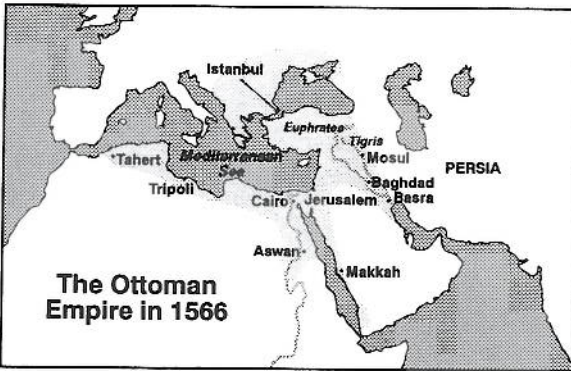


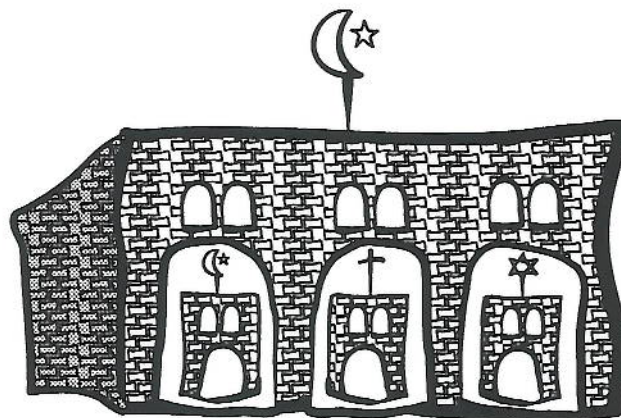
## Event A: The Decline of the Ottoman Empire



Beginning in the late thirteenth century, the Ottoman *sultan*, or ruler, governed a diverse empire that covered much of the modern Middle East, including southeastern Europe, most of North Africa and some of the Arabian peninsula. The sultan considered himself to be the ruler of Islam, and the majority of people in the Ottoman Empire were Muslims. Yet, the empire contained many different religions, ethnic groups, and languages. Ottoman rulers governed this diverse

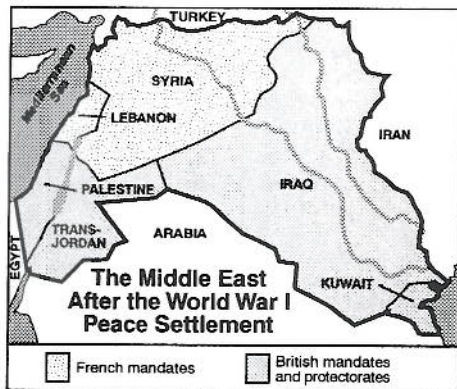
population indirectly through the *millet* (religious group) system, which classified subjects as either Muslims or members of one of three millets: Jewish, Orthodox Christian, or Armenian–Eastern Rite Christian. The millet system allowed religious groups to govern themselves according to their own customs as long as they paid their taxes and supported the sultan. Each millet was governed by a religious leader, who resided in the capital city of Istanbul and was closely controlled by the sultan’s advisors. The millet system of indirect rule allowed diverse communities to live peacefully in the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years.

Starting in the 1600s, the power and size of the Ottoman Empire began to decrease as western European countries seeking power in the region won wars and took economic control. Between 1789 and 1878, a series of sultans adopted western European political and social ideas in an attempt to counteract the increasing loss of Ottoman dominance over the empire. Conflict between European-influenced reforms and strong Ottoman traditions caused growing tension within the empire. In 1878, a new sultan rejected the reforms and returned to traditional forms of Ottoman rule. However, the conflict continued when, in 1908, a group of western-influenced revolutionaries called the Young Turks overthrew the sultan and reestablished European-style government.





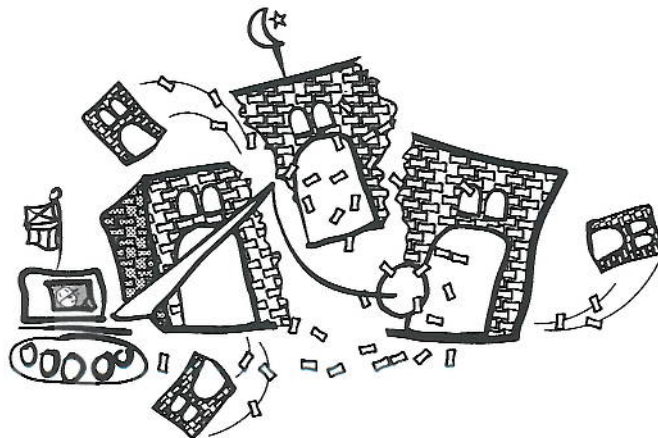
## Event B: The World War I Peace Settlement



At the end of World War I, the weakened Ottoman Empire, which was allied with Germany during the war, fell. The Ottoman territory in the Middle East was taken over by Britain and France, who during the war had signed a secret treaty, called the Sykes-Picot Agreement, in which they agreed to divide the land of the empire into various *mandates*, similar to colonies. In the agreement, Europeans stated that the former Ottoman lands “were inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world,” and

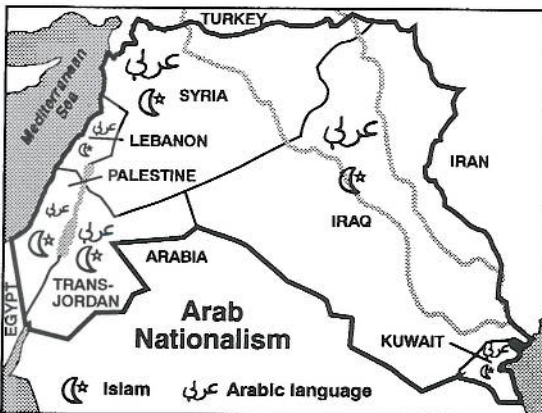
that Europeans would assist them “until such time as they [were] able to stand alone.” Britain and France created the mandates against the wishes of Arab leaders and hand-picked a ruler for each mandate. The organization of these European mandates did not reflect Ottoman traditions, such as the millet system, but instead represented European interests in the area with pro-western governments and economic policies. In fact, the Allies chose the rulers for Syria, Transjordan (present-day Jordan), Iraq, and part of the Arabian peninsula from the one family—the powerful Husayn family in Makkah on the Arabian peninsula—that they believed would support their interests. Britain took control of the coastal regions of the Arabian peninsula, Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq, and signed a treaty of protection with Kuwait, making it a British protectorate. France took Lebanon and Syria. Only Turkey, the base of the Ottoman Empire, remained independent by winning a war of independence.

The majority of Arabs living in the European-carved mandates resented the intervention of Europeans. Arabs who had fought against the Ottoman Empire felt they had been cheated because they believed that the Allies, who had been purposefully vague about their intentions, had promised to grant them the right to create an independent united Arab state. Under the Ottomans, Arabs and other ethnic groups had never thought of themselves as divided into different regional entities. Instead, they had associated themselves with the empire and their respective millet. Even after the war, most still owed allegiance to local rulers long associated with the Ottoman Empire and its indirect form of government, and they were bitter that new borders, foreign rulers, and European laws had been forced upon them.





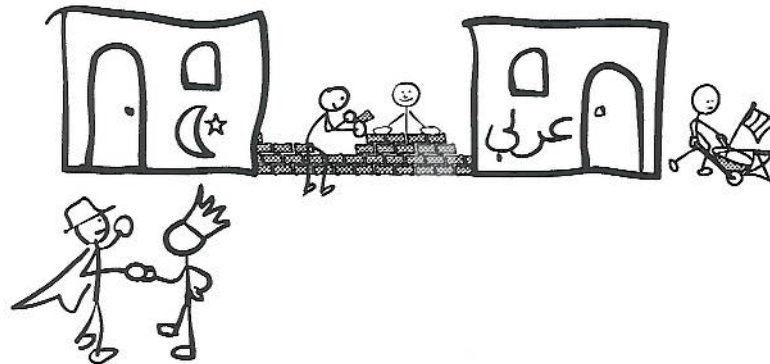
## Event C: The Rise of Arab Nationalism



Some Arab leaders responded to European colonialism by calling for unity and independence for all Arab people. This idea led many Arabs to think of themselves not as subjects of an empire but as a distinct nation united by a shared language and history. The leading proponent of this point of view was Sati al-Husri, an educator who lived in Iraq. He believed that the Arabic language united all Arabs, whether they were Christian or Muslim, and that an Arab should feel loyalty toward his or her fellow Arabs and not a European-created state or a religion.

Other Arab leaders felt that the only response to European colonialism was a return to rule according to Islamic law and customs. In 1924 the *caliph* (leader of Islam) in Istanbul, the former center of Islam and capital of the Ottoman Empire, was deposed (removed from leadership). To many Muslims, this signified the end of an Islamic state that could defend the Islamic way of life in the Middle East. These Muslims felt that European colonists and the Middle Eastern rulers who worked with them were corrupting the morality of the Middle East by weakening Islamic leadership and traditions. They believed that the only way to insure that Muslims could live properly was to force out the Europeans and choose leaders who would respect and protect the laws and customs of Islam. Arab nationalists in countries across the Middle East engaged in demonstrations, boycotts, and writing campaigns against European colonial powers.

Still other Arabs realized that they did not have the ability to fight the Europeans, and many resigned themselves to working within the system of new states created by Britain and France. They hoped that if they could govern in partnership with the Europeans, they would be able to rule themselves according to Middle Eastern customs.



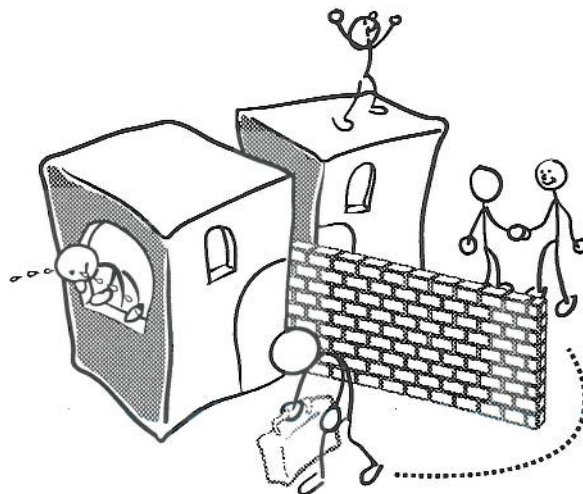
## Event D: The Partition of Palestine



Since the first century A.D., when the Romans drove the Jews from Palestine and into exile throughout Europe, northern Africa, and Asia, Jews had dreamed of returning to Palestine. In the late 1800s, Jews in Eastern Europe, reacting to continued Russian *pogroms* (violent attacks) against Jewish communities, formulated the idea of *Zionism*—Jewish nationalism focusing on creating a Jewish state in Palestine. In Britain, Zionist leaders appealed to the British officials who controlled the Palestinian mandate to allow them to immigrate to Palestine. In 1917, British officials produced the Balfour Declaration, which proclaimed Britain’s support for the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Zionists interpreted the declaration to mean that Britain supported unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine and eventually the creation of an independent Jewish state.

Palestinian Arabs completely opposed the Balfour Declaration as a violation of their rights. Palestinians felt the British had given away their ancestral homeland—in 1917 they made up over 85 percent of the population of Palestine—without even consulting them. Jews immigrating into Palestine bought land for farming, and peasants evicted from these farms moved to the cities. There they formed a mass of unemployed Arabs angry at both Jewish settlers and the British government. In 1936, their discontent erupted into an armed revolt, which the British army crushed in 1939 after much violence and death.

British leaders decided they could not bring the two groups in Palestine together, so in 1937 they decided to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. The Jews tentatively agreed, while the Arabs—who comprised 71 percent of the population—completely opposed the plan. Violence increased, and the British decided to abandon the partition plan. After World War II, the British declared they could no longer control the violence in Palestine, and they turned the mandate over to the United Nations, who developed a partition plan in 1947.



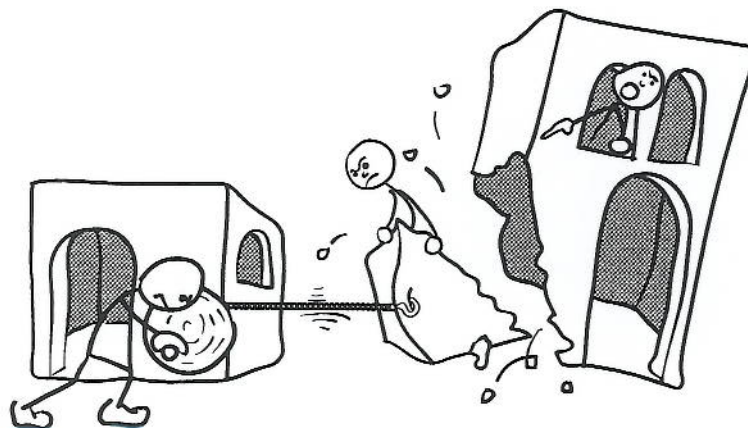


## Event E: The Partition of Syria and Lebanon



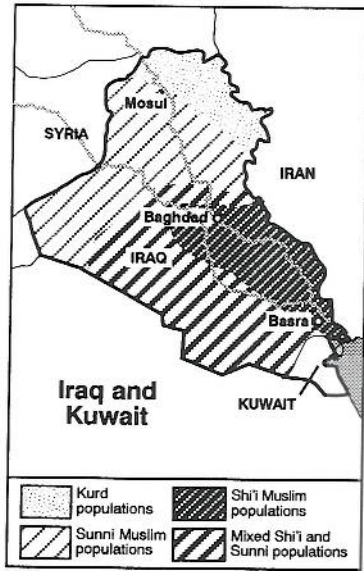
The French had maintained a special and close cultural relationship with French-speaking Arab Christians, called Maronites, in Lebanon since the Crusades in the eleventh century. The Maronites had special privileges under the Ottomans in a region called Mount Lebanon, where they were the overwhelming majority. After World War I, the French controlled the mandates of Lebanon and Syria. Instead of recognizing traditional borders, the French added land inhabited primarily by Muslims to Mount Lebanon to create another mandate called Greater Lebanon. Most of the Muslims living on this land wanted to be included in the mandate of Syria, which was governed by Muslims. However, to honor their historical relationship, the French gave the Maronites—who made up only 40 percent of the population despite being the single largest ethnic group in Greater Lebanon—political and economic control over the Muslims.

After World War I, Syria became a center of Arab nationalism. When the war ended, Prince Faysal's Arab army, which had helped the Allies defeat the Ottoman Empire, occupied Damascus, the capital of Syria. In 1920, a general Syrian congress proclaimed Syria an independent state with Faysal, who was from the Arabian peninsula, as king. However, based on the Sykes-Picot Agreement, France claimed Syria as a French mandate. Five months after Faysal took power, a French army from Lebanon invaded Syria and defeated Faysal's army, forcing him to flee to Europe. The French then attempted to weaken Arab nationalists in Syria by dividing the mandate into four provinces that split up ethnic groups and isolated the major cities. Although the French army crushed anti-French groups and curtailed demonstrations, harsh French rule actually inspired Syrians to form nationalist parties that worked to gain independence. Their efforts were supported by Arabs throughout the Middle East, who were outraged by France's actions and believed that Arabs had the right to choose their own form of government. In 1946, the French left Syria, feeling they could no longer control Arab nationalism.





## Event F: The Formation of Iraq and Kuwait



After World War I, Britain combined the diverse Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra into the mandate of Iraq to create a country strong enough to balance neighboring Iran's power in the Middle East. Shi'i Muslims in the south made up slightly more than 50 percent of the population of Iraq, and Sunni Muslim Arabs in the center made up the second largest group. Non-Arab ethnic groups—Kurdish Muslims and Assyrian Christians—lived in the north. Under the Ottomans, local rulers and millet leaders had peacefully governed these different ethnic groups, but the British placed them all together with little concern for regional traditions. Hoping to avoid the problems of the French in Syria, the British decided to allow Iraq some say in government. Therefore, instead of ruling Iraq directly, the British chose Prince Faysal to be king because they felt that Iraqis would support him and that he would support British interests in the region.

Faysal's governance met Britain's approval, and Iraq gained independence in 1930. After Faysal's death in 1933, Sunni Muslim Arabs in the army effectively took control of the government, so one ethnic group came to dominate this diverse country.

Just south of Iraq, the tiny country of Kuwait developed with a different history. In the seventeenth century, Arabs had established a fishing, trading, and pearl-diving community at the port of al-Kuwait. The Ottoman Empire claimed control of this region, which they included in the district of Basra. In practice, they allowed one family, the al-Sabah family, to govern Kuwait without interference. In the eighteenth century, the British became interested in the Persian Gulf because of its importance as a trade route between Europe and India. They signed a treaty of protection with the al-Sabah family in 1899 and governed the area as a protectorate until 1961, when Kuwait became independent. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, claiming that it was historically a part of the Basra district. The invasion developed into the Gulf War, which involved the United States and led to Iraq's defeat.

