

National Independence

Introduction

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- After the end of the war, the Arab East and the Maghrib, which for a generation had been the almost exclusive field of influence of two European states, became one where four or more could exercise power of influence, and where relations between them were not so stable as they had been before.

Introduction

- In this situation, it was possible for nationalist parties to press for changes in the status of their countries.
- France was in a weaker position than Britain, and the pressure upon it was the greater.

Introduction

- France was obliged to leave Syria and Lebanon. When British and Free French forces occupied the country in 1941, an arrangement was made by which the French had administrative authority but the British had strategic control.
- Britain recognized France's position as paramount European power, subject to the grant of independence to the two countries.

Introduction

- The Free French were unwilling to grant self-government immediately; their claim to be the real France would not seem plausible in French eyes if they surrendered a French territory.
- For the British, on the other hand, to fulfill the pledge of independence would be to their advantage among Arab nationalists hostile to their policy in Palestine.
- The politicians of Beirut and Damascus sought to obtain independence.

Introduction

- There were two crises, one in 1943 when the Lebanese government tried to limit French authority, and the second in 1945 when a similar attempt by the Syrians led to a French bombardment of Damascus.
- A British intervention and a process of negotiation which ended in an agreement that French and British should withdraw simultaneously and completely by the end of 1945.
- Thus, Syria and Lebanon obtained complete independence without limitations.

The British Colonial Role

The British Colonial Role

- The British position in the Middle East appeared to be unshaken and in some ways strengthened by the end of the war.
- In the Arab parts of the Middle East, the United States seemed to have no wish to replace the paramount power, although there were overtones of rivalry for markets and for control of oil production.

The British Colonial Role

- The beginning of the 'Cold War', however, led to greater American involvement.
- In 1947, the United States took over responsibility for defending Greece and Turkey against any Russian threats to them. (USA was not present in the WWII).

The British Colonial Role

- The British withdrawal from India in 1947 might have appeared to make it less important than before for Britain to remain in the Middle East, but this was not the government's view.
- Investments, oil, markets, communications, the strategic interests of the western alliance, and the sense that the Middle East and Africa remained the only parts of the world where Britain could take the initiative seemed to make it more important to retain its position, but on a new basis.

The British Colonial Role

- The general line of British policy was one of support for Arab independence and a greater degree of unity, while preserving essential strategic interests by friendly agreement, and also of helping in economic development and the acquisition of technical skills to the point where Arab governments could take responsibility for their own defense.

The British Colonial Role

- This policy rested on two assumptions: that Arab governments would regard their major interests as being identical with those of Britain and the western alliance; and that British and American interests would coincide.
- In the next ten years, however, both these assumptions were proved to be invalid.

The British Colonial Role

- In Palestine, the resolution of conflicting interests proved to be impossible, and this was to cause lasting damage to relations between the Arab peoples and the western powers.
- As the war drew near its end, it became clear that the relationships of power had changed.

The British Colonial Role

- The Arabs in Palestine were less capable than before of presenting a united front, because of the exile or imprisonment of some leaders during and after the revolt of 1936 - 39 and the tensions and hostilities generated by violent movements.

- The `Jews' in Palestine, for their part, were united by strong communal institutions.
- Many of them had had military training and experience in the British forces during the war.

The British Colonial Role

- British government, while conscious of the arguments in favor of rapid and large-scale 'Jewish' immigration, was aware also that it would lead to a demand for a 'Jewish' state, and that this would arouse strong opposition from the Arabs and from the Arab states.

The British Colonial Role

- The American government, having as yet smaller interests of its own in the Arab East and being under some pressure from its large and politically active 'Jewish' community, was inclined to use its influence in favor of the Zionist demands for immigration and statehood.
- Bilateral discussions, came to no conclusion, for no policy suggested met with the approval of both Jews' and Arabs,

The British Colonial Role

- The British government was not willing to carry out a policy which did not have that approval.
- American pressure upon Britain increased which would pave the way towards the establishment of a 'Jewish' state Palestine.
- In 1947 Britain decided to hand the matter over to the United Nations. A special committee of the United Nations sent out to study the problem produced a plan of partition on terms more favorable to the Zionists.

The British Colonial Role

- The Arab members of the United Nations and the Palestinian Arabs rejected it.
- On 14 May the `Jewish' community declared its independence as the so-called state of `Israel', and this was immediately recognized by the United States and Russia.
- Consequently, Egyptian, Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese forces moved into the mainly Arab parts of the country.

The British Colonial Role

- Fighting took place between the new 'Israeli' army and those of the Arab states.
- From prudence to begin with, later because of panic and the deliberate policy of the 'Israeli' army, almost two-thirds of the Arab population left their homes and became refugees.
- Public opinion in the Arab countries was much affected by these events. They were regarded as a defeat for the Arab governments.

The British Colonial Role

- In Arab countries, the prevalent opinion was that British policy in effect had helped the Zionists: having encouraged 'Jewish' immigration.
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- The United States for its part was seen to have acted throughout in support of the Zionists without feeling ashamed of this attitude and conduct.

The British Colonial Role

- The 'Israeli' government, in which the dominant figure was David Ben Gurion refused to take back any substantial number of Arab refugees.
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- This resulted in a change in the structure of the population.

The British Colonial Role

- The basis of British power in the Arab East had always been the military presence in Egypt.
- The end of foreign occupation in Syria, Lebanon, Easpt and the Sudan made it difficult for Iraq and Jordan to accept less than what they had obtained.

The Suez Crisis

The Suez Crisis

- By the middle of the 1950s, most Arab countries which had been under European rule had become formally independent.
- Foreign military bases remained in some of them, but would soon be abandoned.
- French rule remained only in Algeria, where it was being actively challenged by a popular nationalist revolt.

The Suez Crisis

- British rule or protection remained in the eastern and southern fringes of the Arabian peninsula. The main state of the peninsula, Saudi Arabia, had never had a period of foreign rule, but British influence had been considerable.

- The discovery and exploitation of oil had led to a replacement of British by American influence, but had also made it possible for the patriarchal rule of the Sa'udi family to begin the process of turning itself into a more fully developed system of government.

The Suez Crisis

- Yemen, on the other hand, remained isolated from other countries under its imam. in spite of becoming a member of the Arab League.
- The ambiguities of policy in Iraq and Jordan, however, the desire to end the presence of British forces, but at the same time to have some military relationships with the western powers, showed that formal withdrawal of foreign military forces did not by itself necessarily create a different relationship with the former imperial rulers, but rather restated the problem of independence in a new form.

The Suez Crisis

- The United States, which now, in the period of the Cold War and economic expansion, believed that its interests in the Middle East could be protected only through close relations with local governments prepared to link their policy with that of the Western alliance.
- Many politicians and political groups argued, however, that the only guarantee of independence in the postcolonial world would lie in maintaining neutrality between the two armed camps.

The Suez Crisis

- Between the Arab states, there was a desire for a closer union an idea that became a part of the common language of Arab politics.
- The future of the relationship between the Arab states and `Israel' also became linked with the general question of alignment.

The Suez Crisis

- At this point, Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir was leader of the military group that now ruled Egypt.
- The signature of the agreement under which British forces were to leave the Canal Zone gave Egypt the freedom to follow a policy of non-alignment, and to form around itself a bloc of similarly non-aligned Arab states that the outside world would have to deal with as a whole.

The Suez Crisis

- The appeal for neutralism and closer unity under Egyptian leadership, made by Abd al-Nasir to Arab peoples over the heads of their governments, was a threat to those Arab regimes which stood for different policies.
- The rise of a strong Egyptian government, having its own source of arms and appealing strongly to the feelings of Palestinians and other Arabs, was seen by 'Israel' as a threat to its position.

The Suez Crisis

- In 1956, the United States, which had held out hopes that it would give Egypt financial aid for a very large irrigation project (the High Dam at Aswan), suddenly withdrew its offer.
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- In response to this, the Egyptian government no less suddenly nationalized the Suez Canal Company and took over the administration of the canal.

The Suez Crisis

- The 'Israelis' saw it as an opportunity to weaken an over-powerful and hostile neighboring state, the frontier with which had been disturbed for some time.
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- The result was a secret agreement between France, Britain and 'Israel' to attack Egypt and overturn the rule of `Abd al-Nasir.

The Suez Crisis

- In October, 'Israeli' forces invaded Egypt and moved towards the Suez Canal.
- Abd al-Nasir's refusal gave a pretext for British and French forces to attack and occupy part of the zone.
- This action, however, was a threat not only to Egypt and those Arab states which supported it, but to the United States and Soviet Union, which as great powers could not accept that such decisive steps should be taken in an area in which they had interests without those interests being taken into account.

The Suez Crisis

- Under American and Soviet pressure, and faced with worldwide hostility and the danger of financial collapse, the three forces withdrew.
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- This was one of those rare episodes when the structure of power in the world stood clearly revealed.

The Suez Crisis

- The results of this crisis were to increase the standing of Abd al-Nasir in the surrounding Arab countries, since he was generally thought to have emerged from the crisis as the political victor, and also to deepen the split between those who supported him and those who regarded his policies as dangerous.

The Suez Crisis

- In the same year, a struggle for power between political groups in Syria led one of them to take the initiative in calling for union with Egypt; the union took place, and in February the two countries were merged in the United Arab Republic.

The Suez Crisis

- Within the United Arab Republic itself, the differing interests of Damascus and Cairo also led, in 1961, to a military coup in Syria and the dissolution of the union.
- In spite of these setbacks, however, `Abd al-Nasir still appeared, in the eyes of most Arabs and much of the outside world, as the symbol of the movement of Arab peoples towards greater unity and genuine independence.