

# When America Fought the British Empire And Its Treacherous Sykes-Picot Treaty

by Dean Andromidas

Jan. 13—When will justice descend upon the nations of Southwest Asia? As these words are being written, more than 265 children have been slaughtered in Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip. The world wrings its hands, yet does nothing. Since the end of World War II, not one decade has passed without a war robbing each generation, Arab and Jew, of the happiness of peace; not one family has been free of grievous loss due to war.

Count these wars:

The first Arab-Israeli war of **1948**, followed by the **1956** unprovoked war against Egypt by the tripartite alliance of Britain, France, and Israel in what is the euphemistically called the "Suez crisis." Then in the next decade, the **1967** Arab-Israeli war, misnamed the "Six-Day War" and hatching the myth of a great Israeli victory; in reality, this war has never ended. It was soon followed by the "war of attrition" and Israel's strategic defeat in the **1973** October war. The promising Israeli-Egyptian peace of 1979, hammered out through the intervention of the United States, was soon followed by Israel's disastrous invasion of Lebanon in **1982**, and the second round, which proved just as disastrous, in **2006**. The current Israeli massacres in Gaza are only the latest engagement of Ariel Sharon's war of attrition launched against the Palestinians in **2000**, when he marched his troops onto the al-Haram al-Sharif (the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Islam's third-holiest shrine, where the Prophet Muhammed is believed to have ascended into Heaven).

Israel will lose this war as well. The only question is whether it will lose its claim to being a civilized nation, before it admits defeat and seeks a lasting peace.

In **1980**, farther to the east, the British orchestrated the Iraq-Iran War, followed by Margaret Thatcher's and George H.W. Bush's **1991** Gulf War, and the second round launched by Tony Blair and Bush Junior in **2003**.

Arab-Israeli hatred is not the "cause" of this perpetual war, nor are oil resources, nor anything internal to the region. The cause is a system whose very purpose is the breeding of new wars. It is the Sykes-Picot system, imposed on the region by the British Empire at the end of the First World War. For almost a century, it has kept in thrall a region whose geo-strategic position affects the peace and economic development of Europe, Africa, and the entire Eurasian land mass.

The only power great enough to liberate and bring justice to this region is the United States. Not with its armies, but with a principle far more powerful than imperialism: the principle by which the United States was "conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." A nation whose foundation is the security of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

No one understands this better than the Anglo-Dutch Liberal empire.

This report will demonstrate that forces in the United States fully understood the danger of the Sykes-Picot system when the British planned to erect it after World War I. They understood that the injustice of the system had its foundations in the principle of imperialism which had grown to dominate the planet. They understood that in order to avoid new wars, it had to be replaced by a principle of justice, only attainable by creating nation-states, dedicated to securing the rights and economic development of each and every citizen.

These facts are documented by two official American commissions, which conducted investigative tours of the region, and whose reports have been ignored by today's historians or are relegated to footnotes. These two commissions were the King-Crane Commission and the Military Mission to Armenia. If their recommendations had been acted on, the world would look much different than it does now.

FIGURE 1

**Imperial Partition of the Mideast: The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916**



Aegean, as well as yet-to-be-defined swaths of territory in parts of the Ottoman Empire, which now form Turkey. In another secret treaty, between Italy and Britain in 1917, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, always willing to promise the same land to two or three different parties, promised to give the Italians Smyrna and parts of Anatolia that had already been promised to the French, the Russians, and the Greeks.

Demonstrating that France can be just as duplicitous as Britain, in March 1916 France and Russia signed the secret Sazanof-Paleologue Treaty, which would give Russia the land between

**1. Secret Treaties, Public Wars**

Orchestrated by the British, World War I was a war among Empires: the British Empire, the French Empire, and the Russian Empire, against the empires of Germany and Austro-Hungary. The plan to carve up the Ottoman Empire served as the glue that held together the European alliance that went to war against Germany. Sykes-Picot was only one of several secret treaties which defined an overall system.

First, in March 1915, through a series of three notes exchanged among Russia, Great Britain, and France, Constantinople was promised to Russia, while France and Britain were to be given other amputations from the Ottoman Empire. Russia was to allow Britain to take control of the so-called “neutral zone” that the two empires had established to separate their respective spheres of influence in Persia, carved out prior to the war: the Russian sphere in the north and the British in the south.

The Treaty of London was signed in April 1915, bringing Italy into the war with the promise of territory carved out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Albania. This would have made the Adriatic an Italian lake. Italy was also to be given “compensations” in North Africa and was promised the Dodecanese Islands in the

Persia and the Black Sea, and would extend France’s land grab in Asia Minor and Syria, to the Tigris River.

Then, in May 1916, the Sykes-Picot Treaty gave Britain and France exclusive rights to divide up the Arabic-speaking regions of the Ottoman Empire. Roughly what is now Syria and Lebanon was to go to France, while Britain claimed what became the Palestinian mandate and Iraq. At the same time, Britain was promising Emir Faisal Hussein (the son of the Hashemite Sharif Hussein of Saudi Arabia, and later the British-allied king of Iraq) an Arab State in the same area, in return for his rebelling against the Ottoman overlords.

When the United States entered the war on the side of the Entente, it declared war only against the German and Austro-Hungarian empires, but not the Ottoman Empire. *The United States did not recognize any of these secret treaties, nor did it sign any of the post-war treaties among the Ottoman Empire and Britain, France, and Italy.*

These were the plans on paper; the reality was more along the lines laid out by H.G. Wells in his *A World Set Free*, the world’s first novel about a nuclear war, with radium bombs. Published in 1914, three months before World War I broke out, Wells’ “fictional” war unfolded exactly as the real war unfolded three months later.

Wells' war was to last 50 years, and to end only after the king of England succeeded in organizing a world government. Such a world government would not, according to Wells, have been possible, without 50 years of war. When World War I came to an end in Europe in November 1918, the British unleashed wars, civil wars, and revolutions throughout Eurasia and Southwest Asia. Almost a hundred years have passed, and the belief structures they put into place still fuel wars to this day.

It is useful to demonstrate, that despite the fact that the U.S. was sitting on the same side of the peace table as Britain, it had a strategic concern that *Great Britain would be our principal future enemy.*

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## 2. The U.S. Did Not Agree

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On Sept. 9, 1919, Navy Lt. Cdr. Holloway H. Frost delivered the first of a series of lectures to the General Staff College on strategy in the Atlantic. Frost was, at that time, assigned to the Planning Division of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

In his lecture, he referred to England's exhaustion as a result of the war, and social and industrial unrest in many of the Empire's dominions. "But while these conditions apparently render a war with Great Britain an impossibility," he continued, "they may even be the direct cause of such a war. A revolution is today a possibility in any country; and once this is accomplished, it is impossible to predict what course the revolutionists may take; possibly they may, like the Russians, engage in war against their former allies. But even assuming the impossibility of the success of a revolution in Great Britain, may not the desperate conditions, which exist, drive her into a war, if it becomes demonstrated that they can be improved in no other way? It is evident that no nation, which bases its prosperity on trade, can exist with an adverse trade balance of four billions annually, a figure which the British estimate will increase in the near future, rather than decrease. The United States is the direct cause of this adverse trade balance. If it develops that we can successfully compete with England on the seas, this adverse balance will be maintained. A nation doomed to commercial defeat will usually demand a military decision before this commercial defeat is complete. Therefore, there is always the possibility that the British, however friendly they may wish to be, may be forced into a war to maintain their com-

mercial supremacy of the seas, which is essential to the existence of the British Empire."

Was Frost just voicing his own opinion? Opening up the 1919 volume of Foreign Relations of the United States, the official Department of State documents, in the Chapter concerning Great Britain, one comes upon a section entitled "Oil Concession in Palestine and Mesopotamia."

The first document is a letter addressed to the Acting Secretary of State from H.C. Cole of Standard Oil Company of New York, dated March 15, 1919. The letter is a request for action against the British government. The letter relates how British military officers in Palestine forced Standard Oil's Arab partners to allow them entry into the company's offices in Jerusalem, and then rifled through the files and "borrowed" maps and other data related to oil concessions that the company had purchased in 1914 from the Ottomans.

The complaint further stated that the company had been forbidden to reclaim its concessions by the British authorities, quoting a report by one of the company's advisors who had gone to Palestine to investigate: "There is one thing I can very plainly say, that is, by every means possible British will prevent any American Petroleum Company from operating or producing in any territory which they may retain after the war. They did everything possible to find our claims in Palestine and finally when they were unsuccessful, they forced Ismiel Bey to produce all the plans of the various claims, which they proceeded to copy."

Despite a testy exchanges of diplomatic notes between the U.S. Secretary of State and British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon over the next ten months, American companies were unable to independently exploit oil in territory under British mandate until after World War II.

Thus Frost's assessment was not that of a single officer, but the analysis that *shaped U.S. military planning for the next 15 years*, as the British Empire was considered the number one threat facing the United States.

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## 3. Two Missions Which Tried To Define U.S. Policy

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When the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, Leon Trotsky, rifling through the files of the Tsar's Foreign Ministry, found the secret treaties and released them to



Library of Congress

*President Wilson's pro-British advisor Col. Edward House did his best to promote London's policy, but was opposed by influential groupings in the U.S. military and political institutions.*

the world's press. Soviet Russia repudiated the treaties and declared, "No annexations and no indemnities," as the principle upon which Russian war aims would rest.

Although historians claim that the United States knew nothing of the treaties, Col. Edward House, the Anglophile advisor to President Woodrow Wilson, knew of their existence as of, at least, April 28, 1917, when he noted in his diary a meeting with Lord Balfour, His Majesty's Foreign Secretary, who was on his first trip to Washington after the U.S. entered the war. House writes that while poring over a map of the world, they were discussing how the "English-speaking peoples" were going to put the world back together again after the war. Prussia will be giving up territory for the State of Poland; the Austro-Hungarian Empire will be divided into three states; and choice morsels will be offered to Italy for her "sacrifices." They finally came to

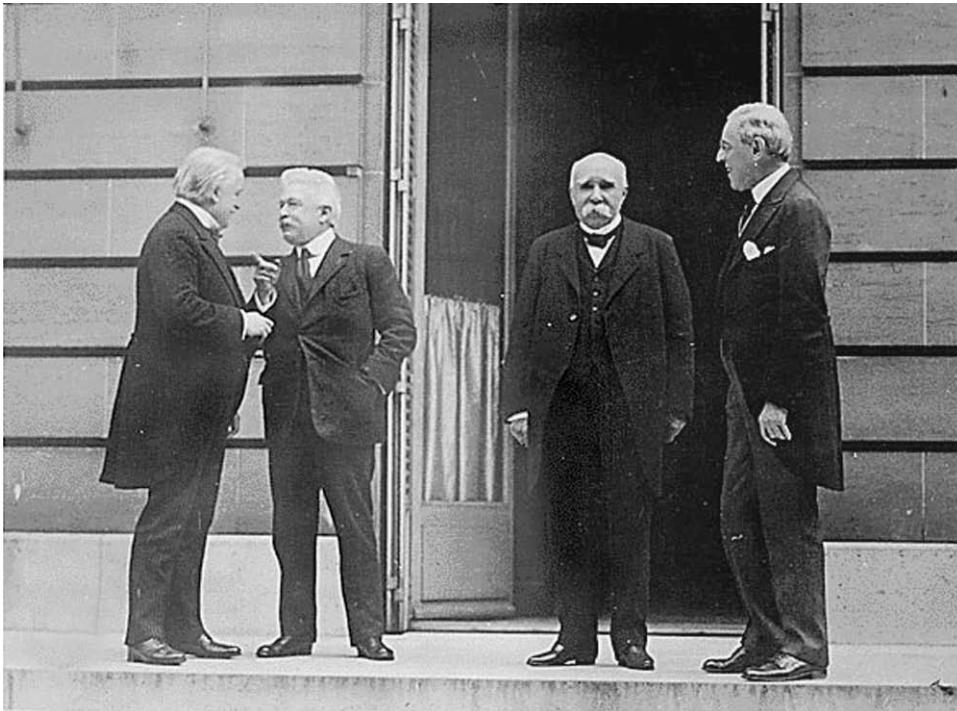
the Ottoman Empire and the secret treaties. House wrote in his diary: "Crossing the Bosphorus we came to Anatolia. It is here that the secret treaties between the Allies come in most prominently. They have agreed to give Russia a sphere of influence in Armenia and the northern part. The British take in Mesopotamia [and the region], which is contiguous with Egypt. France and Italy each have their spheres embracing the balance of Anatolia up to the Straits. It is all bad and I told Balfour so. They are making it a breeding place for future war. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The war ended in November 1918, and by the beginning of 1919, the Allies convened the Paris Peace Conference, to settle the terms of the post-war settlement, which entailed not only carving up the Ottoman Empire, but Austro-Hungary and Germany as well. The resulting mess was, theoretically, to be tidied up through the formation of the League of Nations. While there is evidence that there were Americans who hoped the League of Nations and mandate system could be created in the spirit of fostering the development of nations, rather than imperial designs, what the British wanted was one world government that would legitimize their colonies.

Wilson was maneuvered, whether willingly or not, into a corner, where he endorsed the League of Nations, with its deep compromises and insane reparations against Germany. The Senate, for good reasons, failed to approve the treaty. When the U.S. found that neither France nor Britain allowed for an "open door" economic policy in their mandates, Lord Curzon simply told Washington that since it was not a member of the League, it had no right to object.

The existence of the secret treaties made a travesty of the supposed allied war aims—not that Britain, France, or Italy cared, but the United States, being the only non-empire at the talks, did. At one of the many meetings the four victorious powers held in Lloyd George's suite in Paris, Lloyd George magnanimously offered Wilson the Russian pieces of the Ottoman pie. French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau reminded Lloyd George that once Great Britain realized that the

1. *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House: Arranged as a Narrative by Charles Seymour* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1926-28).



National Archives

*The Council of Four at the Versailles Peace Conference, left to right: British Prime Minister David Lloyd George; Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando; French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau; and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, May 27, 1919. At one of the Big Four meetings, Lloyd George was kind enough to offer Wilson the Russian pieces of the Ottoman pie. Wilson declined, and said the U.S. would not recognize any of the secret treaties.*

oil of the Middle East lay under Mosul, in what is today Iraq, it had unilaterally redrawn the map of the Sykes-Picot Treaty and taken it from France. Lloyd George replied that it was Britain that had made the most “sacrifices” in the Near East during the war, and so France should be satisfied with “compensations” cut out of other parts of the carcass of the Ottoman Empire. Not to be left out, the Italians reminded everyone that their “sacrifices” also required “compensations.”

Wilson replied that the U.S. would not recognize any of the secret treaties, and he called for the entire issue to be reopened. This turned the conference upside down, and on March 25, 1919, Wilson suggested that the Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey send a commission to the region to reassess the question and find out the desires of the peoples involved. After initial agreement, France and Britain, both committed to achieving what they had agreed in secret, refused to participate. The United States decided to go ahead alone. Thus was born the King-Crane Commission. The heads of the commission were Charles Crane and Dr. Henry Churchill King.

and a noted author on education, philosophy, and religion.

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## 4. The King-Crane Report

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The commission arrived in the region in June 1919 and finished its report on Aug. 28, 1919. It toured throughout “Syria,” which at the time comprised what is now Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel. It held meetings and interviews with local leaders and representatives of diverse organizations, and received no fewer than 1,800 petitions from various political organizations. Its aim was to ascertain the wishes of the population on the questions of independence and mandatory power.

The group found that everyone wanted independence, while the majority of the people, as evidenced by 60% of the petitions, wanted the United States as the mandatory power (Britain and France garnered no more than 15%). Only among Catholics and Lebanese Christians could there be found strong support for France as

Crane, a major financial supporter of the Democratic Party, had a keen interest in foreign affairs. He had been a member of Wilson’s Special Diplomatic Commission to Russia in 1917, after the resignation of the Tsar and the U.S. entry into World War I. He was also a member of the American section of the Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey. He would later become ambassador to China (1920-21).

Crane was highly critical of the Zionists. This and problematic aspects of his background and political views have been used to try to discredit him. In terms of the King-Crane report, all this should be ignored. The report was written under the direction of King, along with a group of experts. King was president of Oberlin College



*Dr. Henry Churchill King (left) and Charles Crane headed the American commission that was sent to the area of the former Ottoman Empire in 1919, to ascertain the wishes of the people of the region, respecting independence and mandatory power. The British and French had refused to back the mission.*

a mandatory power.

This was clearly not what the British and French wanted to hear.

It was pointed out in a confidential annex to the report, that support for Britain was primarily gained through the work of Faisal Hussein, since “The British government has been advancing money to his government for a long time, and at present allows it 750,000 dollars per month. Out of this Faisal draws about 200,000 per month for his personal expenses, staff, propaganda agents, etc. . . .”

Because of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, promising a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, the Zionists—most notably Chaim Weizmann, who lived the life of a British lord—strongly supported a British mandatory power.

The King-Crane commissioners wrote that their findings “showed that the people knew the grounds upon which they registered their choice for America. They declared that their choice was due to knowledge of America’s record, the unselfish aims with which she had come into the war, the faith in her felt by multitudes of Syrians who had been in America; the spirit revealed in American educational institutions in Syria, especially the College in Beirut, with its well known and constant

encouragement of Syrian national sentiment, their belief that America had no territorial or colonial ambitions, and would willingly withdraw when the Syrian state was well established, as her treatment both of Cuba and the Philippines seemed to them to illustrate; her genuinely democratic spirit, and her ample resources. From the point of view of the desires of the ‘people concerned,’ the Mandate should clearly go to America.

“The commissioners, therefore, recommend, as involved in the logic of the facts, that the United States of America be asked to undertake a single Mandate for all of Syria.”<sup>2</sup>

While the report suggested that Britain become the mandatory power if the U.S. did not accept the job, since Britain was the second choice of most of the petitioners, it added:

“We should hardly be doing justice however, to our sense of responsibility to the Syrian people, if we did not frankly add some at least of the reasons and misgivings, variously expressed and implied in our conferences, which led to the preference for an American mandate over a British mandate. The people repeatedly showed honest fear that in British hands the mandatory power would become simply a colonizing power of the old kind; that Great Britain would find it difficult to give up the colonial theory, especially in case of a people thought inferior; that she would favor a civil service and pension budget too expensive for a poor people; that the interests of Syria would be subordinated to the supposed needs of the Empire; that there would be, after all, too much exploitation of the country for Britain’s benefit; that she would never be ready to withdraw and give the country real independence; that she did not really believe in universal education, and would not provide adequately for it, and that she already had more territory in her possession—in spite of her fine colonial record—than was good either for herself or for the world.”

The failure of France to garner support was for much the same reasons. The report noted that the specter of

2. The King-Crane Commission Report, “I. The Report upon Syria,” and “III Recommendations.”

France's colonization of Algeria, with a mass immigration of Frenchman at the expense of the local population, did not endear it to an Arab population.

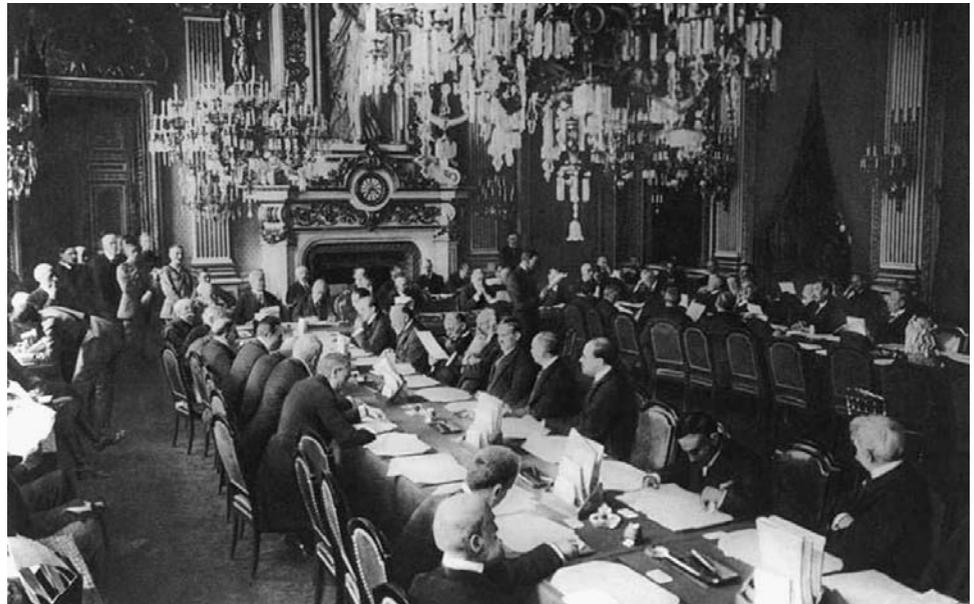
The report was critical of the attempt to establish a Zionist state in Palestine, because of the overwhelming opposition expressed by the Arabs. The commission in fact called for putting limits on immigration.

The British refused to allow the commission to visit Mesopotamia (today's Iraq), a fact clearly stated in the report: "It was impossible for the Commission to visit Mesopotamia at this time.

Earnest requests to make such a visit were presented at Damascus and Aleppo, accompanied by complaints that the British occupying forces are restricting freedom of speech, movement, and political action, and that they show signs of an intention to allow extensive immigration from India, to the great detriment of the rights and interests of the inhabitants of the region. A committee at Aleppo presented a program for Mesopotamia."

To the undoubted consternation of the British, the report continued: "The Mesopotamian Program expresses its choice of America as Mandatory, and with no second choice. Undoubtedly there has been a good deal of feeling in Mesopotamia against Great Britain, and the petitions specifically charge the British authorities in Mesopotamia with considerable interference with freedom of opinion, of expression, and of travel,—much of which might be justified in time of military occupation. But feeling so stirred might naturally breed unwillingness to express desire for Great Britain as Mandatory."

While the commissioners supported a British mandate if the United States refused, they specified that, "from the point of view of world-interests, in the prevention of jealousy, suspicion, and fear of domination by a single Power, it were better for both Britain and the world that no further territory anywhere be added to the British Empire. In a country so rich as Mesopotamia in



*The U.S.-sponsored King-Crane Commission tells the Versailles Peace Conference of Arab desires for independence. The report was suppressed, and the League of Nations in effect agreed to the terms of the Sykes-Picot Treaty, dividing up the Ottoman Empire among the imperial powers.*

agricultural possibilities, in oil, and in other resources, with the best intentions there will inevitably be danger of exploitation and monopolistic control by the Mandatory Power, through making British interests supreme, and especially through large Indian immigration. This danger will need increasingly and most honestly to be guarded against. The Mesopotamians feel very strongly the menace particularly of Indian immigration, even though that immigration should be confined to Moslems. They dread the admixture of another people of entirely different race and customs, as threatening their Arabic civilization."

The mission did not carry out serious investigations in the non-Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire, but it did make recommendations which will not be detailed here, because they were superseded by the U.S. Military Mission to Armenia, which toured what is now Turkey, as detailed below.

In general, the King-Crane report welcomed the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire along its natural divide between Arabs and Turkic non-Arabs, but cautioned: "If the Entente powers are sincere in their declarations not further to harass the Muslim world and so give excuse for a pan-Islamic movement, they should also at once definitely and publicly renounce all further political encroachments on that world, and outline a clear policy of uplifting the Muslim, already subject to their

control, by enlarged opportunities both in education and in public service.”

In conclusion, the report issued a serious warning of the implications of the continuing imperialist designs:

“[T]he drift toward selfish exploitation of the Turkish Empire has come about, there should be no mistake about the fact or its dangers. It needs to be said and heeded that Constantinople is once again the nest of selfish, suspicious, hateful intrigue reaching out over the whole Empire, if not the world. What will it mean if this policy is allowed to prevail? . . . The allies should bear clearly in mind that their fidelity to their announced aims in the war is here peculiarly to be tested, and that in the proportion in which the division of the Turkish Empire by the allies is made a division of spoils by victors, and is primarily determined by the selfish national and corporate interests of the Allies, in just that proportion will grave dangers arise.”

The report showed the effects of the betrayal of these ideals on the U.S. veteran of World War I: “For example, no thoughtful man who had the opportunity of watching in France the stream of American officers and soldiers and of able men enlisted for various forms of service to the soldiers, as they came and went, could fail to see among those men, as the armistice went on, the spread, like a contagion, of depression and disillusionment as to the significance of the war aims, because of the selfish wrangling of nations. . . . The fact should be squarely faced that thousands of Americans who served in the war have gone home disillusioned, greatly fearing, if not convinced, that the Allies had not been true to their asserted war aims, and have been consequently driven to an almost cynical view of the entire conflict, cynicism that made them feel like withdrawing all further American help and henceforth washing their hands of the whole European imbroglio. This attitude has been reflected in many other American citizens who had been devoted supporters of the Allied cause. Now that is not a good result for America, for the Allied Powers or for the world.”

Shortly after the report was delivered to President Wilson, he suffered his first collapse, believed to have been a stroke, which would leave him almost fully incapacitated. Whether he would have acted on it is not known; but what is known is that the Anglophile Colonel House, despite his earlier reservations, was the man running U.S. foreign policy. The report was suppressed, only to be made public in 1922, under the extraordinary circumstances detailed below.

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## 5. U.S. Military Backs Turkey Against Sykes-Picot

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Shortly after the King-Crane mission was completed, another U.S. mission was sent to the region, this time to tour the non-Arab region of the Ottoman Empire, that which comprises modern Turkey. Entitled, “American Military Mission to Armenia,” it was dispatched under the authority of the President and not the Allied Commission. It was to “Proceed without delay on a Government vessel to Constantinople, Batum, and such other places in Armenia, Russian Transcaucasia, and Syria, as will enable you to carry out instructions already discussed with you. It is desired that you investigate and report on political, military, geographical, administrative, economic, and other considerations involved in possible American interests and responsibilities in that region.”

This was a very different group, comprised of almost all career military officers. The result was a hard-nosed report by men who understood military and strategic affairs as did few other Americans. The mission was led by Maj. Gen. James G. Harbord, chief of staff to Gen. John Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe. Harbord played a role in developing U.S. military policy during the war, the cornerstone of which was for all efforts to be concentrated against Germany. In this conception, the U.S. Army would fight in France and only in France, where it would deploy on its own section of the front, fully under U.S. command, end the war as quickly as possible, and gain for the United States a strong position at the peace table. Pershing and his staff fought hard against French and British schemes to deploy U.S. troops in other theaters, to fight for British and French imperial interests. So Harbord had an excellent understanding of the British problem. He would later serve as Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, where he oversaw the development of War Plan Red, the code name for war with Britain.

This commission came to conclusions surprisingly similar to those of the King-Crane Commission, but with a much sharper strategic insight. Although the report does not specifically state it, in a sense the report served to define the modern state of Turkey, and identify Turkey, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk) as a potential ally, that could serve as a flank against Sykes-Picot—a conception that was acted upon by a certain section of the U.S. military. This was



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*Gen. James G. Harbord led the American Military Mission to Armenia in 1919. The mission's report advised that the United States—not Britain and France—should take a mandate over all of what had been the Ottoman Empire, while preparing the way for the creation of modern Turkey as an independent nation. Harbord had a keen understanding of British geopolitical games.*



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*Adm. Mark Lambert Bristol was the American High Commissioner in Constantinople. He supported General Harbord's mission, while giving valuable assistance to the nationalist movement of Mustafa Kemal.*

reflected in the fact that the U.S. High Commissioner in Constantinople was a senior naval officer, Adm. Mark Lambert Bristol.

The Ottoman government at the time was merely a puppet government under the Sultan, set up in Constantinople, which, as King-Crane reported, was a “nest of selfish, suspicious hateful intrigue” by Britain, France, and Italy. Mustafa Kemal had created the League for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia and Roumelia, repudiated the puppet government of Prime Minister Ferid Pasha, and withdrawn from Constantinople, to set up a national assembly and government of national liberation in the provincial town of Angora, now called Ankara. Kemal became an object of hate in the eyes of the British and French.

The Greeks, who had already been invited by the British to grab Smyrna, now held it in occupation. Meanwhile, the part of Armenia that had been in the Russian Empire had declared independence, and was

backed by both the British and the French. The scheme to take several eastern provinces of Turkey and set up an Armenian state was already in the process of being implemented “unilaterally,” with the support of Britain and France. The United States was mixed up in this, because it had been running a major relief operation since 1915, in response to the massacres of Armenians in that year.

A central task of the Harbord mission was to assess the feasibility of the United States becoming the mandatory for an Armenian state. It was Lloyd George who asked the U.S. to take this responsibility. Gen. Tasker Bliss, who was the U.S. representative on the Allied Military Committee, and a key strategic thinker for the U.S. military, told Lloyd George that after Britain and

France had grabbed all the valuable pieces of real estate, Britain wanted to stick the United States with the most economically worthless, problematic region, while the rest of what is now Turkey would be parcelled out among France, Italy, and Greece.

Seeing a British trap, the military mission, rather than advise that the U.S. take a mandate only in Armenia, advised that it should take a mandate over the entire Ottoman Empire, and if not that, then the entirety of non-Arab part of the empire. In defining the limits of an American mandate, Harbord, in fact, defined a territory that would become modern Turkey by 1923, a process that received the support of the U.S. military.

One of the first leaders the mission met was Mustafa Kemal, who was considered a “rebel” by the British. Harbord was the highest-ranking Allied official to have met Kemal, which added tremendously to the Turkish leader’s prestige. In his report, Harbord described him as “a former general officer in the Turkish Army, who commanded with distinction an army corps at the Dardanelles, and appears to be a young man of force and keen intelligence.” Harbord discussed the Turkish leader at length and incorporated a lengthy situation report written by Mustafa Kemal himself.

Expressing full support for Harbord’s proposal for the United States to become the mandatory authority, Mustafa Kemal wrote: “The Nationalist Party recognized the necessity of the aid of an impartial foreign country. It is our aim to secure the development of Turkey as she stood at the armistice. We have no expansionist plans, but it is our conviction that Turkey can be made a rich and prosperous country if she can get a good government. Our Government has become weakened through foreign interference and intrigues. After all our experience we are sure that America is the only country able to help us. We guarantee no new Turkish violences against the Armenians will take place.”

On the question of the creation of an independent



*Mustafa Kemal (later known as Atatürk), was the founding father of the Republic of Turkey. The Harbord commissioners viewed him as a potential ally, who could serve as a flank against the Sykes-Picot arrangement.*

state of Armenia, the mission report advised against it, on several counts. One was the fact that Russia, which was in the midst of a civil war, would soon be stabilized. It would once more become a strong state, and would reunite with Russian Armenia, which subsequently occurred. Second, and more important, the Armenians were incapable of ruling themselves, and especially ruling over other ethnic groups. The report documented that the Armenians had perpetrated just as brutal massacres of Turks, Kurds, and other ethnic minorities as the Ottomans had. Furthermore, in the region in which the proposed Armenian state was to be set up, Armenians comprised only 25% of the population. The commission concluded that the Armenia problem must find a solution

within a unified mandate that covered the entire area of Turkey, and in a broader nation-state based on universal principles of equality and not ethnicity, which would only lay the seeds of future conflict.

It is worth quoting from the mission report:

“The events of the Greek occupation of Smyrna and the uneasiness produced by the activities and propaganda of certain European powers have so stirred the Turkish people in the long interval since the armistice, that the mission fears that an announcement from Paris at this time of an intention to carve from Turkey a State of Armenia, unless preceded by a strong military occupation of the whole Empire, might be the signal for massacres of Christians in every part of the country. There is no wisdom in now incorporating Turkish territory in a separate Armenia, no matter what the aspirations of the Armenians. Certainly it is unwise to invite trouble, which may be avoided by the consolidation of the mandate region under a single power. Under one mandatory they will be neighbors. Under two or more they will be rivals, their small differences subjected to the interminable processes of diplomatic representation, with the maintenance of duplicate and parallel establishments in many lines of governmental activity.

Only under a single mandatory can the matter of ultimate boundaries be deferred, which is believed by this mission to be important.”

The report also called for the dissolution of the foreign-controlled council of administration of the Ottoman public debt, and its reduction, if not cancellation. While not advising directly on whether the United States should take a mandate in the area, the report listed pros and cons on the issue, both sides of which were very critical of the British and French.

In conclusion the report stated:

“A plebiscite fairly taken would in all probability ask for an American mandate throughout the Empire. In its belief that the Armenian problem is only to be solved by a mandatory which should include also Constantinople, Anatolia, Turkish Armenia, and the Transcaucasus, the Mission has the concurrence of many Americans whose views, by reason of long residence in the Near East, are entitled to great weight. Such Americans are practically united in believing that the problems of Armenia, Anatolia, Constantinople, and Transcaucasia must be considered as an inseparable whole.

“No duty of modern times would be undertaken under so fierce a glare of publicity. Such a mandate would hold the center of the international stage, with the spotlight from every foreign office and from every church steeple in the world focused upon it. No nation could afford to fail, or to withdraw when once committed to this most serious and difficult problem growing out of the Great War. No nation incapable of united and nonpartisan action for a long period should undertake it.

“We would again point out that if America accepts a mandate for the region visited by this mission, it will undoubtedly do so from a strong sense of international duty, and all the unanimous desire so expressed at least of its colleagues in the League of Nations. Accepting this difficult task without previously securing the assurance of conditions would be fatal of success. The United States should make its own conditions as a preliminary to consideration of the subject—certainly before and not after acceptances, for there are a multitude of interests that will conflict with what any American would consider a proper administration of the country. Every possible precaution against international complications should be taken in advance. In our opinion there should be specific pledges in terms of formal agreements with France and England, and definite approval from Germany and Russia of the dispositions made of Turkey

and Transcaucasia, and a pledge to respect them.

“They little know of America, who only America know.”

General Harbord puts the subject straightforwardly: “Without visiting the Near East, it is not possible for an American to realize even faintly, the respect, faith and affection with which our Country is regarded throughout that region. Whether it is the world-wide reputation which we enjoy for fair dealing, a tribute perhaps to the crusading spirit which carried us into the Great War, not untinged with hope that the same spirit may urge us into the solution of great problems growing out of that conflict, or whether due to unselfish and impartial missionary and educational influence exerted for a century, it is the one faith which is held alike by Christian and Muslim, by Jew and Gentile, by prince and peasant in the Near East. It is very gratifying to the pride of Americans far from home. But it brings with it the heavy responsibility of deciding great questions with a seriousness worthy of such faith. Burdens that might be assumed on the appeal of such sentiment would have to be carried for not less than a generation under circumstances so trying that we might easily forfeit the faith of the world. If we refuse to assume it, for no matter what reasons satisfactory to ourselves, we shall be considered by many millions of people as having left unfinished the task for which we entered the war, and as having betrayed their hopes.”

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## 6. British Empire Launches Permanent War

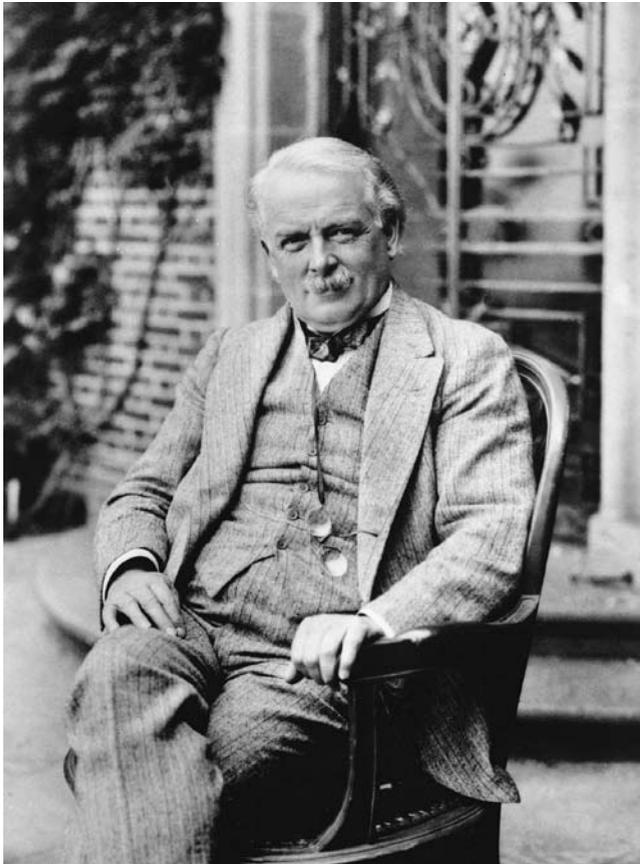
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Harbord’s report was completed on Oct. 16, 1919. While officially suffering the same fate as the King-Crane Report, it nonetheless served as a cogent strategic assessment of dangers of the Sykes-Picot system.

The British response was to organize wars to crush any resistance to carving up the Ottoman Empire.

On April 13, 1920, Harbord’s report appeared in the *Congressional Record*. On April 20, 1920, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan convened the Conference of San Remo to officially divide up the Ottoman Empire. The conference was held outside the authority of the peace conference. The United States was not represented. By June, the French had erected their mandate in Syria, and by August the British had theirs in place in Palestine and Mesopotamia.

On Aug. 10, 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed



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*British Prime Minister David Lloyd George was always willing to promise the same land to two or three different parties, thus sowing the seeds of a century of wars in Southwest Asia (among other places).*

between the puppet government of the British and French in Constantinople, on the one side, and France, Britain, and Italy on the other. While confirming the British and French mandates in Mesopotamia and Palestine, the treaty divided the rest of the Ottoman Empire into six regions to be parcelled out among the Allies. On the same day, the secret Tripartite Agreement was signed, confirming Britain's oil and commercial concessions, and turning German enterprises over to a Tripartite Corporation. The United States, which was not invited to the conference, did not sign the treaty, nor did the League of Nations endorse it.

The treaty only served to create an alliance of scoundrels and thieves to unleash wars against the National Liberation Movement led by Mustafa Kemal. The Ottoman Empire never approved it, because in March, Britain had abolished the Ottoman Parliament, arresting over 100 Turkish leaders and shipping them to Malta,

which was Great Britain's principal naval base in the Mediterranean, for eventual trial of war crimes. The trials were never held, because the British allowed some to "escape" and the rest were later released to return to Turkey, to overthrow Mustafa Kemal. This was the beginning of the grouping known today as the Ergenekon, which the Turkish government has only begun to dismantle.

Greece, which already had troops on the ground, was given Smyrna, but did not sign the treaty, and proceeded on an ill-fated war of conquest, in its attempt to create a Greek Empire over Turkey.

A Democratic Republic of Armenia, based primarily in the former Russia province, was recognized by the Conference of San Remo and given several provinces of eastern Turkey.

While having its mandate confirmed in Syria and Lebanon, France was given a large sphere of influence in southern Turkey, including Cilicia, which it immediately occupied militarily. Italy was given the Dodecanese Islands and a large sphere of influence in western and central Turkey. The Kurds were given vague promises of a state, carved out of Turkey, and not in Iraq or Iran or Syria. The Dardenelles were to be internationalized, as was Constantinople. The latter would serve as the seat of the Ottoman Bank, which would be run exclusively by the British, French, and Italians, to manage the huge Ottoman debt.

The whole scheme collapsed before Turkey's liberation army, led by Mustafa Kemal. He first defeated the Armenians, then signed the Treaty of Moscow with the Soviet Union on March 16, 1921, which not only secured his northern frontier, but gave him access to arms and munitions. He then turned around and defeated the Greeks and French, with whom he signed the Treaty of Alexandropol, driving a wedge between France and Britain. A treaty was signed with Greece which fixed the borders and provided for an exchange of populations. In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, in which these belligerents recognized the new Turkish government.

### **Admiral Bristol and the Creation of Turkey**

Where was the United States in this process? This appears to be almost a well-kept secret. The best way to uncover it is to look at the role of Adm. Mark L. Bristol, who in 1919 was named U.S. High Commissioner in Constantinople, a position he held until formal diplomatic relations were established in 1927. Bristol was

also commander of the U.S. naval detachment in Turkish waters. After 1927 he became commander of the Asiatic Fleet, which also required skills of a diplomat. His last post, between 1930 and his retirement in 1932, was as chairman of the executive committee of the Navy's General Board, one of the highest positions in that service. He was a major critic of the Naval Limitation Treaty of 1930 for not giving the U.S. parity with Britain (*Time*, Nov. 3, 1930). In 1933, he joined America, Inc., a lobby group created to support President Franklin Roosevelt against the American Liberty League.

Bristol, who had lent aid and support to Harbord's mission, and agreed with its conclusions, gave invaluable support to the nationalist movement led by Kemal, in the form of political and strategic advice, among other ways. It is obvious that Bristol saw the creation of a Turkish Republic as a crucial flank against the dangers of the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot policy.

An article in *Time* (June 6, 1927) under the title "Paladin Departs," reporting on his departure as high commissioner, quoted the official Turkish daily, *Miliet*: "Admiral Bristol is the only pearl in our crown of thorns," and then lamented that Turkey was "inflamed with consuming anguish and the departure of our great friend."

The article related that from 1919 to 1923, Bristol countered the French, British, and Italians, and positioned himself "on the side of the underdog Turk." When Kemal seized power in 1922, *Time* wrote, Bristol "sensed the new regime of President-Dictator Mustafa Kemal Pasha was healthy, and, in any case, unshakable." He was the first Allied representative to call on Mustafa Kemal in 1924.

Bristol was an outspoken critic of the British, French, Greeks, and Italians. Most of all, he was against the deprecation of the Turks in general. When Kemal set up the Grand National Assembly in Angora (now Ankara) in 1919, he assigned the professional intelligence officer Robert Imbrie as American Consul, in order to maintain contact with the Liberation government which was at war with the former wartime allies of the United States.

In a long letter to James L. Barton, head of Near East Relief, one gets a sense of how Bristol viewed America's erstwhile allies. The statement is in the context of Wilson's plan for an Armenian state. Commenting on an assertion by Barton, that independent Arme-

nia could be protected by the U.S. with the European powers, Bristol wrote: "I am afraid you have more faith in European countries than I have. Thus far the European nations have protected none of the races in this part of the world. The fact is, in my opinion, the plans that they have been carrying out have resulted in greater harm to the so-called Christian races than if nothing at all had been done. I cannot imagine anyone believing that the European countries would do anything to protect the boundary of Armenia fixed by Mr. Wilson unless it was to their selfish interests to do so, and I do not see any selfish interest" which they would back in this situation.

Bristol argued that a U.S. commitment to defend Armenia based on arbitrary borders as defined by the Treaty of Sèvres, would involve America in the worst of "European entanglements." Referring to the Harbord report, he added, "If we had adopted such a policy two years ago and worked steadily for it, I feel certain we could have accomplished something. I haven't yet given up hope because I think it is too late. It is never too late. . . . Let us adopt a big policy and stand for it and do our best to get this policy carried out. . . . I am not certain that America, if she fully realized the big task in the Near East and at the same time could be made to see what a big opportunity there was for America to do, probably the biggest thing in the world for true peace, would not tackle the job. Our people like to do big things. . . ." Bristol lamented that, "in a measure, our reputation has been destroyed by the belief that we are working with the Allies of Europe, or at least supporting them in the schemes that they have been carrying out in the Near East."

On Kemal, Bristol wrote: "I do not agree with Lloyd George that Mustafa Kemal has mutinied and is a rebel. He may be a rebel in the strict and technical sense. But it is the action of the Allies that drove him to rebel."

By the end of 1922, Kemal had managed to defeat all the powers that the British deployed against the National Movement, and consolidated the new Turkish Republic, which under Sykes-Picot was never supposed to exist. A new vibrant republic, free of British domination, won broad support within the U.S., especially within the military and foreign policy establishment. When Turkey, Britain, France, and Italy convened a peace conference in Lausanne to end the wars against Turkey, the United States attended as an observer, to officially safeguard U.S. rights. Assuring the sovereign rights of the Turkish Republic was obviously in the in-

terest of the United States. The King-Crane Report played a crucial role.

In December 1922, on the eve of the Lausanne Conference, former President Woodrow Wilson authorized the release of the King-Crane report. It was published in full by the trade journal *Editor and Publisher* (Dec. 2, 1922). Within days, the *New York Times* published the full report, with the *Editor and Publisher's* introduction, which was even more hard-hitting than the report itself. Describing how the report's warnings of disaster had in fact come to pass, it went on: "Secret treaties largely caused the war; they certainly prolonged it; and they wrecked the peace. Out of secret treaties has grown that international distrust which is probably the gravest factor in a world full of evil forces. Secret treaties have made war-time allies present-day enemies. They have begotten in America a lack of confidence in the nations of the Old World that is the real reason for this country's holding aloof from international obligations. If it were not for the secret treaties, disclosed at Paris, there would have been a different kind of League of Nations, and the United States would have been in it. There is simply no measuring the harm that has been done to humanity by the perpetuation of this first characteristic of the old diplomacy."

Coming on the eve of the Lausanne Conference, its publication must have been a diplomatic bombshell.

### **The Chester Concession**

At the same time, another intervention was made, which has all but disappeared from history. It was the announcement that the Turkish government had approved a concession to construct railroads and exploit natural resources, to an American syndicate. This was the "Chester concession," led by retired U.S. Adm. Colby M. Chester. This allowed for the construction of an interlocking network of railroads that stretched from Angora (now Ankara) to Mosul, which at that time was part of the British Mandate of Iraq, but still claimed by the new Turkish government. It seems that Chester recognized Turkey's claims. From the main west-to-east line, the railroad network would branch out both to the north and the south at various points, and allow for exploitation of natural resources, including oil. The network embraced all the territory that France or Britain might demand "rights" to at the Lausanne Conference.

Admiral Chester had been one of the key proponents of the Panama Canal, and enjoyed influence in Washington. Chester's sons were also involved in the proj-

ect; one was a former military officer and practicing engineer, and the other was a leading businessman. Other members of the syndicate included Gen. George W. Goethals, who was the chief engineer in building the Panama Canal.

The fact that Chester was an Navy man, as was Bristol, should not be underestimated. This project served as a major political intervention, at a time when Turkey need international support.

The new concession also served as a centerpiece for strong U.S.-Turkish economic cooperation. Through the Ottoman American Development Company, agricultural projects were planned, including the importation of thousands of American-produced tractors and other projects. Turkey was deeply interested in economic ties with the United States.

It was not the policy of the U.S. government at the time to lobby for projects of private interests, nor did it particularly champion the project. But it was the duty of the State Department to protect the business interests of Americans, so the U.S. government, even if it wanted to, could not overtly back the British and French against an American company. More importantly, it gave the Turkish government the leverage it needed to fight out unreasonable French and British demands. The concession's claims to Mosul were especially dicey. While Turkey eventually did give up Mosul in 1926, it was at least able to fix its own eastern border.

The project eventually collapsed, due to lack of capital and sabotage by the British and their Wall Street allies. Nonetheless, it served the Turks well in negotiating the Lausanne agreement.

Right after Lausanne, the U.S. negotiated its own bilateral treaty with Turkey. Although it had massive support in the U.S. establishment, it never passed the Senate, in part because of the Armenian lobby. In 1927, unable to get the treaty through the Senate, the government established diplomatic relations by Executive Order. The first U.S. Ambassador was Joseph Grew, a career diplomat who had negotiated the treaty.

Although the fight for a Turkish Republic served as a crucial flanking operation, the Sykes-Picot system prevailed in the rest of the Ottoman Empire. It has kept the nations and peoples of the region in the thrall of the British Empire, fighting one another and not their real enemy. Only the United States, armed with a policy in the spirit of these two commissions nearly a century ago, can liberate these nations from the Empire, once and for all.