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Presentation outline

This panel will explore the impact of the Sykes-Picot and Mandate decisions on the evolution of the region under French control.

- I. What if any of Syria and Lebanon's strengths and weaknesses can be traced back to Sykes-Picot?
  - a. Lebanon
    - i. Not Sykes Picot Agreement but French state building
    - ii. In case of Lebanon sectarian balance was not sustainable
    - iii. Maintaining the sectarian balance formed in the census of 1932 where Christians made up 51% of the population was an awfully slim majority on which to base power sharing in the 1943 National Pact. That being said, speculation as I've heard it over the years that keeping the Bekaa or the south out of the Lebanese Republic would have averted civil war to me seems far fetched.
  - b. Syria
    - i. In Syria more troubling from the start
    - ii. Much more instability in Syria than Lebanon during the Mandate area, both in terms of divisions of Syria into separate sub-states, confrontations with the French Mandate authorities.
    - iii. But to be fair, throwing off the colonial yoke with Independence did not bring about stability. By various accounts, Syria was perhaps the world's most politically unstable countries, suffering from over a dozen coup d'états, and for three years ceased to exist as the "northern province" of the United Arab Republic.
    - iv. With the coming to power of the Ba'ath Party in 1963 and Hafez el Assad in 1970 brought more "stability" to Syria. But a closer look indicates that stability was often paper thin and appeared thicker than it was by civil war in neighboring Lebanon.
    - v. The role of the first uprising under the Assads that culminated in February 1982 with the Hama massacre in bringing about the demographic and political conditions for the current uprising cannot be overstated. When Assad used the Hama incident to arrest nearly all of his political opponents and place the country on lockdown, he caused the Middle East Equivalent of the San Francisco earthquake effect. Syrians stayed home for nearly a decade, yielding a spike in birthrates. In the ten years following the Hama Massacre, Syria was among the twenty fastest growing populations in the world.

- II. Was the Lebanese civil war a lagging negative result of Sykes-Picot, or was the Lebanese resilience against mayhem a positive legacy of the same?
  - a. Lebanon
    - i. Suffered and Benefited from strong sectarian communities
      - 1. Suffered in terms of distinct identities that were often the dividing lines during the civil war
      - 2. Benefited in that these communities kept health, education and basic services going during 15 years of civil war
  - b. Syria
    - i. The Baath party and the Assad regime undermined communal identity in favor of a minority-based regime that undermined communal identity.
      - 1. A strength for a time
      - 2. But as communal identity was eroded, so were these communities responses to the mayhem of the Syrian Civil War
- III. Is the current Syrian crisis an indication that the French approach, from Sykes-Picot onward, planted the seeds of discord? Or is it proof that the French attempt at partitioning and federalizing Syria was the sound course that was not followed?
  - a. A federalized Syria probably would have avoided some aspects of the Syrian civil war. But the influence of the Arab Nationalist movement and later Nasserism and the Baath meant Syria was inevitably the battleground for what all three of those movements regarded as the future of the region.
- IV. More poignantly, what are the prospects of survival of the nation-states of Lebanon and Syria today, and have the notion of a nation-state lost its relevance?
  - a. Nation state more important than ever
  - b. Comes down to governance
  - c. The question is: does better governance require a federalization of breakup of Syria. I think it does.