

# People of the Great War: Shaping the Modern World

## Shaping the Modern World

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: Activity 1: Reshaping the World

## The Middle East

### Historical Background

British involvement in the Middle East had been based on the perceived need to protect the land route from Europe to India, Britain's 'jewel' in her Imperial crown, and later, the Suez Canal. After Winston Churchill's decision to convert the British Naval fleet from coal to oil, the British government bought the majority of shares in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and had created further ties to this region.

During the First World War the Ottoman Empire fought against the Entente of France, Russia and Britain. War against the Turks was fought in the Mediterranean (Gallipoli) and Middle East (Egypt). However the Arab population saw the war as a chance for them to fight for their own independence and the Arab Revolt began in June 1916. The revolt was led by Sherif Hussein of Mecca. His most talented son, Feisal, was advised by TE Lawrence, a British intelligence officer who had been based in Cairo, Egypt, but who joined the Arab forces as a liaison officer in October 1916. Under Feisal's leadership, the Arab forces captured the important port of Akaba on the Red Sea in July 1917.

Meanwhile regular British and Imperial troops were fighting the Turks in Palestine under the command of General Sir Edmund Allenby. His Egyptian Expeditionary Force was made up of men from Britain, India, Australia and New Zealand. In December 1917 they captured Jerusalem. Allenby and Lawrence realised that their forces could defeat the Turks by cooperating together. They launched an offensive in September 1918 in which Allenby's forces went northwards through Palestine, supported by Feisal's Arab forces inland. Damascus fell on 1 October and by 31 October an armistice had been agreed. The war in the Middle East, and Ottoman rule there, was over. The Arabs had fought with the British in the hope that their claims for independence would be supported by them. But this was not the case. Britain and France had already agreed to sustain their imperial status in the region and Arab claims were not met in the peace treaties that followed the war.

The situation was exacerbated by the Balfour Declaration issued by the British Cabinet in November 1917. It stated that the British government would 'view with favour' the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, with safeguards for the rights of non-Jewish communities living there. These non-Jewish communities made up 90% of the population in Palestine. Similar statements had been made in support of a future Arab nation. But the precise nature and location of both these concepts was deliberately vague and continues to cause controversy and competing claims.

The region continued to be unstable and the first post-war treaty that dealt with the Ottoman legacy, the Treaty of Sevres of 1920, was not even implemented. The



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Ottoman Empire was thrown into civil war. Revolts and conflict in Arab lands continued. In 1922 the League of Nations gave the Mandate for Palestine to Britain. It set out the terms under which Britain had responsibility for the temporary administration of the country on behalf of the Jews and Arabs living there. Following the Second World War Britain withdrew from the Mandate in 1948. Israel declared independence as a Jewish state, an event that has led to a succession of wars with its neighbouring Arab states.

## Useful Links

[www.iwmcollections.org.uk](http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk)

The Imperial War Museum has an extensive collection of images which are relevant to conflicts in the Middle East and the Balkans, from the First World War to the present day. A selection of these can be accessed on this site.

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/upload/package/54/Lawrence/index.htm>

The Imperial War Museum's small online exhibition about TE Lawrence, which includes information about the First World War and subsequent years in the Middle East, useful further links and the exhibition text and captions.

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/maps/ottoman.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/maps/ottoman.htm)

Map showing the Ottoman Empire in 1914

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/maps/mesopotamia\\_turkey.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/maps/mesopotamia_turkey.htm)

Map showing the Middle East during the First World War

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/middle\\_east\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/middle_east_01.shtml)

Account of the Middle East during the First World War and its aftermath

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in\\_depth/middle\\_east/israel\\_and\\_the\\_palestinians/key\\_documents/1682961.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/middle_east/israel_and_the_palestinians/key_documents/1682961.stm)

Transcript of the Balfour Declaration (1917)

<http://www.timemaps.com/atlas/MiddleEast/AD1914/index.html>

Maps showing the changes to the Middle East

[www.historylearningsite.co.uk/middle\\_east\\_1917\\_to\\_1973.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/middle_east_1917_to_1973.htm)

Simple but comprehensive account of events in the Middle East from the end of the First World War to the 1970s

[www.historylearningsite.co.uk/united\\_nations\\_middle\\_east.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/united_nations_middle_east.htm)

Simple account of UN involvement in the Middle East from 1940s – 1970s

<http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/charity-news/middle-east-news.htm>

Charity working in the Middle East

[http://www.christianaid.org.uk/issues/conflict/middleeast/index.aspx?gclid=CKyD\\_O6s05UCFQyR1Qo\\_doBO9iQ](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/issues/conflict/middleeast/index.aspx?gclid=CKyD_O6s05UCFQyR1Qo_doBO9iQ)

Information about the conflict and about charity involvement in the Middle East from Christian Aid

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/default.stm)

Current news and events from the Middle East



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## The Balkans

### Historical Background

The nineteenth century had been a time of great change for the Balkans region. As the Ottoman Empire became less effective, Russia took the opportunity to expand into the area. Control of the straits that connect the Black Sea to the Mediterranean has been a long term ambition for Russia. This would give access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean so that her Fleet would not be iced in during the winters. The Balkans is therefore in a strategically important place. Russian advances into the region were met with military resistance during the Crimean War and in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The peace settlement of 1878 broke down any remaining stability in the region, leaving a mixture of old and new states with state borders that had been drawn on a map by men who had little understanding of the region and were therefore unsustainable.

In June 1914 the Archduke of Austria-Hungary, heir to the throne, was assassinated in Sarajevo. This incident sparked off the First World War. Almost every one of the big European powers believed that their vital interests in the area were threatened by this event. The series of crises and wars earlier in the century had been kept to a regional level. But this event could not be contained as successfully and within four weeks Europe had plunged itself and its Empires around the world into war.

Austrian forces overwhelmed Serb and Russian forces in the campaigns fought in the Balkans. When the Bulgarians joined the war to fight on the Austrian side in 1915, the Serbs were forced into a mass retreat over the mountains towards the Albanian coast during the winter of 1915. 40,000 lives were lost in the retreat. The Serb forces were accompanied by the Stobart Unit, British women volunteers who worked to supply medical care for the sick and wounded. The unit had been established by Mrs Mabel St Clair Stobart and was one of a number of remarkable women's organisations that undertook such work in the region.

The postwar peace treaties created new political boundaries in the Balkans, including the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes which was later renamed Yugoslavia. The Second World War again divided the region between warring powers, subjecting large areas to German and then Soviet occupation. The Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma also had a great impact here. Yugoslavia's situation was further complicated by a vicious civil war that was fought in parallel to the Second World War. Following the defeat of Nazi Germany the Balkan states were occupied by the Soviet army and were incorporated into the Communist bloc of states in east and central Europe. Yugoslavia and Albania were exceptions only in that their leaders refused to accept Soviet dominance and asserted themselves as independent Communist states.

Yugoslavia was governed by Marshal Josip Tito who had led the Communist partisans during the war. He suppressed the growth and expression of nationalism there until his death in 1980 and although the state held together for a further ten years, its breakdown has destabilised the whole region. The conflicts of the 1990s



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began with Slovenia and Croatia declaring independence from Yugoslavia. A series of wars between the former states of Yugoslavia has resulted in attempts at 'ethnic cleansing' to remove whole ethnic populations from lands claimed by rival groups. It has also resulted in the only act of genocide in Europe since the Second World War in the massacre at Srebrenica of July 1995.

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[www.throughmyeyes.org.uk](http://www.throughmyeyes.org.uk)

An online exhibition from *Their Past Your Future* at the Imperial War Museum, includes personal stories from some of those involved in the conflicts in the Balkans during the First World War and in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s. It also has historical background notes about the Balkans.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/map/yugoslavia/>

Maps and information about the changes in the Balkans region from 1900 to 2003

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugoslavia>

Comprehensive Wikipedia entry on the changing nature of the Balkans region up to 2006

[http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g\\_bosnia.html](http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g_bosnia.html)

Peace Pledge Union entry on the genocide in Bosnia

<http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/conway/5e5160c8.html>

Image of the original bridge at Mostar

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3919047.stm>

BBC News report on the opening of the newly rebuilt Mostar Bridge in 2004

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/birth-of-a-nation-but-will-kosovo-spark-another-balkan-crisis-764277.html>

Newspaper article about the declaration of independence by Kosovo in 2007

<http://www.isg-fi.org.uk/spip.php?article373>

Obituary of Slobodan Milosevic

<http://uknato.fco.gov.uk/en/uk-in-nato/nato-operations/balkans>

Information about UK involvement with NATO forces in the Balkans

<http://www.rgs.org/NR/rdonlyres/3EBBA0DE-A096-421B-ACF9-5DD011B6BA90/0/Refugees.pdf>

Information from the Royal Geographical Society about the Refugee situation in the Balkans

## Disclaimer:

These sites were researched in 2008. The Imperial War Museum is not responsible for the content of external websites.



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