




# The Sykes– Picot Agreement

The Making of the Modern Middle  
East and Subsequent Conflicts



# The Sykes–Picot Agreement

A 1916 secret treaty between Britain and France, with assent from Russia and Italy, to define their control and eventual dismemberment and partition of the Ottoman Empire .

# Ottoman Empire 1830 – 1914





# Ottoman Empire 1914





The Ottoman Empire was a corrupt and oppressive government. The Turks treated the Arab people, in particular the Shi'a, terribly.

By 1914, all the world could see that it was doomed to fall.





Cartoons such as these appeared in newspapers all over Europe .



# Young Turk Revolution 1909

Even within the Ottoman Empire, it was obvious that the regime was failing. Young Turks attempted to reform and modernize the empire.



# Allies declare War with Germany

## August, 1914

Young Turks wanted to remain neutral . But, already allied with Germans .

British hope they stay neutral . Needed access to the Suez Canal and newly discovered oil .





# Turks Declare War

Secret anti-Russian alliance, signed by Germany and Turkey, in August, 1914, pushes Turkey into the war. Turkey attacks Russian Black Sea Ports on October 29, 1914.



# Russia Retaliates

The Russians declare war on the Turks a week later, November 2, 1914. British and French, respecting mutual alliances follow suit 3 days later.

War in Middle East seen  
as a sideshow to the  
“real” war in Europe .

But, if the Turks could be  
defeated early, then the  
British and French could  
concentrate on the  
Western Front .

Could the Arabs be  
convinced to help?





# Grand Sharif Hussein of the Hejaz





Grand Sharif Hussein of the Hejaz

Emir of Mecca and Keeper of the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina.

Fiercely resistant to Turkish interference, Hussein was also  
acceptable to Muslims everywhere.

Both the British and the Turks tried to persuade Hussein to fight on their side.

Hussein agreed to wage war against the Turks with the British  
in return for the British guaranteeing Arab independence.



# The McMahon Hussein Correspondence

1915 — 1916

Exchange of letters between the Grand Sharif and Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt promising Arab independence if they help defeat the Turks.





The Sharif “may rest assured that Great Britain has no intention of concluding any peace in terms of which the freedom of the Arab people from German and Turkish domination does not form an essential condition.”

– Sir Henry McMahon, December 1915

But, at the same time,  
France and Britain  
began secret  
negotiations to divide up  
the riches of the Middle  
East.

Two mid-level diplomats  
were given the task –  
Mark Sykes and  
Francois Georges-Picot



Sykes



Picot



# Mark Sykes

- Baronet from Yorkshire
- Staunch Catholic
- Colonel in the British Army
- Member of Parliament
- Veteran of the Boer War
- Diplomatic Advisor to the Arab Bureau





# Mark Sykes

He was also a strong supporter of Zionism and a key negotiator of the Balfour Declaration .

T. E. Lawrence on  
Mark Sykes:

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“...a bundle of  
prejudices,  
intuitions, half-  
sciences.”





At the first meeting of Sykes and Gertrude Bell, she was appalled and called him "opinionated and prejudiced."





# Francois Georges-Picot

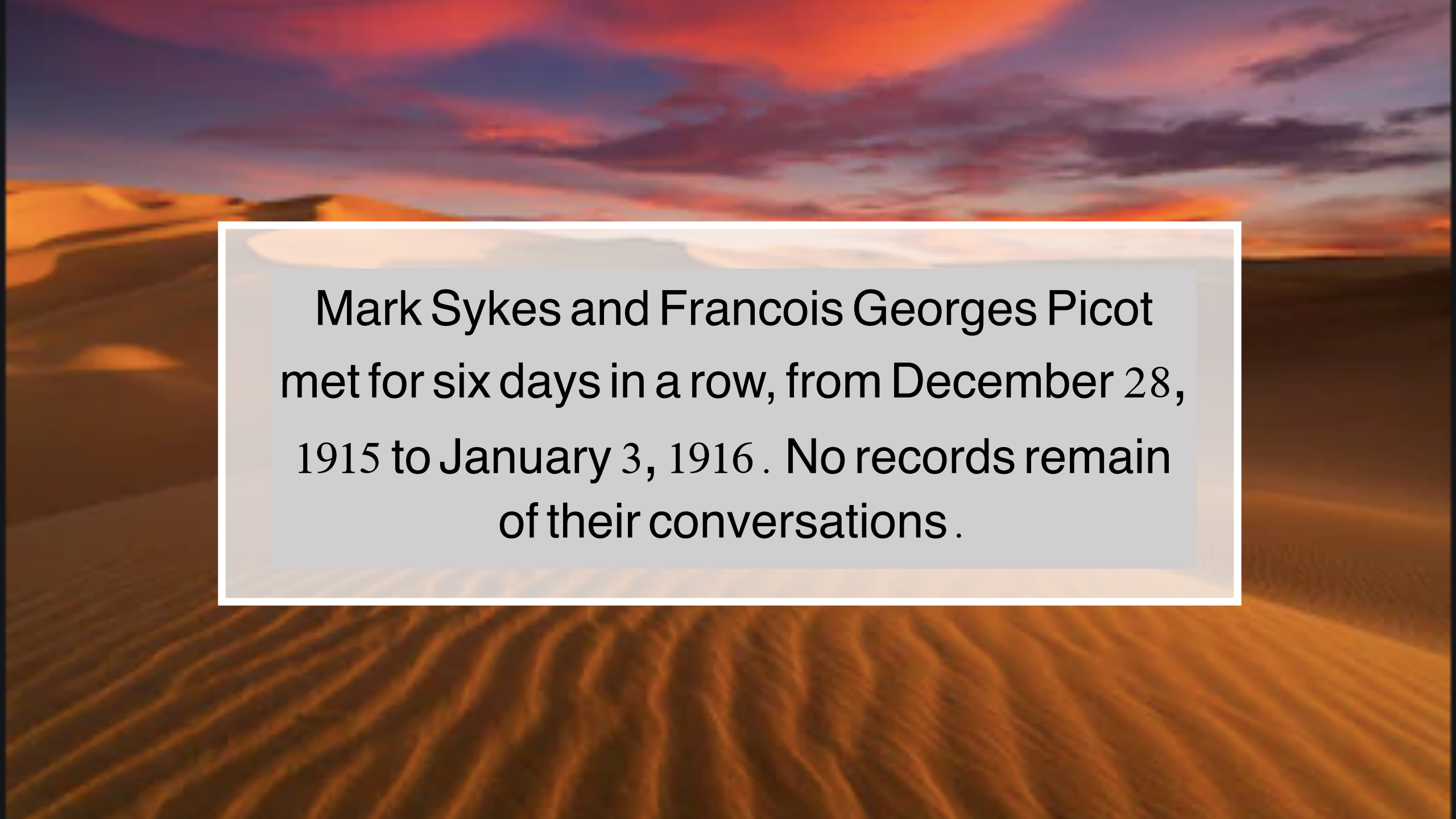
- Lawyer
- Diplomat
- Ambassador to Copenhagen, Beijing, Beirut



# Francois Georges-Picot

Arabs regard Picot as a war criminal . Picot wrote up papers that exposed Arab nationalists to the Turks . This resulted in the named people being put to death .[↓](#)

Additionally, he indirectly abetted the Ottomans during the Armenian Genocide when he withdrew the French Army, leaving the Armenians defenseless . [↓](#)

The background of the slide is a photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there are sand dunes with distinct, wavy ripples in the sand, illuminated by the warm light of a sunset. The sky above is filled with soft, wispy clouds in shades of orange, pink, and purple, with a hint of blue at the top. The overall scene is peaceful and evocative of a remote, arid environment.

Mark Sykes and Francois Georges Picot met for six days in a row, from December 28, 1915 to January 3, 1916 . No records remain of their conversations .

May, 19, 1916

The Sykes-Picot  
Agreement was  
signed.





## Provisions of the Sykes – Picot Agreement:

1) Russia would acquire western Armenian, some Kurdish territory, Constantinople and the Turkish Straits.

(2) France would acquire Syria and Lebanon and southeastern Turkey.

(3) Great Britain would secure access to India through the Suez Canal and control of Palestine, Jordan and southern Iraq and the ports of Haifa and Acre.



## Further Provisions :

- 4) Italy assented to the agreement in 1917 and received southern Anatolia.
- (5) There would be a confederation of Arab states divided into French and British spheres of influence.
- (6) Alexandretta should be a free port.
- (7) Palestine, because of the holy places, should be under an international regime.

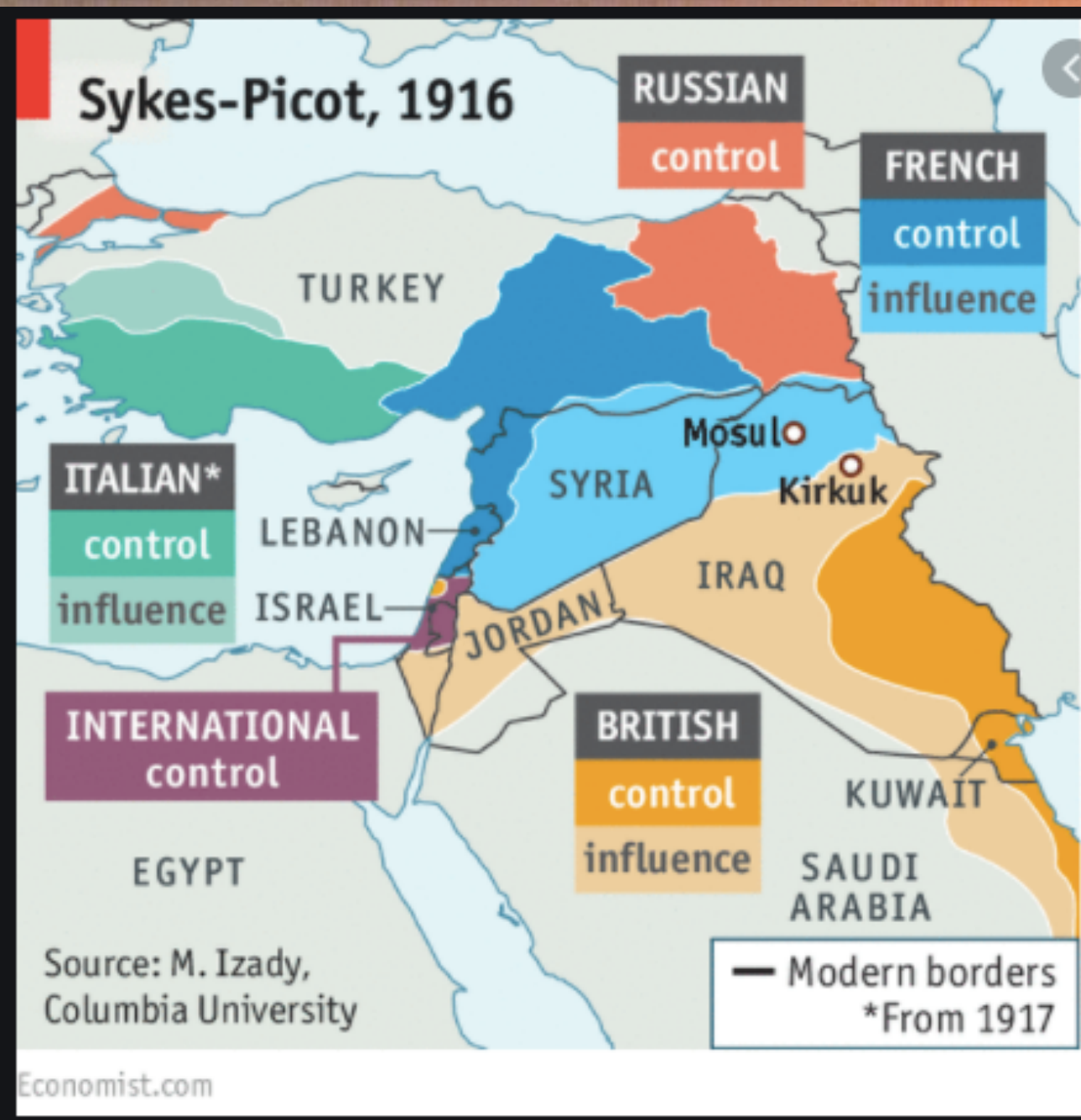




# Sykes–Picot Agreement








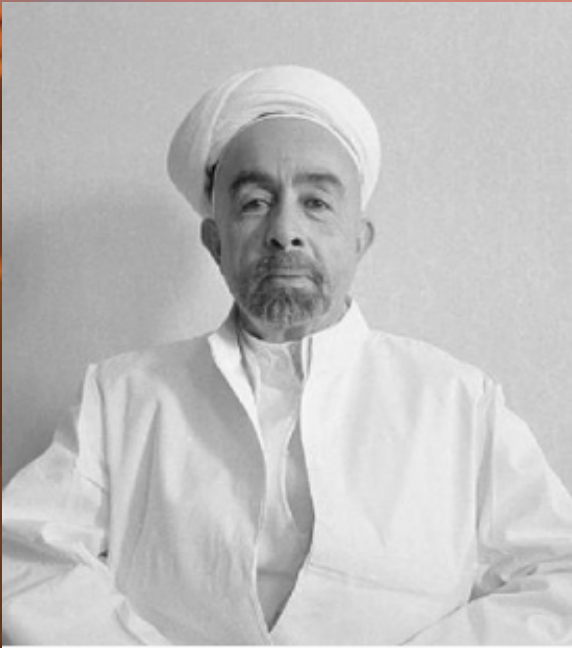
How the Middle East would be controlled



The background of the slide is a photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there are sand dunes with distinct, wavy ripples in the sand, illuminated by the warm light of a sunset. The sky above is filled with soft, wispy clouds in shades of orange, pink, and purple, with a hint of blue at the top. The overall scene is peaceful and evocative of a vast, open space.

This was May 1916 .  
Grand Sharif Hussein was not told of the agreement .  
On June 10, 1916, he raised his rifle on his balcony in  
Mecca and fired the first shot of the Arab Revolt .

# The Arab Revolt



Abdullah



Garrison at Mecca



Port of  
Jeddah



# The Arab Revolt– The Arab Advance





Faisal



T.E. Lawrence







Damascus

Arab hit and run warfare enabled the British Army to defeat the Turks. The British Army was on the outskirts of Jerusalem by December 1917

October 1, 1918—Lawrence and Faisal slip into Damascus to establish Arab government. But, devastated to learn that Syria would be given to the French to run.



# Finally -- the War is over

The Turks surrender and sign the Armistice of Mudros  
on October 29, 1918, two weeks before the  
German Armistice. [↓](#)



# Paris Peace Conference

On January 18, 1919, diplomats from more than two dozen countries gathered in Paris for a conference to discuss how to end the war permanently. The conference lasted a little more than a year. The discussions produced five treaties including ones with Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria.






The Sykes –Picot Agreement becomes public .

Despite Feisal's appeal to world leaders, the demand for Arab self-determination was ignored .

France was to govern Syria and Lebanon and Great Britain the mandates of Palestine and Iraq (formerly Mesopotamia) .

There was no room for Arab self-government .



# Countries created by the Sykes-Picot Agreement

- Syria
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Iraq
- Palestine



Flag of Iraq (1922, under King Faisal)



Flag of Syria (1921)



Flag of Lebanon (1920, under French Mandate)



Flag of Jordan



Flag of Palestine (1964)



Flag of the Arab Revolt






## Ultimate Irony

Flag of the Arab Revolt was designed by Mark Sykes – in an effort to create a feeling of "Arab-ness" in order to fuel the revolt. A revolt he knew was founded on false promises.

# Legacy of the Sykes-Picot Agreement






A wide-angle photograph of a desert landscape at sunset. The foreground is dominated by sand dunes with distinct, wavy ripples. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, red, and purple, with scattered clouds catching the low light. The overall mood is serene yet dramatic.

In 2015, ISIS released a  
video, in English, entitled  
The End of Sykes-Picot



A desert landscape at sunset. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, red, and purple clouds. The foreground shows sand dunes with distinct ripples, illuminated by the warm light of the setting sun.

Simply ending the Sykes-Picot Agreement is too simplistic. Even more Arab countries now exist.

But understanding the cause for conflict just might lead us to peace.