

Three Differing Views of Early 20^c Palestine

Two of the most controversial and widely discussed documents concerning the beginnings of the Arab-Israeli conflict have been the Hussein-McMahon Letters and the Balfour Declaration. The controversy centering around these two documents is due, in part, to the fact that they were the first concrete commitments made to the Arabs and the Jewish Zionists by the British government. In addition, the wording of these two documents was imprecise, and consequently spurred many debates concerning their meaning and the real intentions of the British government.

The Hussein-McMahon letters of 1915-1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 are cited by Arabs and Jews in the justification of their claims to the land that was formerly Palestine and is now the state of Israel and the Israeli-occupied territories. An examination of the events leading to the writing of these documents will provide insight as to why Great Britain acted as it did.

Doc #1: The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (1915-1916)

Sir Henry McMahon's reply to the Sherif of Mecca:

October 24, 1915

Complimentary titles,

I have received your letter of the 29th. Shawal, 1333 A. H., with much pleasure and your expressions of friendliness and sincerity have given me the greatest satisfaction....

....I am empowered in the name of the Government of Great Britain to give the following assurances and make the following reply to your letter:--

- (1) Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sherif of Mecca.
- (2) Great Britain will guarantee the Holy Places against all external aggression and will recognize their safety.
- (3) 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 focus of government in those various territories.
- (4) 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 advisors and officials as may be required for the formation of a sound form of administration will be British....

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 result of which will be the expulsion of the Turks from the Arab countries and the freeing of the Arab people from the Turkish yoke {control} which for so many years has pressed heavily upon them....

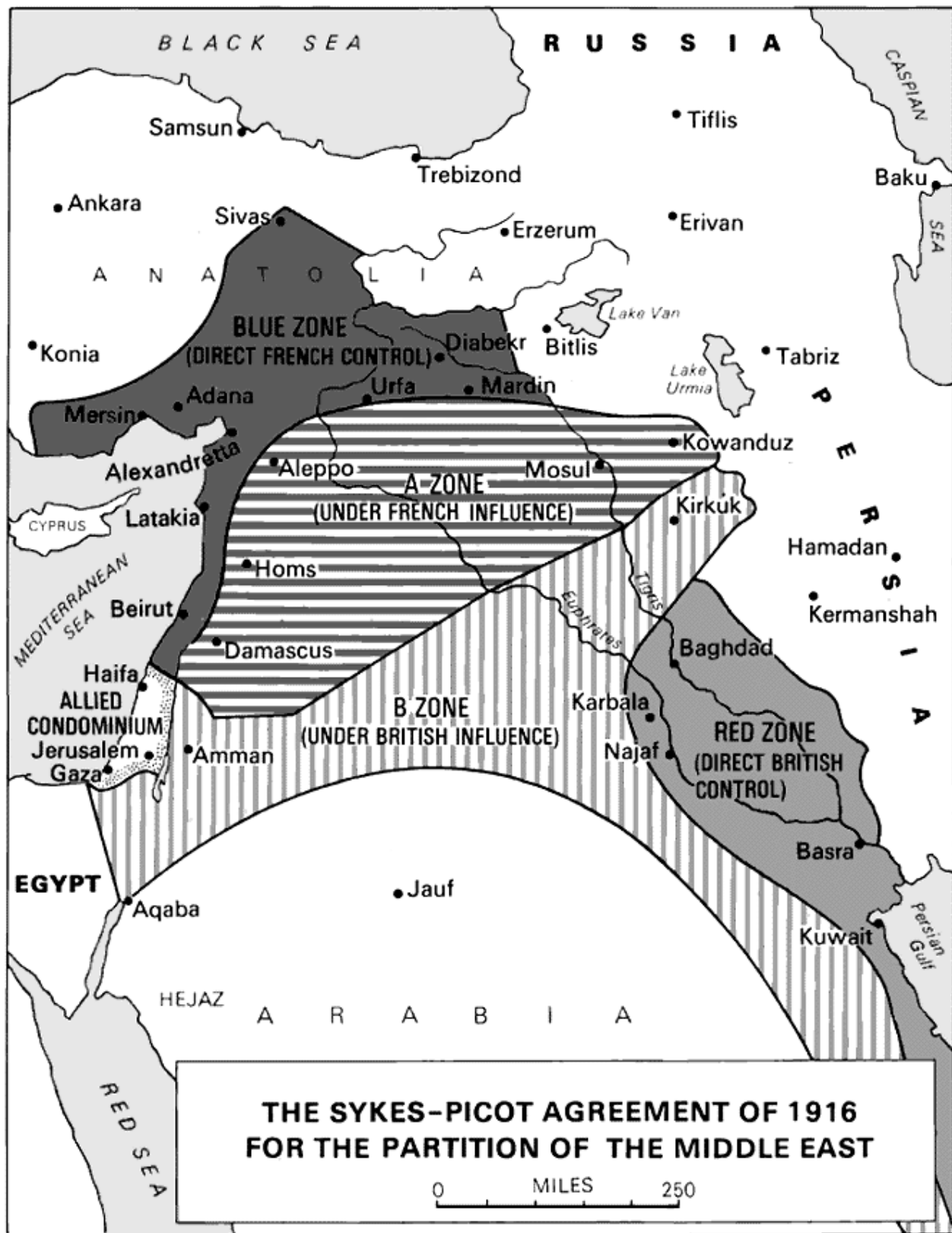
May Allah soon bring a lasting peace and freedom to all peoples!....

Compliments,

(signed)

A. HENRY McMAHON.
British High Commissioner, Cairo, Egypt.

Doc #2:



Doc #3: The Balfour Declaration (1917)

Foreign Office
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild.

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

"His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate {assist} 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.

(signed)

Yours sincerely,
ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR
British Foreign Secretary