

A New Rivalry between Great Britain and France over the Middle East and The Mediterranean Sea during the First World War

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed at highlighting the new rivalry between Great Britain and France over the middle east and the Mediterranean Sea between 1912 and 1916.

Method: The researchers used the quantitative method; mainly the inductive-deductive method for analyzing the events in historical texts in the years under study.

Results: The study results showed that English ambitions were confronted with a united reaction by the French government and the emerging colonial entities. They also showed that the French policy adopted a number of political, diplomatic and military strategies which did not succeed because of the countermeasures that were taken by Great Britain.

Conclusions: The study asserts the notion that the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea have gained strategic importance in international politics due to the region's unique geographical location since it links three continents, namely, Asia, Africa and Europe together and it is considered an area where the political and economic interests of many European countries intersect, especially after the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Despite the short-lived military French campaign in Egypt, this campaign is considered one of the most influential events in the history of Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea.

Keywords: Great Britain, France, Mediterranean Sea, European powers, Ottoman Empire, Strategic goals.

منافسة جديدة بين بريطانيا العظمى وفرنسا حول الشرق الأوسط والبحر الأبيض المتوسط خلال الحرب العالمية الأولى

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ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على التنافس الجديد بين بريطانيا العظمى وفرنسا على الشرق الأوسط والبحر الأبيض المتوسط بين عامي 1912 و1916.

المنهجية: استخدم الباحثون المنهج الكمي؛ وبشكل رئيسي المنهج الاستقرائي الاستنباطي لتحليل الأحداث التي وقعت في النصوص التاريخية في السنوات محل الدراسة.

النتائج: أظهر هذا المقال كيف واجهت الطموحات الإنجليزية ردة فعل موحدة من الحكومة الفرنسية والجمعيات الاستعمارية الناشئة. كما بينت أن السياسة الفرنسية اعتمدت عدداً من الاستراتيجيات السياسية والدبلوماسية والعسكرية التي لم تنجح بسبب الإجراءات المضادة التي اتخذتها بريطانيا العظمى.

الاستنتاجات: لقد اكتسبت منطقة الشرق الأوسط والبحر الأبيض المتوسط أهمية استراتيجية في السياسة الدولية عبر العقود الماضية من خلال موقعها الجغرافي الفريد كونها حلقة الوصل بين ثلاث قارات آسيا وإفريقيا وأوروبا وتعتبر منطقة تتجمع فيها المصالح السياسية والاقتصادية للكثيرين. تتقاطع الدول الأوروبية، خاصة بعد تراجع الدولة العثمانية. على الرغم من قصر مدة الحملة الفرنسية على مصر، إلا أن هذه الحملة تعتبر من أكثر الأحداث تأثيراً في تاريخ الشرق الأوسط.

الكلمات الدالة: بريطانيا العظمى، فرنسا، البحر الأبيض المتوسط، القوى الأوروبية، الإمبراطورية العثمانية، الأهداف الاستراتيجية.

Introduction

The beginning of this rivalry dates back to the eighteenth century, with Britain's occupation of the Strait of Gibraltar and its complete control over the Mediterranean Sea (Wadie, 1970). The Mediterranean Sea eventually became an English lake, and despite Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in 1798, the British had increased their influence, with the penetration of their culture and geopolitical interests in the region (Munes, 2022). This influence was a presage, at the Mediterranean level, of a "second Hundred Years War" (1714-1815).

During this period, there was renewed interest in the Mediterranean Sea on the part of the great European powers and Russia, due to the emergence of the "Eastern question" in 1774. In addition, the Ottoman Empire was rapidly losing ground; whereas, on the world stage, the Western powers were employing permanent and complex stratagems to ensure a hold there and thus guarantee their particular interests.

The Ottoman Empire was qualified and perceived as "the sick man of Europe", and throughout the 19th century the British and the French fought over the Maghreb and part of the Middle East (Egypt) through fictitious territorial divisions, based on religious criteria. A facade of collaboration was succeeded by an open rivalry, brought to light following two historical highlights: the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the victory of the Prussians in 1870 over the French.

The Suez Canal had not been sufficiently anticipated by the British in its political-economic scope. When it opened, awareness was such that it became a major issue in the negotiations (Tarchoun and Dalila, 2020). For the French, following the defeat at Sedan, the Mediterranean area offered new ground for conquest and a sense of victory, in the hope of returning their national destiny to the panache and scope of yesteryear.

From 1890 to 1900, the Franco-English rivalry did not weaken with regard to Egypt and the Canal. The Fashoda affair had weakened those tensions for a time, forcing the two parties to find a "modus vivendi" acceptable to each in the sharing of the Mediterranean coast (Tarchoun and Dalila, 2020). The "Entente Cordiale" of April 1904 marked and formalized this truce.

But the truce ended in 1914 with the involvement of the Ottoman Empire alongside the great powers in the theater of war. As a result, the Suez Canal and the whole of the eastern Mediterranean Sea were threatened, and the Dardanelles seemed the most suitable region to shelter the front that had become necessary. Between the end of 1914 and the first months of 1915, the British hatched a plan to put this front in place.

Then came the time of the manifest confrontation between maritime powers, when the British admiralty imposed its power on the French navy, which still believed in the validity of the agreements concluded at the start of the war ensuring its control of military operations in the Mediterranean.

On the Gallipoli Peninsula, while troops underwent Turkish bombardments, the British soldiers took control of operations, and the French soldiers became executants, relegated to operational tasks while the modus operandi and decision-making process were subject to British choices, and therefore to British interests.

The interest in highlighting and analyzing the process which led the two powers, allies against the German invader, to compete without concession in the Eastern Mediterranean in the context of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, is obvious.

The post-war borders during Operation Dardanelles could easily be guessed. This battle rekindled Franco-English tensions, and the eastern Mediterranean once again became a central part of the unacknowledged designs of geopolitical influence. Less than 10 years after the signing of the Entente Cordiale, the Ottoman Empire still found itself at the heart of Franco-British strategic maps. The interests of these great powers were far too strong and divergent for the truce to have lasted for long (d'Andurain, 2009).

The Franco-English Antagonisms of the 19th Century: From Anglophobia to Cordial Understanding before the First World War.

The Napoleonic era was marked by a project to link the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. In the middle of the 19th century, Ferdinand de Lesseps and the Saint-Simonians took over this project. The Suez Canal became the realization of this process, which had begun ten years earlier, in 1859.

As a result, the world saw its largest seaway take shape. Inaugurated on November 17, 1869, the canal caused an

"upheaval in maritime transport" (Piquet, 2009), bringing Europe and the Indies closer together in an indisputable way; thus, making their proximity practical.

England was uninterested in the canal at first, but its potential was soon undeniable. Indeed, in November 1875, taking advantage of the khedive bankruptcy (Ali, 2007), England bought 44% of Ismail's shares, even though the canal was not yet profitable, allowing a rapid and above all assured return on investment. The Franco-Egyptian administration soon observed the steady arrival of British representatives and vectors of English sovereign policy, who thus obtained influence over Egyptian affairs (Julien, 1966). British advances continued in areas of strong French influence, marked by its hold, on par with France, over the territory's finances. At this time, the condominium and public debt fund was created.

British ambitions continued to expand, and the Berlin Conference ended in 1878 with the English annexation of Cyprus, thanks to essential support from the Ottoman Empire (Al Suroji, 1975). This enabled Britain to guarantee a certain longevity in its influence over the Mediterranean. French parliamentarians, aligned with Clémenceau (Zévaès, 1926), did not have a sufficiently clear-cut position, and their procrastination allowed the English to settle in Egypt, much to the disappointment of the "gambettists" (Ageron, 1972).

English influence was strengthening a little more each month, racing to seize areas under French influence. In July 1882, the condominium fell, and the British were left alone on board. The nationalist revolt of Urabi Pasha came under the wrath of English troops, who landed in Egypt and put an end to it in September 1882, thus ensuring British power over Egypt in June 1883.

The Constantinople Convention of October 29, 1888, aimed to ensure that the canal would "always be free and open, in time of war as in time of peace, to any merchant or war vessel, without distinction of flag" (Adam, 1922, d'Andurain, 2009). However, the reality was quite different, since the violent irruption by the British in Egypt by arms, calling into question this free access, which caused concern among the great powers. A latent, but growing, Anglophobia was emerging in the French community.

English ambitions were to be confronted with a united reaction from the French government and the emerging colonial associations. The idea of a French Egypt was supported by a communication campaign disseminated by the Committee of Egypt (Munes, 2022), created in 1895 for this purpose. Its Secretary General Henri Pensa and Colonial Minister Gabriel Hanotaux were increasing their efforts to weaken English presence and influence (Andrew, and Kanya-Forstner, 1975, d'Andurain, 2009), as described by the British, then became an objective to be settled.

The convention of June 14, 1898, on the border known as Say-Barroua was the realization of this. The negotiations turned for the most part on the question of Borgou (North Dahomey).

However, this convention did not prevent the French from sending a new mission to the Haut-Nile despite the protests of the British, who did not want any French in the Nile Basin.

Departing on July 24, 1896, from Loango, a French post on the Atlantic coast, north of the Congo River estuary, the expedition ascended the Congo then Bahr-el-Ghazal before arriving at the Nile. The "Congo-Nil mission" (1896-1899), also called Mission Marchand (1863-1934), aimed to bring the Congo (French Sudan) and Djibouti into the French sphere of influence, linking its possessions in Dakar with Djibouti along a West-East axis. British hegemony was contested, and the second objective of the mission was therefore to force the British to "reopen the question of Egypt".

The mission arrived in Bahr el-Ghazal in 1897 to end its course in July 1898 at Fashoda. The Fashoda crisis (from September to November 1898) aroused in France a nationalist feeling which crystallized against "the perfidious Albion". Faced with the strength of the Anglo-Egyptian troops present on the ground, the French government had no choice but to ask Captain Marchand (Marc, 1972) to vacate the post after bitter discussions.

This was a first step towards the Cordial Agreement with England, a process which would be supported by Théophile Delcassé (1852-1923), the new minister for the colonies (Andrew, 1968). Colonial disputes seemed to be put on hold, and the status quo was enacted, each power exchanging areas it deemed ancillary for the benefit of those it considered essential to its imperialist design.

The position of each of the powers in the Mediterranean was therefore long-term: Egypt was subject to English power,

the preservation of the Suez Canal being the condition, and the Moroccan protectorate left to the French. The antagonisms seemed appeased, on the surface.

With Germany gradually becoming the common enemy, the Entente Cordiale was the first step in realizing the Alliance that would be so precious during the war. The status quo and the settlement of these old colonial disputes allowed an appeasement of the nationalist withdrawals experienced, both in France and in England, during the Fashoda crisis of 1898 (Andrew, 1968). French colonial aspirations then shifted to Morocco and the western Mediterranean. The Orient was not completely out of the French sights, but ambitions remain unofficial for the moment.

British strategic objectives

The Empire of the Indies remained since the Napoleonic era at the center of the actions and expectations of the British. The potential of the development and economic and political influence of England were intimately linked to the control of the Indies, and this fact was even more present in 1914. 315 million producers, suppliers, and consumers were concentrated in this sovereign reserve, placing them in the first layer of English national interests. This territory was therefore a vital component of English sovereignty, and the maintenance of this influence, both over this exceptional area and the access roads leading to it, took precedence over any consideration of justice or alliance.

The Sykes - Picot agreement of 1916 created these imaginary lines of influence and geostrategy, illustrating and solidifying alliances, but also creating conflicts of interest, exemplified by English advances on French priorities, which changed and evaporated as the negotiations progressed (de Gontaut – Biron, 1922). The English demands presented in this document are as surprising as their overall favorable outcome, which led to a clear decline in French tenacity.

The British remained focused on Palestine, which they had identified as the lever, the center, the heart of any alliance or tension in the question of the Levant. In order to stand up to Egypt, whose influence they feared in that territory, they advocated the internationalization of Palestine.

The fact that a strip of 300 kilometers of desert separated it from Egyptian territory did not slow their momentum. Internationalization also had the objective of ensuring that the overland routes of India could not become the circle of influence of another great foreign power. Cairo, symbol of the cultural stakes of these negotiations must not be subject to the influence of France in the Levant.

The fact that they had acquired Haiffa and Saint-Jean-d'Acre would be of no further use to the British if these ports were to be included in French-influenced territory. The Haiffa-Baghdad railway was also a very important issue for the English, and this international management of Palestine was a guarantee of its sustainability (de Gontaut – Biron, 1922). In 1916, the Treaty provided for an English railway line from Haiffa to Baghdad, parallel to the Suez Canal. The disproportionate cost compared to the lengthy projection of its realization, along with the interest of its construction in terms of economic and business development and the difficulty of ensuring its security through the desert regions, quickly caused the English to abandon the project. It seemed to them to be smarter, faster, more effective, and more efficient, in terms of cost / benefits, to take advantage of the Syrian network.

Its attachment to the Baghdad-Constantinople line and its secure route snaking between the Syrian mountains reinforced its attractiveness, especially since it allowed access to regions with high potential for production, natural wealth, and trade, passing from Mosul to the Dead Sea, and from Adana to Gaza. The military approach aspiring to create a Syrian stronghold, skirting the flank of Egypt, and serving as a protective rampart for the Indies, was reinforced by the use of the Syrian network.

Politico-religious arguments put forward the idea of England as a great Muslim power, encompassing the two poles of Islam, Mecca, and Damascus, reinforcing this military strategy. The influence on the religious capital and the cradle of Muslim thought was to remain intact and was to lead logically to the integration of Syria into the group of buffer states, and thus enslaved, would be placed on the route to India. Despite the various official declarations of the English government, claiming that it had no inclination on Syria, thus respecting the French influence on the territory, England confirmed and strengthened the presence of its representatives on the ground, fomenting multiple disturbances against the French.

In addition to these economic, political, and religious objectives, there was the strategic military interest of an English influence on Syria. Indeed, this military strategic interest quickly appeared during the Sinai campaign. The Turkish-Germanic troops having failed in Romani, the English troops were confronted with a logistical obstacle of size, and their progress slowed, due to the evolution of two elements: the construction of the railway line along the coast and that of the water pipe going to el Arich. British interests were served by Lawrence as he pushed the Arabs to unite their efforts in order to support British expectations.

French strategic objectives

An essential means of communication between the Indies and Europe, the threat on the Suez Canal would wake up France and push it to intervene in the East (Munes,2022). Indeed, the Turkish-German forces were marching across the Sinai, and their shadow hung over the canal. The British could not afford to intervene and chose Palestine to disembark. As this land was so precious to the culture and religion of France, they considered landing a so-called African expeditionary force (opposing the Legion of the East, composed for the great majority of Armenians). Even if officially, there was no duly constituted campaign plan, there was still in fact a regrouping of soldiers in Marseilles, who could be moved quickly and efficiently in the regions within which the British army could intervene. These soldiers were a fairly small core group, which over time was to expand with identified, unaffected troops who remained awaiting mobilization.

The French general-in-chief did not support the project, noting the risk of being "caught in the East in a gear", and declared himself "in favor of a restricted action, limited to the occupation of a small number of points of the coast, where the troops would remain under the support of the guns of the fleet (Letter to the Minister of War, 1915). In order to anticipate any event, the French set up several scenarios to plan for an intervention in Syria, taking the option of naval involvement. Even if the occupation of the coast was not planned, two French ships headed for Port Said would be responsible for controlling the coastline. As for Cairo, which had not been forgotten, the general commanding the forces of Egypt received the support of a French military mission in order to provide the French government with information on British ambitions, actions and maneuvers (de Gontaut – Biron,1922).

The Fundamental Turning Point of 1912: Interest in the Levant at the Epicenter of French Politics

If the French-Asia Committee had evolved in its positions, this was due to several events. On March 30, 1912, the installed Moroccan protectorate, the French-Africa Committee, and the French-Asian Committee saw their composition changed, and many French representatives joined them. The latter focused their attention particularly on the eastern Mediterranean (Andrew and Kanya-Forstner,1981, Khoury,2006). In 1911, the war between the Turks and the Italians (Tarchoun and Dalila,2020), followed by the conflict in the Balkans in 1912, considered the possibility of imminent "liquidations".

French Republican policy was favorable toward France's engagement in the East. Robert de Caix (1869-1970) was not the only one; Raymond Poincaré also believed that this position was the only one to take, given the context (Speech by Raymond Poincaré before the Chambers after the armistice in the Balkans, 1912). Minister of Foreign Affairs, Head of Government between 1912 and 1913, and finally President of the Republic, he made his mark on French orientation and relaunched actions aimed at restoring France's Eastern influence. A real project was then put in place, consisting of multiple events and concordant actions, and allowing France to recall its existence, to strengthen its links, and to restore vigor to its influence, whether cultural, economic or military. Thus, a visit of the naval authorities to Djounieh in January 1912 was organized as a sign of friendship with the Maronite patriarch (Bulletin of the French Asia Committee, 1912). A naval demonstration was carried out during the Italo-Turkish war and during the bombardment of Beirut by the Italians (February 24, 1912). An omnium (*) of economic affairs in Syria was set up in May 1912 (Cloarec,1998). Finally, a naval agreement was signed with the British, with plans to make way for the French navy (November 1912) (Cloarec,1998, Asia Committee Bulletin,1914) in the Mediterranean. At that time, Mark Sykes (new Unionist MP) echoed the elites and British officers who were astonished, worried, and even angry to see that France had undertaken, dared, and succeeded in its return to the East (Bulletin of the French Asia Committee, no.157,1914).

Poincaré developed his program before the Senate in December 1912, and Robert de Caix, who had become the true representative of French policy in the Levant for the rest of his career, (Khoury,2006), became the spokesperson for the government. The French-Asia Committee then became a specialized space for reflection on French activities and influence in the East and particularly in Syria. French deputies expressed themselves through "wishes", which were communicated on an ongoing basis (Bulletin of the French Asia Committee, 1913).

In April 1914, the Entente Cordiale celebrated its tenth anniversary, and the "colonial party" took an official stand on the Atlantic aspirations of England and the *Royal Navy*. They agreed that, if they abandoned Eastern aspirations, it was because of the common enemy, Germany (Bulletin of the French Asia Committee,1914).

The Eastern Mediterranean at the Center of the war | Interests of the Western Powers

In August 1914, war broke out. French maritime operations were engaged in the western part of the Mediterranean Sea in order to bring troops from the Maghreb to the front (Jauffret, http://www.stratisc.org/TC_7.htm). It was the only area of operations, because in the other parts, it was mobility that took precedence under the naval convention of November 1912, confirmed in February 1913, and reactivated on August 6, 1914, in London in an agreement providing for that. "[...] the French navy will ensure throughout the Mediterranean the protection of English and French commerce [...]. It will also monitor the exit of the Suez Canal and the Strait of Gibraltar, and prevent enemy auxiliary cruisers in the Mediterranean" (Auguste ,1928). The two navies saw their influence equitably distributed, and the Mediterranean was abandoned to the French, while the British reinforced their prerogatives on the North Sea (Pedroncini,1991).

The *Goeben* and *Breslau* affair, which carried out a daring raid on the Algerian coast, just hours after the declaration of war, resulted in *Omnium: 1872 Enterprise*, "a company which centralizes a whole branch of commercial or industrial operations". With the renegotiation of this agreement, the Franco-English fleet had the authorization to occupy the island of Lemnos and set up a base there. The basic principle remained respected, in that French admiral Boué de Lapeyrère still commanded the Anglo-French forces.

While since September 1914, the French navy had been confined to Malta, the need to meet the Indian soldiers at Port Said, and to confront the ships entering the Dardanelles, forced it to change its positions more closely. This geographic shift was a mark of the importance given to the Suez Canal, both within the British Empire, and also in the more general theater of war (Goby,1984). The escort of Indian troops from Port Said to the metropolis needed to be organized.

The main activity of the French fleet therefore consisted, from September to October 1914, of ensuring the protection of some 36 vessels and nearly 25,000 men constituting the English transports. Men were not the only ones to use the canal, but goods and oil too, which made it an essential canal for communication and trade. The English had also identified the canal as a major issue, and more quickly than the French, who were also shifting their attention to the East. The British then thought of mounting an expedition against Gallipoli as early as September 1914, but in order to verify if a mission could control the island (Pedroncini,1991), they negotiated with the Greek representatives. At this stage, it was only a project of alliance with an uncommitted country.

Three events then intervened, pushing the British to modify their geopolitical orientation from the end of September: the closure of the straits, the entry of *Goeben* and *Breslau* into the Black Sea (October), and the Allies' ultimatum to Turkey on the 30th of October 1914. They realized that the eastern Mediterranean was a territory at risk and that their interests were in danger. They no longer viewed the August 6, 1914, agreement in the same way, and found themselves in an awkward position with regard to the French. They therefore decided that the latter did not effectively protect the Canal, and transported ships from the Atlantic to the territory concerned.

Growing anxieties and mistrust going hand in hand, the British set up a siege against Egypt on November 2, 1914. Their naval forces were increasingly concentrated in the Mediterranean alongside Rear Admiral Peirse, who was responsible for the defense of the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal Company (Usborne,1935), and Escaille's lieutenant, Dominican Father Jaussen, were confirming their concerns by providing them with alarming information that the Turkish threat was a reality. The British took the leap and ignored the 1914 accord, imposing their protectorate over Egypt on December 18, 1914.

The Ottoman Empire therefore no longer had authority over Egypt, which was not yet the first step in the

dismemberment of "the sick man of Europe", (d'Andurain,2009) because he remained in his integrity, at least in official discourse, while on the ground it began to crumble. From this moment, the British had a new approach to the cities of the Syrian coast (Alexandrette for example) by practicing the "diplomacy of the hands in the air", obstructing the rallying of the troops. At this point, the Turks were nearing the canal (Usborne, 1935).

From the beginning of 1915, the Franco-English agreement of 1914 was undermined, since England was not content to stay in Egypt, but went well beyond in its action in the area of Syrian influence (de Gayffier-Bonneville 2004), though Syria was an ally of the French. On December 28, 1914, France responded by issuing a memorandum to the high naval command in the Mediterranean, providing for the independence of the English admiral in command at Port Said (Auguste,1928). Already some time before, the

British had insisted with the French that the coastguards *le Requin* and *la Foudre* carry the unique French seaplane squadron to be sent to Port Said. On January 26, 1915, and again on February 2 and 3, the Turks attacked the Suez Canal. Their fears now confirmed, the English now had only one objective. No longer worrying about Allied interests, they would strengthen their position in this area.

The idea of creating a second front was widely shared by English and French officers. Military thought at the end of 1914 marked this perspective, emphasizing the notion of the offensive. This concept was based on the theory that the offensive position was the only one that could keep the Allied troops in good moral health. The Gallipoli campaign, on the other hand, resulted from a more British point of view, according to which the overflow technique is widely present alongside a protection of the Suez Canal. According to the British, their naval force must be able to come to the rescue of allied troops caught in the conflict. The indirect strategy then replaced the strategy, resulting in a "Clauswitzian" theory of concentration and decisive battle on the main front (d'Andurain,2009). In the face of the artillery stoppage, the naval force became an essential asset.

British policy was very attached to the sending of expeditions in connection with its power to protect the island and the English colonies (Bourlet, and Inquimbert 2001) and more recently the full issue of the same Review history of Armies, n° 258, 1st quarter 2010 dealing entirely with "expeditionary forces". This mode of warlike expeditions was also a habit in France, but the British used this concept even in semantics, as shown by the name of the army of volunteers who arrived in France in August 1914: the "British Expeditionary Force" (BEF). This expeditionary force combined the troops normally ensuring the defense of the metropolis and troops specializing in expeditions in external operations (Expeditionary Force). This preponderant place given to the expeditionary form of armed operations was found in the name of the Mediterranean naval project in March 1915: "Mediterranean Expeditionary Force".

British Bypass Policy against France in the Eastern Mediterranean

The Royal Navy very clearly embodied the project of a second front with Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty since 1911, serving as Minister of the Navy in the Prime Minister's office, and Admiral John Fisher, First Lord of the sea, that is to say chief of staff of the fleet since October 1914. Campaign plans for this period were to be strongly influenced by these two personalities (Geoffrey, 1999), known to have had "the best bad idea of the war coupled with a particularly mediocre execution, sometimes bordering on absurdity in detail" (Becker, 2008, d'Andurain, 2009).

After his defeat at Tannenberg, the head of the Russian armies asked, "if Lord Kitchener could not mount a naval or military demonstration against the Turks, to [...] thus relieve the pressure exerted on the Russians" (Moorehead,1958, p. 29). In response, the British War Secretary replied to Churchill on January 2, 1915, that "the Dardanelles are the only point where a demonstration could have any effect in stopping reinforcements to the east [...]"(d'Andurain,2009). Fisher and Churchill applied the overflow plan recommended by Hankey.

On board the inflexible flagship, a telegram to the attention of Vice-Admiral Sackville H. Carden, commander of the British squadron in the Mediterranean, asked, "Do you think it is possible to force the Dardanelles using only the fleet? [...] the losses would be heavy, but the results of such great importance that they would justify the sacrifices. Telegraph your notice (Usborne, 1935, d'Andurain,2009). January 3, 1915. The Dardanelles expedition is scheduled, in expeditionary form January 11, 1915. Britain feared Russia's control over the Dardanelles, and it feared a rapprochement between Russia

and France that could lead to understandings between them that would harm British interests in the East after the war. The geopolitical vision of the area appeared clearly, and the conception of the second front was renewed with the interest of bypassing the French. The Eastern Mediterranean was once again a conspicuous British target.

On January 12, 1915, Churchill summoned the French naval attaché to London. He clearly made him understand that the division of the zones of maritime influence must be regulated and adapted to the situation, and told him that the agreement of August 6, 1914, did not take into account the entry into the war of Turkey, so it had become important to redefine the spheres of maritime activity (Auguste, 1928). This request is reaffirmed in a January 18 letter from Churchill to the French Minister of the Navy. The latter went to London on January 26, accompanied by his chief of staff, and discovered that this decision did not signify an agreement with the French naval staff (Pedroncini, 1991). The General Staff of the French Navy does not believe in the possibility of a forcing of the straits by the only Royal Navy, but that the "Churchill-Carden" plan was a purely British plan.

On January 31, 1915, the division of the maritime zones of influence was redrawn, and the English vice-admirals received authority over two zones, Dardanelles and Egypt, while a French vice-admiral controlled the coasts of Syria (Auguste, 1928). With a second British attack in the pipeline on the Suez Canal, the discussion offered the French very little room for maneuver. The canal was not their only objective, because the straits were a clearly identified stake for British interests, as well as the supply of wheat and oil conditioned by an Anglo-Russian dialogue and the influence of the Balkan states, which had remained neutral. The year 1915 marked a turning point in English strategic actions, revealing the weaknesses of the two fronts, both eastern and western. The sea became the privileged theater of English operations, and the *Royal Navy* was its instrument. The opportunity was too good to return in force to the region, the protection of the canal still remaining the main objective.

The Allies of yesterday were becoming suspicious of each other, and the Dardanelles project was taking shape in this context. The French were slow to see the stabilization of the front as a defeat, and still rejected the idea of a second front, because their military personnel were reduced. Two obstacles stood in the way of this adherence to the principle of a second front: the French tradition and the position of the partially occupied territories.

The commander of the occupation troops of Egypt was then accompanied by a French military mission headed by lieutenant-colonel of artillery Maucorps, former military attaché in Constantinople, with the interpreter Rémond and the reserve lieutenant Doynel de Saint-Quentin. The objective of this mission was to observe the operations of the Egyptian army, to take stock of the enemy forces, and to develop communication with the British (Leclerc, 1998). The 3rd squadron was created on February 5, 1915, and replaced the special division at sea. This replacement was supposed to control, under the orders of Vice-Admiral Dartige du Fournet, the area between Rhodes and the Turkish-Egyptian border (Auguste, 1928). This squadron also demonstrated the interest of the French in remaining present in this major area of influence. Despite these isolated actions, the French and the English still collaborated to best prepare the attack on the Dardanelles.

The British Game to Diminish Frances' Gains in the Levant

The British game was then set up against French ambitions. Between March and June 1915, a distance developed between the two powers, as the disembarkation of the expedition created the need for each of the parties to officially update their military and political objectives. Russia claimed Constantinople and the Straits but conceded the rest to Franco-English ambitions. The stripping of the Ottoman Empire could then take place, and all parties made efforts to make their voices heard from the beginning of March 1915 (Soutou, 1989, Frémeaux, 2006). On the one hand, the war council imagined the future of the Ottoman Empire by seeking points of consensus and possible reconciliation; on the other hand, the English and the French were trying, by all means, to realize their geopolitical visions of the region, thus serving their own interests (Nouschi, 1970).

The Dardanelles attack was scheduled for 25 April 1915 and would attract to it all the forces present in the Mediterranean, ensuring that everyone had very clear positions.

Support for troops at Sedd-ul-Bahr (Auguste, 1928) required reducing Egypt's maritime protection. To another extent, the situation was also changing as technology evolved and German submarines entered the military scene near Gibraltar on

May 6, 1915. The sea was no longer the secure space it had been for the British, as two of their cruisers were sunk on May 25 (Auguste, 1928). And the land remained as risky as ever, as evidenced in the Dardanelles and Egypt. Italy's entry into the war added further confusion to the situation and to the leadership. There were at the time six independent admirals, having great difficulty in imagining a common and united goal. The interests of the great powers, even if they were not completely opposed, were nonetheless conflicting (Guy, 1991).

The situation took a new turn when the British separated from part of the French mission in Egypt. The financial question was highlighted, but it seems surprising that the head of the mission, Lieutenant-Colonel Maucorps, whose technical and strategic fame was recognized by all, was recalled, while his deputy remained at his post. He had been very attached to France's rights over Syria and ardently wished for French operations to give France back its place in the country (from his "Maucorps plan", which he had sent to Jean Goût at the Quai d'Orsay). This position apparently did not please the English.

On the other hand, his second had less authority and remained more flexible in taking English interests into account. He was therefore "kept alone with the English army because of his personal worth, the tact with which he had carried out his mission and the gradual ascendancy he had gained with the British authorities". (Leclerc, 1998, d'Andurain, 2009). He came to an understanding with Sykes in July 1915, and Syria was divided into two zones of Franco-English influence (Laurens, 1999), once again enacting English claims on this country.

England demanded control of Admiral de Robeck's sector in the eastern Mediterranean, their sector of Syria and Egypt, and finally those of Malta and Gibraltar, arguing the need to have a coherent position vis-à-vis the German submarines and their attacks. The Bunsen Committee defended the idea of dividing the entire Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence already envisioned by Mark Sykes. The French project of an "integral Syria" was compromised, and the theses advanced by Lawrence were realized, the stake being to ensure control of the Syrian coasts, a Palestinian return to negotiations, and a crystallization of all British claims.

The Growing Power of the Colonial Party in France Driven by the Issue of Integrated Syria

The "colonial party", made up of two large groups (Africans and Asians), was animated by sharp divisions on the objectives of each before the war, as well as on colonial policy from 1914-1916. As soon as the Dardanelles operation began, this division was erased in favor of a solidarity united around the same idea, that the Ottoman Empire was going to be dismantled. The French-Asian Committee reacted to this issue in March 1915 by initiating a public call for dismantling, to the attention of its government (Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, 1975). The outcome of the Dardanelles attack appeared inevitably victorious and was already the forefront of a larger geopolitical project that concerned the whole region.

While the French navy still showed setbacks in the Mediterranean (noted during the Paris conference on December 7, 1915), the "colonials' pope" launched the creation of a "commission for the study of colonial problems which could arise after the war" (Grupp, 1974, d'Andurain, 2009). At this very moment, Mark Sykes, a privileged and legitimate interlocutor in Kitchener's eyes, began talks with François Georges Picot, consul general in Beirut, a supporter of a project for "integral Syria". At the Société de Géographie de Paris, they met, surrounded by all the figures of the "colonial party". Men exchanged and interwove their points of view. To these illustrious personalities could be added any member who had the legitimacy and influence to integrate into the colonial network of reflection. The following are thus associated with the theoretical establishment of the future partition of the Ottoman Empire: members of the Geographical Society, industrialists and traders, the chambers of commerce of Marseille or Lyon, and the Schools of the Orient. The official objective was to reflect on "geographic questions for peace".

Asia would be the most problematic and would require much debate. Robert de Caix, a great specialist in China, saw his expertise shift towards the Levant. He considered that the Franco-English positions had been profoundly modified with the war. The two currents of the "colonial party" being united in the perspective of a colonial turning point which had to be taken since the war, he appeared as one of the leaders of this united party. He became in fact the new leader of the "colonial party", and Eugène Etienne withdrew. Thoughts about Asia were then the focus of most of the negotiations within this reunified party (Grupp, 1974).

The system of capitulations seemed solid and appeared to assure the great powers a legal and financial influence. So, the division of the Ottoman Empire was not the primary topic of discussion. Land occupation was not on the agenda either. The concept of indirect government was more desirable in the English approach, which remained attached, out of interest, to the whole of the Ottoman Empire. Along with this expectation of a status quo, the French catalysed a movement of decentralization in the Empire.

The integrity of the Empire was still maintained, because there still existed in Paris a core group working in this direction (Cloarec,1998). The war would nevertheless generate partitions, because the Allies would be forced to be present on the ground and therefore to specify the "war goals" or, in other words, their territorial claims at the end of hostilities, in particular during the war of the Dardanelles.

The Ottoman Empire saw its integrity crumble on March 1, 1915, when Russia claimed Constantinople and its Straits. Syria became the center of the Franco-English triangle, Hussein Sherif of Mecca. Partition was on everyone's mind, but the criteria for partition and the balance between the claims had yet to be determined. Focused on new concepts of "Levantine" and "Arabity" (Laurens,1998) , the English confronted the project of "integral Syria". With each putting forward his long-term geopolitical vision for the region, a vision that Hussein struggled to share, the dialogue continued.

The "Syrianists" then saw greater Syria as stretching from the chains of Taurus to Sinai, and comprising the cities of Adana, Alexandretta, Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem and Beirut. Vast with an area of nearly 350,000 km², it extended from west to east from the Syrian coast to the Euphrates. The British were particularly keen on defining the contours of Palestine, because this would allow them to separate southern Syria from the region as a whole. Taking root in their humanity and moving away from the concepts advanced by Lawrence, they approached Western theories to set up their vision of the future of the East and to update their own artificial definition of "Syria", "Palestine", and "Iraq". One can clearly see the very negative impact of the Battle of the Dardanelles, both on the balance of forces involved and on the entire Ottoman territory. Indeed, it induced tensions, divisions, and murderous and expansionist behavior. The Allies found themselves once again separated by opposing visions.

The Arab world took shape at this time. From military and maritime interests, negotiations between "Allies" were shifting to economic and political considerations. The war forced priorities to be set and accelerated the inevitable disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Protecting the Suez Canal remained an English priority and served as the basis for their entire strategy.

The Anglo-Egyptian and Anglo-Indian oppositions were not completely of the same nature, and their differentiation has the merit of demonstrating the complexity of the interests involved. However, the fact remains that it was the vision inspired by Kitchener and Churchill that prevailed. The maritime agreements of 1912, renewed in 1914, very quickly became obstacles to the necessary rebalancing of forces and actions induced by the war. The Syrian coast became a major stake of control for the English, oscillating for a long time between Alexandretta in the north and Palestine in the south.

The Syrian coast was an area in which the French were accustomed to seeing their prerogatives realized, and this British intrusion weakened them in their ability to be seen throughout the region, and even in Europe, as masters of the region. Whether the English claims related more to Alexandretta or to southern Syria did not matter to French officers and politicians who, in any case, interpreted these ambitions as proof of English imperialism.

Conclusion

Since ancient times, the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea, with its unique strategic location, have represented the connecting point between the three continents of the world, Asia, Africa and Europe, and it represented a natural bridge for East trade to Europe. As a result of this importance, the Middle East and the Red Sea region witnessed international competition over control of this important road. The conflict developed between the European powers, especially Britain and France, and this conflict continued to take multiple forms since the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century.

It turned out that the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea were not only commercial crossings, but also the largest major

trade centers in the East. However, this did not prevent the British and the French from trying to trade in them from time to time, taking advantage of the weakness that afflicted the Ottoman Empire.

The rivalry between Britain and France continued to take different forms, and it was evident in the attempt of the two parties to enter into close political and commercial relations with the various powers in the region in order to strengthen the influence of each of them, and to search for new colonies that would secure their control and exploitation of wealth.

After the opening of the Suez Canal for international navigation, the conflict between the two countries took a new form, and there were wide economic and other political developments, as the canal opened the door to international competition in the region wide, and the situation was not limited to France and Britain, but other colonial countries such as Italy, Germany and Russia.

Although the French campaign headed to Egypt in 1798, it was confirmed that this campaign was intended to be a prelude to other goals, more distant and comprehensive, represented in exploiting the short road leading to India, extending French influence in the Middle East and the Red Sea, and striking British interests as well. in the East.

It can be said that there was a latent war between Britain and France during that period, each of which tried to strike the interests of the other. British influence there, whether by launching a major military campaign or by strengthening its political and commercial relations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

The British-French rivalry in the Middle East and the Mediterranean was not only political and commercial, but had other religious dimensions, which emerged in the folds of events, as each of them tried to carry out a missionary activity, in addition to the attempts of the British to have influence in the holy places in Hijaz.

Although the British and French documents have confirmed the nature of the British-French conflict in the Middle East and the Mediterranean during the end of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, the predominance of British influence was clear and in every region, France tried to put its hand on, In fact, this matter was not surprising thanks to the persistence of the British Empire at that time in terms of governance that supported its colonial policy and military power, while France was exposed to many internal problems that affected its external activity and postponed the achievement of its colonial goals in the East for a period of time.

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