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When other Western powers failed in Mideast?

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As the United States prepares to occupy Iraq and install a new government, it is worthwhile to revisit past interventions and occupations in the Middle East. There are plenty to choose from, but the record is uninspiring. From 1918 in Iraq to 1967 in the West Bank to 1991 in Kuwait, there isn't a single successful example to follow.

Immediately after World War I, Britain and France occupied and penciled in the borders of what would become Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. No one bothered to ask the people who lived in the new states what they desired.

In almost every case, the Europeans were greeted with massive revolts involving tens of thousands of their new colonial citizens. Iraqi, Palestinian and Syrian patriotism and nationalism were born in the caldron of colonial occupation and mass resistance. Widespread resistance was suppressed with the most brutal means imaginable, including poison gas and the bombing of civilians.

France and Britain had entered the Middle East with self-proclaimed good intentions. Britain emphasized democracy and development, while France stressed the "civilizing mission." But both countries tried to run their new possessions on the cheap. The new colonies were supposed to be profitable or at least self-supporting.

Imperial politicians used the lure of natural resources in the new colonies to convince voters at home that the colonies could be run cheaply, but the riches never materialized. All of the colonies represented a bottomless pit for British and French soldiers and treasure, and hundreds of thousands of colonial citizens died.

Britain and France abandoned their colonies after World War II. Both countries were humiliated and nearly broke from the impossible cost of forcing dominion over people who didn't wish to be ruled by outsiders.

Still, the cost to the former colonies was greater. Left with venal and untested elites who had been favored for their sycophancy, most new states succumbed to a long and painful series of military coups.

Infrastructure and industry had been underdeveloped, education had been neglected, and the Europeans intentionally had exacerbated sectarian and class divisions. Responsible and competent local leaders had been harder for the colonial authorities to deal with. Venality and corruption were encouraged. The results still are haunting us all.

Not one example of foreign intervention and occupation in the Middle East has turned out well. Misery and bitterness have been the only harvest. Why would it be any different today?

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