

# THE BRITISH EMPIRE

The **British Empire** includes the colonies, mandates and other territories ruled by the United Kingdom. It originated with the overseas goods and trading posts established by England between the late 16th and early 18th centuries. At its height, it was the largest empire in history and, for over a century, was the biggest global power. By 1922 the British Empire had control over about 458 million people, one-fifth of the world's population at the time. The empire covered more than 13,012,000 square miles, almost a quarter of the Earth's total land area. As a result, its legacy is widespread. At the peak of its power, the phrase "the empire on which the sun never sets" was often used to describe the British Empire, because its control across the globe meant that the sun was always shining on at least one of its territories.



**Historians date the beginning of British imperialism in the Middle East to 1798**, the year Napoleon from France invaded Egypt. Concerned that France would block Great Britain's access to the eastern Mediterranean and threaten trade routes to India, the British navy worked to remove French troops from Egypt. From here on, Britain worked to gain goods and territories there.

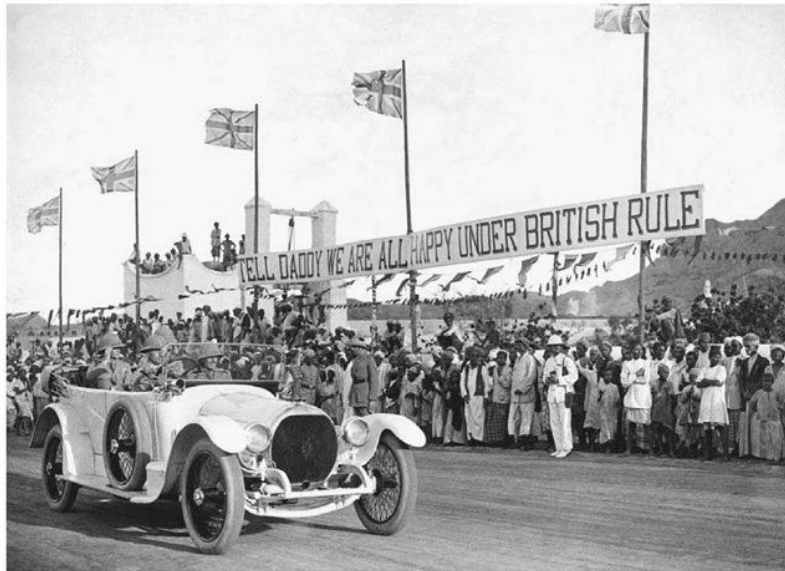
**At the end of the eighteenth century**, British trade in the eastern Mediterranean lands accounted for a small 1 percent of total British foreign trade. Britain then becomes the Middle East's biggest trading partner in the early nineteenth century, more than France, Austria, and Russia. It kept this role as late as World War I. Britain was a major supplier of cheap colored cotton textiles and also supplied what some economic historians call colonial goods—Caribbean sugar and Indian tea that came from the larger British empire. In return Britain got long-staple cotton from Egypt and other food and animal products such as dates, barley, and leather. British businesses accounted for at least half of Iran's foreign trade by the mid-nineteenth

century, exchanging manufactured goods and textiles for Iranian carpets, silk, and other raw agricultural materials



--The British Empire spanning "Cape to Cairo"

**By the 1830s British transport from the eastern Mediterranean** to the Indian Ocean occurred along two main routes: the first stretched from the Syrian Desert, down the Euphrates River, and into the Persian Gulf; the second, crossed the isthmus of Suez into the Red Sea.



**Edward, Prince of Wales, Visits Aden. Edward, prince of Wales, is greeted with a banner proclaiming support for his father, King George V, during a 1921 state visit to Aden, a British protectorate in what is now Yemen.**

**In Egypt in 1881,** a nationalist uprising broke out because of widespread economic stress and growing anti-European feelings. Known as the 'Urabi Rebellion—after the military officer, Ahmed 'Urabi, who led it—this uprising created concern among Britons, who feared that problems in Egypt could threaten the Suez Canal—the British lifeline to India. Britain took

action in 1882 by bombarding the coast of Alexandria and occupying Egypt. Britain kept a hold over Egypt for the next seventy years.

**During World War I**, oil became a major political factor in the region. In Iran in 1901, a British businessman named William Knox D'Arcy controlled a local oil extraction; in 1909 D'Arcy started the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The British navy switched from coal to oil fuel in 1912; in 1914, as the war began, the British government bought most of the AIOC company/money.

**According to some historians**, the post-World War I period was "Britain's moment in the Middle East."

**Along with France**, Britain played the leading role in getting rid of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and in creating new government territories in the Fertile Crescent, which were, future nation-states. The League of Nations, which was like the post-World War I United Nations, stated that mandates were territories "inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world." France gained mandates over Syria and Lebanon; Britain gained Palestine and Iraq and made sure that the boundaries of the new Iraq included the oil-rich region around Mosul. France and Britain agreed up front that in running these mandates they should try to prepare these regions for eventual self-rule—that is, independence in the future.

**In Egypt**, British colonialism after 1882 had caused and aided the development of local nationalism. In 1919 Egyptian nationalists demanded the right to Egyptian self-rule and called for an end to the British rule. When Britain tried to prevent Egyptian nationalist leaders from saying their views at the Paris Peace Conference, a riot broke out. Britain decided to declare partial independence for Egypt three years later in 1922.

**After WWI, a Big problem for Britain** imperialism in the Middle Eastern region had to do with Palestine. Unlike the other Middle East mandates, the League of Nations-approved agreement for Palestine did not give a goal to rule themselves for the territory's native people, who were mostly Muslim and Christian Arabs. Instead, the mandate for Palestine had a Jewish administration and settlement, where Britain would help Jews move there.

**The end of the British Empire** in the middle of the twentieth century after World War II, is due to Britain's lack of money and willpower to maintain its colonies in the Middle East. Britain started to leave the Middle East beginning with Palestine in 1948. The last of Britain in the Middle East was in the Gulf region. As oil profits (money) began to transform this poor region into the Middle East's wealthiest are, Britain began to leave. Kuwait gained independence in 1961, while Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates gained independence in 1971.

**British imperialism has influenced the Middle East** because of the decisions of government decision-makers. Yet, missionaries, travelers, soldiers, merchants, archaeologists, and many others—that is, a diverse (different) group of people have left their influence as well. The

interactions with the Middle East have left a large impact on British society, culture, and national identity as well.