

Outraged and Organized: U.S. Peace Activists in Nicaragua

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On July 19, 1979, Sandinista revolutionaries entered Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, and declared victory over the oppressive Somoza dynasty which had ruled the nation for over three decades. The radical shift of power within this Central American nation had a profound effect both on the lives of Nicaraguans and the climate of international politics, particularly within the Cold War context. Throughout the next ten years, social upheaval and economic crisis within Nicaragua led to the influx of thousands of volunteers from both the United States and the rest of the world who worked on development projects and, during the Contra War, projects promoting peace. Those who traveled from the United States to Nicaragua during the 1980s had assorted backgrounds: men, women, clergy, lay persons, recent college graduates, and retirees were among the diverse people who went to Nicaragua to help combat the poverty in the developing nation. These U.S. peace activists often met with Sandinista leaders and worked side by side with them on economic reform programs and social reform programs.

The central question which this paper will address is why the peace activists choose the Sandinista cause as their own. What would cause U.S. peace activists to not only go against the official policy of their own government, but risk their own lives working in a war torn nation? It cannot be explained simply by peace activists identifying with the leftist, idealistic goals of the Sandinista regime. The motivation of the U.S. peace activists was stronger than common ideology; rather, peace activists were so disgusted by the atrocities committed by Contra rebels that an overwhelming sense of moral outrage united them and prompted them to support the Sandinistas. Moral outrage, in this particular situation, can be defined as the explicit violation of normative standards of morality. U.S. volunteers were also outraged because they knew the Reagan administration funded the Contras. Thus, many U.S. volunteers felt they needed to take responsibility and counter their own government's misdeeds in Nicaragua. Furthermore, the volunteers became polarized when they saw the negative portrayals of the Sandinista cause in the U.S. media; they felt a duty to help change public opinion in the United States about the nature of the Sandinista regime. Often, this led to volunteers overlooking substantial human rights violations committed by

the Sandinista regime, including their imposed limits on freedom of speech and the harsh treatment of the indigenous population. Thus, the feelings of moral outrage tended to polarize activists and made them more likely to sympathize and work with the Sandinistas during the Contra War.

I. Origins and Establishment of the U.S. peace movement in Nicaragua

In order to analyze why U.S. peace activists took up the Sandinista cause, it is first necessary to understand how this peace movement for Nicaragua came into existence. The U.S. peace movement in Nicaragua can be traced to U.S. missionary involvement and the spread of liberation theology in the 1960s. Liberation theology emphasized the liberation of the oppressed; priests, nuns and lay Catholics who embraced liberation theology believed that that God was working to liberate humanity from every injustice, be it spiritual, cultural, economic or political.. Liberation theologians believed that God was struggling to free the oppressed and thus, individuals should do the same in order to do God's will. [1] Liberation theology was also influenced by the reforms proposed by the Second Vatican Council, which were progressive and liberal. [2] Originating in Latin America, liberation theology spread to the United States; one group, the Maryknoll Order, was inspired to change the nature of their missions to Central American nations. Nuns and affiliated lay workers from this order were sent to Nicaragua and other Central and South American nations and helped liberate the poor from their poverty. [3]

Liberation theology became particularly meaningful both in Latin American and the United States within the context of the 1979 Sandinista revolution. Anastasio Somoza and his brutal National Guard controlled all aspects of Nicaraguan life for over thirty years. The regime was oppressive; all economic growth benefited Somoza and his family while the vast majority of the nation was landless and in the depths of poverty. Still, Somoza maintained close ties with the United States particularly with President Nixon. Within Nicaragua opposition to Somoza was growing; the FSLN, a guerilla group that promised democracy and economic reforms to benefit the people, maintained a constant presence in the nation from the 1960s onward. After President Jimmy Carter withdrew support for Somoza on account of human rights abuses and FSLN leaders managed to seize the National Legislative Palace, Somoza's National Guard took extremely brutal action, randomly massacring thousands of Nicaraguans. The massacre finalized the illegitimacy of the Somoza regime and in the summer of the following year, the FSLN launched its final offensive, driving Somoza from the nation. [4]

As the Sandinistas consolidated power, they spread their idealistic message throughout the nation. Sandinista leaders emphasized their ideology as having three components or "three legs of a stool." [5] The first "leg" was establishing a political

democracy with free and open elections. The second “leg” of the Sandinista ideology was setting up a participatory democracy where Nicaraguans from all walks of life would be encouraged to participate in government programs. Finally, the last “leg” was economic democracy; the Sandinistas hoped to establish a system of redistributing wealth to create economic equality for Nicaragua. [6] Many U.S. volunteers approved of the Sandinistas goals for Nicaragua and found them to be similar to the democratic values of the United States. These proposed reforms for Nicaraguan society by the newly installed Sandinista regime seemed to promote equality and liberty for all Nicaraguan citizens; however, as internal strife plagued the nation, the Sandinistas did not always promote these values. For example, the Sandinistas heavily censored opposition newspapers. [7] In addition, conflict broke out between Sandinistas and the Miskito Indians on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua and many claim the Sandinistas committed human rights abuses against this Indian group. [8] This demonstrated how the practices of the Sandinistas did not always coincide with their ideology.

Although the FSLN achieved victory in Nicaragua in 1979, their struggle for sovereignty continued throughout the 1980s. This was mostly the result of the Contras, militants opposed to the Sandinistas, who were set up and backed by the United States government, first covertly, then overtly. Over \$1 billion U.S. dollars went into maintaining the Contra organization by 1988; some of this aid was approved by Congress yet \$3.8 million was given through an illegal diversion of profits from covert arms sales to Iran. [9] The Contras were trained in psychological warfare; they used constant intimidation in order to wear down the resolve of the Nicaraguans and the Sandinista government. This intimidation unfortunately included arbitrary violence against civilians as well as sabotage of already delicate infrastructure in order to dismantle means of production. The tactics of the Contras, along with other problems with the government system, hindered the ability of the Sandinistas to develop their nation and bring the masses out of poverty.

The specific set of circumstance surrounding the formation of the group, Witness for Peace, lends credit to the idea that moral indignation was a key source of motivation for the organization of peace activist groups and the support of the Sandinista regime. In 1983, a group from North Carolina, led by an ex-Maryknoll nun who worked with the poor in Nicaragua in the 1960s, traveled to Nicaragua on a “fact-finding” tour. [10] The group traveled to a village near the Honduran border and saw the destruction caused by Contra attacks. When the group of Americans was in the village the attacks stopped. The Contras would not risk killing Americans because the U.S. government funded their operations. The concept of placing U.S. volunteers in war zones to prevent attacks by Contras quickly fermented and the group brought their message back to the United States: the Sandinista government reflected the will of the

people and the Contras engaged in senseless violence against Nicaraguan citizens. A second trip to the war zones in Nicaragua took place a few months later consisting of 153 people from forty states.[11] The group held a poignant prayer vigil with a community shattered by Contra murders and kidnapping; they later went to the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua and showed him “pieces of shrapnel from U.S.-manufactured mortar shells they found in bombed villages.” [12] The lack of response by the ambassador showed the volunteers that the Reagan administration’s position on the Contras would not be swayed. This also angered the volunteers; even physical evidence of U.S. backed Contra attacks on villages did not persuade the administration to stop funding. The policy of the Reagan administration which ignored testimony of human rights abuses by the Contras violated the ethical values of Witness for Peace volunteers. The group was thus motivated to try and correct what they saw as inexcusable wrongdoing by their government.

The 153 volunteers returned home and shared their experiences through their local churches and the media. Their group officially took the name Witness for Peace, and a national steering committee was formed quickly thereafter. They worked to raise money throughout the country in order to send long term and short term delegations who would non-violently protest the U.S.-backed Contras and support the Sandinista government. [13] The organization grew and, as one scholar reflects, “those living in the war zone of Nicaragua developed in-depth knowledge of the situation, while others learned as much as they could in the course of two weeks.” [14] This was their basic plan for spreading knowledge and peace activism both within Nicaragua and the United States. Witness for Peace continued to grow with hundreds of new members joining throughout the mid 1980s. The group focused on Nicaragua because, although other bloody conflicts existed at this time period, they felt this particular conflict warranted immediate action. Witness for Peace delegates saw first hand the destruction cause by the Contras who were backed by the United States. The group felt a responsibility to stop the funding of the Contras and this often meant siding with the Sandinistas.

The story of one individual U.S. volunteer also shows the process of politicization; Ben Linder became involved in Nicaragua as a young college graduate with strong leftist ideals and a keen sense of adventure. Linder was raised in a progressive family that fostered his sense of social justice and his political ideas. His family was Jewish and his mother had moved to Mexico to escape the Nazis in Czechoslovakia, yet the family was not very religious. Still, Ben identified with his Jewish heritage and tradition; as one friend put it “for Ben, it’s who he was...being Jewish is caring about others who are fighting against oppression. I think even more so in his family, because his mother had so recently come over from Europe.” [15] He became a vegetarian in college to protest the killing of animals and attended protests against nuclear power as

an undergraduate. Thus, Linder's values as Jew and as a liberal influenced his decision to move to Nicaragua.

Faced with the decision of how to pursue his career after college, Joan Kruckewitt, Linder's biographer, explains, "Ben wanted no part of any U.S. government-affiliated program with conservative Ronald Reagan in office." [16] Instead, after two initial visits to Nicaragua, he moved there to apply for a job as an engineer in the state-owned energy company. He wished to use his skills as a mechanical engineer to work on development projects within the nation. Kruckewitt's book details the challenges Linder faced: adjusting to the different language and culture, quelling the fears for his safety by friends and family, dealing with a lack of resources and organization within the Instituto Nacional de Energía as well as the persistent threat of Contra attacks while he worked on an alternative energy project in a remote village in the North plagued by violence. Linder consistently stood up to these challenges, in part due to his moral indignation resulting from witnessing the Contra atrocities and thus believing in the Sandinista cause as representative to the needs of the Nicaraguan people.

II. Witnessing War

Many U.S. volunteers who went to Nicaragua in the 1980s witnessed first hand the death and destruction caused by Contra rebels. Personal stories told by Nicaraguan villagers deeply affected the U.S. volunteers and motivated them to take action, both by helping the Sandinistas and by vocally opposing Reagan's policies aiding the Contras. The first hand testimony of these "witnesses" provides insight into the realities of life within the conflict zone as well as insight into the source of moral outrage that unified the volunteers and cause them to support the Sandinista regime.

Volunteers in Nicaragua often wrote in diaries or letters back to the United States detailing their experiences. One such volunteer was Rebecca Gordon, a bookkeeper and feminist activist who published a lesbian literary magazine. She compiled all the letters she wrote to her partner Jan Adams during her time as a delegate for Witness for Peace. She decided to join the group and travel to Nicaragua because she felt the dire situation required "something beyond my ordinary level of political involvement." [17] In one early letter she wrote, "Ocotol is not far from here...yesterday at 4:00 in the morning, something like 500 contra attacked the city. They were repulsed by the local militia, but not without casualties." [18] Gordon's testimony about the horrors of war continues throughout the rest of her memoir. She also reflects upon her unique experience as a member for Witness for Peace; she is a Jewish lesbian and did not fit the organizations predominately Christian mold. Despite her unique background, she connects with her fellow members as a result of terror of daily life in Jalapa and Matagalpa, two towns seriously affected by Contra violence.

Her experience increased her level of political commitment to the Nicaraguan revolution. She also expressed her dedication to the ideals of Witness for Peace, sharing a common feeling with her fellow members that “if U.S. money is buying the supplies, the training, and even the soldiers to wage war against these people, then people from the U.S. ought to be there to share the effects of that war.” [19] Gordon’s writing solidly conveys the common motivation of U.S. peace activists in Nicaragua; they felt an obligation to experience the war caused by their government and work to stop the progress of the war, by being politically active back in the United States. This expression of solidarity with the people of Nicaragua is largely due in part to witnessing the hardships of Nicaraguan daily life.

Another Witness for Peace delegate, James McGinnis, also wrote about his experience in Nicaragua and the personal narratives he heard from Nicaraguans affected by war. McGinnis, like Gordon, traveled to the town of Jalapa where he heard countless stories of mothers losing their sons in the war. He reflected upon hearing the accounts of two mothers who, “spoke passionately and simply about the ordinariness of their sons: ‘They were not great leaders, just young persons who could no longer stand the poverty and repression under Somoza.’” [20] He also visited the Jalapa hospital where he met a young man wounded the day before in a battle with Contra forces. Finally, McGinnis told of the economic effects of the Contra strategy. He assessed the situation as follows, “These attacks focus not on military targets but on economic destruction...only several weeks earlier, an agricultural cooperative no far from Jalapa had been the target-fourteen persons killed, homes destroyed, and crops burned.” [21] Although McGinnis had a strong background in peace activism, he was the director of the Institute for Peace and Justice in St. Louis, MO, the experience of witnessing the destruction and hearing the tragic stories from Nicaraguans affected how he presented his experience back in the United States.

Christian Smith, in his text documenting the U.S. Central American peace movement, also compiled specific testimony from Witness for Peace volunteers about the poverty, death and destruction in Nicaragua. Smith includes a section of a letter written to him by a sixty-nine year old delegate who stated, “it is not easy to feel patriotic when one goes to a cemetery to view with survivors the mass graves of 34 victims of a U.S. mine explosion and of 80 children strafed on a airstrip runway as they were about to be evacuated.” [22] U.S. policy, which resulted in the death of Nicaraguan citizens, was viewed as immoral by the peace activists and caused them to side with the Sandinistas. Even if volunteers were against Reagan prior to traveling to Nicaragua, their political views were polarized even further as a result of feelings of disgust at the policies of the U.S. The peace activists vehemently opposed U.S. funding of the Contras; therefore, they sided with the Sandinistas, not because the

volunteers were Marxists or communists, but because it was the logical alternative in such a contentious situation to express their views.

Ben Linder, in his letters back to his family and friends, also expressed his repugnance at U.S. policy of supporting terrorist Contras. As he worked on hydroplant that would bring electricity to a small village in Northern Nicaragua, he expressed a constant fear of attack by Contras, because they targeted utilities and other sources of infrastructure. Linder learned about the history of one village, El Cedro, which had an agricultural cooperative and had survived three Contra ambushes resulting in dozens of deaths, kidnappings, and the effects of the destruction of property, including the burning of all the town's houses, the health center, the warehouse and both chapels. Linder visited the village in order to scout out a new site for another hydroplant that would bring electricity to the region and saw first hand the destruction of the Contra attacks both the physical damage and the emotional damage on the villagers. [23] It was experiences like these that shaped Ben Linder's political views and actions throughout his four years working to help promote economic development in Nicaragua.

III A Polarizing Effect: Supporting Sandinistas and Discrediting Reagan

Volunteers from the U.S. in Nicaragua experienced a common feeling after seeing the effects of the Contra War on the people of Nicaragua; the tactics used by the Contras unequivocally violated normative standards of morality. Smith analyzes this phenomenon, writing, "Many social movements represent exactly this kind of action where people's sense of what is right and just is so seriously violated that they feel compelled ... to organize to set things right." [24] Combined with the known fact that the Contras were organized by the CIA and the U.S. tax dollars were being used to arm and fund the organization, this situation gravely distressed Witness for Peace volunteers and prompted them to take action; they focused much of their energy on spreading their message throughout the United States when returning from Nicaragua and forming a strong political opposition to the Reagan administration. As one scholar of the peace movement, Clare Weber writes, "The fact that many WFP activists were motivated by moral outrage rather than political ideology made it harder for them to be dismissed by political representatives and the main stream media as 'communists.'" [25] The use of the "communist" label in the United States was very strategic; it vilified the Sandinistas and undermined the legitimacy of their government. This label also simplified the complex issues that overwhelmed the nation and clouded the actual problems that existed in Nicaragua such as vast poverty.

U.S. peace activists who sided with the Sandinistas clearly risked being labeled Marxists, communists or Soviet sympathizers by the Reagan administration. These labels evoked a specific stigma in the Cold War context; communism was seen as the antithesis of the ideals of American democracy. Communist sympathizers were

essentially seen as being against freedom and self-determination, ideals held in high esteem by the American public. Historically in the United States, those branded “communists” faced immeasurable hardships that were capable of ruining lives. This was seen specifically with the Red Scare and McCarthy eras, but the persecution of communist sympathizers persisted through the end of the Cold War, which included the time of conflict in Nicaragua.

It was hard to label Witness for Peace volunteers as communists because it was a faith-based group and the majority of the members were white, educated and upper-middle class and did not appear to be communists or Soviet sympathizers. Due to the fact that Witness for Peace consisted of many religious people, it was not logical that they would be communists; Soviet style communism vehemently opposed organized religion. Thus, evading these labels, the group sought to spread their message throughout mainstream channels in the United States, speaking at places of worship and schools as well as using media such as newspapers, television and radio to tell the horrific stories of the Contra War.

Witness for Peace, along with other activist groups and individual volunteers, was driven to create a political opposition because of the conflicting image of the Sandinista government portrayed by the Reagan administration in the media. Smith writes on how the Reagan administration conveyed an image of Central America within the “Soviet-aggression frame” [26] In order to convince the American public that supporting the Contras was sound policy for national security, the Reagan administration sought to equate the Sandinistas with the Soviet government to play on fears of Soviet military aggression towards the United States. The logic of Reagan and his political advisors was that if the Sandinistas were the puppets for the Soviets, then the United States would be in danger of an attack from Nicaragua because it was near to the United States geographically. Hence, it followed that the United States should support the Contras who could overthrow the Sandinistas and consequently stop the spread of communism and the possibility of an attack by the Soviets on the United States.

U.S. peace activist disagreed with this line of reasoning by the Reagan administration. When these volunteers traveled to Nicaragua, they did not see a Soviet military presence which posed a threat to the United States. Instead, they saw a grassroots effort to combat poverty and uplift the poor. They also saw that effort being hindered by the Contra rebel. In response to the “Soviet Aggression” line of reasoning by the Reagan administration, which they believed was an oversimplification of the situation in Nicaragua, U.S. peace activists framed their own image of Central America. In one such image, peace activists used the emotional representation of women and children killed by U.S. armed Contras to show that U.S. policy was inconsistent with intrinsic American values such as showing the utmost respect for human life. Christian Smith

labeled this image as the “wayward America frame.” [27] Using this line of argument, U.S. peace activists sought to lobby for a congressional ban on giving funds to the Contras. [28]

Witness for Peace used different strategies to catch media attention back in the United States. The groups’ mission was dramatic; church-going Americans traveled to Nicaraguan war zones where they were in danger of being killed. After returning to the United States, the delegates often used their local newspapers to spread their message of the immorality of Contra guerrilla tactic and similarly, the immorality of Reagan’s foreign policy in Nicaragua. Eventually, Witness for Peace “became accepted by many U.S. politicians and journalists as a reliable source of information on the war in Nicaragua.” [29] Witness for Peace delegates consistently traveled to Nicaragua and thus could relay their experiences to the general public; it directly contradicted the continuous sound-bites of the Reagan administration.

Witness for Peace also combined with other Central American peace activist groups to get their message out to the American public through the national media. For example, in December of 1986, the Nicaragua Network, a solidarity group based in Washington D.C., took out a full page advertisement in the *New York Times*. Witness for Peace was one of the thirteen organizations that sanctioned the message of the ad which read: “We’ve seen this before, last time it was called Vietnam.” [30] Clearly, U.S. peace activists used the historical memory of the Vietnam War and the emotional response which it invoked. The advertisement continued, reading,

The Reagan Administration has deceived us about its unjust and illegal war against Nicaragua... this war has caused the deaths of more than 13,000 Nicaraguans...this policy is incompatible with peace, and with the fundamental sense of decency and democracy by which most Americans guide their lives. [31]

These peace activists were undeniably using what Smith dubbed, the wayward America frame. By juxtaposing American decency with the death of thousands caused by a deceitful president, the peace activists sought to shift the public’s thinking about foreign policy. The advertisement urged the public to learn the truth and then take action to stop Reagan’s policy supporting the Contras. Ads such as this one show that the translation of moral outrage into political action played on the emotional aspects of the war as well as the recent historical memory of Vietnam in order to change U.S. policy.

Witness for Peace also created its own advertisements to raise awareness about the war in Nicaragua. One such example was placed in the *New York Times* on March 12th 1986. This advertisement did not ask for donations, it simply outlined specific Contra atrocities contrasting them with a quote by Secretary of State George Shultz.

Shultz stated that freedom fighters, such as the Contras, did not slaughter school children. The advertisement contrasted this statement with a report from an Assistant Attorney General for the state of Missouri who collected eyewitness testimony involving the massacre of school children by the Contras. [32] Using gruesome testimony of killings done by the Contras using a bayonet, Witness for Peace aimed to evoke feelings of horror in the general public which would result in sympathizing with the people of Nicaragua as well as taking a stance against the Reagan administration for support the Contras. Again, Witness for Peace used the “wayward America” frame of Central America; by calling attention to the fundamentally immorality of the Contra tactics, the group intended to show that the U.S. should stop funding the Contras because the rebels severely violated human rights.

It was easy for U.S. volunteers to decry the massive amount of death and destruction caused by the Contras; many had witnessed the atrocities first hand. Yet many volunteers had become so focused on stopping U.S. aid to Contras that they often overlooked the negative aspects of the Sandinista regime. For example, in the memoirs of James McGinnis and Rebecca Gordon, two Witness for Peace volunteers, there exists no mention of the censorship practiced by the Sandinista government in the 1980s nor the violent conflicts that took place in the early 1980s between the Sandinista army and the Miskito Indian populations on the Atlantic coast. Many volunteers felt they could not afford to be critical of the regime because the regime was consistently under attack, with actual battle raging in the countryside and battles being waged in the public dialogue through the U.S. and international media. Another interpretation of this phenomenon is more basic; the more the Reagan administration maligned the Sandinista regime, the more U.S. peace activists embraced the regime, mainly because it was the only alternative to the persistent, indiscriminate violence practiced by the Contras. Consequently, one of the limitations of political activism motivated by morality in a dichotomous situation such as Nicaragua is that it fails to leave any room for self-reflexivity or moderate reforms.

Although the goal of many peace activist groups in the 1980s was to stop U.S. imperialism in the region, these organizations had to narrow their focus to stopping U.S. aid to Contras. Witness for Peace worked around the clock in the months leading up to a vote on Contra aid in Congress in 1986 by contacting legislators and inundating the media with stories of the atrocities in Nicaragua. By focusing on a smaller problem within a broader issue, Witness for Peace and other activist groups could use their resources most effectively because their narrow goal was attainable; however, this trade-off failed to change the big picture. As Smith writes, “[They] might succeed in ending Contra aid for the time being but fail in changing the underlying policy paradigm that had generated one hundred years of military aid... CIA-sponsored coup d’etats, [and] support of exploitative Central America

oligarchies.” [33] Evidently, U.S. support of Contra rebels, despite their brutal and devastating tactics, fit into the over-arching framework of U.S. interventionist policy under the guise of fighting communism. Thus, even though peace activists were united to stop the funding of Contras because of their violated ethical standards, their organized political opposition, although influential to the American public, could not reverse the long-standing tradition of the United States intervening in the domestic dispute of other nations.

Ben Linder, like the volunteers from Witness for Peace, became more political throughout his four years in Nicaragua due to the massive amounts of tragedy he witnessed as a result of the Contra war. Joan Krukewitt’s book about Linder includes detailed information about the progression of Linder’s views; however, due to the political repercussions after his death, her writing is slanted in Linder’s favor. Still, she traces his transformation carefully; she shows that when he first arrived in Nicaragua, Linder appeared to others as a fun-loving adventurer guided by a desire to help the poor and work towards social justice. In one letter back to the United States Linder wrote, “So why am I here? Adventure is part of it. Proving myself is also part. Doing good is a very large part. The rest I guess will be known in time.” [34] Linder did not profess a deep desire to join the Sandinistas nor was he a virulent Marxist. He developed close relationships with the people of Nicaragua, many of whom were revolutionaries, yet this was not the reason he associated with them. He chose to associate with them out of personal admiration for their unwavering perseverance in the face of terrible poverty and constant instability. Similarly, although he worked for the INE, the state electric company run by the Sandinista government, he did so out of his desire to help the poor get electricity and improve their lives. As the director of TecNica, a technology development group for Nicaragua, stated about Linder, “He was one of the most unideological people I’d ever met. He never made political statements...he was a humanely motivated revolutionary. His revolution had everything to do with people, and nothing to do with theory.” [35] Although members of the Reagan administration, including Vice President George H.W. Bush labeled him a communist after his death, [36] those who personally interacted with him during the time he worked in Nicaragua felt his politics did not warrant such a label.

Like Witness for Peace volunteers, Linder also traveled back to the United States to spread his message and raise money. He participated in a speaking tour throughout Northwest United States to raise money to build another hydroelectric plant in Matagalpa. Mira Brown, his partner on the speaking tours, explained that, “the project was possible because we’re in a country with a revolutionary government, a country with an agrarian reform...where people not only have the freedom to organize themselves...but are encouraged...to resolve their own community’s problems.” [37] Brown’s quote showed that by using a similar method as other U.S. peace activists,

Linder and Brown attempted to explain the virtues of the Sandinista government as being similar to that of the United States. Thus, the U.S.'s support of the Contras was in direct violation of these mutual virtues of self-governance and freedom that each country strongly identified with. In addition, Brown and Linder also shared their stories about the devastating effects of Contra attacks. During their presentations at local churches and solidarity groups, they showed pictures of widows and El Cuá's "bullet-scarred" ambulance and told stories of the danger of El Cuá due to Contra attacks. [38] While the fundraising tour was a success, Linder had difficulty relating to his friend and family in the U.S. because how the atrocities of the war had shaped him and sobered him to the injustice of the world.

As his time in Nicaragua continued, Linder eventually decided to arm himself when working closely with Nicaraguan people on development projects in areas prone to Contra attacks. The grim realities of war become more apparent as he moved from the capital Managua to the smaller village of El Cuá. Linder's father explained that his decision to carry a rifle was not strictly for self defense. Kruckewitt quotes David Linder as saying, "If he did not carry one, people would be sent along with him to protect him, and he didn't want Nicaraguans endangering their lives for him..." [39] Although Linder was motivated by his moral outrage to take a stance against the Contras by helping the people of the countryside, he was not a violent communist revolutionary; that is, he did not take up arms for ideological reasons. Unfortunately Linder's story ends tragically as well; while working on the new hydroelectric plant he was gunned down by Contras and murdered.

Linder's death sparked upset and protests throughout Nicaragua and the United States. Those who opposed Contra aid used Linder's death as solid proof that the Contras were terrorists, especially when the autopsy showed that he was killed from point-blank range while wounded. [40] The Contras involved in the killings claim that the Sandinistas were fired first and the Reagan administration stated that while they regretted his death, any American working in the war zone puts themselves at risk. This moral outrage over Linder's death also prompted political action; the Linder's parents spoke at a hearing in the U.S. Congress about their son's death and organized a peace tour which raised \$25,000 to continue the projects in El Cuá. [41] His parents also held press conferences denouncing the Reagan administration's support of the Contras and urged Congress to vote down proposals for aid to the Contras. The aftermath of Ben Linder's death showed how moral outrage led to political action in the United States due to the circumstances surrounding the Contra war in Nicaragua.

As a result of President Ronald Reagan's staunch support for the Contras throughout the 1980s, a strong social movement emerged, rallying for peace in the small Central American nation of Nicaragua. By analyzing the testimony of volunteers, those from the group, Witness for Peace, and the individual activist, Ben Linder, it can be

deduced that moral outrage over the atrocities committed by the Contras motivated these peace activists to take political action back in the United States. Although the activists were from varying backgrounds, they were united by their profound feelings of fury at the Reagan administration for aiding what they believed to be an inhumane terrorist organization. Thus, the volunteers channeled their resources into creating a political opposition to the Contras in their own nation, the United States, while supporting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

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[1] Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 146.

[2] Smith, 11.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States and Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993) 225.

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WWI & the Partition of the Ottoman Empire: Mandates as a Pretext for Imperial Domination

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The advent of the nineteenth century found the Ottoman Empire, once a tri-continental power, faced not only with the question of decline, which was arguably no longer even a question, but with the far more daunting question of imminent dissolution. In 1856 the decaying empire was admitted into the “Concert of Europe,” thus assuring that the empire would be maintained, “tottering but intact,” at least for the time being.^[1] With the rise of Germany as a great power, the Concert of Europe broke down and the continent divided into hostile camps.^[2] The outbreak of war in 1914 left Ottoman statesmen with the choice of which alliance it would join. Ottoman neutrality was not an option, as neutrality made partition by the winning side inevitable.^[3] Unfortunately for Ottoman leaders, they entered the war on what would prove to be the losing side. Five years later, the victorious powers divided the former empire into imperial possessions, drawing borders where they had never before existed. At this juncture, Gertrude Bell – widely recognized as one of Great Britain’s leading authorities on the Middle East, wrote to her old friend Aubrey Herbert

O my dear they are making such a horrible muddle of the Near East, I confidently anticipate that it will be much worse than it was before the war...It’s like a nightmare in which you foresee all the horrible things which are going to happen and can’t stretch out your hand to prevent them.^[4]

As she wrote in April 1919, Liberals and Labourites clashed with conservatives in Britain over annexation and international supervision regarding conquered territories, while an exceedingly powerful colonial lobby struggled to assert its influence over Prime Minister Clemenceau in France. In the realm of international diplomacy, Clemenceau and British Prime Minister Lloyd George were involved in a fierce

debate regarding their rival imperial interests, while both statesmen cringed at Woodrow Wilson's calls for internationalization and "self-determination." As these statesmen deliberated over virtually every aspect of the pending mandates, Great Britain's promise to establish an independent Arab state fueled emerging Arab nationalism, and unrest brewed throughout the former Ottoman territories.

The cauldron of animosities which would continue to boil long after the Peace Conference resulted from empty and often conflicting wartime promises, misplaced rhetoric, and a total disregard for the people of the former Ottoman Empire. During the Paris Peace Conference, the delegates formed the League of Nations as a new means of international diplomacy in world affairs. Article 22 of the League of Nations Charter established a mandate system for societies they deemed "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world."^[5] The self-proclaimed "advance nations," were to take on the "responsibility" of "ensuring the well-being and development of such peoples."^[6] Thus, the sole duty of the British and French in their Middle Eastern mandates was "the rendering of assistance...until such a time as they are able to stand alone."^[7] Furthermore, it was required that "the wishes of the communities must be a principle consideration in the selection of a mandatory."^[8] British statesman Arthur Balfour articulated his nation's contempt for the wishes of Arab communities in his response to Edwin Montagu's statement "Let us not for Heaven's sake, tell the Moslem what he ought to think, let us recognize what they do think." Balfour replied "I am quite unable to see why Heaven or any other Power should object to our telling the Moslem what he ought to think."^[9]

British and French disregard toward the will of the former Ottoman subjects was manifested in the decisions reached at the San Remo Conference of April 1920. Tracing British and French planning on the Middle East from 1914 to the San Remo Conference illustrates the way in which the mandates system was developed to serve as a mediator both in the domestic sphere – between colonial ambitions and calls for no-annexations, as well as in the international sphere – between Wilson's principle of "self-determination," and British and French plans to extend their imperial empires. It is the position of this paper to illustrate that "ensuring the well-being and development" of the former Ottoman territories came secondary to guaranteeing British and French interests in the region. Consequently, the mandates fostered gross instability in the region, much of which reverberates to the present.

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As the war broke out in Europe, it was not yet clear which side the Ottomans would take. Although Great Britain had been the staunchest supporter of Ottoman territorial integrity up until the war, it was unlikely that they would side with an alliance which included their historic rival, Russia. When the Ottomans joined the Central Powers in

October, Allied planners began to set their sights on various prizes which they hoped to acquire by right of conquest. Russian planners had long sought a warm water port, and since 40% of all Russian exports passed through the Turkish Straits, the prospect of such an acquisition was all the more compelling.^[10] The Russian Empire had also long shown interest in Palestine, for the territory contained sites holy to the Orthodox Church while Orthodox Christians in the region looked to Russia to protect their interests from the French-backed Catholics.^[11] France claimed “historic rights” to the territories which include modern-day Syria and Lebanon, as a protector of both the Maronite Christian population and French investments in railroads and silk production.^[12] Great Britain, for its part, aimed to maintain control over the Suez Canal, protect communications to India and ensure post-war security for British investment and trade in the region.^[13]

French colonial ambitions in the region led to the founding of the *Amis de l’Orient* – an affiliation of various colonial lobby groups, which was renamed the *Comite de l’Orient* in 1914. Within its ranks, the *Comite* included Etienne Flandin and Georges Leygues of the ‘Syrian party’ in parliament, an association which had planned for a Lebanese uprising even before the Ottoman Empire entered the war.^[14] The French colonialists became preoccupied with British actions in the Ottoman Empire, regarding them as a potential threat to French imperial interests. This preoccupation would lead France to participate in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign in April 1915.^[15] Churchill’s original plan for the campaign included a British occupation of Alexandretta, touching a nerve with the French colonialists.^[16] The French viewed such an action as a British attempt to gain a foot hold in the part of Asia Minor that had traditionally been regarded as part of the French sphere of influence.^[17] Victor Augagneur, the French Minister of Marine, met with Churchill on 26 January 1915, agreeing to take part in the Dardanelles operation so long as Britain dropped plans to land at Alexandretta.^[18] In a development indicative of the French cabinet’s lack of control over policies regarding imperial interests, Augagneur deliberately concealed the plans until 13 February. On 4 March, Russia formally demanded Constantinople, and an area on either side of the Straits, to which the British conceded almost at once. Theophile Delcasse, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, had been kept fully informed of the developments but, like Augagneur, failed to inform the cabinet in a timely fashion.^[19] Kept in the dark until after the fact, the French government had no choice but to acquiesce and seek a *quid pro quo*, demanding Russian recognition of a French sphere of influence in Syria and Cilicia.^[20]

Once the French had struck a deal with Russia, planning turned toward securing British approval of French colonial ambitions. The French consul-general in Beirut, Francois Georges-Picot, urged Delcasse that he must move quickly in negotiating with the British since the size of the British forces in the Middle East would be far greater

than that of the French and thus, he argued, the right of conquest would fall far more with the British than with the French.[\[21\]](#) Delcasse had, in fact, attempted talks with England in March, but had found Sir Edward Grey “not very anxious to carve up Asia Minor in advance.”[\[22\]](#) Nevertheless, Picot was sent to the London embassy in preparation for future talks.

...

While the French moved to secure British acceptance of their colonial ambitions, the British were engaged in talks which promised to give control of these territories elsewhere. A series of letters known as the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, regarding an Arab uprising against the Ottomans in exchange for the promise of a future independent Arab kingdom, culminated in a fiery controversy following the Paris Peace Conference. Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt and Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, laid the framework for the British backed Arab uprising and the specific details of the future Arab kingdom in a correspondence beginning on 14 July 1915 and extending into March, 1916.

In the first letter to McMahon on 14 July Hussein proposed that the lands of the kingdom should be

Bounded on the north by Mersina and Adana up to the 37 degree of latitude, on which degree fall Birijik, Urfa, Mardin, Midiat, Jezirat (Ibn ‘Umar), Amadia, up to the border of Persia; on the east by the borders of Persia up to the Gulf of Basra; on the south by the Indian Ocean, with the exception of the position of Aden to remain as it is; on the west by the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea up to Mersina.[\[23\]](#)

According to this plan the kingdom would include much of what today constitutes the modern Middle East. In McMahon’s reply on 30, August, he affirmed Britain’s desire for “the independence of Arabia and its inhabitants,” but continued that “With regard to the questions of limits and boundaries, it would appear to be premature to consume our time in discussing such details in the heat of war.”[\[24\]](#) On 9 September Hussein replied that “it is necessary to first discuss this point [the establishment of boundaries].” McMahon realized that Britain could no longer stall on the issue and replied “I have realized...that you regard this question as one of vital and urgent importance.” He then revealed the British reservation that

The two districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and portions of Syria lying to the west of the district of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo [modern day Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian occupied territories and parts of Syria and Jordan] cannot be said to be purely Arab, and should be excluded from the limits demanded.[\[25\]](#)

In addition the *vilayets* of Basra and Baghdad were to be under a temporary “special administrative arrangement.”^[26] McMahon then guaranteed that “in the name of the Government of Great Britain... Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sharif of Mecca.”^[27] In the letter dated 5 November Hussein renounced insistence on inclusion of the *vilayets* of Mersina and Adana but pressed to keep the *vilayets* of Aleppo and Beirut.^[28] McMahon replied on 14 December that in regards to Aleppo and Beirut, “the interests of our ally, France, are involved in them both, the question will require careful consideration and a further communication on the subject will be addressed to you in due course.”^[29] On 1, January 1916 Hussein more or less acquiesced, but insisted “at the first opportunity after this war is finished, we shall ask you (what we avert our eyes from to-day) for what we now leave to France in Beirut and its coasts,” adding that “it is impossible to allow any derogation that gives France, or any other Power, a span of land in those regions.”^[30]

The aforementioned letter by Hussein was the seventh in the correspondence of ten, and was the last to deal with the issue of the future Arab kingdom’s territories. The final three letters dealt solely with preparations for the uprising. The vast kingdom promised to Sharif Hussein of Mecca would be parceled away between the British and the French, leaving his sons with only nominal control of the post-war kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan.

...

At a meeting of the French Asian Committee (*Comite de l’Asie Francaise*) on 18 February 1915, the committee abandoned its traditional policy of maintaining a sphere of influence within the Ottoman Empire, opting instead for establishing control over Cilicia and “*la Syrie integrale*,” a Syria which included Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan.^[31] Throughout the spring and summer of 1915, other sections of the colonial party began to push for “*la Syrie integral*,” including the Syrian party in parliament, led by Flandin and Leygues, who presented the acquisition of Syria as a matter of national prestige.^[32] As mentioned, in March 1915 Delcasse had found that Britain was not yet ready to discuss partition of the Ottoman Empire. By October 1915, however, the correspondence between Hussein and McMahon had produced a promise of an Arab uprising in exchange for an independent state. Such a promise, of course, would first have to be discussed with the French.

On 21 October Sir Edward Grey asked Paris to appoint a delegate, and Francois Georges-Picot was promptly selected by Ambassador Paul Cambon.^[33] Picot had intimate ties with the French colonial movement, as his father was the founder of the *Comite de l’Afrique Francaise*, and his brother Charles the treasurer of the *Comite*

de l'Asie Francaise. Therefore his appointment guaranteed that the French government's war aims in the Middle East would be those of the *parti colonial*.^[34] Picot was scheduled to meet with Sir Mark Sykes, a wealthy aristocrat who dabbled in British diplomacy and had traveled in the Middle East from Cairo to Baghdad.^[35] At the time of their meeting, the war was not going particularly well for the Allies, the Gallipoli landings had failed and in Mesopotamia a large Indian force had surrendered.^[36] British military strategists had promised Arab independence, in the hope that the Arab Revolt could harass the Ottoman forces and cause them to overextend their armies.^[37] In addition, British planners believed they could use the revolt to shore up their right flank as their armies invaded from Egypt.^[38] In order to begin the offensive, however, the British would be forced to divert troops and resources from the Western Front, a move which would require the approval of their ally France.^[39] As Arab independence had been offered to bring the Sharif of Mecca on board with British planning, so was Sykes-Picot offered to the French.

Picot drafted his own instructions for the meeting, which the new French prime minister and foreign minister Aristide Briand approved without amendment.^[40] The ambitious French demands included the whole of Syria (including Palestine, Lebanon and Mosul) as well as Cilicia in Ottoman Turkey.^[41] These French claims did not originate within the government, but rather, they were those of the French colonialists. The cabinet, it appears, did not even partake in the discussions.^[42] On 3 January 1916, while the Hussein-McMahon letters had just established the boundaries of a future "independent" Arab state, Sykes and Picot provisionally agreed on a partition of the territories that were simultaneously being promised to Hussein. British and French imperial wrangling as early as 1915 is indicative of the fact that their ambitions stretched far beyond ensuring "well-being and development" in the region.

While Picot's full ambitions were not realized, he regarded the agreement as the best obtainable at the time, and French Prime Minister Aristide Briand concurred. According to the draft, direct French control was to be limited to Cilicia and coastal-Syria, while the Syrian interior was to be granted to the future Arab kingdom within a French sphere of influence.^[43] Furthermore, the Syrian interior would exclude the ports of Haifa and St. Jean d'Acre, which were reserved for Britain.^[44] Additional British possessions would include central and southern Mesopotamia, extending down into present-day Saudi Arabia along the Persian Gulf.^[45] Palestine was to be internationalized in accord with Russian claims, to which the French conceded, adding that they might move to acquire it at a later date.^[46] What remained was an area which included modern-day Syria – minus access to the Mediterranean, Jordan and Mosul in northern Iraq. The aforementioned territory was to be divided into spheres of influence, France's sphere incorporating the remnants of Syria and northern Iraq, the British zone including Jordan and south-west Iraq. The plan was approved by

the respective governments in May 1916, in blatant disregard to promises made, on behalf of the British government, to the Sharif of Mecca. Hussein, oblivious to the secret pact, launched the Arab Revolt a month later.

...

No sooner had the British signed on to Sykes-Picot than they began to regret it. Lord Curzon cursed “that unfortunate agreement which has been hanging like a millstone round our necks ever since.”^[47] Lord Curzon joined fellow hardliner Alfred Milner in Lloyd George’s War Cabinet, which took power in December 1916 and would prove to be far less accommodating to French colonial ambitions than Asquith’s government had been.^[48] In March 1917 Alexandre Ribot returned as Prime Minister of France and found himself in an increasingly difficult position. The French colonialists had stepped up their pressure on the foreign ministry. As one British Foreign Office official reported “The French colonial party is at present extremely strong and active.”^[49] The increased pressure came at a time when many British planners were working to dismantle the promises made by Sykes-Picot. Lloyd George, “a Liberal turned land-grabber,”^[50] in the words of historian Margaret MacMillan, had already determined to “grab” Palestine.^[51] On 6 April Sykes informed Picot, his former protégé, that “it would be advantageous to prepare [the] French for [the] idea of British suzerainty in Palestine by international consent.”^[52]

As fears over British intentions mounted, the French colonialists continued to exert pressure on the government. In early May, Shukri Ganim founded the *Comité Central Syrien*, a colonial pressure group which included Georges Samne and P. Etienne Flandin.^[53] On 23 May at an audience with Prime Minister Ribot, the delegation pressed for French military action in Syria and also raised the question of Palestine, presenting a petition calling for a French protectorate.^[54] Pressure by the colonialists was futile, however, in light of the situation on the ground. The French army, stretched increasingly thin along the Western Front, was further demoralized by mutinies in May and June.^[55] As British forces stood poised to capture the Ottoman territories, French colonialists realized the futility of pressing for revision of Sykes-Picot, an agreement which many planners on both sides regarded as obsolete. The Ottoman territories would fall to the British by conquest and throughout the summer, the colonial planning turned from revision of the agreement to preservation.

The French saw their position further weakened in November 1917 when Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, promising the Jewish people a national home in Palestine. Throughout 1917, British and Zionist goals appeared to be converging. Chaim Weizman wanted a Jewish Palestine, which he argued would need protection for some years to come.^[56] The Zionists preferred British protection over American or French protection, and thus appealed to British planners who hoped Palestine could

be transformed into “an Asiatic Belgium” in a strategic location protecting the vital Suez Canal.[57] This made sense to Lloyd George, who gave his blessings to the declaration, dismissing as irrelevant any French claims to Palestine or, for that matter, any claims by the people who inhabited the land. One month after the Balfour Declaration, Field Marshal Edmund Allenby led the Egyptian Expeditionary Force into Palestine, sweeping the Ottoman soldiers from the Holy Land. The French responded with a weak appeal to preserve internationalization.

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While British and French imperialists battled one another for colonial possessions, a wave of anti-imperialist idealism presented a new challenge, both in the domestic sphere and on the international stage. In April 1917 the Independent Labor Party in Britain charged that “annexation of territory and people by force of arms is robbery and oppression,” and incompatible with international socialism.[58] Throughout the spring and summer of 1917 the *Manchester Guardian* editorialized against annexations and pushed for a new colonial policy arguing that “imperial aggrandizement” was inconsistent with Allied principles.[59] “Populations,” they argued “ought not to be bandied about without regard to their own wishes as if they were property.”[60] British Liberals and Laborites were united in calling for no annexations and internationalization of colonial affairs during the final years of the war. The Inter-Allied Labor and Socialist Conference met in London in February 1918 and went on record demanding that “the natives of all Colonies and Dependencies must be protected against capitalist exploitation, and that “administrative autonomy should be granted to all groups sufficiently civilized, and to others a progressive participation in local government.”[61] In Great Britain, the powerful and influential coalition of Liberals, Laborites and Socialists were a force that had to be considered and their calls for new colonial policies no doubt influenced the way in which mandates were later applied.

Even in France, where the Socialists pushing against annexation were a marginal power, Cachin was able to pressure Prime Minister Ribot into stating “we repudiate all annexations” because the international climate had shifted, yet another example of an empty wartime promise.[62] Despite this slight ideological divergence, attitudes in France were such that the bulk of French opinion still favored annexations.[63]

While imperial planners were generally able to overcome domestic ideological attacks, international developments came to constitute a far greater obstacle to their objectives. With the Bolshevik rise to power in Russia following the October Revolution, Lenin became a force on the international stage. On 8 November Lenin read his Decree on Peace before the Soviet Congress, calling for an immediate end to hostilities and a peace without annexations or indemnities.[64] A few days later

Trotsky began to publish the Allied secret treaties, further embarrassing the Allied governments. In London, Lloyd George, understanding the need to conciliate Labor opinion, made yet another shallow war time promise, declaring that there should be no partition of the Ottoman Empire.^[65] In the United States Woodrow Wilson felt that Lenin's Decree on Peace should have been his own.^[66] Accordingly, on 8 January 1918 Wilson issued his Fourteen Points. "Wilsonian idealism" struck a blow to British and French planners alike. Wilson's fifth point established a principle that was to be a thorn in the side of imperial planners for decades, the right of self determination. Point five read:

A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.^[67]

Wilson's twelfth point specifically extended these rights to the people of the Ottoman Empire, stating "the...nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of an autonomous development."^[68]

Gaston Domergue articulated the French colonialist response, exclaiming that "The obstacle is America!"^[69] While the British were equally outraged, both sides realized the necessity of paying lip service to the principle of self-determination. In both Britain and France, imperial planners began to talk the language of the Americans. Shifting gears, Domergue argued "we need a colonial empire to exercise, in the interests of humanity, the civilizing vocation of France."^[70] In London, Curzon argued that the British ought "to play self determination for all its worth, wherever we are involved in difficulties with the French, the Arabs, or anybody else, and leave the case to be settled...knowing...that we are more likely to benefit from it than anybody else."^[71]

Masking their distaste for self determination, the British and French issued a joint declaration to the Arabs on 8 November, assuring the Arab people that the goal of their campaign against the Ottomans had been "the complete and definitive liberation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks and the establishment of national governments and administrations drawing their authority from the initiative and free choice of indigenous populations."^[72] The sincerity of the declaration must be placed under intense scrutiny, in light of later Franco-British actions in the region.

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While the public declarations by the British and French had taken a new form in light of domestic and international developments, behind the scenes the imperial wrangling continued. The winter of 1917 saw the French colonial movement receive several crushing blows. Georges Clemenceau returned to power in November 1917. His earlier career was marked by bitter opposition to colonial expansion, which now took the form of indifference, mingled with shades of contempt.^[73] Clemenceau viewed the war with a single-minded concentration on the Western Front, ending any hopes of a substantial French force being deployed in the Middle East.^[74] While Clemenceau ignored both his foreign and colonial ministers, the *parti colonial* watched as the Egyptian pound became the currency in Palestine and then in Syria.^[75] Picot rushed to Palestine in an attempt to protect French interests, but Sir Edmund Allenby and his occupation forces were found to be uncooperative.^[76]

In April 1918 British forces under Arnold Wilson took control of Mesopotamia. With this development British troops controlled virtually every Ottoman territory up for partition. Among the British, two schools of thought emerged about what should be done with their acquisitions. The Anglo-Indian school of thought, represented by A.T. Wilson and Lord Curzon, argued that securing the empire's communications with India required total British control over the Middle East, unhampered by calls for any Arab state or states.^[77] The Anglo-Egyptian school supported by T.E. Lawrence, Gertrude Bell and Commander Hogarth, argued that British control over empire communications should be assured by fostering the growth of Arab states with British advisors, in close alliance with Great Britain.^[78]

While British actions in the Middle East continued to arouse fears about British intentions amongst the French colonialists, the British maintained an ominous silence in regard to their long term plans.^[79] In the summer of 1918 the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Quai d'Orsay, warned that French public opinion would not accept that "France be deprived of benefits which were rightly hers by those who diverted their troops at the crucial moment."^[80] In similar fashion, Picot attempted to inform Sykes about the mood in France; the British refused to take Picot or the Quai d'Orsay seriously, refusing to hand over full powers to French representatives in the part of Syria promised to them by Sykes-Picot.^[81]

With the decisive Allied breakthrough on the Western Front in August, the French colonialists launched a campaign to rally public support for their cause, utilizing the familiar device of national prestige. In order to placate the fears of their ally, on 30 September the British defined Picot's rights and duties as French representative in the occupied territories and reassured the French that if Syria "should fall into the sphere of interest of any European Power, that Power should be France."^[82] The British then informed France that unfortunately, the Sykes-Picot agreement would have to be revised. Following the conclusion of hostilities, the British further asserted their

position of dominance by insisting on negotiating the armistice with the Turks alone, infuriating even Clemenceau, who had claimed indifference to colonial affairs.[\[83\]](#)

Nevertheless, setting their differences aside, Lloyd George and Clemenceau met in December 1918, just before Wilson arrived for the Peace Conference. Under pressure from the colonial lobby, the Quai d'Orsay presented Clemenceau with a lengthy rationale for preserving Sykes-Picot, which he subsequently ignored.[\[84\]](#) During the meeting, of which no historical record exists, Clemenceau abandoned French claims to Mosul and Palestine; his generosity, many historians argue, was on account of promises made by Lloyd George to support French demands in Europe, particularly along the Rhine.[\[85\]](#)

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As the Paris Peace Conference opened in January 1919, the delegates were faced with the daunting task of sorting out rival claims to the former Ottoman territories, as well as establishing the nature of the mandates system. Woodrow Wilson was the first delegate to issue a Paris Draft Covenant. In it, he described the League as “the residuary trustee with sovereign rights of ultimate disposal,” demanded approval of the mandates by the populations, gave the populations the right of appeal to the League, and gave the League “complete power of supervision and of intimate control.”[\[86\]](#) The draft was opposed by even the most anti-imperialist delegates. In a second draft, Wilson tried to remove some of the harshest wording, but was once again rebuked. Four days later the British delegation proposed a Paris Draft which would eventually become Article 22 of the League of Nations Charter. At a meeting of the Council of Ten on 30 January, Wilson tried to shame his adversaries and was once again reproved. The British Draft was adopted as part of the Covenant on 10 February, with Wilson’s sole contribution of the clause establishing the Permanent Mandates Commission, which provided a certain degree of League oversight regarding the mandates.[\[87\]](#)

Having established the mandate principle in theory, the Paris delegates turned to the more difficult task of putting it into practice. On 6 February Feisal, the son of Hussein bin Ali, and leader of the Arab revolt, called on the British to fulfill their promises from the Hussein-McMahon letters.[\[88\]](#) Caught between guarantees to both the French and the Arabs, Lloyd George delayed on withdrawing his troops from Syria.[\[89\]](#) Clemenceau, who had made numerous concessions to Lloyd George in December, was furious. He assured French President Raymond Poincare, “I won’t give way on anything any more, Lloyd George is a cheat.”[\[90\]](#) The deadlock continued throughout March. While the French wanted to use the mandates to claim Syria without granting Arab independence, the British wanted to use it to fulfill their promises to King Hussein and the Arabs.[\[91\]](#)

As the delegates stood at a stalemate, developments in other parts of the Ottoman Empire roused British planners into action. The rhetoric of self-determination had the unanticipated consequence of fueling nationalist movements in other parts of the world. Protests in Egypt turned violent following the arrest of several nationalist leaders. On 18 March, eight British soldiers were murdered and the British government reacted by imposing martial law and dispatching Allenby's troops.^[92] Likewise, in India, March and April saw huge demonstrations for independence in several major cities. On 13 April a panicked British officer ordered his troops to fire into a crowd in what came to be known as the Amritsar Massacre.^[93] With the uprisings in Egypt and India spiraling out of control, Lloyd George began to realize the limits of British power.

While the British fought desperately to maintain control over Egypt and India, Feisal, upon his return to Syria in May, began to agitate for independence. More specifically, he called on Arabs to "choose to either be slaves or masters of your own destiny."^[94] British military planners warned that they would be unable to control an uprising in Syria, thus prompting Lloyd George to withdraw British troops in September and allow the French to move in.^[95] With the Syrian question finally resolved, the British and French were able to move toward an agreement.

At the San Remo Conference in April 1920 the British and French awarded themselves mandates: Palestine (including Jordan) and Mesopotamia for the British, Syria (including Lebanon) for the French.^{[1] [96]} While the Franco-British struggle for Syria had ended, the French had not yet reached an understanding with Feisal, who on 7 March 1920 was proclaimed king of Syria within its "natural boundaries" (including Palestine and Lebanon), by the Syrian Congress.^[97] A similar congress, claiming to speak for the people of Mesopotamia, likewise declared independence from British rule, proclaiming Feisal's brother Abdullah as king and demanding that the British end their occupation.^[98] Following an ultimatum, French troops under General Gourard moved into Damascus on 24 July, destroying a poorly armed Arab force and sending Feisal into exile; the French proceeded to shrivel Syria's borders while swelling those of Lebanon, thus placing thousands of Muslims in a Christian dominated state.^[99]

As the French asserted control over the recalcitrant Arabs in Syria, rebellions broke out in Mesopotamia, evoking a violent British response whereby expeditions burned villages and extracted fines, while the British air-force set a new precedent in colonial domination by firing machine-guns and dropping bombs from the air.^[100] Once order had been restored, British planners looked for a more cost effective way to manage their colonial acquisitions. At a conference in Cairo in March 1921, British colonial secretary Winston Churchill decided that Feisal should be given the crown of the newly created kingdom of Iraq and his brother Abdullah the crown for

Transjordan, both in close consultation with British advisors.[\[101\]](#) Feisal was officially crowned king of Iraq on 23 August, 1921.

...

Article 22 of the League of Nations Charter gives the official explanation for establishing the mandates system. The mandatory powers were to assist the people of the former Ottoman Empire who “are...not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.”[\[102\]](#) The “advanced nations” (the mandatory powers) were to take on the “responsibility” of “ensuring the well-being and development of such peoples.”[\[103\]](#) Accordingly, the sole duty of the British and the French in the region was “the rendering of assistance...until such a time as they [the mandated people] are able to stand alone.”[\[104\]](#) Finally, it was required that “the wishes of the communities must be a principle consideration in the selection of the mandatory.”[\[105\]](#)

The way in which the mandate system came to be applied to the former Ottoman Empire demonstrates clearly that such justifications for establishing mandates were merely rhetorical guises for imperial ambitions. It is not difficult to recognize that the Arab people wanted a unified and independent Arab kingdom. The Sharif of Mecca made this known in his correspondence with McMahon. Furthermore, in March 1920 the Syrian Congress called for independence as well as a unified Syria, under the rule of King Feisal. These calls echoed the findings of Wilson’s commission of inquiry, the King-Crane commission, which spent the summer of 1919 traveling through the Middle East and found that an overwhelming majority of people wanted Syria to encompass both Palestine and Lebanon and that a similar majority wanted independence.[\[106\]](#) Furthermore, on 2 July, 1919 the Syrian General Congress at Damascus passed a resolution, which began by stating that “we ask absolutely complete political independence for Syria (a Syria including Lebanon and Palestine);” if a mandate were necessary they asked that it be the United States or Great Britain but added “We do not acknowledge any right claimed by the French Government in any part whatever of our Syrian country and refuse that she should assist us.”[\[107\]](#) Illustrating British contempt for the requirement under Article 22 that “the wishes of the communities must be a principle consideration in the selection of the mandatory;” Lord Balfour wrote

there are only three possible mandatories England, America, and France. Are we going ‘chiefly to consider the wishes of the inhabitants’ in deciding which of these is to be selected? We are going to do nothing of the kind. England has refused. America will refuse. So that, whatever the inhabitants may wish, it is France they will certainly have.[\[108\]](#)

Clearly, the mandate system was not created as a means to the ends articulated by Article 22 of the League of Nations Charter. Rather, it served as a domestic mediator between colonialists and the anti-imperialists who called for no annexations. Further, it provided a veil for imperial powers to practice a new form of colonial domination in an international community where notions of “self-determination,” began to take hold. Finally, it allowed Britain and France to control the resources, development and governance of the weaker societies on the pretext that they were helping to foster Arab independence, all while insuring continued imperial domination.

[1] In addition twenty-five percent of the oil profits from Mosul would be given to France.

[1] Donald Quataert. *The Ottoman Empire: 1700-1922 2nd ed.* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press,

2005), 56.

[2] James L Gelvin. *The Modern Middle East: A History.* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 175.

[3] Quataert, 60

[4] Margaret MacMillan. *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World.* (New York, NY: Random House, 2003), 400.

[5] Gelvin, 180-1

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] MacMillan, 380

[10] Gelvin, 177

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] C.M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner. "The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914-1918" *The Historical Journal*: Vol. 17, No. 1. (1974) <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed, October 21, 2006), 80.

[15] Andrew, 81

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Andrew, 82

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Andrew, 83-4

[22] Andrew, 84

[23] Ralph H Magnus ed. *Documents on the Middle East*. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1969), 12.

[24] Magnus, 14

[25] Magnus, 17

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Magnus, 18

[29] Magnus, 20

[30] Magnus, 22

- [31] Andrew, 82-3
- [32] Andrew, 83
- [33] Andrew, 84
- [34] *Ibid.*
- [35] MacMillan, 383
- [36] *Ibid.*
- [37] Gelvin, 178
- [38] *Ibid.*
- [39] MacMillan, 383
- [40] Andrew, 85
- [41] *Ibid.*
- [42] Andrew, 86
- [43] Andrew, 85
- [44] *Ibid.*
- [45] MacMillan, 384
- [46] Andrew, 85
- [47] MacMillan, 383
- [48] Andrew, 94
- [49] Andrew, 92
- [50] MacMillan, 382
- [51] Andrew, 94
- [52] *Ibid.*

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] MacMillan, 416

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Ernest B. Hass. "The Reconciliation of Conflicting Policy Aims: Acceptance of the League of Nations Mandate System." *International Organization*> Vol. 6, No. 4 (1952): 521-536. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed October 1, 2006), 523.

[59] Hass, 522

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] Hass, 523

[62] Hass, 524

[63] Hass, 525

[64] A.J.P. Taylor *The First World War: An Illustrated History*. (New York, NY: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1972), 201.

[65] Taylor, 205

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] Arthur S. Link et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 45(1984), 536. <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/51.htm> (accessed October 21, 2006).

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] MacMillan, 386

[70] *Ibid.*

[71] *Ibid.*

[72] Hass, 526

[73] Andrew, 96

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] MacMillan, 385

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] Hass, 526-7

[78] *Ibid.*

[79] MacMillan, 385

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] Andrew, 103

[83] *Ibid.*

[84] Andrew, 104

[85] MacMillan, 382

[86] Hass, 534

[87] Hass, 535-6

[88] MacMillan, 391

[89] MacMillan, 393

[90] MacMillan, 394

[91] Hass, 530

[92] MacMillan, 402

[93] MacMillan, 405

[94] *Ibid.*

[95] *Ibid.*

[96] MacMillan, 406

[97] MacMillan, 407

[98] *Ibid.*

[99] *Ibid.*

[100] MacMillan, 408

[101] *Ibid.*

[102] Gelvin, 180

[103] *Ibid.*

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] Gelvin, 181

[106] MacMillan, 406

[107] Gelvin, 216

[108] Wm. Roger. Louis “The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919-1922.” *International Organization*: Vol. 23, No. 1 (1969): <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed October 1, 2006), 89.

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