

**Summary of Doctoral (Ph.D.) Dissertation**

**The Place of the Middle East in British  
Colonial and Foreign Policy, 1914-1935: Iraq  
and Palestine as a Case Study**

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## **I. An introduction to the research**

The time span from 1914 to 1935 was a pivotal period in British history, characterised by prominent changes in geopolitics, colonial aspirations, and foreign policy strategies in the Middle East. The present thesis delves into the intricate factors that influenced British colonial and foreign policy in the region throughout the specified period.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, industrialisation emerged as a driving force behind the European powers' pursuit of new markets, resources, and territory. The primary objective of the British Empire was to extend its authority and defend its current territories, motivated by a need to preserve its dominance in the seas and secure its commercial passes. The Middle East emerged as a crucial area for British interests due to its advantageous geographical position and abundant natural resources.

The commencement of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway project and the identification of oil deposits in Abadan shortly before the onset of the Great War intensified British fascination with the area. Based on Lord Curzon's assertion that Iraq should be under British authority, British policy regarded Mesopotamia as a crucial region for political and economic endeavours. The British military initiated strategic preparations to exert dominance over southern Mesopotamia even before the commencement of the Great War.

The Great War was initiated by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary, which prompted Germany to launch a formal declaration of war

against Russia, Belgium, and Britain. Great Britain's primary objective was to preserve its economic stakes in the Suez Canal, Dardanelles, Alexandretta, the Persian Gulf, and Mesopotamia. Reluctance of the Ottoman Empire to engage in the war prompted Britain to collaborate with an Arab movement, including Ibn Saud and Sheikh of Kuwait, in order to establish dominance over Mesopotamia.

British soldiers launched an assault on Ottoman troops in the Basra vilayet, located to the south of Iraq, resulting in the siege of Kut Al-Amara. Winston Churchill formulated a strategic plan for the Gallipoli Campaign with the aim of safeguarding British troops and exerting control over the maritime route connecting Europe and Russia. The objective of this endeavour to establish a connection with Russia and terminate Turkey's involvement in the conflict was to alleviate pressure on Russia and facilitate the delivery of supplies to Russia via the Black Sea.

The British secured local backing from Arabs in their opposition to Turks through the correspondence exchanged between Sharif Hussein and McMahon, which ultimately resulted in the Arab uprising against Germany's ally, the Ottomans. The Gallipoli Campaign proved to be futile, thereby prompting the foundation of Anzac Day. British authorities acknowledged the importance of Palestine as a strategic area to protect the Suez Canal and subsequently built Haifa Harbour following the war. During the Great War, Britain and France engaged in a vigorous discussion about the partition of the Middle East in order to pursue their respective economic aspirations. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 effectively resolved

the miscommunication between the two parties. However, Myriam Yakoubi contended that British officials were determined to prevent the French from gaining access to Egypt, the Suez Canal, and the Persian Gulf. In 1917, the British violated their agreement with the French by issuing the Balfour Declaration, explicitly stating their endorsement of the creation of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine.

The resolution of post-war grievances in the Middle East was shaped by the Paris Peace Conference, culminating in the Treaty of Versailles, which founded the League of Nations as a worldwide framework for collective security. Following the San Remo Conference of 1920, France was granted a mandate over Syria, which included Lebanon, while Great Britain was granted a mandate over Palestine and Mesopotamia. Moreover, during the post-war era, the British participated in intricate talks with their allies, particularly France, about the distribution of land in the Middle East. As a result of the British government's prioritisation of protecting economic interests in Mesopotamia and acknowledging the strategic importance of Palestine, Haifa Port was established, and the Baghdad-Haifa oil pipeline was built.

Furthermore, British imperial rule in India acted as a blueprint for the British administration in Iraq, substituting the Ottoman government and rules with British ones and reinforcing tribal connections. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 proposed the establishment of a Jewish "national home" in Palestine, and in July 1922, the League of Nations acknowledged and officially approved the British mandate over Palestine. The failure

of the Allies to find resolutions to the Middle East issues following the downfall of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the issuance of a Class 'A' League of Nations mandate and the eruption of large-scale protests in Baghdad. Within Palestine, the Arab opposition resulted in the British government overemphasising Jewish rights to the detriment of the rights and fundamental aspirations of the Palestinian population.

In response to the volatile conditions in the Middle East, British officials formulated tactics to harmonise their own interests with those of the Middle Eastern population. The Treaty of Sévres in 1920 stipulated the establishment of a future Kurdish state, but its realisation was hindered by both internal and external constraints. The Cairo Conference in 1921, overseen by British Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, centred mostly on the prospective trajectory of Iraq. Amidst the unresolved Kurdish dispute, the conference made the decision to appoint Faisal, the son of Hussain, as the monarch of Iraq.

The Cairo Conference also deliberated on Trans-Jordan, promoting the expeditious military takeover to build a secure governance and terminate adversarial actions against France in the British zone. The Treaty of Lausanne, ratified in 1923, is the sole peace accord that has consistently been in force since the conclusion of the Great War. It played a crucial role in facilitating peace talks between Turkey and the "Allied and Associated Powers" following the war.

Following the war, British difficulties in the Middle East resulted in a decrease in British spending, particularly in

Iraq. To protect Britain from dangers posed by Egypt, Iraq, and India, Churchill suggested deploying an expeditionary army and limiting the presence of troops in Iraq to 4,000 British and 16,000 Indian soldiers.

The objective of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in 1922 was to provide Iraq with self-governance and assert British authority over Iraq's foreign policy. The treaty delineated the boundaries of British authority over Iraq, financial affairs, and the accountability of the Iraqi government in the realms of defence and administration.

The 1923 Lausanne Conference generated intense disagreement between Britain and Turkey on the control of Mosul, ultimately resulting in the Ankara Treaty with the United Kingdom. This agreement effectively resolved the Mosul conflict and also solidified British control over oil supplies. The Signing of the Red Line Agreement of 1928 designated the Turkish Petroleum Company as the exclusive entity responsible for managing oil resources in the Middle East.

The Anglo-Iraqi Agreement of 1932 was a diplomatic agreement between the British government and the King of Iraq, which effectively terminated Iraq's mission and acknowledged its status as a sovereign nation. Despite facing criticism, Iraq was granted membership in the United Nations in 1932, which greatly enhanced its political and economic well-being and marked its integration into the global community.

The United Kingdom's initial attempts to enforce the Balfour Declaration in Palestine underscored its

geopolitical significance in the Middle East. The Mandate for Palestine was granted to Britain during the San Remo Conference in 1920. Britain approved this mandate in July 1922 and initiated its implementation in September 1923. Notwithstanding the mandate's elevation from colonialism, the British retained Palestinian lands as Crown Colonies.

The Jewish migration to Palestine during the British Mandate era was contentious due to the British selection of Herbert Samuel as the inaugural High Commissioner, which infuriated Arabs who insisted on significant reforms. The British authorities rationalised the establishment of a Jewish state, resulting in conflict and a significant increase in the Jewish population.

This thesis analyses the complex interaction of economic, political, and military dimensions that influenced British colonial and foreign policy in the Middle East at this crucial era. Through an analysis of the British government's intentions, tactics, and activities in the region, this work offers a detailed comprehension of the intricate dynamics that shaped British colonial and foreign policy in the Middle East from 1914 to 1935.

## **II. Methodology**

This study is grounded on an extensive and varied range of primary and secondary sources, thoroughly depicting British engagement in the Middle East. This has included using an extensive range of source material, and the significance of these sources in influencing the study

and the subsequent results will be further examined. This research aims to expand on the extensive literature on the British Empire and its participation in other countries by focusing on the unique and often neglected topic of the British influence on the Middle East. This study has therefore addressed many significant historiographical arguments about British colonial policy and analysed how these ideas are manifested in British actions and policies in the Middle East. The Middle East region has experienced extensive engagement and interaction with various local communities and political entities. This study aims to offer an impartial analysis by incorporating historical accounts from both British and local sources. By doing so, it seeks to understand the perspectives of both the British and the locals regarding British actions. This research is likewise comparative and aims to analyse British actions in the Middle East concerning British imperial policy and activity in other areas.

The work comprehensively examines the economic and colonial competition between Britain and other powers in the Middle East from 1869 to 1935. We will analyse the impact of the Second Industrial Revolution on the British Empire, the history of British commercial diplomacy, and the British military tactics used throughout the war in the Ottoman Empire. In addition, we will examine the Division of the Middle East concerning future economic interests and the period of fulfilling war promises and preserving war ambitions, namely from 1923 to 1935. Overall, the research design is structured to address the intricate interplay of colonial policies, economic agendas,

and geopolitical manoeuvres undertaken by the British in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Palestine.

In order to do this, we will use a qualitative research technique, using historical analysis as our major method. To thoroughly comprehend the events and processes that occurred during this era, we will analyse primary materials, including historical records, correspondences, agreements, and treaties. In addition, we will examine secondary sources such as scholarly papers, books, and other published materials to place our results in perspective and provide a more detailed and sophisticated analysis of the events.

The study will be structured in a chronological manner, where each chapter will centre on a distinct era in time. We will use a thematic analysis methodology, focusing our attention on significant topics such as industrial advancement, colonial strategies, economic rivalry, military operations, diplomatic agreements, and economic motivations. By doing this, we will be able to discern recurring patterns and trends all through time, enabling us to conduct a more comprehensive examination of the occurrences.

To guarantee the trustworthiness and accuracy of our study, we shall use many sources of information and cross-reference our results. In addition, we will thoroughly assess the sources, taking into account their constraints and prejudices, and provide an impartial analysis of the events. Furthermore, archival research forms a cornerstone of this study, involving the

examination of documents housed in national archives, including the British National Archives.

Moreover, primary source materials such as official correspondence, memos, treaties, and reports provide firsthand insights into the decision-making processes, negotiations, and interactions between various stakeholders during the period under investigation. The research methodology also incorporates the critical interpretation of primary sources to discern underlying motives, contradictions, and complexities in British colonial policies and economic agendas in Iraq and Palestine. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, this research employs a comparative analysis approach to juxtapose developments in Iraq and Palestine.

### **III. The results of the research**

The scholarly framework of the dissertation examined how the colonialism in Europe intensified as a result of the Second Industrial Revolution, resulting in rivalry for land and dominance in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. "Splendid Isolation" and the significance of India's manpower supplies were defining features of Britain's separation from the rest of Europe. The British Empire's emphasis on the Middle East, namely the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia, resulted in heightened fascination with the area. Though the Suez Canal provided a strategic gateway to the East, Britain proved more adept at capitalising on commercial and political prospects. Following the discovery of oil in Persia in 1908, London's interest in the region was significantly increased. The murder of

Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary served as the catalyst for the outbreak of the Great War, as it prompted the formation of alliances, and the pursuit of objectives associated with imperialism, militarism, and nationalism by other nations.

British backing for the Ottoman Empire stemmed from its strategic geographical position and the possible danger posed by Russian territorial growth. Nevertheless, in 1914, Britain established binding agreements with Germany and the Ottoman Empire to impede German territorial growth and enhance the Ottoman economy. The pressure exerted by oil companies on the Royal Navy to shift from coal to oil resulted in Winston Churchill's conviction in oil as the most appropriate fuel. Britain's primary goal in Mesopotamia was to maintain dominion over Alexandretta, a crucial stronghold for areas rich in grain production and oil reserves. The British Empire had three strategic alternatives to safeguard its interests in the Middle East: engage in territorial disputes within the Ottoman Empire, offer support to the Ottoman Empire, or take a non-interventionist perspective. A consequence of British intervention in Mesopotamia was the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the region.

The British Empire effectively protected its commercial and military interests in the Middle East following the conclusion of the Great War, with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, sharp conflicts emerged between Britain and the Arabs, who had previously backed Britain. The events of the Gallipoli campaign and the British struggle in Sinai and Palestine had a crucial impact on the national identities of Australia and New

Zealand. The deployment of motorised vehicles by the British army and the triumph of the Gallipoli campaign served as catalysts for the formation of the Turkish Republic. The British military operation in Sinai and Palestine showcased the geopolitical significance of the area and reinforced Britain's ambitions for imperial expansion. In due course, the eastern specialists of the British government withdrew from the Sykes-Picot Agreement, giving precedence to the avoidance of future conflicts above its military importance. These events had significant ramifications for both regional and worldwide dynamics.

A momentous milestone in the division of the Ottoman Empire during the Great War was the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. The treaty partitioned the empire into five zones, authorising each nation to govern one zone and exert influence over another. Russia covertly supported the agreement, which sprang from the pre-war geopolitical favouritism of Britain and France towards Syria. The de Bunsen Committee delineated the British aims in the region, encompassing acknowledging Britain's involvement in the Persian Gulf, eradicating prejudice against British commerce, honouring commitments made to Arab leaders, promoting industries, safeguarding Britain's strategic position, and consolidating a stable government in Mesopotamia. The Balfour Declaration, which advocated for the establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine, worsened the situation. Historians hold divergent views on the Sykes-Picot agreement, with some contending that it was a carefully devised strategy and

others claiming Britain and France proceeded without adequately contemplating the repercussions.

From 1919 to 1923, the Middle East underwent substantial transformations as a result of the territorial partition caused by the Great War and the establishment of new nation-states. In order to exert control over the territory and safeguard its political and economic aspirations, the British administration implemented the mandate system. By containing allusions to the Balfour Declaration, the San Remo agreement of 1920 conferred upon Britain a "dual mandate" to act on behalf of international society and Palestine. Nevertheless, the British Mandate over Palestine granted the Zionist Organisation the authority to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine, a development that was met with disapproval by the Arab population. The Cairo conference in 1921 placed its attention on the prospective trajectory of Iraq, but, the unresolved matter of the Kurdish conflict persisted. By formally acknowledging Turkey as an independent nation, the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 required Turkey to give up all of its Arab conquests. French acquisition of jurisdiction over Syria and Lebanon and British assumption of responsibility for Iraq and Palestine were outcomes of the San Remo Conference, which was a Class 'A' League of Nations mandate.

The primary objective of the Cairo Conference of 1921 was to achieve stability in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq, by implementing a resolution that would establish a monarchy and parliamentary democracy that would be generally acknowledged. In Mesopotamia, the British administration encountered significant financial

challenges, especially with its oil riches, and aimed to preserve its control over the region. The Treaty of Sèvres and the Treaty of Lausanne illustrate the changing political dynamics prevailing in the Middle East and the subsequent establishment of Turkey as a sovereign nation-state. The British government's approach to the region was shaped by geopolitical considerations, such as the requirement to manage the region's oil reserves in order to maintain Britain's position as a worldwide power. The objective of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922 was to create Iraqi self-rule while preserving British authority but encountered resistance from nationalist factions. British military commitments had profound repercussions following the Great War, and the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922 was pivotal in determining Iraq's trajectory towards independence.

Between 1923 and 1926, competition among Arabs, Turks, and the British over Mosul, Iraq, revolved on the issues of dominance, autonomy, and oil control. The disagreement was addressed by the Lausanne Conference in 1923 and the Iraqi-Turkish Frontier Agreement of 1926. The Red-Line Agreement of 1928 sought to allocate oil resources in the Middle East among international oil companies from the United States, Britain, and France. The 1930-1932 Anglo-Iraqi Agreement formed a robust partnership between Britain and Iraq, bestowing upon Iraq the right to self-governance and sovereignty. In 1920, the San Remo Conference allocated the Mandate for Palestine to Great Britain with the objective of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Nevertheless, the Arab people expressed bitterness and opposition towards the British administration's endorsement of Jewish migration and the

creation of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The main objective of British economic interventions in Iraq and Palestine between 1932 and 1935 was to ensure access to oil resources and dominance over significant trade routes.

#### **IV. The Research Main Findings**

This paper offers an extensive examination of the geopolitical and economic factors related to British engagement in the Middle East from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, with a specific emphasis on the timeframe during and after the Great War. The primary research findings are as follows:

- 1. Colonial Expansion and Competition:** The Second Industrial Revolution spearheaded European colonial expansion, namely in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, resulting in intense competition. These circumstances resulted in heightened rivalry among European nations, particularly in Africa, where British, French, and German military forces competed for land, intensifying the armament race and establishing alliances.

- 2. British Strategic Interests in the Middle East:** Britain's principal objective in the Middle East was to retain dominance over trade routes leading to India, namely via the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf. Following the discovery of oil in Persia in 1908, British interest in the region intensified, prompting

efforts to ensure oil supplies, particularly for the Royal Navy.

**3. The Great War and the Ottoman Empire:** The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand ignited the Great War, during which Britain battled to safeguard its strategic interests in the Middle East. The participation of Britain in the war resulted in the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire, as Britain established dominion over crucial areas such as Mesopotamia (now Iraq) and exerted influence on the geographical partitions that followed the conflict.

**4. Sykes-Picot Agreement and Its Impact:** The Sykes-Picot Agreement, which partitioned the territory of the Ottoman Empire between Britain and France, had enduring consequences, such as causing discord among Arab communities who felt disillusioned by the assurances of political autonomy. Furthermore, the deal established the foundation for forthcoming hostilities in the region.

**5. Post-War Mandates and Regional Instability:** Following the Great War, Britain and France implemented mandates in the Middle East, which encountered opposition from indigenous communities. A notable consequence of the British mandate over Palestine was the emergence of major tensions between Jews and Arabs, which laid the foundation for subsequent confrontations.

**6. Economic and Geopolitical Motivations:** The British operations in the Middle East were motivated by economic and geopolitical factors, namely the

imperative to safeguard oil resources and uphold their geopolitical dominance, especially in Iraq and Palestine. This encompassed the creation of the Iraqi Petroleum Company and the implementation of infrastructural initiatives such as the Haifa port, which played a vital role in advancing Britain's economic and strategic objectives.

**7. Arab and Kurdish Nationalism:** In the aftermath of the war, Arabs and Kurds witnessed the emergence of nationalist groups aimed at achieving more self-governance and liberation from colonial domination. The aforementioned groups frequently clashed with the objectives of Britain and France, resulting in rebellions and enduring instability within the region.

**8. Treaty of Sèvres and Lausanne:** The Treaty of Sèvres, which pledged Kurdish autonomy, was finally superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne, which established Turkey's authority but failed to satisfy Kurdish ambitions, hence exacerbating persistent regional tensions.

**9. Long-term consequences:** The British and French mandates in the Middle East, together with the results of other treaties and agreements, established a lasting heritage of political instability and strife, notably in Iraq and Palestine. The relentless quest of oil and dominance over commercial sea routes persisted in moulding the geopolitical terrain of the region.

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- 4- **Mahmada, Ali Mohammed Qader, The Effect of the Great War on the Role of Women in British Society**, published in the Yearbook of the University of Debreceen in September 2021.
- 5- **Mahmada, Ali Mohammed Qader, The Evolution of British Commercial Diplomacy in the Near East 1869–1914**, published in the Department of History Yearbook in April 2022.
- 6- **Mahmada, Ali Mohammed Qader, Lynch Company's River Navigation Franchises in Mesopotamia: Economic Control and Local**

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7- **Mahmada, Ali Mohammed Qader, Balfour's Legacy: Britain, Zionism, and the Controversial Path to Israel's Establishment**, published in the Journal of Human and Social Sciences (published by the Arab Institute of Science and Research Publishing in cooperation with the National Research Centre).  
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8- **Mahmada, Ali Mohammed Qader, The British Economic Interests in Mesopotamia 1914-1918: A study of Securing Oil, Trade and Commercial Path**, published in the Journal of Modern Economy,  
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#### Foreign language scientific articles in Hungarian journals (1)

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