

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 192

### “1919 – The Near East II”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The British Army and its Arab allies took the city of Damascus on September 30, 1918, shortly before the end of the Great War. Those Arab allies were commanded by Faisal bin Hussein, the third son of the Sharif of Mecca.

Hussein entered the city and, with the support of the British commander, General Edmund Allenby, declared Syria an independent Arab state.

A few days later, the British took him aside and explained to him that in the secret Sykes-Picot agreement, they had already promised these lands to the French. Oops.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 192. 1919: The Near East, part two.

Last time, we began the story of the postwar disposition of the Arab lands formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire, then took a diversion to Egypt and Afghanistan. I did mention Syria, and how the British had promised that corner of Arab lands to France, then considered renegeing on the deal, but agreed to the French claim in the end.

I didn't talk about the Arabs themselves, or what they thought of all this. Actually, they didn't think about this at all, because the Sykes-Picot agreement was a secret, or at least, it was until the Bolsheviks spilled the beans. What the Arabs *did* think about was the British pledge to Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, ruler of the Hedjaz, that in exchange for taking up arms against the Turks, Britain would recognize him as the king of an Arab state after the war.

The British and the French had also made high-sounding promises to the Arab public. Shortly after the armistice, they circulated a statement in Arabic declaring that one of the Allied war goals was “the complete and definite emancipation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks

and the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous population as a whole.”

These pledges were inconsistent with what the British and the French promised each other, which was to divide between them the most attractive Arab lands: Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Mesopotamia. These lands represented what the American archaeologist James Henry Breasted dubbed “The Fertile Crescent” in his book, *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*, published in 1916.

And don’t forget the Balfour Declaration, the commitment the British government made to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine. How do you reconcile these three commitments, the pledges made to Hussein, the Balfour Declaration, and the Sykes-Picot Agreement, into a coherent plan for the post-war Near East? The short answer is, you can’t. The long answer is, this episode.

We already saw how in the immediate aftermath of the war, the British were getting pretty greedy. Where do the French get off taking any territory? What had they contributed to the war against the Turks? And as for Hussein and his Arab Revolt, well, Hussein had not delivered the grand Arab Revolt the British had been hoping for. It was more of a modest Hedjaz Revolt. Okay, fine. We’ll name him King of Hedjaz and call it good. But why shouldn’t Britain, which had brought down the Ottoman Empire all but single-handedly, simply take the rest of Arabia for itself?

Well, we discovered the answer to that question in the previous episode. The British thought they had the secret sauce that allowed them to rule over large Arab and Muslim populations peacefully. The unrest in Egypt had laid that idea to rest. And the war to drive the Afghan Army out of India had drained £14 million from the already depleted British Treasury in just a few weeks. Not a war to subdue Afghanistan, mind you, just a war to keep the Afghan Army out of British India. Now ask yourself how much it would cost the British Treasury to occupy all of Arabia if the Arabs chose to resist British rule.

No, 1919 has not been kind to British imperial ambitions. But if Britain can’t have all of Arabia, she can jolly well make sure she gets the good bits. The emirates along the eastern and southern shores of the peninsula. Mesopotamia. And Palestine.

The interior of the Arabian Peninsula was just hundreds of square miles of sand, at least as far as the British were concerned. Not worth making a fuss over. Let Hussein have it! The next least interesting bit was Syria. So we’ll let the French have that. That’s the bit they’re most interested in anyway; they won’t mind letting us have Mosul and the oil fields so much if we give them Syria.

But all this divvying up of Arabia was happening behind closed doors. Publicly, Faisal bin Hussein entered Damascus and declared an independent Syrian state on behalf of his father as

king. And just to be clear, this “Syrian” state as Faisal envisioned it would have included Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. Its southern border would have been the northern border of his father’s Kingdom of Hedjaz. When Faisal made his declaration, residents of Damascus thronged the streets and fired rifles into the air in celebration, in the mistaken belief that the British and the French meant what they had said about Arab self-rule.

But no, the Allies weren’t about to let that happen. Clemenceau was upset by Faisal’s actions; the British assured him there was nothing to worry about. All this was merely provisional; the final disposition of the Arab territories would be decided at the Paris Peace Conference.

The British told Faisal exactly the same thing. And so Faisal led an Arab delegation to Paris to plead their case before the Supreme Council for Arab independence. Accompanying him was British Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence, the famous “Lawrence of Arabia,” who had been the British Army liaison to Faisal during the Arab Revolt. Lawrence now served as Faisal’s translator. He scandalized the French by dressing in Arab clothes. They saw him as an uninvited provocateur, stirring up the Syrian Arabs against French rule. When Clemenceau reminded him that the French had fought for Syria during the Crusades, Lawrence reminded him that the Crusades had failed. Lawrence scandalized the British as well, with his habit of referring to the Arabs as “us” and the British as “you.”

Lawrence and Faisal had grown close during the Arab Revolt and now had a serious mutual mancrush going. Personally, Faisal is described by his contemporaries as intelligent, handsome, and charming. He cut a dashing figure, fitting every Westerner’s image of a noble Arab. He was the third son of Hussein, the Sharif and Emir of Mecca, whom I’ve mentioned several times now in this podcast, but I haven’t yet talked about this family’s big claim to fame. They are of the House of Hashim, often called the Hashemites, because they can trace their ancestry all the way back to the fifth century Arab notable, Hashim ibn Abd Manaf, who, just for the sake of context, was born in a world where the Western Roman Empire was still very much an ongoing operation. Hashim was the great-grandfather of Muhammad and the Hashemites are thus also descendants of the Prophet, making Faisal the modern heir to an ancient and distinguished line, with a pedigree he was quite happy to recite in full to anyone who cared to listen.

A member of the Hashemite clan had ruled over Mecca since the tenth century, all the way down to Faisal’s father Hussein, who was made Emir of Mecca by the Turks in 1908. The Hashemites thus became the obvious choice to become the rulers of independent Arab kingdoms. Especially in their own minds, and Lawrence fully endorsed their claim.

Faisal and Lawrence arrived in Paris in January 1919, to a cool reception, then went on to London where the officials were friendlier, but also warned him that the fledgling Syrian state he had just declared might have to accept a French mandate. They also pressed him to sign an agreement with Chaim Weitzmann, President of the World Zionist Organization. Under this agreement, Faisal and his father would accept the Balfour Declaration and renounce the Arab

claim to Palestine. Faisal signed the agreement, but only after adding a provision making his consent provisional upon Arab independence.

Faisal probably believed he needed to sign this agreement in order to win British support against the French, who clearly coveted Syria for themselves. You might well ask: What does this agreement mean? Is it binding on the Arabs? Did the British uphold their end of the bargain? These are questions still hotly debated a hundred years later, in our own time.

Faisal and his delegation appeared before the Supreme Council at the Paris Peace Conference on February 6. Faisal addressed the Council in Arabic, with Lawrence providing an English translation. Some claim that Faisal was merely reciting verses from the Koran while Lawrence actually pled the Arab case himself. Either way, the offer made was that the Arab side was willing to negotiate special exceptions for Lebanon and Palestine, but expected the rest of the Arab lands to be granted independence. Perhaps this would be a unified Arab state, or perhaps multiple Arab states, depending upon the will of the Arab people. Or if the Allies believed a mandate was necessary for a period of time, Faisal asked that the Arabs at least be permitted to choose for themselves which of the Allied powers would take that mandate.

In response, the French argued that Faisal did not speak for the people of the Levant and brought in their own Lebanese and Syrian Arabs, who dutifully told the Council that the Arabs desired above all else to be ruled by the French.

Here is where the tensions between Britain and France over Syria reached their peak. Clemenceau reminded Lloyd George that the French had already given up the other territories promised to them under Sykes-Picot. Would the British deny France the one territory she wished to keep? The British brought General Allenby in from Damascus to warn everyone that the Arabs would rise up against any attempt to impose French rule over them.

The Americans were never very keen on Sykes-Picot in the first place; it was a clear example of that “secret diplomacy” that Woodrow Wilson had denounced in his Fourteen Points, and he did not feel bound by it. On one of the many occasions the agreement came up at the peace talks, Wilson quipped that “Sykes-Picot” sounded more like a variety of tea.

The US side offered a compromise. How about a joint British-French-American commission to visit Syria and determine firsthand what the Arabs wanted? This was how most of the contentious issues at the Peace Conference were being handled, by handing them over to a committee of experts with instructions to dig more deeply into the problem and come back with a recommendation. Lloyd George and Clemenceau grudgingly agreed to this idea. Later, they changed their minds and refused to appoint any British or French commissioners to the group. The Americans went ahead with an all-American commission anyway, which conducted its investigation and returned with the unsurprising news that what the Arabs wanted was independence.

Alas, the US representatives at the peace talks felt that their country had no compelling interests in the region and were loathe to get involved in these imperial quarrels, and so the US limited itself to insisting that any British or French administrations in the Near East be conducted as mandates under the supervision of the League of Nations. The British and the French, who didn't take mandates very seriously, didn't mind agreeing to that.

Faisal returned to Syria in May, and began giving speeches calling on the Arab people to choose between slavery and freedom. In July, the Syrian National Congress in Damascus called for independence for Syria and a constitutional monarchy with Faisal as king.

But the decisions that mattered weren't being taken in Damascus. They were being taken in Paris and London. In the fall, Lloyd George and the British Cabinet gave up on quarrelling with the French, and, seeing how there was no longer any reason to be spending British money on an occupation of a territory Britain did not intend to keep, ordered a withdrawal from Syria. The last British troops were gone by November.

In January 1920, the French offered Faisal a deal. He could reign over a Syrian Arab state if it operated as a French protectorate. Faisal said yes at first, but ultimately turned down the offer when he discovered how unpopular it was in Syria. In March, the independent Kingdom of Syria was officially declared, with Faisal as the reigning monarch. But the British and the French, in the peace treaty imposed on Constantinople the following month, awarded Syria to the French and Palestine and Mesopotamia to the British. In July, the French gave Faisal an ultimatum to submit to French occupation or face war. Faisal chose to submit, although some Arabs took up arms against French forces. They were outnumbered, outgunned, and quickly defeated.

[music: "Mawwal"]

Back in episode 155, I spoke at some length about Iran, about how most English speakers of this time called it Persia, but that's the Greek name, et cetera, et cetera. Everything I said at that time about the name of Iran in that episode is equally true about what we're now going to be calling Iraq. Most English speakers of this time called it Mesopotamia, which is Greek for "the land between the rivers." Arabs have been calling this land "Iraq" for more than a millennium now, so it's about time for us English speakers to get with the program. "Ear-RAHK" is the pronunciation closest to the Arabic and is the preferred English pronunciation, so that's the one I will try to stick to using. Some dictionaries list "Ear-RACK" as an acceptable alternative pronunciation. In the United States you often hear it pronounced "Eye-RACK," but I haven't found any source willing to endorse that pronunciation, even as an alternative. Personally, I dislike it for the same reasons I dislike "Eye-RAN." It sounds vulgar and suggestive of prejudice, at least to my ear. So you won't be hearing it round this joint.

Anyway, during the Great War, Hedjaz had revolted against the Turks and there were many in Syria who supported the Allies, but in Iraq, which the British are still calling Mesopotamia, the inhabitants mostly remained loyal to Constantinople. That's because the population of Iraq is

heterogeneous. In the Ottoman province of Basra, you find Shiite Arabs, who observe a different religious tradition from their fellow Arabs. In the province of Baghdad, you find Sunni Arabs, and farther north in the province of Mosul, you find Kurds, who are Sunnis, but not Arabs. There are also a significant number of Jews in Baghdad and Christians in Mosul. This mixture does not produce much of an all-Iraq nationalism. Even within these individual religious and ethnic communities, you find them further divided still by tribe and clan. Inter-communal quarreling and strife were common in Iraq.

The job of overseeing the British military occupation of this uneasy land fell to Colonel Arnold Wilson, a British officer in the Indian Army. The assignment earned him the jocular title, “The Despot of Mess-Pot.” But you can at least credit Wilson with this much: he’s the one who convinced British officials to stop calling the place Mesopotamia and start calling it Iraq. Maybe he just wanted to lose the silly nickname.

Working with Wilson was the English traveler and writer Gertrude Bell, who was as knowledgeable about the peoples of Iraq as any Briton of her day. She got an appointment as “Oriental Secretary,” a sort of special advisor on Iraqi affairs to the British Cabinet and the British administration in Baghdad. She became a key official in the administration of Iraq and the most influential woman in government anywhere in the British Empire, probably. Bell wanted the British to create an independent Iraqi nation. Wilson, on the other hand, saw Iraq as a mish-mash of irreconcilable communities with no national consciousness and thought the land would need to be governed directly by Britain for the foreseeable future.

Iraq was restless throughout 1919, and there were occasional killings of British soldiers. But it exploded into open violence in 1920, once the terms of the peace treaty and the British mandate in Iraq became public knowledge. More soldiers were killed. Arab raiding parties roamed the deserts. In Karbala, Shiite clerics declared it unlawful for any Shiite to serve in the British administration. The British had to call in additional troops and the Royal Air Force to put down the revolt. As they found in Afghanistan, aerial bombing was an effective way to strike back at enemy soldiers, especially when those soldiers had no aircraft of their own.

I should mention here that the British are sometimes accused of using gas against Iraqi rebels in the 1920 fighting. There’s no evidence this actually happened, although it was definitely considered. Winston Churchill, now the British war minister, is on the record as advocating gas attacks in Iraq, although he was talking about nonlethal gases, like what we call “tear gas,” and not chlorine, or phosgene or mustard gas, such as were employed in the recent war.

The uprising cost about 500 British and Indian lives, and thousands of Iraqi lives, and proved another embarrassment for British imperialism. A leader in the *Times* asked, “[H]ow much longer are valuable lives to be sacrificed in the vain endeavour to impose upon the Arab population an elaborate and expensive administration which they never asked for and do not want?”

At least another hundred years, I'd say, but that's just me.

I should add that the British were also in a quarrel with the Turks, who stubbornly refused to submit to the will of Britain and France. More about that in coming episodes, but the quarrel I'm speaking of today is over the province of Mosul. The people of Mosul are not Arabs, and the British took control of Mosul after the armistice went into effect and in violation of its terms, so in the Turkish view, the British occupation of Mosul was illegal and Britain should withdraw. In the British view, drawing a border between Iraq and Turkey across the Mesopotamian plains would leave Iraq unacceptably vulnerable. The border needed to be farther north, in the mountains.

Also, there was all of that lovely, lovely petroleum to consider.

The 1920 uprising in Iraq cost the British Treasury the extravagant sum of £40 million, which was double what the government had budgeted for all administrative costs of governing Iraq for the entire year. The government asked Wilson, what went wrong? Wilson had a long list of people to blame for stirring up trouble in Iraq. It was Faisal and his supporters who, having been driven out of Syria, were now determined to rule Iraq. It was the Bolsheviks. It was local religious fanatics. It was the Turks.

And some were suggesting it was the Jews. In 1920, English and French translations were published in London and Paris of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. I mentioned this document in episodes 5 and 27, a long time ago, but in short, *The Protocols* are a book that purports to lay out the Jewish plot to take over the world. This book first appeared in Russia in 1903, where it was used to justify repression of Jews in that country, but was little known outside Russia until now. The advent of communist revolutions in Russia and Hungary led by Bolshevik groups that included a number of Jews had begun to attract international attention. The publication of *The Protocols* fanned the flames, especially since the Russian revolution could be seen, or made to be seen, as in line with the takeover strategy described in the book.

Happily, by 1921, intrepid journalists had revealed that *The Protocols* were a forgery, created by the Imperial Russian secret police. They weren't even a very good forgery, as much of the text had been plagiarized from an obscure French satire written in 1865, intended as a critique of Napoleon III. I am pleased to be able to tell you that after these revelations, no one ever mentioned *The Protocols* again, and they sank into irrelevance.

Ha, ha. I am joking. Henry Ford paid to have half a million copies of *The Protocols* printed and distributed in the US in the 1920s, years after they were already proved fake. National Socialists in Germany promoted the Protocols in the 1930s. Later in the twentieth century, they were endorsed by a number of Arab leaders, and they live on into our time, where they are still embraced by deeply disturbed people.

Yes, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The gift that keeps on giving. Thank you *so* much, Imperial Russian Secret Police.

[music: "Mawwal"]

In February 1921, the British Colonial Secretary, Lord Milner, retired. He was replaced by the war minister, the now-46-year-old, still keen and energetic, Winston Churchill. Churchill had always been a "grasp the nettle" kind of guy, so when he became colonial secretary, he set about at once to resolve the thorny problems that faced Britain's administration of its two troubled Near Eastern mandates. He convened a conference in Cairo, where talks on Egyptian independence were still ongoing, to determine the futures of Iraq and Palestine. Never one to succumb to idleness, Churchill spent his time between meetings on his latest hobby, oil painting, and on writing a history of the Great War.

Churchill will write a number of history books over the course of his life. Thirty years from now, he will famously tell Parliament, "I consider that it will be found much better by all Parties to leave the past to history, especially as I propose to write that history myself." This line is sometimes rendered as "History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it."

Advising Churchill at the conference would be T.E. Lawrence. Both of these men had been critical of British administration in the Near East. Churchill had been pointing out that the British government had managed to make enemies out of everyone in the region: the Turks, the French, the Arabs, the Greeks. Everyone. Lawrence had written an article for the *Times* in which he made the argument that so far, British rule over the Arabs had been far harsher and bloodier than Turkish rule had ever been.

Back in the heady days of 1918, when victory was imminent, British officials had gotten awfully greedy about the Near East. Now, in 1921, the hard truths about the cost and difficulty of administering the region had sunk in, and there was a strong sentiment in the British government and public to withdraw.

Churchill went into the Cairo Conference saying that his top priority was to reduce the costs of the British mandates in the Near East. He also had a plan, which had already been discussed in Whitehall, a plan that promised to provide easier rule over calmer mandatory territories, while also implementing the pledge to the now-King Hussein of Hedjaz.

The French didn't want any part of Faisal's rule in Syria and they had expelled him from the country. Arnold Wilson was accusing Faisal and his supporters of stirring up trouble in Iraq. The solution the British proposed was to make Faisal the King of Iraq. He was smart, popular, and he was a Sunni from a noble Arab family, which should make him acceptable to Sunni Arabs, which was the community the British were working most closely with, and would provide most of the officials in the new Iraqi government. The thinking was that Sunni Kurds should also



welcome a Sunni king, while the Shiite Arabs would be impressed by his lineage as a descendant of the Prophet.

The British did their best to make it appear that the call for Faisal to take a newly created Iraqi throne was spontaneous and came from the people of Iraq. Faisal returned to Mecca and announced his availability, then waited for the call, which was confirmed by a 96% vote in a plebiscite. But the British were pulling all the strings.

Faisal had to strike a difficult balance. Iraqi leaders were suspicious of this guy they'd never met whom the British had parachuted into Baghdad and declared a king. They were even more suspicious of the British though, and so what Faisal needed was to stand up to the British in order to earn credibility with Iraqis. On the other hand, his rule over Iraq wouldn't survive for long without British support and he well knew this. Many Iraqi leaders wanted immediate independence. They had no use for the British or for a League of Nations mandate, neither of which had they never asked for. In 1922, Britain and Iraq worked out a peace treaty that would allow British military bases in Iraq and considerable influence in Iraqi governance, but Faisal was able to talk the British down from a twenty-year expiration date to a four-year date.

There was a second treaty in 1930, and in 1932, Iraq won full independence, or at least that's what they called it, including membership in the League of Nations. But the British maintained their military bases in Iraq, despite much Iraqi opposition. There were multiple revolts against the Baghdad government in the 1930s, each of which was put down by the Iraqi Army, often brutally. King Faisal died unexpectedly in 1933, just a year after independence. He was in Switzerland, and it happened just after a medical examination had declared him in good health. Officially, it was a heart attack, but there are those who believe he was poisoned.

Faisal was succeeded by his 21-year-old son, who assumed the throne as King Ghazi. Ghazi himself would die unexpectedly just a few years later in 1939 in an automobile accident. Again, it was rumored that this was actually an assassination.

But all these troubles lie in the future. At the Cairo Conference in 1921, the Sharifian Solution, as they were calling it, seemed the best bet to stabilize the situation in Iraq and allowed Churchill and the Conference to turn their attention to an even more difficult problem: Palestine.

Chaim Weitzmann and a delegation of Zionists had appeared before the Supreme Council at the Paris Peace Conference to make their case for upholding the Balfour Declaration and the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It was not an easy case to make. Jews were not a de facto ally in the way that, say, the Czechs or the Poles were. They were not special victims of the Great War in the way that the Armenians were. The Allied leaders in Paris did not recognize any particular debt to the Jewish people of Europe.

Nevertheless, Weitzmann made his case, and he made it on pragmatic grounds. Most of the Jewish population of Europe before the war had lived in one of two multiethnic empires: Russia

and Austria. The Austro-Hungarian Empire no longer existed; it had dissolved into ethnic states based on national identities, none of which were Jewish. In Russia, most Jews had lived in the Pale of Settlement, regions of western Russia that were not ethnically Russian and which Russia had lost following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Poland. Ukraine. The Baltic States. Belarus. Again, these new nations were ethnic states that would be unlikely to recognize Jews as part of their ethnic community.

The result in 1919 was millions of European Jews attempting to leave the lands where they had been born. Where would they go? Germany was scarcely able to feed itself. Which of the Allied powers wanted to volunteer to take in large numbers of Jewish refugees? Italy? France? Anybody? Anybody? Britain? Anybody?

Yeah, no. That's not going to happen. Palestine, on the other hand, represented a plausible alternative. The Zionist calculation went like this: the current population of Palestine was less than a million people, making the land seriously underpopulated. Palestine was capable of supporting four million, perhaps more. Palestine could therefore provide a home for millions of European Jews without displacing a single Arab. So this doesn't have to be a zero-sum game.

Weitzmann's presentation was received warmly by the Americans, the British, and the Italians. By the French, less so. No one sought the opinion of the Arabs in Palestine, who were increasingly becoming convinced that the British occupation, and later mandate, over their land was a cloak for a Zionist takeover. The British Cabinet only confirmed these worries by appointing as the first civilian administrator over Palestine, or High Commissioner in British government parlance, the 49-year old Herbert Samuel. Samuel was a Liberal politician and former MP, who had served in the Asquith Cabinet as Home Secretary during the war. He left the Cabinet when Asquith was ousted, and lost his seat in the 1918 Coupon Election. He was a respected figure. He was also a practicing Jew, the first ever to serve as a British cabinet minister. He was also also an enthusiastic Zionist.

Not that there's anything wrong with any of this, but appointing a well-known Zionist as High Commissioner for Palestine was very bad optics, as we would say in our time. It seemed to confirm every Arab's worst fears that the fix was already in. By 1919, the more enthusiastic Zionists in Palestine were already waving Zionist flags and calling for the name of the country to be changed to Israel. Even more alarming were the actions of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a Russian-born ardent Zionist who had helped organize Jewish volunteers to fight in the British Army in the Near East, the Jewish Legion. Now he was openly arming and training Jews in Palestine and calling not just for a Jewish homeland, but an out-and-out Jewish state. By 1920, there were eruptions of violence and rioting between Jews and Arabs.

And if that isn't a thorny enough problem, the British administration in Palestine also had to deal with an influx of refugees from Syria in the north, people who wanted no part of the French administration there, and with the arrival from Hedjaz in the south of Abdullah, the second son

of King Hussein of Hedjaz. Abdullah had brought a few hundred fighters from Hedjaz and was recruiting more from among those Syrian refugees, intent on leading them all north into Syria to fight against the French administration there and avenge the ouster of his brother Faisal. The French demanded the British do something about this.

Now, in early 1921, it was left to Winston Churchill to sort it all out. On March 24, he and Herbert Samuels rode by train from the Cairo Conference to Jerusalem, where they were greeted by a huge crowd. Churchill and Samuels smiled and waved, thinking them well-wishers. They were not well-wishers; they were protesters.

Churchill met with Abdullah, listened to his concerns about the Balfour Declaration, and made a proposal. The eastern three-quarters of Palestine, everything east of the Jordan River, would be administered separately as an Arab entity with Abdullah as its governor. In this eastern territory of Transjordan, or Transjordan, the Balfour Declaration would not apply. In exchange, Abdullah would call off his war on the French administration in Syria.

Abdullah took the deal, which was ratified by the League of Nations, and he became the Emir of Transjordan. The borders with Hedjaz were adjusted so that Transjordan and Palestine would both have ports on the Gulf of Aqaba.

As for western Palestine, which everyone is just going to call Palestine from now on, the Jewish leaders were unhappy that Churchill had just closed off three-quarters of the total land area of Palestine to Jewish settlement, but were grateful for British support for a Jewish homeland. Churchill for his part, predicted that their work would “confer blessings upon the whole country.”

Churchill also met with a delegation of Palestinian Muslims and Christians. He told them that the Balfour Declaration was a done deal, and in fact it would eventually be ratified by the League of Nations, but he assured the Arab delegation that Britain would regulate Jewish immigration into Palestine so that the native Arabs would not be overwhelmed by a sudden influx. He also reminded them that the Balfour Declaration called for the establishment of “a national home for the Jews.” It did not say “the national home of the Jews,” nor did it say that Palestine could not be the national home of any other people, nor did it propose to set up Jewish rule over Arab people. He added that the British “cherish a strong friendship...with the Arab race as a whole. That is what you would expect from the British Empire, which is the greatest of all Muslim states in the world...”

Churchill's Cairo Conference did manage to ease tensions in the Near East for a while, and reduced the cost to the British Treasury of ruling the region from over £40 million per year to £11 million, which he said was his highest priority. T.E. Lawrence declared that Churchill had “made straight all the tangle” in the Arab world. Gertrude Bell was less sanguine, particularly with regard to the Balfour Declaration, which she thought unfair to Palestinian Arabs. Of the

situation in Palestine, she wrote, “It’s like a nightmare in which you foresee all the horrible things which are going to happen and can’t stretch out your hand to prevent them.”

The wheeling and dealing between the French and the British over the Near East were pretty sleazy, even by the standards of early twentieth century imperialism. British and French rule in the region would not bring much in the way of benefit to either nation. One thing it did bring was a new sense of unity and nationalism to the often quarreling Arabs. They could all agree on one thing: they wanted no part of British or French imperialism.

The French would face repeated uprisings and resistance to their rule in the Levant. The British shrewdly chose to keep low profiles in Iraq and Jordan, moving those lands toward autonomy and independence fairly easily. Palestine, well, Palestine remains a challenge to the British. The Arabs there will continue to reject the British mandate and the Balfour Declaration and largely refuse to participate in the British administration. Palestine is going to remain turbulent for the foreseeable future.

We’ll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening, and I’d especially like to thank Koishi and Shama for their donations, and thank you, Ryan, for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Shama, Koishi, and Ryan help make it all happen, for themselves and for all of us, so if you have a few bucks and would like to help out, visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com), and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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Next week will be a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you’ll join me in two weeks’ time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we finish out our investigation of the Arab lands formerly part of the Ottoman Empire by turning our attention to the Kingdom of Hedjaz and why it isn’t there anymore. Saudi Arabia, in two weeks’ time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Emir Abdullah’s Transjordan became largely autonomous after 1928, with the British retaining a military presence and control over foreign affairs. Transjordan became the fully independent Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan in 1946. The name was shortened to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1949.

Jordan remains a constitutional monarchy to this day, with the current King, as of the date I release this podcast, being Abdullah II, the great-grandson of the first Abdullah. Fun fact: King Abdullah II is a Trekkie. In 1996, prior to his accession to the throne, then-Prince Abdullah appeared in a nonspeaking role in an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager*, making him to the best of

my knowledge the only royal personage ever to appear in an episode of *Star Trek*. And you probably don't care, but I do.

[music: Closing Theme]

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