

The Sykes–Picot Agreement: view from Russia in historic and present terms

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It is hard to render the contemporary history and fate of peoples of the Middle East in isolation from “the Sykes–Picot Agreement”. In May 2016 it will be 100 years since the signing of a document by the governments of the Entente which went down in history under the title “the Sykes–Picot Agreement”.

It defined in secrecy, behind the back of Arab peoples the borderlines between the zones into which the Asian territories of the Ottoman Empire were divided.

The tsarist Russia, although it entered a number of military agreements with the Entente on the division of the Ottoman Empire, decided against claiming any Arab lands.

After the October Revolution Russia ceased its participation in the negotiations. The new Soviet State in November 1917 exposed in press this and some other secret agreements found in the archives of the tsarist Russia and the world at first learned about the deal.

It is needed to outline that this move came inartificial for a government which broke off with the world war, denounced policy of occupation and annexation, enslavement of peoples, collusive agreement of European powers aiming at sharing of natural wealth of Arabs.

Since then the Soviet State opposed the system of mandate imposed by the League of Nations on the Arab peoples and the allocation the mandates for the administration of their territories. Moscow refused its participation in the Permanent mandate commission of the League.

One cannot but mention Moscow’s contribution to Arab obtainment of their political independence and national sovereignty after the end of the Second world war.

It was proved by the soviet stand clearly demonstrated at United Nations debates relevant to the question of Lebanon, Syria, and Libya independence. Its stand for support of Algerian people’s battle against colonial mastery for national liberation, in favor of right cause of Palestinians and all that did not pass unnoticed.

Today politicians, experts and scholars take a close look at the current turbulent events in region which had shaken a number of the states owing to “Arab spring” that led to large extent of conflict. Some

are seeking its explanation through exploring the past notably the deal “Sykes–Picot accord” concluded at the beginning of the 20th century.

It is interesting that a resembling resentment over “accord” comes out at times from contrary and antipolar sides. For example Turkey's leadership does not hide its scorn for this accord which it says created artificial barriers between Muslim states and deprived Turkey of its natural influence in the region. Meanwhile ISIS repeatedly promised to make its best to “bury the “Sykes–Picot deal”.

There is a widespread view that responsibility for partitions of Ottoman Empire which suited interests of colonial powers and for artificial borders set largely regardless to historic, cultural and others realities rests with the Sykes–Picot accord. It led to an onset of a whole range of ethnic and religious conflicts that makes the atmosphere in some area still highly explosive.

Threads of history do not break but stretch through the decades.

But unlike the situation of one-century old the present reality in the region is seen yet differently.

Firstly it seems that the spirit of statehood, national identity on country scale penetrated sufficiently at various levels into different stratum of structures of modern Arab society within its borders though the situation is reverse and some setbacks are possible.

Secondly, geopolitical configuration and alignment of forces in the Middle East fall under an external impact of direct or indirect military, economic or other interference.

To my mind the present state of affaires distinguishes of the old one for a number of reasons. There is a multiplicity of actors both local and global in the region and each has its own aims and interests though sometimes they are not conspicuously expressed.

The current conflicts in the Middle East are of a new type and generation. They are unfolding in context of transformable relations in the societies amid the ongoing global processes in the world, rivalry of emerging local political poles Turkey, Iran and so on. These conflicts are affected heavily by a number of factors notably the broad decline of world economy, volatility of oil markets, growing flows of weapons toward the Middle East and Arab gulf, China phenomenon and so on.

It can be expected that the shaping of the future in the region at upcoming century will depend on impact and combined interaction of the just cited variables.

