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Repartitioning the Sykes-Picot Middle East? Debunking Three Myths

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May 16, 2016, marked the 100th anniversary of the Sykes-Picot Agreement between Great Britain and France, which envisioned a division of the Ottoman territories in the Levant and Mesopotamia between the imperial powers. This plan, secretly agreed to during World War I, is often described as the moment when Europeans began to draw "lines in the sand" that became the ostensibly "artificial" borders of the modern Middle East. The centennial came less than two years after the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) released a pair of propaganda videos in which they bulldoze a breach through the berm delineating the Iraq-Syria border and declare "the end of Sykes-Picot."[1] ISIS's flaunting of their control over this imperial-era border, coupled with ongoing conflicts and state weakness in the Middle East, has led scores of journalists, think tank researchers, and Western policy makers to ask whether the region's system of states and borders is unraveling, and if new, less "artificial" borders are emerging naturally or might be drawn at what amounts to a new Sykes-Picot moment.[2] In the words of one writer, "The Arab world today is ripe for reorganization."[3]

This Brief argues that the Sykes-Picot Agreement and its implications for today are often misunderstood and misapplied. To this end, it examines three myths that are widely reflected in opinion pieces commemorating the centennial, in analyses of the fragility of the regional state system and in discussions of ISIS's

avowed ambition to erase borders:

1. The Sykes-Picot Agreement marks the moment when Europeans drew artificial states and borders on a blank map of the Middle East, with little consideration given to local groups or facts on the ground;
2. ISIS's expansion, and its control of territory in both Iraq and Syria, represents an unprecedented challenge to this regional state system; and
3. A collapse of colonial-era states would result in smaller, "more natural," and more peaceful polities defined by relatively homogeneous ethnic or sectarian identity groups. These myths undergird the narrative that Western policy makers should welcome partition—de facto or de jure—as a solution to ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria.

This Brief challenges each of these myths. It argues, first, that there was no "Sykes-Picot moment" one hundred years ago when borders were carved onto a tabula rasa; second, that ISIS's ambition to erase state borders in the region is neither novel nor unprecedented; and third, that Westerners and Arabs understand "the end of Sykes-Picot" in fundamentally different ways, in terms of retractive versus expansionist borders. This disconnect in the "cartographic imagination" of outsiders vis-à-vis that of most Arabs contributes to widely held suspicions regarding U.S. and Western intentions, which are exacerbated by the flawed narrative of ethnic and sectarian partition as a natural solution to regional conflicts.

Myth #1 — The Sykes-Picot Agreement is the moment when Europeans drew artificial states and borders on a blank map of the Middle East with little consideration given to local groups or facts on the ground.

A September 2013 episode of Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* humorously captures the prevailing perception of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. John Oliver, wearing a colonial-era uniform and pith safari helmet and calling himself "Sir Archibald Mapsalot III," cavalierly draws lines on a map of the Middle East as he explains to the host, Jon Stewart, "Look, there's nothing the Arab respects, Jon, more than a strong, steady white hand drawing arbitrary lines twixt their ridiculous tribal allegiances."[4]

Much of the commentary around the centennial of the Sykes-Picot Agreement saw it as just that: the moment when Europeans began to draw today's borders on a blank map without regard to local identities or historical precedents. This is reflected in a widely cited passage in David Fromkin's famous history of the region: "It was an era in which Middle Eastern countries and frontiers were fabricated in Europe. Iraq and what we now call Jordan, for example, were British inventions, lines drawn on an empty map by British politicians after the First World War; while the boundaries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq were established by a British civil servant in 1922."[5]

This perception is mistaken, for three reasons: first, the Sykes-Picot Agreement had very little to do with the states and borders of today's Middle East. The primary goal of the negotiations between the eponymous diplomats Sir Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot was to designate anticipated spheres of influence for Great Britain and France in Ottoman territories in Southwest Asia, thereby both limiting costly post-war competition between European powers

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and securing territories and coastlines important for those powers' strategic interests.[6] Much of what was agreed upon in 1916 was never implemented; the states and borders that exist today show little resemblance to those envisioned in the Sykes-Picot Agreement Map—the original of which, signed by Sykes and Picot, is seen here.
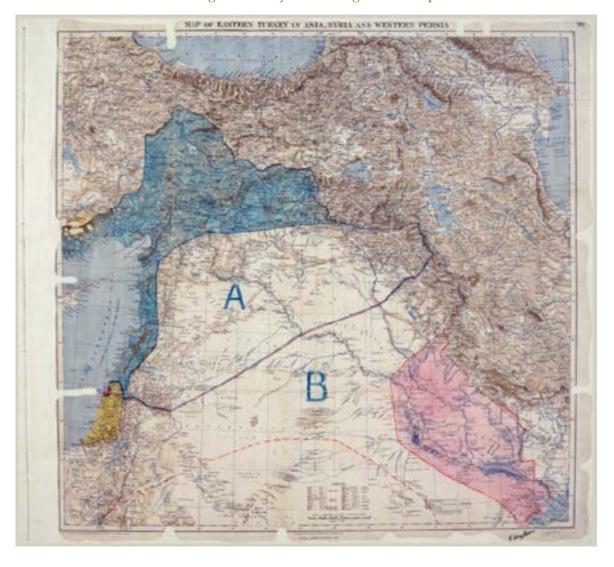
Figure 1: The Sykes-Picot Agreement Map[7]

What states and borders did Sykes and Picot envision? France and Britain proposed an independent Arab state or a confederation of Arab states, "under the suzerainty of an Arab chief," in the areas marked "A" and "B" on the map.[8] France would have exclusive "priority of right of enterprise and local loans" in area "A" and the right to supply advisors and foreign functionaries to the state (or states) in area "A," and Britain would have similar rights in area "B." In the portions of the map shaded in blue and red, France and Great Britain, respectively, would "establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states." In other words, France would have de facto control over much of what is now south-central Turkey and the coastlines of modern Syria and Lebanon, and Britain would control the Tigris-Euphrates River system from just north of Baghdad to the Persian Gulf, territory that was close to facilities of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company.[9]

Little, if any, of this vision, however, came to pass. The independent Arab state or confederation of states proposed in areas "A" and "B" never emerged. These areas in fact joined parts of the proposed zones of de facto control to become the cores of Syria and Iraq, whereas Sykes-Picot clearly envisioned a very different patchwork of sovereignties. Furthermore, borders moved. The Agreement assigned Mosul, Irbil, and much of today's al-Anbar province west of Fallujah to the French zone of influence; these territories instead soon became parts of the British Mandate. As Sara Pursley writes, "The only border of present-day Iraq . . . that can possibly be called a Sykes-Picot line is the southern-most section of its border with Syria, traversing the desert region from Jordan up to the Euphrates river near al-Qa`im—though, as we have seen, this was not the border of Iraq in Sykes-Picot but the boundary between the A and B regions of the 'independent

Arab state.'…The remaining, longer, section of the Iraq-Syria border, from al-Qa`im to Turkey, does not exist in any form in Sykes-Picot."[10] The boundary between Iraq and Syria was delimited in general terms by a French-British agreement in 1920 and again in 1922, but the actual boundary that ISIS celebrated erasing in 2014 was not set until 1932, by the League of Nations.[11]

The second reason that Fromkin's and others' understanding of Sykes-Picot is mistaken is that there was in fact no one moment in 1916 at which the map of the Middle East was drawn. As in other world regions, the emergence of a territorial state system took place gradually, and borders took decades to settle. Post-war conferences and agreements that carved up Ottoman territories—the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the San Remo Agreement of 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, the Cairo Conference of 1921, the Conference of Lausanne in 1922–23—played important roles in shaping the map of the Middle East, but the details of those agreements and the negotiations that resulted in them reveal that the process by which the map emerged was complex and highly contingent, and that local actors often stymied European efforts to draw borders and divide territories.[12] A few nascent states, such as Hatay State and the short-lived Kingdom of Kurdistan, vanished from the map.[13] New ones, such as Jordan and Israel, emerged.

Finally, Europeans did not draw borders willy-nilly, without regard to local factors.[14] Local actors and historical precedents played important roles in determining not only what borders were drawn but even which proposed states survived and which did not. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, for example, awarded much of south-central Turkey, including the cities of Adana, Gaziantep, Diyarbakir, and areas north as far as Sivas, to the French zone of direct influence; these and later efforts to carve up Anatolia were stymied by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Local actors and politics heavily influenced the specific location of the Iraq-Syria border, including the "ridiculous tribal allegiances" mocked in the *Daily Show* skit mentioned earlier.[15] International conferences and agreements, including San Remo, sought to contain nationalist demands that had already begun to emerge at the turn of the century, and foreign powers were, to some extent, constrained by what was, and was not, possible to implement.

Local precedents for seemingly "artificial" states also mattered more than analysts often recognize. For example, scholars have demonstrated the extent to which the modern state of Iraq had Ottoman administrative roots. Sara Pursley describes an 1893 Ottoman map displaying the label "al-'Iraq al-'Arabi" (Arab Iraq) to designate a geographical area stretching across the administrative provinces of Basra and Baghdad, and argues that the Sykes-

Picot boundaries of "Iraq" correspond to the Ottoman map.[16] Similarly, Visser argues that Iraq had several sorts of antecedents that predated the British invasion of 1914, including the name "Iraq," patterns of administrative centralization under Baghdad, and even a nascent sense of patriotism.[17]

The legacy of the Sykes-Picot Agreement is not in the map of today's Middle East: The vast majority of it was never implemented, and the borders that in fact emerged were instead influenced, to varying extents, by local actors and precedents. The expression "Sykes-Picot" might be better understood as a regional colloquialism for the idea that Western powers attempted to shape the future of the region to serve their interests.

Myth #2 — ISIS's expansion, and its control of territory in both Iraq and Syria, represents an unprecedented challenge to the colonial-era state system of the Middle East.

In June 2014, ISIS released a pair of videos: one, in Arabic, entitled "The Breaking of the Borders," and a second, in English, called "The End of Sykes-Picot."[18] In the former, ISIS uses bulldozers to breach the berm delineating the Iraq-Syria border, and a cavalcade of captured Humvees and troop transports drives through. As inspirational music plays, an elderly Arab man watches this purported century-old legacy of Sykes-Picot being erased and wipes tears from his eyes, just before an ISIS soldier respectfully kisses his forehead. In the English-language follow-up video, a young ISIS fighter identified as Abu Safiyya gives a tour of what he calls "the so-called border of Sykes-Picot," proudly proclaiming, "We don't recognize it, and we will never recognize it."[19] Standing in front of a seemingly outdated map of the border region, he declares, "Now it is all one country, one *dawlat* [state], one *umma* [community]."[20]

Although ISIS is usually understood as the latest incarnation of a global Salafi-jihadist movement—it is often described as "al-Qaeda 3.0"[21]—its "end of Sykes-Picot" rhetoric is not unique to Islamists and can be seen as a manifestation of a long tradition of irredentist movements in the region. ISIS grew out of the crucible of post-Saddam Iraq; its predecessor organizations incorporated many disenfranchised Iraqi Sunni Arabs and ex-Baathists into its ranks. Several scholars and writers have noted the high percentage of ISIS leaders who are Sunni Arabs with Iraqi Baathist connections, and have suggested that ISIS's military strategy and tactics reflect the incorporation of many members of Saddam's

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former security forces.[22] But few, if any, have gone further and linked ISIS's rhetoric about Sykes-Picot to Baathist influences; instead, studies of ISIS's ideology emphasize its millenarian proclivities.[23] But ISIS's rhetoric of erasing borders is similar to that of other post-Ottoman supranationalist movements in the region, including the Baath Parties of both Iraq and Syria, Nasser's pan-Arabism, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, which advocates for a Greater Syria encompassing the Levant and Mesopotamia, from Lebanon to Kuwait.[24]

Different branches of the Baath Party ruled Iraq from 1968 to 2003 and Syria since 1963. In Iraq, the party's slogan of "one Arab nation with an eternal mission" was inscribed on all major party documents,[25] and leaders of the party spoke incessantly about the need to liberate and unify all Arab countries. Baath ideology taught that differences between Arabs were unimportant and created by outsiders, and would disappear with the awakening of Arab consciousness. The unification of Arabs was seen as a moral necessity, and the Party's task was to remove what it saw as colonial-era boundaries and unite Arabs in a single political entity.[26] In this sense, ISIS's transnational Islamism echoes Arab nationalists' calls, with "Muslim" substituted for "Arab."

ISIS's actual challenge to borders also finds echoes in Arab nationalism. The region's borders seem weak and fragile today, but the lines seemed even blurrier in 1958. In February of that year, Syria and Egypt merged to form the United Arab Republic, spurring the Hashemite monarchies of Iraq and Jordan to attempt their own rival merger as the Arab Federation—which collapsed six months later, after the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy by army officers. It then appeared as though Iraq would join the UAR, with Jordan and Lebanon perhaps not far behind; but the UAR too broke up, in 1961. Other attempts at unification include the United Arab States confederations with Yemen and Gaddafi's attempts to merge Libya, at various times in the 1970s, with the UAE, Sudan, and Tunisia. Yet, the borders that Arab nationalism threatened to sweep away remained—or, in the case of the United Arab Republic, reemerged by 1961 with its dissolution. The state system of the Middle East, then, has weathered numerous challenges—and the current challenge from ISIS in several ways echoes earlier eras.

Myth #3 — A collapse of colonial-era states would result in smaller, "more natural," and more peaceful polities defined by relatively homogeneous ethnic or sectarian identity groups.

Events in recent years have led more than a dozen Western journalists, analysts, and academics to imagine what the map of the Middle East might look like after "the end of Sykes-Picot." Historian Daniel Neep refers to this disparagingly as exercises of what he calls "cartographic imagination" and explores several such maps.[27] A few appeared in 2006, when violence was particularly bad in Iraq, and a large flurry was created in the summer of 2014, after ISIS rolled across the Syria-Iraq border and proclaimed the unraveling of the Sykes-Picot "conspiracy." The January/February 2008 cover of *The Atlantic* shows a possible future map of the region "After Iraq." It resembles the board game RISK, complete with a pair of dice and movable flags. Jeffrey Goldberg's accompanying article refers to the "intrinsically artificial qualities of several states."[28] Robin Wright, writing in the *New York Times* in September 2013, imagined a "remapped Middle East" that reflected Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Saudi Arabia fracturing in disparate ways.[29] The new country "Wahhabistan" would be among those born.

One thing that these maps, all of them created by Westerners, have in common is that they cartographically imagine existing states fragmenting into smaller polities that are most often defined by purported ethnic or sectarian identity groups instead of by natural features or historical antecedents.[30] All place heavy emphasis on ethnic and religious minorities. In these imagined maps, "natural" borders are ones that do not divide ethnic or religious groups across borders.

Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) such map appeared in a June 2006 article in *Armed Forces Journal* by Ralph Peters entitled "Blood Border: How a Better Middle East Would Look."[31] Peters presents a map with borders that "redress the wrongs suffered by the most significant 'cheated' population groups" (e.g., the Kurds, Baluch, Arab Shia) but fail, as he acknowledges, to adequately address other minorities (e.g., Christians and Ismailis). Peters believes that these new borders will lead to a more peaceful Middle East and calls the existing borders "colossal, man-made deformities." "A Frankenstein's monster of a state sewn together from ill-fitting parts," he writes, "Iraq should have been divided into three smaller states immediately [after Baghdad fell in 2003]." He mentions the "unnatural state of Saudi Arabia" and Iran's "madcap boundaries." Peters' remapped Middle East sees the emergence of a Unified Azerbaijan, a Free Kurdistan, an Arab Shia state, and Free Baluchistan, as well as a Greater Lebanon (which he refers to as "Phoenicia reborn").

These exercises in cartographic imagination reveal more about the map drawers than they do about the people and dynamics of the region. In particular, the assumption

that smaller "ethnic" states will naturally emerge and be more stable is an outgrowth of the U.S. foreign policy establishment's experience in the Balkans after the breakup and collapse of the Soviet Union. This is reflected in the memoirs of officials such as Ambassador Christopher Hill, who repeatedly sees parallels between individuals and events in Iraq and his formative experiences in the Balkans.[32] It is also evident in journalistic coverage. Fred Kaplan, for example, describes long-simmering ethnic hatreds in the region: The Ottomans, he says, protected "Sunnis and Shiites, Arabs and Jews, Muslims and Christians" from each other, and the collapse of the Ottoman order in 1918 unleashed the "demon of national, ethnic, and sectarian disputes over who controls which territory at what border precisely."[33] Kaplan says that "only suffocating totalitarian regimes could control" artificial countries in the region, implying that the decline of strongmen has unleashed similar demons today. Indeed, the results of the Dayton Accords and the emergence of independent Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian states seem to provide the shared model for Western policy makers' thinking about how seemingly intractable conflicts in Syria and Iraq might end.

This Western perspective contrasts sharply with many, perhaps most, Arabs' cartographic imaginings of what the end of Sykes-Picot might look like. A printed poster occasionally seen in schools and bookshops in Arab republics, for example, shows "The history of the Arab nation through 15 centuries." It is a timeline of Arab history, from 630 to whenever the latest version was printed, with columns representing the twenty-two members of the Arab League, grouped geographically and differentiated by colors that show when those countries' territories shared a ruler. Periods and regions of "unity" include the early Islamic conquests after the death of the Prophet and the great caliphal empires: the Umayyads, Abassids, Mamluks, and Ottomans. The timeline changes considerably after World War I, showing the region dramatically divided and subdivided over time under headings such as "British presence" or "French occupation." Thus, the poster depicts a long history featuring periods of unity and independence, which end decisively at the hands of colonial powers.

For most Arabs, the true "end of Sykes-Picot" would mean the end of imperial-era divisions created to deliberately ensure the region's long-term dependence on and subordination to the West. Existing states would not collapse down to atomistic ethnic and sectarian groups; rather, populations would unite and aggregate *up*. Arabs, and perhaps the wider Islamic world, would cease to be divided into distinct state entities. Both the Western and Arab views see the borders of the Middle East as artificial, but they differ considerably in their expectations of

whether those borders would dissolve in an expansionist or retractive fashion.

This clash of these two perspectives is evident in a piece recently written by the director general of a prominent Gulf think tank. Recalling that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was secret and only revealed later after Communists came to power in Russia, he wrote that "the fact that there are no current plans that have been publicly announced by certain powers to divide the region does not mean that such plans do not exist—perhaps the details will become evident at a later time." He continues, "The new lines drawn under the 'second Sykes-Picot' will be filled with hatred and animosity; they will be ethnic and sectarian borders that detonate with blood and desolation, marring the entire region as it plunges into chaos. Their objective is to create a new Middle East—one of various dysfunctional imbalances that counteract the interest of the Arab world in a bid to serve the interests of non-Arab regional powers, namely Iran and Israel."[34] The rise of a "landscape of sectarian states" in the Middle East, however, would be understood differently in the region than it likely would be in Western capitals.

There is in fact little evidence that there are "more natural" states or borders in the region, waiting to be realized.[35] It is a truism that all states are created, but the fact remains that most states in the region have been around for at least eighty years, shaping their populations through education, symbols, and ritual. In the uproar surrounding the Arab Spring, no significant new separatist movements emerged, aside from already existing ones among Kurds in Iraq and South Yemenis, as well as increased demands for local autonomy in parts of Libya and in Kurdish Syria (Rojava).[36] State borders in the Levant today appear faded and fluid; but, they appeared similarly faded in 1958. States and borders in the Middle East have in fact been remarkably resilient and durable since the 1970s.[37]

In addition, differences *within* ethnic and sectarian groups are often just as great as differences between them. Consider Iraq. Iraq's two main Kurdish factions fought a bloody civil war in the mid-1990s, which ended only after U.S.-led mediation. Sunni Arabs in Iraq have been deeply divided since 2003,[38] and ISIS has probably killed more fellow Sunnis than it has members of other groups. Finally, as Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee points out, Shiites in Iraq are divided by class, region, tribe, and other distinctions.[39]

In short, there is little reason to expect homogeneous ethnic or sectarian "post-Sykes-Picot" states to be more peaceful. Indeed, partition of existing states might just make *other* cleavages the axes of contention, as the violence in South Sudan tragically demonstrates.

Conclusion

This Brief challenges the core assumptions behind a narrative commonly encountered in op-eds and papers asking whether we are approaching "The End of Sykes-Picot." Those assumptions include the belief that the Middle East's states and borders are artificial because they were laid down by imperial powers beginning with Sykes-Picot. The rise of ISIS and ongoing civil wars in the region are assumed to pose an unprecedented challenge to those states and borders, and to have revealed their frailty and illegitimacy. The unraveling of borders, it is assumed, will finally permit people to fall (or be moved) into their "natural" configuration among relatively homogeneous ethnic or sectarian polities. According to this narrative, the dilemma for Western policy makers, therefore, is whether they should wait for ethnic partitioning to occur naturally, or convene a conference of great and regional powers to either defend the old order or manage the inevitable redrawing of the map.

The dilemma is a false one because it rests on a number of myths. First, the borders of today's Middle East were not actually drawn by colonial authorities via the Sykes-Picot Agreement. In fact, since World War I, the line-up of states in the region has evolved, with some borders changed and others finally demarcated. Locals played important roles throughout. Second, ISIS's ambition to erase state borders echoes the goals of other movements in other eras, when the region's state system seemed equally at risk of collapse. Finally, Westerners and Arabs understand "the end of Sykes-Picot" in different ways, in terms of retractive versus expansionist borders. The emergence of explicitly Sunni, Shiite, or Kurdish states would be seen by many Westerners as "natural"—but within the region, it would be seen by many as serving Western interests.

Endnotes

1   "The Breaking of the Borders" [in Arabic];* "The End of Sykes-Picot" [in English].*
2   See, for example, Robin Wright, "How the Curse of Sykes-Picot Still Haunts the Middle East," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 2016;* Thanassis Cambanis, "The Middle East's Fading Frontiers," *Boston Globe*, May 1, 2016;* David Ignatius, "How to Put the Middle East Back Together," *Washington Post*, May 3, 2016;* Michael Rubin, "Was Sykes-Picot a Bad Thing?" *AEIdeas* (American Enterprise Institute), May 3, 2016;* Itamar Rabinovich, "The End of Sykes-Picot? Reflections on the Prospects of the Arab State System" (Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution, *Middle East Memo* Number 32, February 2014);* Patrick Cockburn, "Is It the End of Sykes-Picot?" *London Review of Books* 35, no. 11, June 6, 2013, pp. 3–5.*

3   Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* (New York: Random House, 2016), p. 100. In contrast to most outsiders' visions of reorganization, which focus on ethnic and sectarian groups, Khanna calls for the region to "recover its historical cartography of internal connectivity" among "urban oases" (p. 101).

4   http://www.cc.com/video-clips/kovgs5/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-sir-archibald-mapsalot-iii.*

5   David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), p. 17.

6   James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914-1948* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012).

7   There are several versions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement Map. This is the original, signed by the two men. Sykes-Picot Agreement Map signed by Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot, May 8, 1916 (Image from UK National Archives MPK1/426, FO 371/2777 [folio 398]).* See also a map that overlays the territorial divisions of Sykes-Picot with contemporary state borders.*

8   See the text of The Sykes-Picot Agreement.*

9   The British Navy had largely switched from coal-burning to oil-burning ships by 1912, making such facilities a vital national interest. Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914–1956* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963), p. 98.

10 Sara Pursley, "'Lines Drawn on an Empty Map': Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State (Part 1)," *Jadaliyya*, June 2, 2015.*

11 Set down in the "Report of the Commission Entrusted by the Council with the Study of the Frontier between Syria and Iraq" (Geneva, September 10, 1932).

12 Nick Danforth, "Forget Sykes-Picot. It's the Treaty of Sèvres That Explains the Modern Middle East," *Foreign Policy*, August 10, 2015; Cyrus Schayegh, "The Mandates and/as Decolonization," in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, ed. Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan (New York: Rutledge, 2015), pp. 412–19.*

13 David Siddhartha Patel, "Remembering Failed States in the Middle East," *Project on Middle East Political Science*, May 3, 2015.*

14 In an oft-cited passage, Barr (2012, p. 12) writes that "Sykes sliced his finger across the map that lay before them on the table. 'I should like to draw a line from the "e" in Acre to the last "k" in Kirkuk,' he said."

15 See, for example, Eliezer Tauber, *The Formation of Modern Syria and Iraq* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995) and Nelida Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

16 Pursley, "'Lines Drawn on an Empty Map' (Part 1)."* See also, Sara Pursley, "'Lines Drawn on an Empty Map': Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State (Part 2)," *Jadaliyya*, June 3, 2015.*

17 Reidar Visser, "Proto-political Conceptions of 'Iraq' in Late Ottoman Times," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 3, no. 2 (2009), pp. 143–54.*

18 "The Breaking of the Borders" [in Arabic]; "The End of Sykes-Picot" [in English].

19 Abu Safiyya's real name is Bastián Alexis Vásquez; he was

born in Norway to Chilean parents and resided in Barcelona, Spain, before joining ISIS. Vasquez was reportedly killed in January 2016 [in Spanish].*

20   As was mentioned above, that particular border does not date to Sykes-Picot.

21   Al-Qaeda "Central," the organization based in Afghanistan and Pakistan and led first by Osama bin Laden and then by Ayman al-Zawahiri, is seen as al-Qaeda 1.0, and the various pre-ISIS incarnations of the more sectarian Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda, led initially by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, are often dubbed al-Qaeda 2.0.

22   See Martin Chulov, "ISIS: The Inside Story," The Guardian, December 11, 2014,* and David Siddhartha Patel, "ISIS in Iraq: What We Get Wrong and Why 2015 Is Not 2007 Redux," Middle East Brief, no. 87 (Brandeis University, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, January 2015).*

23   William Faizi McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015); Fawaz A. Gerges, ISIS: A History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

24   For a history of Arab nationalism, see Adeed Dawisha, Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

25   Joseph Sassoon, Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 9.

26   This is the central theme of the fundamental principles of the Baath Party constitution, adopted by the first congress of the party in 1947.*

27   Daniel Neep, "Focus: The Middle East, Hallucination, and the Cartographic Imagination," Discover Society, January 3, 2015.*

28   Jeffrey Goldberg, "After Iraq: A Report from the New Middle East—and a Glimpse of Its Possible Future," The Atlantic, January/February 2008.* Goldberg did a follow-up piece in June 2014: "The New Map of the Middle East: Why Should We Fight the Inevitable Break-up of Iraq?"*

29   Robin Wright, "Imagining a Remapped Middle East," New York Times, September 28, 2013.*

30   Journalists were not the only people to engage in such exercises. Vanity Fair brought together four U.S. Middle East experts (Dennis Ross, David Fromkin, Kenneth Pollack, and Daniel Byman) to produce a map. See Cullen Murphy and Haisam Hussein, "Lines in the Sand," Vanity Fair, January 2008.*

31   Ralph Peters, "Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look," Armed Forces Journal, June 1, 2006.*

32   Christopher R. Hill, Outpost: Life on the Frontlines of American Diplomacy: A Memoir (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

33   Robert D. Kaplan, "The Ruins of Empire in the Middle East," Foreign Policy, May 25, 2015.*

34   Jamal Sanad Al Suwaidi, "Will the Region's History of Sykes-Picot Repeat Itself?" The National, April 5, 2016.*

35   Lawrence of Arabia proposed an alternative map of the region, one based largely on ethnic identities (such as Arabs or Kurds).* But, his map does not address the difficult question of what to do with mixed areas, and he ignores sectarian issues. Commenting on Lawrence's map, Pursley notes his question marks on the mixed areas surrounding Mosul. See Pursley, "'Lines Drawn on an Empty Map' (Part 1)."*

36   This may not be surprising. Although the number of states in the world has nearly tripled since World War II, the political and economic factors that economists have linked to demands for autonomy and independence—namely, democratization and international openness—are decidedly weak in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). See Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, "What's Happening to the Number and Size of Nations?" E-International Relations, November 9, 2015. *

37   Steven Simon made this point just as ISIS released its videos in June 2014. "Rumors of Sykes-Picot's Death," he wrote, "are Greatly Exaggerated." ("The Middle East's Durable Map," Foreign Affairs, August 26, 2014).*

38   On the inability of Sunnis in Iraq to coordinate, see David Siddhartha Patel, *Islam, Information, and the Rise and Fall of Social Order in Iraq* (unpublished book manuscript).

39   Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee, "Sectarian Politics and State Formation in Iraq," (presentation at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, January 29, 2015).

*Weblinks are available in the online version at
www.brandeis.edu/crown

Middle East Brief

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David Siddhartha Patel