

## The Future of the Near East

SIR MARK SYKES (1879-1919)

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Comenzamos nuestra recopilación de fuentes para la historia del mundo árabo-islámico contemporáneo con dos artículos de uno de los personajes más importantes dentro del aparato político-militar del Imperio Británico en el Oriente Medio, Sir Mark Sykes.

Sykes será siempre recordado por los acuerdos que llevan su nombre y el del diplomático francés François Georges-Picot, los acuerdos de **Sykes-Picot**. Mediante estos acuerdos secretos el Imperio Británico y Francia se repartían los restos del Imperio Otomano en Oriente Medio, poniendo la primera piedra de lo que luego sería el sistema de "mandatos" —los protectorados franceses e ingleses sobre Siria, Mesopotamia, Palestina y Transjordania—.

Sir Mark Sykes trabajó durante un tiempo como agregado de la embajada británica en Constantinopla y realizó numerosos viajes por la zona, producto de los cuales fue su libro *Dar ul-Islam* (1904). Desde 1911 fue también miembro del Parlamento inglés y, una vez comenzada la I Guerra Mundial, gracias a su experiencia pudo pasar al servicio del Foreign Office e intervenir en la política de su país en las cuestiones de Oriente Medio, especialmente en lo concerniente a la revuelta árabe y a la postura que su gobierno debía tomar con respecto a ella.

En los artículos que aquí recogemos, Sykes da su visión de cómo debería conformarse el "nuevo Oriente Medio" después de la guerra. A qué debería ser reducido el Imperio Otomano y cuál debería ser el papel jugado por las potencias europeas en la zona. Muchas de las cuestiones que aquí plantea tendrían luego su reflejo en el **tratado de Sèvres**, que sería finalmente invalidado y sustituido por el de **Lausanne**. Se trata, en definitiva, de un texto (en dos partes) que prefigura en gran parte lo que sería a partir de ese momento el domino franco-británico en Oriente Medio y la muerte del Imperio Otomano. **TEIM**

The time is not far distant when the democracy of the world in general, and of this country in particular, will be called upon to consider the questions of the Near East. For the purposes of this article the Near East may be defined as those parts of the world which could be compassed by an 800 mile radius centred on Jerusalem.

Within this circle lie problems which until they are solved must menace the establishment of a permanent world peace.

The democracies of the Entente are undoubtedly determined that this war shall be the last war, but it will certainly not be the last war unless they use the victory which lies before them to remove certain root causes of war.



The mere combination of goodwill and general war-weariness working in the minds of this generation will not be sufficient to prevent future generations drifting into war.

In this article it is proposed to consider the elimination of certain future war-producing elements in the area under consideration. Regarded from an historical point of view this area has been the littoral along which the tides of Eastern invasion have flowed and ebbed for countless centuries. The moral and material causes of this ebb and flow had spent their force long before the present world conflict took place. There will be no more Mongol hordes sweeping across the world, there will be no more Crusades or Jehads, but the results of those past conflicts have implanted in this area the causes of existing troubles, which, unless uprooted, will lead to future wars.

### **The Ottoman Empire.**

If we take the average man of which British democracy is composed, we shall find that in regard to this area he has already certain fundamental and important facts in his mind. He knows; (1) that Constantinople is of itself

of vast strategic importance; (2) that the Armenians and subject races of Turkey have been misgoverned for centuries; (3) that Mesopotamia is a potential source of immense food-producing power, and that the Suez Canal is a station on the way to India; (4) that Jerusalem is the sentimental centre both of Christianity, and Judaism; (5) that Mecca is the symbolic centre of the Moslem faith; (6) that the Berlin military clique intended to seize all these things in order to subjugate the Eastern world, just as they meant to seize Paris and Boulogne in order to subjugate the Western world. He knows that to counter this move we fought at Gallipoli, on the Canal, and are still fighting in Palestine and Mesopotamia. The British Democracy at any rate requires no teaching in regard to the main outlines of the situation. When we come to details the matter is much more complicated. The Ottoman Empire, which in the days of Queen Elizabeth appeared to be tottering to its fall, has continued to exist, because the selfishness and greed of pre-war Europe have supplied it with a constant series of champions and defenders. The Ottoman Empire has continued to exist for two reasons. Firstly, because the pre-war statesmen of the Great Powers preferred to see a barbarous and improgressive tyranny blasting the fairest regions of the world rather than that the redemption of these areas should add to the existing strength of a possibly hostile Power. Secondly, because the Ottoman Government has known how to avail itself of the protection of international finance.

### **The Turk and the Non-Turk.**

The Ottoman Empire has for the last half century purchased its existence by playing on the fears and rivalries of the European Powers, and by pawning and mortgaging the resources of the inhabitants of its provinces to various groups of financiers. Through the medium of certain middlemen these groups forced on the Ottoman Government arms and munitions, trafficked in bogus railways, and forestalled each other in obtaining concessions. It has always been the policy of these groups to prevent any drastic action being taken to bring the Ottoman Empire under any kind of effective control, because the financiers and their middlemen know well enough that once the Ottoman Empire was controlled, the profits of the concession hunter and the armament tout would come to an end. It has been part of the nemesis of the Allies that they countenanced and even assisted in building uneconomic railways which, though they did not develop the country, fitted in exactly with Turco-German military schemes. It was, moreover, the financiers who succeeded in forcing on the Turks those weapons of precision which the latter have known so well how to use during the war.

If the problems of the Middle East are to be solved after the war it stands to reason that they must be approached in a very different spirit to that adopted by those whose combined and co-operative suspicion, greed and chicanery were responsible for the pre-war situation.

We have seen how statesmen and financiers supported the power of the Ottoman Empire . It is worth considering how the Ottoman Empire has used its power within its own borders. The theory and practice of the Ottoman Government has always been to support the Turk against the non-Turk, and to foment discord and rivalry wherever party politics, family feeling, sectarian differences or racial antagonism offered an opportunity. As a result of this policy extended over several centuries we find an agglomeration of peoples not only reduced to the lowest depth of poverty and misery, but torn by a host of rivalries and enmities in which it has been the devilish purpose of their misrulers to school them.

### **Cutting Out the Cancer.**

We have therefore two problems to solve. The first is to prevent the Turks dividing Europe against itself; the second is to redeem from bondage the Asiatic peoples whom the Turks have oppressed. So long as the effective military force which dominates the Dardanelles and Bosphorus is Turkish, so long will Constantinople be the hatching place of wars, the focus of intrigue both political and financial. If Allied democracy is not going to fall where its predecessor the Concert of Europe fell, then that cancer must be out of world politics. The Turk holds Constantinople because no one nation dare trust another with so great a prize. But we know what Turkish guardianship of those Straits means —tyranny in Asia and dissension in Europe. The only remedy is for the Straits to be internationalised in the fullest sense of the word. Whether the Sultan resides at Constantinople or not is a matter of little consequence, but allied democracy must be entirely responsible for the fairway, and have on the spot an effective force on land, in the sea and in the air, which will put its authority and supremacy beyond all questions. Further, Allied democracy will have to see to it that concession hunting, financial intrigue, and group work as between the Ottoman Government and individual Powers, are things of the past. If Levantine finance is to continue as a post war factor in the Near East , then one of the root causes of future conflicts will have been left untouched.

International finance before the war, as organised in Stambul, represented nothing less than organised corruption. A number of agents, touts, and hangers-on acted as go-betweens 'twixt that degraded mass of corruption and villainy, the Ottoman Government, and the various cliques of money manoeuvres in European capitals. Finance interfered in policy, and diplomacy interfered in finance, nations were set by the ears, wars promoted, peoples oppressed, reforms delayed or rendered nugatory, in order that individual fortunes might be built up, or that profits should accrue to certain combines. Idealism, morality, fair-dealing or any motive force which tended to promote the welfare of mankind, could not exist in the atmosphere of rascality which prevailed.

## THE PROBLEMS OF THE NEAR EAST-II

The Turkish Government thrive on blackmail, the go-betweens prospered on dishonest commissions, the financial principals worked their way by open and unashamed bribery. If the world is to envisage any prospect of peace this odious system must be abolished once and for all. Allied democracy will have to take over, not only the Ottoman debt, but Ottoman finance as a whole. The question of concessions, loans and exploitation will have to be decided in the open by a body of persons who command the respect and confidence of the world. The basic principle on which that body should act should be that the twofold purpose of economic development is to benefit the inhabitants of the country, and to add to the total wealth of the peoples of the earth as a whole. Unless this is done the cesspool of Levantine roguery will continue to infect the world with fresh fevers and pestilences.

If Constantinople must be neutralised strategically and purified financially, the Dardanelles and Bosphorus must be put beyond the reach of the ambitions of individual States, and Constantinople must cease to be the theatre of the secret operations of uncontrolled groups of international financiers. Until this is done it is idle to talk of a solution of the Near Eastern problem. But with the removal of the political and financial influences, centred in Constantinople, which react on the greater nations of the earth, we have by no means dealt with the Near Eastern question. We have to consider the fate of the subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire itself. It is unbelievable that Allied democracy can accept a continuance of Ottoman government of non-Ottoman peoples as a part of a just peace.

Reforms may be dismissed as hopeless: the history of Turkey for the last hundred and twenty years has been a history of abortive reforms written in the blood at the oppressed whom the reforms were intended to free.

The matter which Allied democracy has to decide is the future fate of the Greek, the Armenian, the Kurd, the Chaldean, the Syrian, the Arab, and the Jew.

### **What the Turks Have Done.**

As Turkey in Asia stands to-day the Anatolian Peninsula may be regarded as practically Turkish. In this area the Turks have exterminated, driven out, or absorbed the previous populations with the exception of a percentage of Greeks on the littoral, and certain Jewish and Christian communities in the larger towns. This area is larger than France, it has immense mineral and agricultural resources, it is sparsely populated.

Under any rule and with any population but that which the Turks have provided, it would be a paradise; even they have not been able to reduce it to a complete wilderness.

In this area the Turks may claim to maintain a Turkish State, and provided that real guarantees are given for the lives and security of non-Turkish minorities inhabiting the littoral and the larger cities. Allied

democracy need have no further concern in the matter. Outside this area we are confronted with a series of thorny and difficult problems.

When peoples have been ground down like the Armenians, deliberately encouraged in wrong-doing like the Kurds, divided and retarded like the Arabs, a few phrases about self-determination and national revival will not serve to overthrow in a day the evil that it has taken centuries to build up. A period of assistance, sponsorship, education and development must intervene, before such peoples can hope to evolve stable and self-supporting institutions.

We have seen how emancipation and nationalism uncontrolled and unchecked have worked in the Balkans, where a collection of newly-invented or revived States have menaced the peace of Europe for the last forty years with their minor policies, ambitions and aggressions.

### **A Basis of Reconstruction.**

The confusion and ruin which the Turks have implanted in the non-Turkish provinces of Asia is far worse, because older, deeper and stronger than that which they cultivated in the Balkans. The nationalist basis upon which new States can be built up in Asia is very much less defined than in the case of Serbia, Bulgaria, Rumania, or Greece. These provinces were the provinces of empires before they became Turkish provinces; with the exception of the Armenians the non-Ottoman inhabitants are in bulk in a pre-nationalist state of existence, though racial and local pride are strongly developed.

Yet here is material wealth, human intelligence, and a general desire for improvement. If life and property can be secured, and the material assets of these regions developed, in a decade, prosperity, education, and general wellbeing will produce the necessary poli[tical] elements necessary to maintain individual national existence.

The task of Allied democracy is to supply means or covering this intervening period of transition. The period in question and the means of covering it will naturally have to vary with the circumstances. There are areas quite capable of assuming almost complete independence; there are others sunken in the very depths of savagery and anarchy; and between the two extremes there is a chromatic scale of almost imperceptible variations. One factor, however, is common to all areas: even those capable of self-government are incapable of self-defence.

Without going into details it would be possible here and now to suggest certain general considerations which might be borne in mind in devising means to rebuild these shattered districts and refloat these sunken races.

First it is suggested that there must be no question of maintaining even the shadow of the Ottoman suzerainty in areas in areas which do not contain a preponderant Turkish majority. Turkish forms and methods, if they are retained, will inevitably stultify, corrupt or distort the natural growth of

reform. So long as a symbol of Turkish rule remains equality of citizenship, as understood in democratic countries, is impossible.

Secondly, it is submitted that these countries must not become the prey of Western monopolists. So far as the development of these areas is concerned, either by way of irrigation, railways, mines, or agricultural development, Free Trade throughout and the principle of the open door should be observed in its strictest sense so far as the Allies and neutrals are concerned.

Naturally German business and German trade come under another category. Hitherto German trade has meant the establishment of commercial concerns subventioned and conducted for the purpose of carrying out military designs. Until the world can obtain adequate guarantees that German ventures (whether camouflaged or not) in Turkey are not connected with military or political objectives, they must be subjected to strict and severe control.

### **National Development.**

Thirdly, it is the strongest personal opinion of the writer of this article that however these areas be divided and administered during the period of sponsorship, though the central authority and moral sanction for government during the transitional period should be Allied democracy, individual nations should be responsible for the political development of individual areas. An International Board may control a city or a waterway, collect a given revenue or hold a fortress, but it cannot develop a people or administer a country. Confusion would instantly arise if parties and cliques within a given area could play off one section of the controlling authority against another, or if in various branches of administration the tone, temper, and policy varied with the preponderating national influence in control, or, worse still, if appointments had to depend, not on the merits of the candidates, but on their nationality with a view to maintaining a proper balance.

The question of the Straits and Constantinopolitan finance can be settled on a broad international basis by Allied democracy taking direct joint control. The redemption of the non-Ottoman peoples and provinces of the Ottoman Empire can be settled, by Allied democracy appointing given nations as trustees for given areas under specified conditions, which should guard effectively against any danger of annexation, permanent protectorate, or monopolistic exploitation.