



Sykes-Picot” A Century Later: A New Order for the Middle East?

Conference Outline

Day 1

- 09:30 – 10:45 – Session 1: “Sykes-Picot” in its Historical Context: The Art of the Possible?
11:00 – 12:15 – Session 2: What if there was no Sykes-Picot? A Counter-Factual Reflection
12:15 – 13:45 – Lunch
13:45 – 15:00 – Session 3: Retrospective and Prospective – Syria & Lebanon
15:15 – 16:30 – Session 4: Retrospective and Prospective – Jordan & Palestine

Day 2

- 09:30 – 10:45 – Session 5: Retrospective and Prospective – Iraq
11:00 – 12:45 – Session 6: A New “Sykes-Picot” for the Region?

Conference Format

Session 1: “Sykes-Picot” in its Historical Context: The Art of the Possible?

The first panel will aim both at demystifying the “Sikes-Picot” agreement (Sikes-Picot) and at comparing it to, and placing it in, the context of the multiple attempts at managing the emergence of a post – Great War new world order, with the anticipated collapse of the Central Empires. Panelists will address relevant questions including: Was Sikes-Picot strategy or tactics? Was it a reasoned summary of long-standing British and French interests in the Near East, or was it reactive planning to unfolding events? How consistent was Sikes-Picot and the assignment of League of Nation Mandates with the Wilsonian vision? How did Sikes-Picot inform and shape the treaty of Sèvres? Was Sikes-Picot compatible with the British promises of a sovereign Arab government and with the Balfour declaration? Was Sikes-Picot a success at 20, in 1936 and at 50, in 1966, in safeguarding British and French interests and stature? This exercise will serve as a baseline reflection in comparing and contrasting intent and result in shaping policy and conceiving of long-term strategies — and will thus enable the consideration of current attempts in these directions.

Session 2: What if there was no Sykes-Picot? A Counter-Factual Reflection

This panel will offer thoughts on the possible evolution of the region had there been no Sykes-Picot agreement. What would have alternative management schemes produced? What would have been the fate of monarchies, Arab nationalism, and Palestine? Would a sovereign Kurdistan have emerged? What possible configurations of states may have appeared? This alternative history exercise will seek to isolate the variable that is Sykes-Picot in the unfolding of the region’s history, and will consider the weight and impact of other variables, as they shape the region in the 21st century.

Session 3: Retrospective and Prospective – Syria & Lebanon

This panel will explore the impact of the Sykes-Picot and Mandate decisions on the evolution of the region under French control. What if any of Syria and Lebanon's strengths and weaknesses can be traced back to Sykes-Picot? 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? 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? 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?

Session 4: Retrospective and Prospective – Jordan & Palestine

This panel will explore the impact of the Sykes-Picot and British Mandate decisions on the evolution of Palestine and Trans-Jordan. Was Jordan an artificial creation then? Is Jordan an artificial state today? Is Israel the main beneficiary from Sykes-Picot? Carrying through with the conversation of nation-states: Are Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, as the 21st century progresses, the negation of the notion, or is it a new paradigm of overlapping-nations – state? What conceivable paths to solutions for a conundrum that remains at the center of regional conundrum?

Session 5: Retrospective and Prospective – Iraq

This panel will explore the impact of the Sykes-Picot and British Mandate decisions on the evolution of Iraq. Was Iraq an artificial creation then? Is Iraq an artificial state today? Has a putative Kurdistan suffered the most damage from Sykes-Picot? Is the apparent dislocation of Iraq a correction of the artificiality of the construct, or is it the incidental result of multiple decisions that have caused attrition to a successful experience of national integration. Can a new Iraq be restored whole, or is it facing inevitable partition?

Session 6: A New “Sykes-Picot” for the Region?

This panel will build on the previous discussions to address questions of forward considerations: Is the region in need of a new foundational consensus, in lieu of the role often associated with Sykes-Picot a century ago? If yes, which states and parties, local, regional, and international would be expected to participate? What mechanisms of enforcement would be implemented? If no, would the region be allowed to create, through its destructive process, the basis of a new order? Or would a regimen of management be put in place for an ushered, even if not strategically guided, evolution?