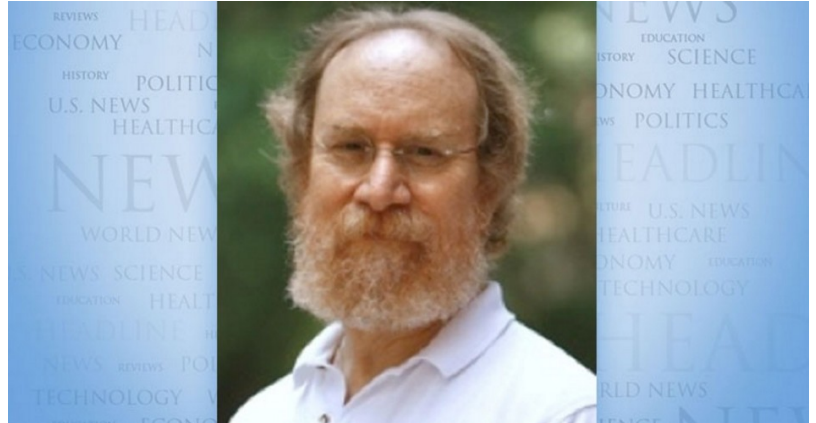




Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on August 23, 2014

Out of Iraq, Etc.!

Nearly a century ago, after four bloody years of World War I, British colonialists created the state of Iraq, complete with their hand-picked monarch. Britain and France were authorized — or, more precisely, authorized themselves — to create states in the Arab world, despite the prior British promise of independence in return for the Arabs' revolt against the Ottoman Turks, which helped the Allied powers defeat the Central powers. And so European countries drew lines in the sand without much regard for the societies they were constructing from disparate sectarian, tribal, and ethnic populations.



Article 22 of the [Covenant of the League of Nations](#) declared that former colonies of the defeated powers “are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.” These included the Arabs (and others) in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and the Levant (today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine/Israel). Because they were not ready for independence and self-government, the covenant stated, their “well-being and development” should be “entrusted to advanced nations who ... can best undertake this responsibility.”

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In other words, the losers' colonies would become the winners' colonies. British and French politicians would judge when the Arabs (and Kurds) were fit to govern themselves. Until then, they would remain under the loving care of enlightened Europeans. On the few occasions when Arabs failed to appreciate their good fortune and resisted, their benefactors had to punish them with tough love in the form of aerial bombardment and other means of modern warfare. It was for the natives' own good, of course.

Or that's how the imperialists told it. Only a cynic could believe that their economic and political interests lay behind this neocolonialist system.

We might keep this history in mind as we view with increasing horror what is taking place in the newly declared Islamic State (formerly ISIL or ISIS) in large parts of British- and French-created Iraq and Syria.

No one can say how the Middle East would have turned out if the Western powers had butted out after the Great War and let the Arabs, Kurds, and others find their own way in the modern world. But treating the indigenous populations like children cannot have advanced the cause of peaceful civilization.

It's no exaggeration to say that virtually every current problem in the region stems at least in part from the imperial double-cross and carve-up that took place after the war. And the immediate results of the European betrayal were then exacerbated by further acts of intervention and neocolonialism, most recently: President George H. W. Bush's Gulf War and embargo on Iraq; President Bill Clinton's continued embargo and bombing of Iraq; President George W. Bush's invasion and occupation of Iraq



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and overthrow of the secular regime of Saddam Hussein (al-Qaeda, of which the Islamic State is an offshoot, was not in Iraq before this); President Barack Obama's support (until recently) for the corrupt, autocratic Shi'ite government in Baghdad; and Obama's throwing in with those seeking to oust secular Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which made that country a magnet for radical Sunni jihadis, the same who are now threatening genocide against Shi'ites, Christians, and Yazidis in Iraq. (Thus Obama's policy is at war with itself.)

History alone does not tell us what, if anything, outside powers should do now; there's no going back in time. But we can say that without foreign interference, even a violent evolution of the region might have been far less violent than it has been during the last century. At least, the violent factions would not be seeking revenge against Americans.

The rise of the brutal Islamic State, with its unspeakable violence against innocents, is an appalling but [unsurprising](#) outcome of the last 100 years, including [seven decades of neocolonialist American intervention](#). This suggests that U.S. intervention at this stage will only come to grief by boosting anti-American jihadi recruitment and even encouraging the targeting of Americans at home. Wars never go as planned. After all this time, any so-called "humanitarian" intervention will be interpreted in imperialist terms — and should be.

The U.S. government must get out of Iraq (etc.). Intervention not only violates the rights of Americans; it is sure to exacerbate the violence in that pitiable region.

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