding these historical relationships lies in their ability to inform more effective approaches to conflict resolution in the present. Critical awareness of these historical events provides valuable insights into the origins of the problems currently

facing the Middle East. By considering the nuances of these interventions, policymakers can develop more sensitive, fair, and sustainable strategies to promote stability and peace in the region.

Therefore, continuous reflection is encouraged on how knowledge of these historical relationships can guide contemporary efforts to build lasting peace in the Middle East. By recognizing and addressing the historical roots of conflicts, there is an opportunity to develop more effective and compassionate solutions, respecting the aspirations of the diverse communities in the region and promoting constructive cooperation among the nations involved.

At the heart of France and the United Kingdom's contributions to the conflict in the Middle East is the need to consider the unintended consequences and ramifications of their historical actions. The imperialist interventions of these European powers not only shaped borders and political structures, but also left deep scars on regional identities and relationships. The complexities of the region's social, ethnic, and religious dynamics were often overlooked in favor of strategic and geopolitical interests, creating a legacy of divisions that have persisted for generations.

Understanding these historical roots offers critical insight for analyzing contemporary conflicts in the Middle East. In-depth knowledge of past interventions is vital to avoid simplistic approaches that neglect the cultural and historical nuances of the region. Recognition of these elements is essential to avoid repeating historical mistakes and to forge more effective and lasting solutions.

Awareness of these historical events can also catalyze efforts toward reconciliation and bridge-building between affected communities. By understanding the origins of conflicts and recognizing the complexity of local identities, the parties involved can seek constructive dialogues that respect diverse perspectives and aspirations. History not only points to the mistakes of the past, but also offers valuable lessons on how to move toward peaceful and just coexistence.

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Ultimately, the approach to historical relations between France, the United Kingdom, and the Middle East must be conducted with empathy and a genuine willingness to understand the inherent complexities. The challenge lies in translating this understanding into concrete actions, promoting a narrative of cooperation, mutual respect, and a common pursuit of a more stable and harmonious future for the region.

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