

1. According to historian James Gelvin, 'World War I was the single most important *political* event in the history of the modern Middle East' (p. 191/ 5<sup>th</sup> edition). Please explain why and discuss (15%)

In a simple, single sentence, World War I brought about a new political order to the Middle East, one that is still in place today. What does this mean? Firstly, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire meant that there was now all this state-less land, contemporarily known as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel/Palestine and Iraq. As a result of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, "The states known as Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Iraq and never before existed. French and British diplomats invented them."<sup>1</sup> While this was mainly due to political factors and powers, it is important to note that by the end of the Ottoman Empire, there was no sense of Ottoman nationalism. In other words, there was no longer a framework that held all of the previous ethnicities together, and as such although there was an increase in nationalism, this was seen in the form of Turkish, Arab, Syrian, Egyptian, Jewish nationalism.

All events in history have a cause and consequence relationship, and this is no different. The Constantinople Agreement, signed in 1915 by Britain and France, explained that at the event of Entente victory, each power would be allotted different areas of the Ottoman Empire. This now created the idea or belief that these political powers had the legal entitlement for compensation from fighting and winning against their opposition. Now, when this, as well as the fact that there is all of this previous Ottoman land now stateless, it is all the more evident that World War I indicates a critical point in terms of the relations between the Middle East and Europe.

---

<sup>1</sup> (Gelvin 2020)

Additionally, due to the increase in Jewish nationalism, also referred to as Zionism, Jewish immigration to Palestine significantly increased, which inevitably increased tension between Jews and Palestinians. With the first diplomatic recognition of the Zionist movement by Great Britain in 1917 and later the establishment of the State of Israel heightening their disputes, the world saw confirmation and commencement of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

As mentioned above, other forms of nationalism in the area grew too. A significant example of this would be Turkish nationalism, led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. He fought and pushed foreign troops out of Anatolia and ultimately led the foundation of a modern or Western Turkish Republic. This “Westernisation” was carried out by focusing on the secularisation of the government, regulating clothing, furthering women’s suffrage, converting to the Latin alphabet and so on.

### **Works Cited**

Gelvin, James L. *The Modern Middle East*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 2020.