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## Mandate System

Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa  
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### MANDATE SYSTEM

*The system established after [World War I \(/history/modern-europe/wars-and-battles/world-war-i\)](/history/modern-europe/wars-and-battles/world-war-i) to administer former territories of the German and Ottoman empires.*

Until [World War I \(/history/modern-europe/wars-and-battles/world-war-i\)](/history/modern-europe/wars-and-battles/world-war-i), the victors of most European wars took control of conquered territories as the spoils of victory. This was especially true of the colonial territories of defeated European powers, as the victors sought to expand their own empires. World War I marked a significant break in this tradition. While [Britain \(/places/britain-ireland-france-and-low-countries/british-and-irish-political-geography/britain\)](/places/britain-ireland-france-and-low-countries/british-and-irish-political-geography/britain), [France \(/places/britain-ireland-france-and-low-countries/french-political-geography/france\)](/places/britain-ireland-france-and-low-countries/french-political-geography/france), Italy, and [Japan \(/places/asia/japanese-political-geography/japan\)](/places/asia/japanese-political-geography/japan) still retained imperial aspirations, other forces tempered these goals. The [United States \(/places/united-states-and-canada/us-political-geography/united-states\)](/places/united-states-and-canada/us-political-geography/united-states) emerged as a world power committed to an anti-imperial policy, one that sought to consider the national aspirations of indigenous peoples as well as the imperial agendas of the victors. The 5 November 1918 pre-armistice statement of the Allies, moreover, affirmed that annexation of territory was not their aim for ending the war.

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The result was the mandate system of the [League of Nations \(/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/united-nations/league-nations\)](/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/united-nations/league-nations), established by the treaties ending World War I. Under this system, the victors of World War I were given responsibility for governing former German and Ottoman territories as mandates from the League. The ultimate goal was development of each mandate toward eventual independence. This goal was tempered, some would argue, by the fact that mandates were awarded with full consideration of both public and secret agreements made during the war. For the [Middle East \(/places/asia/middle-eastern-physical-geography/middle-east\)](/places/asia/middle-eastern-physical-geography/middle-east), the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 helped structure the division of Ottoman territories between France and Britain.

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Article 22 of the League's covenant required that the conditions of mandates vary with the character of each territory. This resulted in the establishment of three classes of mandate. Class A mandates were those to be provisionally recognized as independent until they proved able to stand on their own. Class B mandates were those further from qualifying for independence and for which the mandatory powers took on full responsibility for administration and promotion of the material and moral welfare of the inhabitants. Class C mandates were those whose best interests were to be served by integration into the territories of the mandatory power, with due consideration being given to the interests of the inhabitants.

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The Ottoman territories in the [Middle East](/places/asia/middle-eastern-physical-geography/middle-east) became Class A mandates. Based on World War I agreements, Britain was given responsibility for [Iraq](/places/asia/iraq-political-geography/iraq) and [Palestine](/places/asia/israeli-political-geography/palestine) (later Palestine and Transjordan); France got [Syria](/places/asia/syrian-political-geography/syria) (later Syria and [Lebanon](/places/asia/lebanese-political-geography/lebanon)). These were to be supervised by the Permanent Mandates Commission consisting originally of members from [Belgium](/places/britain-ireland-france-and-low-countries/benelux-political-geography/belgium), Britain, the [Netherlands](/places/britain-ireland-france-and-low-countries/benelux-political-geography/netherlands), France, Italy, Japan, [Portugal](/places/spain-portugal-italy-greece-and-balkans/spanish-and-portuguese-political-geography/portugal), [Spain](/places/spain-portugal-italy-greece-and-balkans/spanish-and-portuguese-political-geography/spain), and [Sweden](/places/germany-scandinavia-and-central-europe/scandinavian-political-geography/sweden), to which representatives from [Switzerland](/places/germany-scandinavia-and-central-europe/swiss-political-geography/switzerland) and [Germany](/places/germany-scandinavia-and-central-europe/german-political-geography/germany) were later added, and a representative from [Norway](/places/germany-scandinavia-and-central-europe/scandinavian-political-geography/norway) took the place of the Swedish representative. Although the non-mandatory powers constituted a majority, the commission never followed an aggressive policy against the interests of the mandatory powers. This was manifest by the fact that Britain and France restructured their mandates by the time the formal system came into place in 1924. Britain split the Palestinian mandate into Palestine and Transjordan, giving a special role in the latter to Sharif Husayn's son, Abdullah, as amir of Transjordan to deter his further pursuit of territorial goals in Syria. France split its mandate in Syria into Syria and Lebanon to enhance the position of Uniate Christians in Lebanon and as part of its overall strategy of sponsoring communal differences to solidify its position of eventual arbiter of all disputes in the area. The British mandate for Iraq remained intact, despite the fact that its population diversity invited similar divisions.

Although few would have predicted it in the early 1920s, all of the Class A mandates achieved independence as provided under the conditions of the mandates. The first was Iraq in 1932, although Britain retained significant diplomatic and military concessions. Syria and Lebanon followed in 1941 as [World War II](/history/modern-europe/wars-and-battles/world-war-ii) was getting under way. In March 1946, just before the formal dissolution of the [League of Nations](/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/united-nations/league-nations) and transfer of its assets to the [United Nations](/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/united-nations/united-nations), the [Treaty of London](/history/modern-europe/treaties-and-alliances/treaty-london) granted independence to Transjordan as the Hashemite Kingdom of [Jordan](/places/asia/jordanian-political-geography/jordan). Only Palestine was left to the [United Nations](/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/united-nations/united-nations) under its trusteeship

program, and in 1947, Britain presented this thorny problem to the UN General Assembly for resolution. The result was approval of a plan for the partition of Palestine into two Arab and Jewish states and an international city of Jerusalem (</places/asia/israeli-political-geography/jerusalem>). Subsequent events precluded implementation of this plan, but since 1949, Israel has been a member of the United Nations.

See also balfour declaration (1917); sykes–picot agreement (1916).

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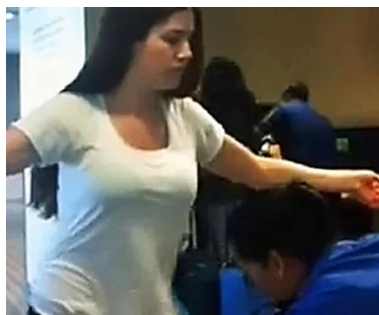
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**Discussion Question #2: What were the goals of the Mandate System?**  
**Discussion Question #3: What countries were controlled under the Mandate System?**  
**Discussion Question #4: What was the Balfour Declaration?**

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